

# The Annual of the British School at Athens

<http://journals.cambridge.org/ATH>

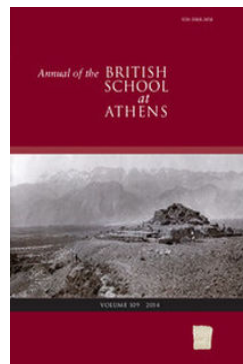
Additional services for *The Annual of the British School at Athens*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

## Prof. Jannaris' Historical Greek Grammar

J. P. Mahaffy

The Annual of the British School at Athens / Volume 3 / November 1897, pp 215 - 220  
DOI: 10.1017/S0068245400000873, Published online: 18 October 2013

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0068245400000873](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0068245400000873)

### How to cite this article:

J. P. Mahaffy (1897). Prof. Jannaris' Historical Greek Grammar. The Annual of the British School at Athens, 3, pp 215-220 doi:10.1017/S0068245400000873

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

## PROF. JANNARIS' HISTORICAL GREEK GRAMMAR.

---

OF the writing of Greek grammars there is no end, and the reading of them is a weariness to the flesh. Most of them are unpractical enough, and give the student imaginary things for real. How many a boy has been persuaded to accept as good Greek the whole of dear old *τύπτω*, as set forth in the paradigms ever since the first book printed in Greek—the Grammar of Lascaris—was constructed for the torment of the young! How often do rules piled upon rules obscure our sense of a living and real language! It is not, therefore, easy to persuade men that have a long and daily habit of reading Greek to turn back to a grammar, unless they are obliged to look for that most idle of all knowledge—theoretical rules to set down upon examination papers. Yet Prof. Jannaris has overcome this strong repugnance in me, and I labour at his very voluminous and intricate book with profit, and with an interest I never before felt in such a book. Not that he persuades me of all his theories—far from it; but he attacks and strives to solve the standing problems which recur perpetually to the honest student of classical Greek, and which ought, we imagine, to have been long since solved. Yet the very length of the life of a problem may be evidence that it will never be solved, for it seems absurd to think that men could have been found to take opposite sides upon it for centuries without adequate grounds for each side, and the man who offers a final solution after many generations may find himself ranked with the honest proconsul, who called together the heads of the Greek schools of philosophy at Corinth, and advised them to settle their disputes in one final conference, at which he himself proposed to act as umpire.

On the other hand, there are such things as controversies which

do not last for ever. No one now contends for what was once hotly maintained, that Schliemann's discoveries have not determined the site of Homeric Troy; no one—except Mr. Gladstone—now maintains that one poet composed the whole Iliad and Odyssey, as we have them. We are not, therefore, wholly without hope that the question, for instance, of old Greek pronunciation, though long under dispute, may find its gradual settlement by the acquiescence of the majority of scholars in the arguments on one side. And this is the first question we are disposed to investigate in a book which professes to give us the historical development of old Greek into new. We could have guessed, *a priori*, which side Prof. Jannaris would take. A Greek of to-day who denied the direct filiation of anything now universal in Greece from classical ancestry would be indeed a *rara avis*, for never was patriotism so ingrained in any people. But we must confess that he sustains his ingrained prejudice with many sound arguments, and despite the fact that he reckons among his opponents so great an authority as Prof. F. Blass, of Halle, I cannot but think that he has made good his case. He does not, perhaps, lay stress enough upon some obvious arguments; for example, that the Romans, in the second century B.C., when they came to transliterate Greek proper names, wrote *Æschylus*, and not as R. Browning—who was fond of wonderful jargon—*Aischulos*, and so Phidias, Æneas, Lycurgus, &c., all of which approximate closely to the present Greek pronunciation. But Prof. Jannaris' arguments are far more elaborate. He shows from the enormous variations in the every-day spelling of Greek in inscriptions and early papyri that the correct style introduced (he maintains) by grammarians is artificial, and does not represent the actual speech of the people at any epoch. And he finds in authors, from Plato (in his *Cratylus*) downward, allusions which corroborate the view that, though not so old as accent, pronunciation, as it existed when Greek was brought into the West by the Renaissance (or along with the Renaissance, or to create the Renaissance), has a respectable antiquity, and had already been established in classical days. These are the general conclusions to be drawn from a forest of facts, especially drawn from the Greek of inscriptions, which might, perhaps, have been better co-ordinated; but then the reader would have lost the peculiar pleasure of seeking the proper inferences for himself. There is no need for me to crowd this

paper with special references to the pages of the book, as it is well indexed, and any serious reader can find for himself what he wants. But I do think it a pity that the whole apparatus of our ordinary Greek grammars should have been included in a book of which the importance depends upon special and peculiar views supported by special investigations. It is upon these, and the admirable analysis of the growth of the present Greek accidence and syntax out of the Hellenistic idiom, that the book must stand or fall.

Let us return to the special questions which here interest us. The next great problem on which this book is well worth consulting is that of accent. In the first place, the at first incredible statement of old Greek grammarians that the proparoxytone is a natural limit determined by physical necessity—that is to say, that if a speaker of Greek put on the stress four syllables from the end of his word he would not have breath to finish it—this statement is justified by maintaining, and apparently with reason, that in Greek all syllables have an appreciable length and require some effort from the speaker, unlike English, where short syllables often drop their vowel altogether in pronunciation. We may say *centénary*; but also *céntenary*, which is nearly *centnary*, the second syllable being merely indicated. But a people pronouncing each syllable distinctly must find a difficulty in a series of more than two unaccented syllables after the word-accent. I think that is the case in German, except that grammatical flexions do not count in pronunciation so far as to disturb the word-accent, whereas in the more deliberate Greek pronunciation they do. We say in German *álderend*, and also *álderenden*, but I cannot remember an uninflected word which has fixed accent with three unaccented syllables following. Such words as *unbehúlflich* are really in accent - ˘ - ˘, not - ˘ ˘ ˘. But I am not discussing German accent further than to show how, even in modern speech, there may be more deliberation in the pronunciation of one tongue than another.

These things being so, Prof. Jannaris proceeds to declare unto us the most comforting doctrine that it is only pedantic scrupulosity of the grammarians to write several kinds of accents; that really circumflex and acute are one, and mean stress, not musical pitch. I think his arguments against the advocates of musical pitch are perfectly sound, and I might add to his arguments (1) that any attempt to read by

pitch which I have ever heard was a complete failure; (2) that the extant remains of old Greek music, with the words attached, show no fixed disposition to raise the note of the tune when the word-accent occurs, which they might be expected to do had the accent really been pitch-accent.

But the real "stress" of the question is its bearing upon Greek metre. If, as seems now certain, the accents put on our Greek texts by the Alexandrians, when Greek became a world language, and foreigners were at a loss how to pronounce it—a sensible device which, if copied by the English, would make their tongue flourish over the world—if, I say, these accents represent a most ancient pronunciation, which goes back to prehistoric times, how is it that our oldest metrical Greek (the Homeric) poems are composed in complete disregard of accent, and on a different principle, that of quantity? Under any supposition we can make, this conflict of accent and quantity is the greatest puzzle bequeathed to us by Greek literature. All the accents are persistent, and people seem always to have put them on their words where we find them. But turn to any Greek poet, from Homer to Nonnus, and you find accents totally disregarded. This metrical contempt is most completely shown by the fact that there are in almost any page of Homer lines where the accents and the long syllables do coincide. Such cases must have plainly suggested to the poets what the effect of such agreement would be, and yet even with these examples before them nine out of every ten lines violate the accentual stress.

It used to be thought one way of escape to make the accent a pitch accent, while putting the stress on the long syllables, but I have already said that I never heard any such attempt without complete failure; either the metre was lost, or the accent obscured. Thus we are driven back upon the old difficulty. How can the Greeks, who spoke by accent, have possibly hit upon a national system of metre which distinctly violated their ordinary pronunciation at every turn, and how can there have existed from the beginning another system of pronouncing, that by long and short syllables, which seems to have been preserved to us at first by metre, afterwards by orthography (long vowels, diphthongs, position)?

This is the problem which Prof. Jannaris attacks, and for which he offers us a new and startling solution. The reader who desires to

find its clearest statement will find it in section 9 of Appendix II. (pp. 528-9), and I request him to compare it with what I say, for an author should be judged at first hand, and not from the mirror of any critic. According to Prof. Jannaris, what we call quantity is not original to Greek, which in its earliest literature knew only metre and accent. When grammarians came to set down in writing, and for educational purposes, their old national poetry, they found such strong variations and conflicts between the spoken words and their treatment in metre that they devised various methods of marking the syllables long in metre, which were not habitually accented in ordinary speech, either by doubling the adjoining consonant, so as to produce what is called length by position, or by adding a vertical stroke after the vowel, which latter device actually gave birth to the diphthongs *αι ει ου υ!* and also by the long vowels **Η** and **Ω**, which, as is well known, do not appear in old inscriptions. Thus the so-called quantities, which tormented our youth when we were striving to write Greek verses at school and college, are, after all, a late and artificial invention of grammarians in the fourth century B.C., who sought by this means to teach and interpret the metre of the traditional epics. But whence or why did the epics hit upon a metrical system in violation of the accents, especially when they were not bound by tradition to recognise any syllable as long, apart from its position? To this vital question I have found no direct answer in the book before us. The indirect answer seems to be that the origin of Greek epic poetry belongs to a long past, indeed a prehistoric age, which we can no longer interrogate, but which evidently contained conditions quite foreign to those of the historical Greeks. And this answer postulates a far greater antiquity for the Homeric poems than I am disposed to admit. This conclusion seems to follow from the assumption that writing is very old in Greece, for which the eight arguments produced (pp. 22-3) are all very weak. By some curious oversight it is even alleged that the great Gortyn inscription comes from the seventh century B.C. There is no clear proof that writing, at least fluent writing, was of early use in Greece, and the Homeric poems do not seem to me divided by any great gap from Archilochus and the earliest lyric poets. Consequently it is difficult to understand how the metric of Homer should have been so strange as to require an artificial rehandling of Greek orthography, and an artificial establishing of long syllables,

which had meantime been recognised and adopted in all the lyric metres.

But it is quite possible that Prof. Jannaris may yet give us full explanations of these difficulties.

Let me repeat in conclusion that in explaining modern Greek forms the book is most ingenious and instructive, and here the author speaks with an authority which few of us can gainsay. This feature, in any case, should secure for him a distinctive place among Greek grammarians. But he takes liberties with our language which a foreigner should hardly take. He coins a crowd of new and strange terms, some of them very ugly, and yet his English, though marvellously good for one not a native, is not above criticism. Thus he often uses *relegate* in the sense of *bequeath*. But these trifles are of no moment to the sort of reader for whom the book is intended. A second edition might usefully be abridged in one direction, and expanded in another; but this latter the author will be required to do in any case when he comes to defend himself against the onslaughts which the champions of conservative views are likely to make upon him.

J. P. MAHAFFY.