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From Mycenaean to Koine: Aspects of the Evolution of the Greek Language

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1. Introduction

The origin of the Greek language spoken today in South-eastern Europe is long and complex. Greek belongs to the very large group of languages called the Indo-European family. Sanskrit, Latin, English, German, Hindi etc. are all Indo-European languages. Greek language has been spoken in the Balkan peninsula since around the third millennium BC, or possibly earlier. Greek-speaking people occupied most of the islands of the Aegean and, about 1000 BC, the west coast of Anatolia. With few exceptions that is even today the area occupied by the Greek language, the nations of Greece and Cyprus. In the second quarter of the first millennium BC, a vast "colonial" movement had taken place, resulting in establishments founded by various Greek cities all around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, especially in southern Italy and Sicily. After the conquest of Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt by Alexander the Great, Greek was the standard language of the rulers in the new urban centres of these countries until the invasions of the Arabs and the Turks. "Colonial" Greek survived longest at Byzantium, as the official language of the Eastern Empire.

Ancient Greek is the Indo-European language with documents going furthest back into the past. The earliest written evidence of Greek is a clay tablet found in Messenia that dates to

between 1450 and 1350 BC, making Greek the world's oldest recorded living language. Of all the languages of Europe, Greek has the longest recorded history. It has an Ancient phase, subdivided into a Mycenaean period (texts in syllabic script attested from the 14th to the 13th century BC), and Archaic and Classical periods (beginning with the adoption of the alphabet, from the 8th to the 4th century BC); a Hellenistic or Koine and Roman phase (4th century BC to 4th century AD); a Byzantine or Medieval phase (5th to 15th century AD); and a Modern phase. Our interest in this paper will be only till the Koine phase.

The Greek language holds a very important place in the history of the Western world. Beginning with the epics of Homer, ancient Greek literature includes many works of lasting importance in the European canon. Greek is also the language in which many of the foundational texts in science and philosophy were originally composed. Together with the Latin texts and the traditions of the Roman world, the Greek texts and Greek societies of antiquity constitute the objects of study of the discipline of Classics. Greek roots have been widely used for centuries and continue to be widely used to coin new words in other languages; Greek and Latin are the predominant sources of international scientific vocabulary.[1]

2. A Brief Historical Perspective

2.1. The Mycenaean Period

There must have been a Proto-Greek spoken but unrecorded and assumed to be the ancestor of all known varieties of Greek.

[1.] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language, accessed on July 9, 2023.

During the Bronze Age (around 3200 – 1100 BC), a number of cultures had flourished on the islands of the Cyclades, in Crete and on the Greek mainland. One of these is the Mycenaean culture which flourished on the Greek mainland in the Late Bronze Age, from about 1600 to 1200 BC. The name comes from the site of Mycenae, where the culture was first recognized after the excavations in 1876 of Heinrich Schliemann and after the texts were deciphered by the British architect Michael Ventris in 1952 and the British classicist and linguist John Chadwick, which are known as the Linear B texts.[2] Mycenaean Greek is the oldest recorded version of the Greek language.[3] The Mycenaean period of the Late Bronze Age was viewed by the Greeks as the "age of heroes" and perhaps it provides the historical background to many of the stories told in later Greek mythology, including Homer's

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[2] Cf. Silvia Ferrara, "Mycenaean Texts: The Linear B Tablets," in Egbert J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language* (Blackwell Companions to the Ancient Word; West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 11-24, here 11.

[3] Egbert J. Bakker, "Introduction," in ID (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, 1-8, here 3, states, "During its, long history the Greek language came to be written down a number of times in a script that was originally designed for another language. The first time was the adaptation, around the middle of the second millennium BC, of a Cretan syllabary for the purposes of record-keeping in the Mycenaean palatial economy." Francisco Rodríguez Adrados, *A History of the Greek Language From its Origins to the Present* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2005) 45, states, "Mycenaean was an administrative language, which presents important lacunae for those attempting a description of the Greek language. It is almost uniform from Knossos and Khania to Pylos, Thebes, Mycenae and Tyrins (the only places in which it has been preserved)… It was the administrative language of the palaces, not a language of the streets." He notes further, 46, "Mycenaean is the Greek dialect of Crete that was subsequently brought to the continent as an administrative language, in addition to writing; no doubt, the first copyists would have come from there."

epics.

2.2. THE ARCHAIC AND THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

Archaic or Ancient Greek was spoken from about 1200 BC to about 300 BC. Greek people who lived during this time period invented the first true alphabet in around 800 BC. This alphabet was an adaptation of the writing system used by the Phoenicians.[4] The Greeks added additional symbols to the Phoenician writing system to represent vowel sounds. The addition of vowels is what made the ancient Greek writing system the first true alphabet. In fact, as we know, the English term "alphabet" comes from the Greek letters *alpha* and *beta*, the first two letters of the Greek alphabets.

It was during the ancient Greek period that many of the greatest works of Greek literature were produced, including *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. These two epic poems are considered to be among the most influential literary works ever written. While classical scholars believe that the author of these two poems was named Homer, many believe that the stories he wrote about, date back to the Mycenaean period. Some of the great writers from the ancient Greek period include: Homer, Sappho, Plato, Aristotle, Aristophanes, Euripides, Aeschylus, Xenophon, Thucydides and Pindar.

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[4] As Roger D. Woodard, "*Phoinikēia Grammata:* An Alphabet for the Greek Language," in Egbert J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, 25-46, here 27, states, "As Phoenicians and Greeks were plying the waters of the Mediterranean, Greek-speaking peoples would have encountered Phoenician writing time and again… At some Mediterranean locale promoting a mixed Phoenician and Greek context, the Semitic *script* was successfully adapted as a means for giving graphic expression to the Greek *language*."

Ancient Greek consisted of a number of dialects. "The history of Greek from the introduction of the alphabet until the *Koine* is the history of the dialects. In the Archaic and Classical periods the Greek language is an abstract notion in the sense that there was no standard language, but a collection of dialects that we think were mostly mutually intelligible."[5] The Greek dialects of the classical period were: Western Group: Doric, Northwest Greek, Achaean Doric; Central Group: Aeolic, Arcado-Cypriot; Eastern Group: Attic and Ionic. The most important and influential of these was Attic, the dialect that was spoken in and around the city of Athens, used in trade as well as philosophical works.[6]

2.3. THE KOINE PERIOD

The next phase of the Greek language was Koine; this is also called as the Hellenistic and Roman period. Koine was a fusion of the Eastern Group, i.e., Ionian with Attic, the dialect of Athens.[7] Koine was spoken from around the time of the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC until circa 300 AD. Alexander had built a vast empire that stretched from Greece to Egypt and to the Indus

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[5] Stephen Colvin, "Greek Dialects in the Archaic and Classical Ages," in in Egbert J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, 200-212, here 200.

[6] Cf. Michel Lejeune - Brian E. Newton – Angeliki Malikouti-Drachman, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Greek-language/The-Greek-alphabet, accessed 5 June 2023.

[7] Leonard R. Palmer, *The Greek Language* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000) 175, says, "Once again a new Common Dialect was evolved for the purpose of government and administration. This was the Koine, which smothered and replaced the ancient local dialects. Its basis was historically determined: it was Attic."

Valley. Greek became therefore the language used by the educated elite in many of the conquered provinces.[8] The Greek that developed in this era of history was international and metropolitan in nature. It was used throughout the Eastern Mediterranean world as a lingua franca, a common means of communication between people who spoke different languages. Koine was the official language of the Eastern Roman Empire. The Western Roman Empire used another Indo-European language called Latin, the ancestor of the modern Romance languages. The Latin alphabet, which is used by English and many other European languages today, is a derivation of the Greek alphabet.

3. GENERAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ANCIENT GREEK

3.1. THE GREEK SYLLABARIES[9]

Starting from a foreign script known as Linear A (used in Crete to record a native language known as Minoan), the Greeks devised, toward 1500 BC at the latest, a syllabic script to record their own language. This script is known as Linear B, as we noted above. Linear A has not been so far deciphered. It probably encodes a non-Greek language.

The major source of Linear B inscriptions are some 4,500

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[8] Palmer, *The Greek Language*, 176, says, "Once Alexander had destroyed the Persian empire, the whole of the Eastern world as far as India was opened up to Greek culture. In this way what we may now call the Macedonian Koine became not only the language of government and administration but the lingua franca of educated men throughout this huge expanse of territory."

[9] Syllabary is a writing system in which each character represents a complete syllable.

unbaked clay tablets found at Knossos (1400–1350 BC) and at Thebes, Tiryns, Mycenae, Pylos, and Chania (1250–1200 BC); of course, these dates are not the precise ones. There are no literary texts and hardly any continuous texts; only a small number of complete sentences exist. The tablets contain accounts of the great Mycenaean palaces and their dependencies.[10]

"As opposed to the alphabet, in which the separate sounds of a language are recorded individually, in a syllabary such as Linear B, individual signs consist of two sounds, typically a consonant followed by a vowel (/ka/, /ke/, /ki/, /ko/, /ku/; /ta/, /te/, /ti/, /to/, /tu/; etc.), with a separate set for simple vowels (/a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/). As a result, a syllabary will include a larger number of signs than an alphabet."[11]

The Linear B syllabary consists of about 90 signs. In principle, each sign represents a syllable beginning with one consonant and ending with a vowel. Thus, there are five different signs for *ta, te, ti, to, tu*, but there is no sign for the consonant *t* without a following vowel. As an initial syllable may be formed by just a vowel, there are also signs for *a, e, i, o, u*. The script does not distinguish *r* and *l*, unvoiced and voiced consonants (except for /d-/), and non-aspirated and aspirated consonants so that the sign *pa* can be read in Greek as *pa, ba,* or *pha*. Consequently, the spellings are often ambiguous. This inconvenient script and the nature of the documents make

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[10] Cf. Michel Lejeune - Brian E. Newton – Angeliki Malikouti-Drachman, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Greek-language/The-Greek-alphabet, accessed 5 June 2023.

[11] Silvia Ferrara, "Mycenaean Texts: The Linear B Tablets," in Egbert J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, 11.

Mycenaean inscriptions difficult to decipher. However the information that can be gathered on the state of Greek five centuries before Homer, although incomplete, is of prime importance.[12]

3.2. THE GREEK ALPHABET

The collapse of Mycenaean civilization around 1100 BCE brought about a period of isolation known as the Dark Age. The Mycenaean script dropped out of use as the Mycenaean palaces were destroyed, perhaps in connection with the Dorian invasions. For a few centuries there is a kind of silence. But by around 800 BC the revival had begun as trade with the wider world increased, arts, crafts and writing re-emerged and city-states (*poleis*) developed. Therefore, in the 8th century at the latest but probably much earlier, the Greeks, as said above, borrowed their alphabet from the Phoenicians as they had commercial contacts. The Phoenician alphabet had separate signs for the Semitic consonants, but the vowels were left unexpressed. The list of Semitic consonants was adapted to the needs of Greek phonology, but the major innovation was the use of five letters with the value of vowels—α (*a*), ε (*e*), ι (*i*), o (*o*), υ (*u*). The earliest datable inscriptions, both from approximately 725 BC, come from Athens (the Dipylon vase) and the colony of Ischia in the Tyrrhenian Sea (the so-called Nestor's cup).[13]

[12.] Cf. Michel Lejeune - Brian E. Newton – Angeliki Malikouti-Drachman, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Greek-language/The-Greek-alphabet, accessed 5 June 2023.

[13.] Cf. Michel Lejeune - Brian E. Newton – Angeliki Malikouti-Drachman, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Greek-language/The-Greek-alphabet, accessed 5 June 2023. See Woodard, "*Phoinikēia Grammata:* An Alphabet for the Greek Language," in Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek*

Greek alphabetic inscriptions are quite numerous: dedications, epitaphs, decrees, laws, treaties, religious rules, judicial decisions, and so forth. The majority are of the Hellenistic or Roman dates. The less numerous Archaic inscriptions (8th–5th centuries BC) are of particular interest for their contribution to the knowledge of the dialects. It is only in Hellenistic papyri, and later in Byzantine manuscripts, that the great works of ancient literature (the originals of which have disappeared) are available in the form of copies, some of which are far removed from the originals. During the period from the 8th to the 5th century BC, there were local differences in the forms of the letters and in their values from one city to another. Moreover, the primitive Greek alphabet underwent various reforms—the creation of new letters or a new use of old letters, first φ (ph), χ (ch), then ξ (ks), ψ (ps), η (ē), and ω (ō). About 400 BC the alphabet became normalized throughout the Greek world as the Asiatic Ionic form was uniformly adopted. The Greek alphabet, still in use today in Greece in the form it reached during the Hellenistic period, has enjoyed an extraordinary success as a direct or indirect model for other alphabets (notably the Latin alphabet).[14]

The alphabet in use today is essentially the late Ionic variant, introduced for writing classical Attic. In classical Greek, as in classical Latin, only upper-case letters existed. The lower-case

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Language, 25-46, who discusses to a certain extent in detail as to how, where, when and why the adaptation from the Phoenician language to Greek took place.

[14.] Cf. Michel Lejeune - Brian E. Newton – Angeliki Malikouti-Drachman, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Greek-language/The-Greek-alphabet, accessed on June 5, 2023.

Greek letters were developed much later by medieval scribes to permit a faster, more convenient cursive writing style with the use of ink and quill.[15]

Ancient Greek texts often used *scriptio continua*, which means that ancient authors and scribes would write word after word with no spaces or punctuation between words to differentiate or mark boundaries. Boustrophedon, or bi-directional text, was also used in Ancient Greek.[16]

3.3. VOCABULARY

If one considers the roots of words, it seems that, albeit the origin being Indo-European, a fairly large number of terms are borrowings are from the idioms of the populations living in Greece. Many words and forms found in Mycenaean correspond to plant names such as *elaiā* "olive," *pyxos* "box tree," and *selīnon* "celery"; animal names such as *leōn* "lion" and *onos* "ass"; so also names for objects such as *asaminthos* "bathing tub," *depas* "vase," and *xiphos* "sword"; and the names of materials such as *elephās* "ivory," and *chrȳsos* "gold." In fine, whatever the origins of verbal and nominal roots were, the Greek language developed a vocabulary full of nuances and of great scope (by using pre-verbs and by forming compounds and derived words). Therefore, at all periods, the lexical creativity of Greek was very productive, giving it a vocabulary of extraordinary richness.[17]

[15.] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language, accessed on July 9, 2023.

[16.] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language, accessed on July 9, 2023.

[17.] Cf. https://www.britannica.com/contributor/ Cornelis -Jord- Ruijgh/4260, accessed on 12 July 2023.

3.4. PHONOLOGY

The phonological systems of Ancient Greek differ noticeably from one period to another and from one dialect to another. The system that we choose here to serve as an example is that which may be attributed to Old Attic of about 500 BC.[18] "In Old Attic there are seven vowel qualities: *i*, open and closed *e, a*, open and closed *o*, and *u*, each of which has a long and a short form, except open *e* and open *o*, which have only the long form. Diphthongs originally included *ei, ai, oi* and *eu, au, ou*, but *ei* began to evolve toward long closed *ē*, and *ou* toward long closed *ō*. In addition, there is a diphthong *ui*, and, usually at the end of words, there are the diphthongs *-ēi, -āĭ, -ōi*, with long first elements, which much later were reduced respectively to long *ē*, long *ā*, and long open *ō*. The consonantal structure is characterized by relative richness in stops (sounds produced by momentary complete closure at some point in the vocal tract)— unvoiced *p, t, k*, aspirated *ph, th, ch*, voiced *b, d, g*—and by few spirants, only *s* and *h* (*h* restricted to initial position before a vowel). There are two liquid sounds, *l* and *r*, and two nasals, *m* and *n*. The velar nasal (as in *ink*) is not distinctive but is only a variant of the *n* in front of a velar stop or a variant of *g* in front of a nasal. Neither *y* nor *w* occurs as a distinctive sound. Most consonants can be doubled between vowels. The only consonant

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18. Cf. https://www.britannica.com/contributor/Cornelis -Jord- Ruijgh/4260, accessed on 12 July 2023. Philemon Probert, "Phonology," in Egbert J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, 85-103, here 85, observes in this regard, "The phonology of Ancient Greek varied with time, place, and social factors. [But we can speak of] the phonology of a relatively consistent and relatively well-attested variety of Greek: educated Classical Attic Greek of the late fifth century BC."

sounds normally allowed at the end of the word are *s, n,* and *r*."[19]

"Apart from some unaccented monosyllabic or disyllabic terms of minor importance, each word is marked by an accent (the highest tone within the word) on one of the vowels (one of the last three vowels, if the word has more than three syllables). Short vowels, if they carry the accent, have only a rising tone; long vowels or diphthongs may have either a rising tone (noted by the acute accent) or a rising tone followed by a falling tone (noted by the circumflex). When a word carrying an acute accent on the vowel of the final syllable is followed by another word within the same phrase, its accent is noted by the sign of the grave accent, in order to indicate that its tone is lower than that of the vowel of the initial syllable of the next word."[20] Probert notes in this regard, "There is one main accent per word; the main phonetic characteristic recognized by ancient grammarians is a raised pitch. The accented element is the vocalic mora (a short vowel or half of a long vowel or diphthong), so that an accent on a long vowel or diphthong falls either on the first mora (when it is written as a circumflex, as in sofw/n) or on the second (when it is written as an acute, as in avnqrw,pouj); over the whole long vowel or diphthong, a falling or rising accent is perceived."[21]

19. https://www.britannica.com/contributor/Cornelis-Jord- Ruijgh/4260, accessed on 12 July 2023.

20. https://www.britannica.com/contributor/Cornelis-Jord- Ruijgh/4260, accessed on 12 July 2023.

21. Probert, "Phonology," 102.

3.5. MORPHOLOGY

Form and meaning combining at the level of the word is the domain of morphology.[22] "The Greek word may … contain three kinds of morphological units ('monemes'): the *root*, one or more *affixes* (suffixes and prefixes; on the 'infix', …), which are attached to the root to form *stems* (…), and finally the *inflexion*, which transforms the stem into a complete word and indicates its syntactical function."[23] It means that every nominal (noun or adjective) or verbal form combines a stem that carries the lexical sense of the word and a certain number of grammatical markers that serve to specify the meaning of the whole word (e.g., singular, plural, present, future, etc.) or to indicate its syntactic function (e.g., subject, object, indirect object, etc.) in the sentence. The category of gender, which differentiates masculine, feminine, and neuter, concerns only the substantive, adjective, and pronoun; it is determined for each word by grammar than by the biological features. The category of person (first, second, and third person) is restricted to the personal pronoun and the verb. There are three numbers—singular, dual, and plural—that are distinguished in both the noun and the verb. The survival of the dual is archaistic; although a living form in the Mycenaean period, it tends to be replaced by the plural in the first millennium. Not counting the vocative case, the Greek declension in the Mycenaean period still contained five cases: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative-locative, and instrumental. Between the Mycenaean period and the 8th century the instrumental ceased

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[22.] Cf. Michael Wiess, "Morphology and Word Formation," in Egbert J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, 104-119, here 104.

[23.] Palmer, *The Greek Language*, 245.

to exist as a distinct case, its role having been taken over by the dative. [24]

The verbal system is organized around four principal tense stems, which are built on the verb stem: "present," aorist, "perfect," and future. The first three are often called aspects. According to this terminology, the "present" stem is used for imperfective aspect (ongoing or repeated process), the "perfect" stem for stative aspect (the state resulting from the completion of the process), and the aorist stem for perfective aspect (completed process). In principle, each tense stem provides four moods for the finite verb (with personal endings), a participle, and an infinitive. Therefore there is one assertive mood (indicative) and five non-assertive moods (subjunctive, optative, imperative, infinitive, participle). The expression of time relations is based on the combination of the values of the tenses ("aspects") and those of the moods. For instance, the past indicative of the "present" (the so-called imperfect) is used for ongoing or repeated processes in the past, that of the aorist for completed processes in the past, and that of the "perfect" (the so-called pluperfect) for states in the past. The

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[24]. Cf. https//www. britannica.com/ contributor/Cornelis -Jord- Ruijgh/4260, accessed on 12 July 2023. In this regard Wiess, "Morphology and Word Formation," 105, observes, "The Attic Greek nominal system expresses the morpho-syntactic categories of case (nom., voc., acc., dat. and gen. with scattered traces of a locative), number (sg., du.,and pl.), and gender (masc., fem., and neut.)… The gender system makes a major division between non-neuter and neuter, the latter of which is characterized by identity of the nominative, vocative and accusative in all numbers. The masculine and feminine distinction is not consistently expressed morphologically. Nouns of identical stem types may be either masculine or feminine (ὁ λόγος vs ἡ φήγος, ὁ πατήρ vs ἡ μήτηρ), although stem types do tend to have predominant gender tendencies."

Greek verb has three voices, active, middle and passive.[25]

In all its stages, the morphology of Greek shows an extensive and complex system of derivational morphology. As Weiss notes, "Derivational morphology, also known as word formation, concerns the creation of new words either from roots (primary derivation), or from already derived words (secondary derivation), or the combination of two or more word stems (compounding). In Greek, derivational morphology often involves the addition of affixal material (external derivation), e.g., χάρι–ς → χαρί–εις but sometimes proceeds by rearrangement of ablaut and/or accent position (internal derivation), e.g., λευκός 'bright' → λεῦκος 'whitefish.'"[26] With regard to the verbal morphology, as Weiss indicates rightly, "Greek has preserved the Indo-European situation more faithfully than most daughter languages…. The chief semantic innovation, achieved completely only after Homer, was the reinterpretation of the resultative as a true perfect, i.e., a past event with current relevance."[27] From the New Testament an example can be drawn from John 19,22 in the statement of Pontius Pilate, ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Πιλᾶτος· ὃ γέγραφα, γέγραφα. "Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." It means that the assertion of Pilate remains to the effect that Jesus is King and continues to be so, which is one of the major themes of the passion narrative of the Fourth Gospel.

[25.] Cf. https://www. britannica .com/ contributor/Cornelis -Jord- Ruijgh/4260, accessed on July 12, 2023.

[26.] Wiess, "Morphology and Word Formation," 109-110.

[27.] Wiess, "Morphology and Word Formation,"110.

3.6. SYNTAX[28]

Many aspects of the syntax of Greek have remained constant: verb agrees with its subject only; the use of the surviving cases is largely intact (nominative for subjects and predicates, accusative for objects of most verbs and many prepositions, genitive for possessors); articles precede nouns; adpositions are largely prepositional; relative clauses follow the noun they modify and relative pronouns are clause-initial.[29]

As Van Emde Boas – Huitink observe, "Many syntactic relationships in Greek are expressed by nominal case-endings. Thus, the nominative is the case for subjects of finite verbs and for predicate nouns or adjectives with a copulative verb …. Of the oblique cases, the accusative is the default case for direct objects … and for the subject of infinitives …; the genitive to connect one noun to another as attribute… and for the genitive absolute construction; the dative is often used for adverbial modifiers …. The vocative is used in addresses...."[30] Since syntactical relations are expressed by means of case endings, Greek word order is relatively free. The creation of the definite article (post-Mycenaean and post-Homeric) is an important innovation. The availability of infinitive and participle clauses, with or without the article, as alternatives for all kinds of subordinate clauses permits

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[28.] Evert van Emde Boas - Luuk Huitink, "Syntax," in Egbert J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, 134-150, here 134, describes the study of syntax thus: "The study of syntax is concerned with the ways words are combined to form sentences. A well-formed sentence is not a jumble of words randomly thrown together, but a structure built out of words shaped and ordered according to specific rules and principles."

[29.] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language, accessed on July 9, 2023.

[30.] Van Emde Boas - Luuk Huitink, "Syntax," 135.

the construction of very long and complex sentences that are nevertheless entirely transparent as to their syntactic structure. This accomplishment of Attic prose (known as periodic style) is unmatched in other languages.[31] The style has been continued in the language, as it is seen in the Koine of Rom 1:1-7.

4. KOINE

The fairly uniform spoken Greek that gradually replaced the local dialects after the breakdown of old political barriers and the establishment of Alexander's empire in the 4th century BC is known as the Koine (*hē koinē dialektos* 'the common language'), or "Hellenistic Greek." Koine was also called "Alexandrinian" as it was much developed in Alexandria of Egypt.[32] Attic, by virtue of the undiminished cultural and commercial predominance of Athens, provided the basis for Koine.[33] However, as the medium of communication throughout the new urban centres of Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor, it absorbed numerous non-Attic elements and underwent some degree of grammatical simplification. Numerous inscriptions enable scholars to trace its triumphant progress at the expense of the old dialects, at least as the language of business and administration, although some rural dialects are reported to have survived as late as the 2nd century AD. Other

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[31.] Cf. https://www. britannica .com/ contributor/Cornelis –Jord- Ruijgh/4260, accessed on July 12, 2023.

[32.] Cf. Konstantine Nikolakopoulos, "The Language of the New Testament as an Example for the Historical Unity of the Greek Language," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42/3-4 (1997) 259-271, here 261.

[33.] Adrados, *A History of the Greek Language*, 178, notes, "So *koine* is fundamentally Attic, although it contains Ionic elements and vocabulary (for example, the declension in ἀς/-ἄδος) and has eliminated Atticisms such as -ττ-, -ρρ- and certain inflectional types."

sources of information for the Koine are the translation of the Septuagint made in the 3rd century BC for the use of the Hellenized Jewish community of Alexandria, the New Testament,[34] and the writings of a few people (e.g., the historian Polybius and the philosopher Epictetus) who preferred it to Attic. As the everyday colloquial language of urban Egypt, it may be studied in papyri going back to the 4th century BC. The Koine may be dated generally from the period of Alexander's conquests in the 4th century BC to approximately the reign of Justinian in the 6th century AD.[35]

Koine is both a spoken and a written language. The spoken Koine could be called as "popular/conversational Koine" and the written as "literary koine." In fact a great amount of Greek prose is often summarised as "literary Koine." But popular koine could also become part of literary koine when written and is widely read and appreciated. Hence "literary koine" is an uncomfortably vague term covering heterogeneous literary material. "So, in the Gospels, Luke uses traditional Attic words as opposed to the popular words used by the other evangelists: κράνιον for Γολγοθάν, φόρος for κῆνσον, ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν for ἀπ΄ἄρτι, σῶμα for πτῶμα, ἐσθίω for τρώγω, δέρω for κολαφίζω."[36] Also in antiquity there were modes of expression particular to Jews and Christians,

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[34.] Adrados, *A History of the Greek Language*, 179, notes again, "With regard to popular, spoken *koine,* we have to make do with the 'mistakes' of written texts, …, the LXX (literature of translation; but some books correspond to a higher level) and the New Testament (these two texts have special features)…"

[35.]   Cf.   https://www.britannica.com/topic/Greek-language/Morphology-and-syntax, Brian E. Newton - Angeliki Malikouti-Drachman, accessed on July 17, 2023.

[36.] Adrados, *A History of the Greek Language*, 197.

which could have to a certain extent influenced Koine; Semitism is one of such influences, although it is contested by some authors today, who think that it need not be an influence from outside but a natural development of the language in the course of time, when meeting other circumstances and cultures. There were in addition different kinds of technical language. And finally the official administration represents a linguistic tradition in its own right, for *Koine* is the language of the officialdom and the administrative language form of the state.[37]

From a morphologico-syntactic point of view several aspects can be pointed out to distinguish Koine from classical Greek. We may draw attention to just a few of them here. Koine replaced the Attic *tt* with the *ss* characteristic of Ionic and other dialects (e.g.,γλῶσσα for γλῶττα, φυλάσσω for φυλάττω; "I guard"; so also the Attic νεώς became ναός, "temple" at an early date. As for the grammar of Koine the dual number was lost in nouns, verbs, and adjectives. In vocabulary there were numerous borrowings from non-Attic dialects, and some Attic words acquired new meanings; thus, *opsaria* "fish" and *brechei* "it rains," which occur in the New Testament, for Classical Greek *ichthyes* and *hyei*.[38] The prepositional phrase εἰς+ accusative, the expression of direction, is very early substituted for ἐν+ dative as the expression of the locative, but the latter expression reappears constantly.[39]

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[37] Cf. Staffan Wahlgren, "Byzantine Literature and the Classical Past," in *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, Egbert J. Bakker, (ed.) (Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World; West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 527-538, here 530.

[38] Cf. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Greek-language/Morphology-and-syntax, accessed on July 17, 2023.

[39] Claude Brixhe, "Linguistic Diversity in Asia Minor during the Empire: Koine

Morphologically, there is the tendency for elimination or modification of unusual forms of all parts of speech and the assimilation of potentially ambiguous forms to those more easily recognizable. Syntactically there is the increased use of prepositions and pronouns, and preference for direct, as opposed to indirect, discourse. Further, syntactical difference is seen in the decline of the optative mood, the decline in the use of the present tense in moods other than the indicative, the decline in the number and rich combinations of particles, the increasing restriction of the middle voice to deponent usage, the expansion of the use of *hina,* and the frequency of parataxis (i.e., linked co-ordinate clauses) in place of hypotaxis (subordinate clauses dependent upon another).[40] From a biblical point of view the Jewish Greek of the LXX and the Christian Greek of the New Testament are the examples of the development and wider use of the Koine.

4.1. JEWISH GREEK

It was in the third century BC that King Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283-246) wanted his library in Alexandria to have a copy of the Jewish Law. But it had to be rendered in to Greek and thus there emerged the Septuagint (*Septuaginta,* the Latin for 70). In a way this work represents one of the natural developments of the classical Attic Greek. Its features are quite significant. We know that Septuagint was the Bible of the New Testament and

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and Non-Greek Languages": in *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language,* Egbert J. Bakker, (ed.) (Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World; West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 228-252, here 230-231.

[40.] James W. Voelz, "The Linguistic Milieu of the Early Church," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 52 (1992) 81-97, here 86.

even of the Church, before the Vulgate would take its position in the Western Church.

Many features of the language of the Septuagint that diverge from Classical Attic have traditionally been identified as resulting from the literal translation of characteristically Hebrew syntactic constructions and lexical expressions into unidiomatic Greek; but they could also be considered as part of the natural development of the language.[41] The following three examples may be pointed out:

(1) The Septuagint strikes the classically trained reader as unusually paratactic: that is, it eschews nested subordinate clauses and participles in favour of a string of syntactically coordinate sentences by καί, "and." Comparing the Greek account of creation of light with the account of creation light with the Hebrew original will bring this out:[42]

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός γενηθήτω φῶς καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς καὶ εἶδεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ φῶς ὅτι καλόν (Gen 1:3-4a)

[41.] Cf. Coulter H. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," in Egbert J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, 267-280, here 267-268. Geoffrey Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 22010) 106, states, "But while it is undeniable that, as a close translation of a sacred text, it embodies Hebraisms (especially where the obscurity or formulaic language of the original led to literalness), the analysis of the ordinary language of contemporary private papyrus documents from Egypt has now demonstrated conclusively that the Septuagint's general grammatical and lexical make-up is that of the ordinary, everyday written Greek of the times, and that it therefore constitutes an important source of information for the development of the language in the Hellenistic period. The translation of the Pentateuch, for example, seems to be in a very natural contemporary Koine…"

[42.] Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 268.

(Gen 1:3-4a) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי־אוֹר:

וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב

And God said, Let there be light: *and* there was light. *And* God saw the light, that *it was* good: (Gen 1:3-4a, KJV).

Way-yōmer   ʾĕlōhîm   yəhî   ʾôr   wa-yhî ʾôr

[and- he] said God   let.there.be. light [and] there.was light

Way-yarəʾ ʾĕlōhîm   ʾĕṯ-hā- ʾôr   kî-ṭôḇ

[and-he] saw   God particle–the–light   that-[it was] good.

The Greek follows the word order and syntax of Hebrew very closely. There are just two exceptions: first the definite article is added to θεός; the Hebrew particle which corresponds to the definite object marker is left un-translated. But more important are the similarities. In this what is significant is the widespread presence of kai,, which may correspond to the *waw conversive* of Hebrew, but is redundant for it is already present in the aorist form of the Greek verbs here.

(2) Another feature that distinguishes the language of the Septuagint from Classical Attic is the increased use of the oblique cases of personal pronouns, especially as possessives, direct objects and resumptive pronouns:

καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ καὶ ἀνέστη Καιν ἐπὶ Αβελ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπέκτεινεν αὐτόν (Gen 4,8)

וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:

and it happened in *their* being in the field, and he rose up

Cain against Abel *his* brother, and he killed *him.*

In this example, forms of the third person pronoun αὐτός occurs three times in just twenty words of Greek: once as the subject of the infinitive, as a possessive pronoun, and then as an object pronoun. All the three time there is a corresponding pronomial element in the Hebrew in precisely the same position in the sentence. This is a greater use of this pronomial stem than is generally said to occur in Classical Attic, in which the sense of the possessive αὐτοῦ is sufficiently expressed through the definite article on its own, and pronominal objects can be dropped altogether. Example (2) also shows once again the prominence of the *waw conversive* in Hebrew. It occurs with all three main verbs, and it is translated into Greek with καί + main verb each time.[43] This feature represents the paratactic character of the language of Septuagint, and it is because of the Semitic influence on Greek language.

(3) A third feature of language of Septuagint that can be attributed to Semitic influence is its non-Classical use of *prepositions*. This is most obvious at the lexical level; certain verbs take prepositions constructions that are not found in Attic authors, but which do have analogues in the Hebrew original. The verb φεβέομαι, "fear," for example, usually constructed with an accusative object in Attic, can take ἀπό + genitive in the Septuagint. This reflects the Hebrew construction of the verb *yārē'* "fear, to be afraid" with the preposition *min* "from," which often assumes the combining form *mē*:

μὴ πτήξητε μηδὲ φοβηθῆτε ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν (Deut 1:29)

[43.] Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 269.

לֹא־תַעַרְצוּן וְלֹא־תִירְאוּן מֵהֶם׃

Do not tremble (2pl.) and not be afraid (2 pl.) from them.[44]

Now, all three of these features – parataxis, increased pronoun use, and non-standard prepositional constructions – have also been claimed not simply as literal translation of the Hebrew text rather as representing the simple historical evolution of Greek by many scholars today.[45]

4.2. THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

As Aramaic is the language in which Jesus is most likely to have taught and spoken, it would be surprising if it had not left some imprint on the Greek of the NT. At the same time some of the features, characteristic of the NT Greek once attributed to the influence of Semitic languages, have been shown to represent the natural evolution of Koine Greek. There are indeed examples which could be indicated as example of the influence of Semitic languages, while today it is thought that they are aspects of natural evolution of the Koine, as seen in the papyri.

We may begin with one clear sign of Semitic influence on the language of the NT, namely the occasional quotation of un-translated Aramaic words:

(i) Mark 14:36: καὶ ἔλεγεν, Αββα ὁ πατήρ.

And he said: Abba, Father.

Here *Abbā*, ("father") is Aramaic.

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44. Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 270. For all these features discussed see also Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers*, 106-108.

45. Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 271.

(ii) Mark 5:41: καὶ κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ παιδίου λέγει αὐτῇ, Ταλιθα κουμ, ὅ ἐστιν μεθερμηνευόμενον Τὸ κοράσιον, σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε.

And he took hold of the child's hand and said to her: "Talitha qum," which, translated, is: Child, I say to you, get up.'"

Aramaic: *tòəlîtā* [emphatic state] "girl," and *qûm* "arise."

Why does Mark write thus? It could simply be that Mark wanted to be more original. It should be noted that Aramaic features occur more in Mark than in Matthew or Luke, suggesting, in line with the standard view that Mark pre-dates the other two synoptic Gospels, and that Aramaic quotations were gradually edited out of the text by the latter.[46]

There are in fact numerous other characteristics which are typical of the Koine in the NT as distinct from Classical Greek, some of which have been already indicated above while pointing to the development of Koine as such. Yet a few more could be mentioned. First of all, there is the disappearance of the dual. Further, the optative mood is used in a very limited way; most of the time it is used in a wish, to be obtained from God. Furthermore, the ἵνα construction is used both for result and purpose clauses. There is also the substitution of regular verb endings (*o, eis, ei*, etc.) for some form of *mi*-verbs. Moreover, there is the simplification of sentence construction by the frequent

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[46.] Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 274. Interestingly in Mark the cry of Jesus on the cross, the text which is a quotation from Psalm 22,2, ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθανι;, is totally Aramaic, whereas the text in Matt 27,46, ηλι ηλι λεμα σαβαχθανι;, has the address portion, ηλι ηλι ("my God, my God"), in Hebrew.

use of καί, ("and") and δέ, ("but") to join clauses and sentences.[47]

These characteristics can still be amplified as follows: (1) There is a multiplicity of new words, with new meanings attached to many old words. For example, γρηγορέω, meaning "keep watch," in Mark 13:35, and ῥομφαία, meaning "sword," in Revelation 1:16, which are new Koine Greek words. φθάνω meaning "arrive" instead of "anticipate," in 1Thess 2:16, and ἐγκόπτω meaning "hinder" instead of "cut," in Gal 5:7 are old words with new Koine Greek meanings attached. (2) Lexically, this tendency meant the preference for "fuller" and phonetically stronger forms. Syntactically, it is seen chiefly in the increased frequency of prepositions and pronouns, and in the preference for direct, as opposed to indirect, discourse. For instance, πρόβατον, meaning "sheep," is used in place of ὄϊς (the classical Greek word), in John 21:16, and ἀκολουθέω, meaning "follow," in place of ἕπομαι in Matt 8:1, both of which are phonetically "stronger" forms. So also πρὸς αὐτόν, indicating indirect object ("to him"), in place of the dative form αὐτῷ in John 3:4, illustrates the increased use of prepositional constructions. (3) There is a strong tendency toward simplicity. Morphologically, it meant elimination or modification of unusual forms of all parts of speech and the assimilation of potentially ambiguous forms to those more easily recognizable, which also led to the loss of fine distinctions. Lexically, it meant in the free use of compound and diminutive vocables with no specifically compounded or

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[47.] Cf. Robert G. Hoerber, "The Greek of the New Testament. Some Theological Implications," *Concordia Journal* 2 (1976) 251-256, here 253. Some of these features are also very well presented by Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers*, 147-152.

diminutive meaning. Syntactically it meant the expansion of the use of ἵνα, and the frequency of parataxis (i.e., linked coordinate clauses) in place of hypotaxis (subordinate clauses dependent upon another). Examples are the use of δεικνύω, meaning "show," in place of δείκνυμι (the Classical Greek form) in John 2:18 (of unusual forms), ἀναγγέλλω instead of ἀγγέλλω, meaning "announce," in John 4:25, and παιδίον, instead of παῖς, meaning "child," in Matt 14:21 (of compounds and diminutives), and finally (of syntax), ἵνα clauses instead of infinitives in 1John 1:9 and 1Cor 1:10, and of καί,, and δέ, linking coordinate clauses (parataxis) instead of participles subordinating one clause to another (hypotaxis), as in Mark's account of the crucifixion of the Lord in 15:23-26.[48]

Now if we put the NT language in parallel with the Septuagint, we turn first to questions of co-ordination: both parataxis and comparatively more prominent in the NT, *asyndeton*. Certainly, the καὶ ἐγένετο construction which is so typical of the Septuagint is also found in the NT, although it is not evenly distributed: seven times in Matthew, seven times in Mark, and 28 times in Luke, and six times in Acts, but never in John.[49]

The fact is that while the Synoptics go with the paratactic method, which is more common in Hebrew, John goes with the asyndeton which is more in keeping with the Aramaic practice. This difference can well be established if we examine the Hebrew and Aramaic parts of Daniel.

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48. Cf. Voelz, "The Linguistic Milieu of the Early Church," 86-87.

49. Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 274.

Contrastive figure for asyndeton in Hebrew and Aramaic sections of Daniel and the NT[50]

Text	Sentences starting with connective particle	Sentences starting with asyndeton
Daniel 1:1-2,4a (Hebrew as original language)	22	1 (the opening verse)
Matthew 3	13	0
Mark 1	36	2
Luke 8	58	2
Dan 2:5-49 (Aramaic as original language)	22	22
John 1	28	34

The figure shows the Synoptics in sharp contrast with John; but Mark appears to have more asyndeton than the other two, which again reflects, as it is generally argued that the gospel is closer to Aramaic original than Matthew and Luke. However, others argue that Asyndeton is not an Aramaism but rather a straightforward Hellenistic Greek, which of course can be supported if we hold that John who is late, not necessarily affected by Aramaism,

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50. Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 275.

shows the development in the Greek language itself.[51]

A second feature of the language of the NT generally shown for possible Semitic influence is once again, as in the Septuagint, an increased use of the third-person personal pronoun which may take several forms. A few examples will clarify the case:

Luke 10,7: ἐν αὐτῇ δὲ τῇ οἰκίᾳ μένετε ἐσθίοντες καὶ πίνοντες τὰ παρ᾽ αὐτῶν·

"But stay in that house [not: in the house itself] eating and drinking what is given by them."

This is the use of proleptic third person pronoun instead of an article, which has sometimes been seen as an Aramaism, but not necessarily.[52]

Matt 3,4: Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ Ἰωάννης εἶχεν τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τριχῶν καμήλου.

"And this (aforementioned) John had his garment made from camel hair."

Luke 24,12:

καὶ ἀπῆλθεν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν θαυμάζων τὸ γεγονός.

"He went off to himself (?) marvelling at what had happened."

These three are occasions in which the writers of the NT used pronouns where a strict Atticist would have avoided them; however, such pronomial use is by no means certain to be a Semitism.[53] There are authors today who point to the Papyri

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[51.] Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 275.

[52.] Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 275-276.

[53.] Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 276.

examples to show that these features are part of the natural development of the Greek language than that of the mere influence of Aramaic language. It is noted that the frequent use of auvto,n as a third person pronoun is paralleled in the papyri:[54]

κατατρέχω αὐτήν λέγων οὐ μὴ ἀφῶ αὐτὴν φυγῖν καταλαμβάνω αὐτὴν καὶ ἐμβάλλω αὐτήν

I run after her saying I will *not* let her run away. I catch her and hit her. (*P.Par.*50.17).[55]

With these considerations what is concluded is thus: "The language of the Septuagint and the New Testament does not represent special dialect of the Jewish-Christian Greek altogether cut off from the regular development of *Koine*, nor is it completely free from Semitic influence. Instead, as one would expect of writings produced in Hellenistic Alexandria and Roman Palestine, it reflects both the broader evolution of the Greek language as a whole and the more specific influence of the Semitic milieu in which it arose."[56]

5. CONCLUSION

This paper gives a glimpse of the development of the Greek language from the Mycenaean to the Koine phase. The treatment of the matter is mostly of a general and introductory nature; it is neither comprehensive nor particularizing, getting into one or the other specifics, which would make a difference. Each sub-heading indicated here would require a longer, further and sharper

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[54.] Cf. George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 278.

[55.] Example as cited by George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 278, from C. E. Maloney, *Semitic Interference in Marcan Syntax* (Chico, CA, 1981) 112.

[56.] George, "Jewish and Christian Greek," 279.

deliberation. Every period of the development and evolution of this language distinguishes itself in numerous and varying ways. The differences between classical Greek and Koine are quite significant. The LXX has the features of an emerging and evolving Koine but is not without Semitic characteristics, being the translation a Hebrew work, whereas the New Testament is Koine proper. Since the Bible is the word of God expressed in the words of men and women (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 13),[57] naturally a thorough-going enquiry into the development of the language in which it was written is indispensable for its rightful understanding and interpretation. Hence it is imperative that the history and development of the Greek language, into which the Hebrew Old Testament was rendered and with which new works were produced (e.g., some of the Deutero-Canonicals, if not all) and in which the whole of New Testament was written, be studied diligently. It is through understanding such a delicate process that the exegesis of the longer Canon (Septuagint) and the New Testament are further sharpened and rightly accomplished.

[57.] DV 13 says, "Dei enim verba, humanis linguis expressa, humano sermoni assimilia facta sunt, sicut olim Aeterni Patris Verbum, humanae infirmitatis assumpta carne, hominibus simile factum est."