

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST  
TRANSCRIPTS**

**EPISODE 14:  
THE GREEK WORD HOARD**

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## **EPISODE 14: THE GREEK WORD HOARD**

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This time, we’re going to look at the vast horde of Greek words which have found their way into Modern English. I’m not going to look at all of the Greek words which have come into English. That would probably take several episodes. But I am going to give you a heavy dose of Greek words to illustrate the impact of Greek vocabulary on Modern English.

Before I begin, let me give you a quick update on the Alphabet series which I am working on. I hope to have that series completed in the next couple of weeks – hopefully by the time of the next episode of this podcast. As soon as it is ready, I will probably post a mini-episode with specific information about the series, and how you can go about getting it and downloading it. So stay tuned for that.

Now, last time, we looked at Greece during the so-called Greek Dark Age and the adoption of the Phoenician alphabet which led to the spread of literacy, and with it, the emergence of Greece from the illiterate Dark Age.

So we are now near the beginning of the period of Classical Greece. The period of Greek history which we all learned about in school. Now even though the Greeks didn’t have an alphabet during the Dark Age, and therefore didn’t have written records, they did what most ancient people did. They kept their history by telling stories which passed to subsequent generations through the oral tradition. These stories were written down as soon as the Greeks had the alphabet. As I have mentioned in prior episodes, this included the early versions of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

By the way, since it will become very important later in the story of English, I should note that the Hebrews down in Canaan had also adopted the Phoenician alphabet around the same time as the Greeks. The Hebrews had adopted the alphabet about 900 BC which was about a century before the Greeks borrowed it. And just as the Greeks used the alphabet to write down the stories which had passed in their oral tradition, the Hebrews did the exact same thing. At the same time that *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were being converted to a written form in Greece, the Hebrews were documenting the stories of their oral tradition in the earliest versions of the books which would make up the Hebrew Bible, or as the Christians know it, the Old Testament. Both cultures were emerging from illiteracy at the same time.

Last time, I discussed some of the early city-states of Greece – cities like Athens, Sparta and Corinth. At the end of the Greek Dark Age, these Greek city-states started to emerge as powerful entities. These states were rivals with each other, sometimes at war and sometimes not. But they were almost always in competition whether it be economic, or military, or political, or even cultural. So even though these early Greeks spoke a common language, there was no unified Greek nation.

Despite the infighting, the Greeks began a tradition in 776 BC which persists to this day. Beginning in that year, they would stop their infighting every four years for a series of games at the shrine of Zeus at Olympia, which of course we know today as the Olympics.

Sporting events were actually very important to the Greeks. One of the most popular Olympic events was a footrace. The race covered a length of about 600 feet which was a measurement known in Greek as the *stadion*. Seats were added to the footrace location, and the entire area became known as the *stadion*. The Romans adopted the term as *stadium* which we still have today in Modern English. By the way, even though the word *stadium* comes from Greek, the term *arena* comes from the Romans who used the term *harena* to refer to the portion of the amphitheater where the gladiators fought. The term *harena* meant 'sand.' And this term was used because the fighting area was covered with sand to absorb the blood of the gladiators. So from there we get the word *arena*.

The Greeks believed that athletes performed at the best when they were nude. The Greek word for 'naked' was *gymnos*. To compete in the nude was *gymnazein* which is the basis of the English word *gymnasium*. Its shortened form in Modern English is *gym*. And of course, the word *gymnastics* also comes from the same root word.

The Greeks also invented the *pentathlon*, which was a competition involving five separate events: running, jumping, wrestling, discus and javelin.

In addition to the Olympics, the Greeks often held other public celebrations or events featuring athletic contests. This type of celebration was called an *agōn*. The actual athletic events were called *agōnia*. Since most participants experienced defeat, the term came to refer to a difficult struggle or other emotional experience associated with defeat. The term came into English as *agony* to refer to a mental or physical struggle. So when ABC's Wide World of Sports used the term 'Agony of Defeat,' they were actually using the term consistent with its original Greek meaning. Greek *agōn* is also the root of the word *antagonize*.

Another use of this root word appears in literature, especially in plays. In a play, the various roles or characters were considered part of the conflict represented in the plot or story, similar to competitors on a sports field or in a battle. The Greek prefix *protos* was used to identify the primary character. And that term *protos* meant 'primary,' and it was combined with the term *agonia* meaning 'conflict.' And the resulting word became *protagonist* which meant the primary character. An adversary or opponent was identified with the term *anti*. Therefore, *anti* and *agonia* became the word *antagonist*.

This period also saw the Greeks establish colonies throughout the Mediterranean, especially the northern Mediterranean and eastward into the Black Sea region. This was the beginning of settlements which we know today as Marseilles, Nice, Naples and Monaco. It was also the beginnings Byzantium, which later became Constantinople and is known today as Istanbul. Socrates would later say that Greeks live around the Mediterranean "like frogs around a pond." This expansion of Greek influence, language and culture will become very important in the next

episode when we look at the early Latin-speakers and the Etruscans in Italy. But more on that next time.

As the Greeks encountered people from other lands, they tended look down on those people as uncivilized. This was another tendency which would eventually extend to the Romans a few centuries later. The Greeks coined the term *barbarian* to refer to the uncivilized peoples who lived outside of Greece.

Some historians believe that the word comes from a Greek imitation of non-Greek languages – something like “bar bar” or “ba ba ba”. The Romans picked up this word and the notion behind it as well. It isn’t entirely clear if the term *barbarian* had all of the negative connotations which it has today. It may have originally simply meant foreigner, but it soon came to mean a savage or uncivilized person.

In the seventh century BC, many of the ruling families which had ruled the various city-states of Greece were overthrown and were replaced by new rulers who were called *tyrannoi*. Initially, this term merely meant ‘ruler who achieved power by a means other than inheritance or constitutional succession.’ So typically it meant a ruler who achieved power by coup. The term has come down to us in Modern English as *tyrant*. It is also the root of the word *tyranny*. Initially, it didn’t have the negative connotation that it would have later. It was really after Alexander the Great many centuries later that the term would come to be used as a negative or pejorative term.

But in the early sixth century BC, the city-state of Athens began to introduce a series of political reforms. Athens began to reject rule by tyrants and began to move to an early form of democratic government. The city was divided into territories. Each territory was based on an older territorial division called a *deme*. These regions were sort of like wards within modern cities. Each *deme* elected a certain number of members to a new representative assembly. The Athenians coined the term *demokratia* which literally meant ‘rule of the people.’ This is the basis of not only a new form of government, but also words like *democracy* and *democratic*.

The sixth century BC also saw the rise of the great Persian Empire to the east. By the way, remember that the Persian civilization, like the Greek civilization, spoke an Indo-European language. And both were descended, at least linguistically, from common Indo-European roots. The Persian Empire had spread westward from modern-day Iran and had conquered Anatolia and most of the Near East. They now set their sights on Greece. By 513 BC, the Persians had moved into Europe in the Balkans. So they were now sitting just to the north of Greece. They had also moved into the Greek territories in western Anatolia. In 490 BC, the Persians landed at the city of Marathon about 25 miles north of Athens. The Athenians were far outnumbered by the Persians. And when they sent a request to Sparta for help, Sparta refused because they in the middle of a religious festival which prohibited warfare.

But surprisingly, and some would say miraculously, the outnumbered Athenians defeated the Persians at the Battle of Marathon. According to Greek legend, the messenger Pheidippides was chosen to carry the news of the victory back to Athens. He made the twenty-five mile trek

without stopping, and as soon as he reached the walls of the Acropolis, he cried out “Rejoice, we conquer!” And then he fell dead to the ground. Well, whether or not the story is literally true, when the Olympic games were revived in Athens in 1896, there was a recreation of the purported Marathon victory run which became the basis of the modern word *marathon*. The length of a marathon is roughly the same as the distance Pheidippides ran to deliver his message of victory to Athens.

Though the Athenians celebrated the victory at Marathon, the Persians were not deterred for very long. A decade later, they invaded again. And for the first time, we see the rival Greek city-states join together to repel a common enemy. This time the Spartans joined the effort and a group of about 300 Spartan soldiers held off tens of thousands of invading Persians at a narrow pass near Thermopylae. This is documented the recent motion picture ‘300’ and is a great story of Greek heroism. But the Persians eventually found a way around the pass. They then surrounded and killed the Spartans, and then proceeded to sack Athens. But Persian victory was fleeting. The Greeks rallied to secure victories against the Persians, and the Persians were again forced to withdraw. One of the last major victories in this second war against the Persians was at Plataea. After this victory, there were rumors that the Persians had hidden a huge amount of treasure at the battlefield. The Greek leader asked the oracle at Delphi what they should do about that, and the oracle told him to “leave no stone unturned.” And that is exactly what the Greeks did. And sure enough, they found the treasure. That is the basis of the saying “Leave no stone unturned.”

For a few decades, the Greek city-states formed an alliance with each other against foreign threats. Athens came to dominate that alliance, and it eventually led to an Athenian Empire. The powerful Athenian leader at the time was Pericles. He was what the Greeks called a *strategos* which meant a general or military leader. From this word we get words like *strategy* and *strategic* which describes the type of actions or plans formulated by military leaders.

This was the time that has come to be known as the ‘Golden Age’ of Greece. Athens itself became very wealthy. Athenian arts and culture flourished. And the Greeks flocked to Athens as the cultural center of Greece.

Sparta came to resent Athenian control over the Greek alliance, and by 431 BC, the Greek city-states were once again at war with other in the Peloponnesian War which was primarily a war between Athens and Sparta for control of Greece. This was a protracted war which lasted over 25 years. Sparta was known for its powerful land army. And Athens was known for its powerful navy. And each side traded victories for many years. In battle, a Greek army would surrender to an opposing army by waiving an olive branch. This was equivalent to the later waiving of a white flag. And this is the basis of the modern term “waive an olive branch” to mean surrender.

During the Peloponnesian War, democracy was temporarily abolished in Athens. The city was also experienced a plague which killed many of its citizens. Meanwhile, the Spartans built up their own navy. And after securing several important victories against Athens, Sparta finally emerged victorious in the Peloponnesian War.

But Spartan control was tenuous. And for the next few decades, internal quarrels continued. Amidst all of the infighting and warfare, the military and political power of the Greeks began to decline relative to their neighbors. To the north, the Macedonian territory began to amass a tremendous amount of power. Macedonia was heavily influenced by Greek culture, but they didn't speak Greek. And the Greeks considered them semi-barbarians. But under the leadership of Philip II, the Macedonians soon began to eclipse the power of Athens and Sparta. The Greek states finally formed an alliance against Philip called the 'Hellenic League.' But it was too little too late. In 338 BC, Philip invaded, and the Greek alliance fell to the Macedonians.

In the wake of the defeat, the Greek city-states finally coalesced into a single unified political entity under Macedonian control. Now, Macedonian military power was combined with Athenian naval power and the Spartan army.

The power of a unified Greece under Macedonian rule was so great, that the son of Philip II – Alexander – defeated the Persian Empire once and for all, and he took control of the entire landmass of the Persian Empire including Egypt. And he extended the new Greek empire all the way to India. Alexander, or as he would later become known to history – Alexander the Great, was a very young man at the time he conquered the Persian Empire. He was only 17. And consequently, he had a tutor. His tutor's name was Aristotle. Aristotle's mentor was a man named Plato. And Plato's mentor was a man named Socrates. What a small world it was for the Greeks.

So that's an overview of the political history of the Classical Greek period. It was a period of rivalry and warfare. But it is the cultural history of this period of Greece that we remember most because it was the culture of this period of Greece which heavily influenced the Romans, and ultimately influenced the entirety of Western civilization. And, as a result, heavily influenced the English language. So let's look at that culture.

As I mentioned in a previous episode, the Greeks are responsible for disciplines such as philosophy, poetry, music and drama. And all of those words come from Greek origins. And since this is a history podcast, I should note that the word *history* also originated in Greece. And since I spend quite a bit of time talking about etymology, or the history and development of specific words, I should note that *etymology* is also a Greek word. *Etymos* meant true, and *logos* meant word. So *etymology* meant the study of the true nature of a word.

For the Greeks, learning and the study of the world around them was incredibly important. In fact, it is amazing the contribution the Greeks made to learning given that they would have probably considered their own Indo-European ancestors of a few centuries earlier to be barbarians. But western civilization as we know it would not exist without the contribution of these ancient Greeks.

In Greek, a *philosophos* meant a lover of wisdom. The first person to call himself a philosophos was Pythagoras who lived in the sixth century BC. The study of the philosophos was *philosophy*. Initially it emphasized *astronomy*, *geometry* and *mathematics* – again all Greek words. Of course, Pythagoras is famous for his Pythagorean Theorem in geometry. But despite

its original emphasis on math and science, philosophy evolved into a much broader range of thought and discourse. It came to represent Greek thought in general.

By the fifth century BC into the fourth century BC, a series of philosophers and students – Socrates, his student Plato, and his student Aristotle – they all revolutionized and expanded Greek philosophy, and they laid the groundwork for much of the philosophical thought of the Western world.

Plato founded a school in Athens called the Academy, and from the name of that school we get *academy* and *academic*. From Plato's writings, we get words such as *analogy*, *enthusiasm*, *mathematical*, *synthesis* and *system*. He also redefined and expanded the meaning of terms such as *method*, *musical*, *philosopher*, *theory*, *type*, *irony*, *idea* and *ideal*.

Words which are attributed to Aristotle include *analytic*, *energy*, *ethics*, *philosophy* and *synonym*. Other words which owe much of their modern meaning to Aristotle include *category*, *mechanics*, *organic*, *physics* and *synthesis*. The term *metaphysics* comes from the fact that Aristotle treated the subject after (which in Greek was called *meta*) his treaty on physics. So 'after physics' was *metaphysics*.

Also from Aristotle, we get an emphasis on the measurable world – a world in which things can be measured, examined and compared. The Romans were intrigued by the practical real-world application of Aristotle's work, and they translated many of his words into Latin. From Latin we get words from Aristotle such as *absolute*, *actual*, *definition*, *equivocal*, *instance*, *moral*, *potential*, *subject*, *substance* and *virtual*.

The broad range of words which come to us from early Greek thought and philosophy is actually pretty amazing. In addition to the words I just mentioned, Greek philosophy produced musical terms, literary terms, science terms, as well as many other terms. So let's break that down and look at some of those words.

Musical terms from Greek include words like *music*, *musical*, *musician*, *chord*, *chorus*, *harmony*, *melody*, *rhythm*, *tone* and *symphony*.

Literary terms include *metaphor*, *rhetoric*, *hyperbole*, *glossary*, *poetry* and *poetic*.

Most of our grammatical terms come from Greek including *grammar* and *grammatical*, *adjective*, *case*, *gender*, *noun* and *verb*. All from Greek.

The first theater in Athens was built around 550 BC. And not surprisingly, we get lots of words related to plays and performances from Greek. These words include *theatre*, *theatrical*, *drama*, *dramatic*, *comedy*, *tragedy*, *catastrophe*, *episode* and *prologue*. And earlier I mentioned words like *protagonist* and *antagonist*. We can even thank Socrates for the modern English term '*swan song*' to describe the last portion of a performance. The Greeks, together with other ancient peoples, felt that swans did not generally sing very well except in anticipation of death. Socrates said that this represented the swans rejoicing in the face of death because they knew that they

were sacred to Apollo, who was the god of music and song, and that at death the swans knew they would return to him. And so this is the basis of the phrase *swan song* which was once used to refer a final song or performance, but has been expanded somewhat in modern usage to describe any kind of final act or event.

And of course, the entire study of science owes an incredible debt to the early Greeks. Science itself was another outgrowth of Greek philosophy. The Greeks looked for natural explanations for the world around them rather than relying upon supernatural explanations. Plato had helped to develop the concept of deductive reasoning. And many historians consider Aristotle the inventor of the scientific method, even though many people before and after him contributed to the method. The scientific revolution began in earnest in the Middle Ages in Europe. And because of the important role played by those early Greeks in the development of science, scientists during the Middle Ages began a tradition of using Greek terms for scientific concepts which were being developed.

As a result, most of the scientific terms which we have borrowed from Greek began to appear in the language during and after the Middle Ages.

In the thirteenth century, we get words like *astronomy*, *arithmetic*, *eclipse*, *comet* and *cosmos*.

In the fourteenth century, we get words like *problem*, *philosophy*, *geometry*, *rhetoric*, *logic*, *astrology*, *element*, *essence*, *quality*, *hemisphere* and *cycle*.

In the fifteenth century, we get words like *method* and *physical*.

In the sixteenth century, we get words like *anatomy*, *geography*, *physics*, *mathematics*, *pharmacy*, *idea*, *method*, *theorem*, *theory*, *hypothesis*, *phenomenon*, *species*, *energy*, *vacuum*, *metamorphosis*, *anthropology* and *syndrome*.

In the seventeenth century, we get words like *diagram*, *system*, *botanical*, *psychology*, *atmosphere* and *geocentric*.

And in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we get words like *biology*, *cardiology*, *ecology*, *geothermal*, *helium* and *hypnosis*.

I mentioned that the term *astronomy* came into English from ultimate Greek origins in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Like many of those words, it gets to us from Greek, to Latin, to French, and then to English. The root of this word is *astro* which comes from the Greek word *aster* which meant star. I mentioned in the last episode that the word *asterisk* comes from Greek – from the Greek word *asteriskos* which meant little star. And *aster* resulted in *astro* which resulted in many English words like *astronomy*, *astrology*, *astrophysics* and *astronaut*, just to name a few.

And speaking of Greek astronomy, during the time of the ancient Greeks, the star Sirius – which is the brightest star in the night sky – rose just before or at the same time as the sun in the summer months. The Greek word *Seirios* meant burning or scorching. And the Greeks used that



word to describe the star we know today as Sirius because it appeared in the summer months near the Sun. With regard to the constellations, the Greeks considered the star to be the dog associated with the hunter Orion. The Romans borrowed the notion of Sirius as the ‘dog star.’ And because the ‘dog star’ rose at or just before the rising of the sun during the summer months, those hot months became known as the ‘*dog days*.’ And of course, we still refer to the ‘*dog days of Summer*.’ So *Sirius*, *dog star* and *dog days* are all interconnected and all relate back to early Greek astronomy.

Closely connected to the general science terms I mentioned earlier are medical terms. The study of medicine also evolved out of Greek philosophy and the later scientific revolution. It relied upon the analytical method of thought inherent in Greek philosophy. Aristotle was the first person to use the word *anatomy* in its medical sense. The Greeks dissected bodies and studied them. Hippocrates was a physician from Athens. Of course, we associate Hippocrates with the Hippocratic oath today. Among the words which Hippocrates coined are *arthritis*, *diarrhoea*, *dysentery*, *epidemic*, *haemorrhage*, *hypochondriac*, and *hysteria*. Hippocrates also used the word *crisis* to represent the crucial turning-point of a disease. And medical scientists still tend to use Greek terms for modern medical advancements.

Before we move on, I should mention a few other Modern English words which originated from Greek philosophy and learning. These include words like *school*, *scholastic*, *logic*, *analogy*, *technique*, *critic*, *individual*, *question*, *economics* and *pyramid*.

In addition to full words which were borrowed from Greek, English regularly uses Greek roots to create new words. So let’s just look at a few common root words in Modern English.

The Greek word *bios* meant ‘life.’ And from that root we get lots of words in Modern English – words like *biology*, *biography*, *biochemistry*, *biophysics*, *biopsy*, *bionics*, *biodegradable*, and on and on.

The word *gaster* meant ‘stomach’ in Greek, and we get words like *gastric* and *gastronomy* from that root.

*Derma* meant ‘skin,’ so we get words like *dermatology* from that root.

*Kallos* meant ‘beauty’ and from there we get a word like *calligraphy*.

*Pous* meant ‘foot’ and gave us words like *tripod* and *podiatry*.

The word *rhinos* meant ‘nose’ and from that we get words like *rhinoceros* and *rhinoplasty*.

*Hydōr* meant ‘water,’ and we get all the ‘hydro’ words from Greek – so *hydroplane* and *hydrogen* come from Greek.

*Chrōma* meant ‘color,’ so it produced words like *chromatic* and *polychrome*, just to name a few.

**Autos** meant ‘self,’ so most of the words in English that begin with ‘auto’ come from Greek – or at least from that Greek root. So words like **autonomy**, **automatic**, and **automobile**. **Automobile** because you didn’t need a horse to pull it. It could actually operate on it own, so it was an **auto mobile**.

**Thermos** meant ‘hot,’ so we get words like **thermometer** and **thermal** from Greek.

**Makros** meant ‘large,’ so it gave us words like **macrocosm** and **macroeconomics**.

**Mikros** meant ‘small,’ and it produced all the ‘micro’ words we have – **microscope**, **microbe**, **microchip**, **microwave**.

**Monos** meant ‘single’ or ‘one’ and produced all of the ‘mono’ words. I say all of the ‘mono’ words – it produced most of them. So words like **monologue**, **monolithic**, **monopoly**, **monarchy**.

**Homos** meant ‘same,’ so it gave us words like **homogenous** and **homonym**.

**Polys** meant ‘many,’ so we get **polygamy**, **polygraph**, **polytheism**.

**Prōtos** meant ‘first,’ and it gave us words like **prototype** and **protocol**. And in linguistics, the very earliest version of a language is called the ‘proto’ language, so we call the original Indo-European language the Proto-Indo-European language. So we see that in linguistic use as well as general common English use.

The word **dyo** or **dis** meant ‘tw’o in Greek and gave us words like **diurnal**, **dioxide** and **dichotomy**.

**Pente** meant ‘five’ and gave us words like **pentagon** and **pentagram**.

**Athlon** meant ‘contest’ and gave us all of those athletic events that end with ‘athlon’ like **triathlon** and **decathlon**.

**Logos** meant ‘writing, speech or study’, and so almost all of the words in English that end in ‘ology’ are rooted in that Greek word. So words like **biology**, **sociology**, **trilogy** and **technology**. All of those words.

**Metron** meant ‘measure’ and so most English words that end in ‘meter’ are traced back to original Greek origins. So words like **barometer**, **speedometer**, **meter**, **centimeter**, **kilometer**, even **metric** – all come from that root.

**Anti** meant ‘opposite,’ so again, most English words that begin with ‘anti’ can be traced back to this Greek root. So words like **antibiotic**, **antimatter**, **antidote**, **antiseptic**, **antifreeze**, **antitheses**.

*Dia* meant ‘through or across,’ and that gives us words like *diameter*, *diagonal*, *diagram*, *dialogue*.

*Para* meant ‘beside or against or almost’ and gave us lots of words – words like *parallel*, *paramedic*, *parasite* and *paraphrase*.

And *hyper* meant ‘above or over or excessive,’ and gave us words like *hyper-extend*, *hyper-drive*, *hyperactive*, *hyperbole* and *hyperventilate*.

So these are just a few Greek roots which can be found throughout English. And I think you can start to see how Greek permeates Modern English.

Now as I said earlier, almost all of the words I have mentioned in this episode came into English during the periods of Middle English and Modern English. They primarily represent words taken from Latin or French with Greek origins. But there is at least one very old Greek word which found its way from Greek directly into the original Germanic languages before the Anglo-Saxons migrated to Britain. In other words, it is a Greek word from the original Anglo-Saxon language which came into English without coming through Latin. And that makes the word one of the oldest Greek words in the English language. And that word is *church*. And a closer look at that word allows us to begin a transition from the Greeks to the Romans, the Germanic tribes and the Celtic people of Europe.

I mentioned the word *church* in the earlier episode about the history of the letter C. The original Greek word was *kyriakos*. The word passed from Greek to the Gothic Germanic tribes who had migrated into the Balkan region around the second century AD. And Christian missionary work with the Goths in the 4<sup>th</sup> century led to the adoption of the Greek word, and the expansion of the word northward throughout the Germanic tribes. The Old Saxons in continental Europe had the word as *kirika*. But remember that Old English had experienced an assibilation of the ‘k’ sound. Remember all that? Well the ‘k’ sound had become a ‘ch’ sound in Old English. So *kirika* became *cirice* (/che-ree-che/) in Old English. And from that, we eventually get the Modern English word *church*.

But the bigger point here is the role that Greek played in the expansion of the early Christian church into Europe. So let’s conclude our look at the Greeks by exploring what happened.

You may recall from the last episode that the Phoenicians had been a very important player in the Mediterranean. And their alphabet was adopted by the Greeks, the Hebrews and others which resulted in the first real widespread expansion of literacy in the ancient world. But the tiny Phoenician homeland came under attack from rising regional powers. First, the Babylonians overran the Phoenician cities in the sixth century BC. Then the Persian Empire conquered the territory. A couple of centuries later, the Greeks under Alexander the Great took control of the region. After the establishment of the Greek Empire under Alexander, the Greek language began to emerge as the dominant lingua franca of the region. It was the language of the ruling classes, arts and literature. And this was an extension of a process that had begun even earlier. Whereas the Phoenicians were really only interested in trade, the Greeks established colonies and

settlements around the Mediterranean. And with those fixed settlements, the Greek language took hold. And it had been spoken throughout the region for centuries. And Alexander's conquests made Greek even more prominent in the region.

Meanwhile, in the wake of the attacks on the Phoenician city-states, the Phoenician language died out in the Eastern Mediterranean in the first century BC. A closely-related Semitic language called Aramaic took its place as the dominant native language in the region. Aramaic was the local language spoken during the time of Christ. But even though Aramaic remained a local vernacular, Greek had already become entrenched as the dominant lingua franca of the region. And it was being spoken throughout the vast territory which had been conquered by Alexander. So that included the Near East, the Black Sea region and southeastern Europe.

But shortly after the Greek Empire was established under Alexander, the Romans swept through and conquered the same region. And the arrival of the Romans actually led to the expansion of the Greek language. First, Italy soon received an influx of educated Greeks. Many of these Greeks sought employment by the Roman Empire and Greek influences began to spread into Roman higher learning. The Romans began to be heavily influenced by the Greek culture and Greek learning. And as I have repeatedly discussed, Greek words spread into Latin before they eventually passed to English.

But back in the eastern Mediterranean, Greek was firmly entrenched by this point. Even after Greece was conquered by the Roman Empire, the Greek language remained as the dominant language throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Latin was never able to replace Greek in this region. In fact, the linguistic division between the Greek-speaking east and the Latin-speaking west was the basic dividing line for the later Eastern and Western Roman Empires.

Greek texts, including histories, philosophies, plays and other literature, were very popular throughout the Mediterranean. And because of the role Greek played in the region, it became the default language for arts, science and entertainment. Greek even began to replace Aramaic among many of the native Semitic tribes. Latin did begin to seep in after the Romans conquered the region, but Latin was associated with the hated Roman Empire. So Greek remained the preferred language by default. And that's part of the reason why Greek remained entrenched even under Roman rule.

And that is also why the early Christian missionaries chose to write many of the early texts of the Christian Bible in Greek. It was the best way to spread the early Christian religion to people throughout the region. And the decline of Aramaic reinforced the role that Greek played in this process.

Between the third and first centuries BC, the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek for the first time. This ultimately included all of the books of the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. This translation is known as the Septuagint. That word comes from Latin and means 'translation of 70 interpreters' because Hebrew legend held that there were 70 (or some say 72) translators of the texts into Greek. Modern scholars question this number, but the bottom line is that there was

now a Greek version of the Old Testament. And this Greek version became the basis for many subsequent translations including translations into Latin.

By the way, the original Hebrew texts were thought to be lost to history. And that is part of the reason why this early surviving Greek translation was so important. But in 1947, a shepherd boy looking for a lost goat stumbled across several caves near the Dead Sea. And in those caves, he found around 800 scrolls of papyrus and leather. And it turns out that those scrolls were part of the Hebrew Bible – the Old Testament. And those scrolls dated from the same period in which the Septuagint was being translated into Greek. But these scrolls were primarily written in ancient Hebrew. So scholars can now compare the original Hebrew texts which survive in these Dead Sea Scrolls with the Greek and other early translations.

Following the death of Christ, the early Christian missionaries began to write manuscripts and letters promoting their Christian message in the first century AD. And these manuscripts and letters were written in Greek from the very beginning. The early Christian version of the Hebrew Bible was the Septuagint, so when these early Christians quoted from the Old Testament, they took their wording from the Septuagint in Greek. And a large portion of the New Testament was composed by the Apostle Paul, who not only wrote in Greek, but also wrote his letters in a distinctly Greek format with an opening, followed by an exordium (which is kind of like a thanksgiving and praise section), followed by a proof (which is an appeal for action), which is then followed by a peroration (which is a reiteration and expansion of the appeal), and then lastly comes the conclusion. By copying this traditional Greek letter format, it allowed Paul's letters to be accepted and read throughout the Greek-speaking world. He also traveled throughout Greece as part of his early missionary work, and the book of Corinthians specially concerns the early Christian Church in Corinth. All of the books of the New Testament were composed in Greek.

And that's the major point here. The fact that Greek played an essential role in the spread of the early Christian Church, and in fact it really was the language of the early Christian Church, though Latin, Aramaic and Hebrew were also used. But Greek was by far the primary language of the Church.

Now you may be saying, what does of this early Greek and Christian stuff have to do with the history of English. Well the answer is that it actually has a lot to do with the history of English.

First, it provides a backdrop to the spread of Christianity which is an essential part of the story of the Middle Ages in Europe. But for our purposes, both Christianity and Latin were exported from Rome into Western Europe. And much of the early literacy within and throughout Europe was confined to monks who wrote in Latin. So the history of Latin in Europe is closely tied to the history of the Church in Europe.

A second consequence of the spread of the Christian Church on the history of English is the significant number of Greek words which found their way into English through the Church.

For example, the Greek word *theos* meant ‘God.’ It is the root of *theology* and *theological*. It also appears in the word *enthusiasm* which comes from the word *entheos* meaning ‘inspired or possessed by God.’

Even the term *Catholic* has origins in Greek. The term came from a combination of *kata* meaning ‘concerning’ and *holou* meaning ‘whole.’ So it basically meant ‘concerning the whole,’ and it came into Latin as *catholicus* meaning ‘universal’ which is the sense that it had in the early Christian church.

From the Indo-European root word *\*spek* came the Greek root of *scope* meaning ‘to see’. The Greeks utilized the word in *episkopos* which meant ‘overseer.’ And this is the root of *Episcopalian*. It is also the root of *bishop* as taken from Latin meaning the persons who administer the Church’s dioceses.

The Presbyterian Church didn’t have bishops. It is govern by elders who were called *presbyteros* in Greek. Again, the terms passed through Latin into English as *presbyterian*.

The term *Baptist* also comes from Greek – specifically the Greek word *baptizein* meaning ‘to dip or immerse in water.’

*Evangelical*, *Pentecostal* and *Apostle* are also rooted in Greek. Even *Christ* comes from a Greek word meaning ‘the anointed.’ And *Jesus* comes from a Greek translation of the Aramaic name Jeshua.

We also get other religious terms from Greek including *ethical*, *agnostic*, *demon* and *mystery or mysterious*.

But there is one other reason why the early spread of the Christian Church into Greece and the use of the Greek language is so important to our look at English. And that is because it is directly connected to the oldest known Germanic language.

You may recall from way back in Episode 3 that I talked about the Indo-European family tree. And in discussing the Germanic languages, I mentioned that they originated in Scandinavia and they spread southward into the heart of continental Europe. Some of them traveled into western Europe and became know to linguists as the West Germanic tribes. These tribes produced modern Germanic languages like English, German, Dutch and Frisian. But some of those tribes migrated into eastern Europe and became known as the East Germanic tribes.

All of the East Germanic tribes have been long lost to history as they became mixed into other groups over time. And for the most part, their languages and dialects have disappeared with them. But one group’s language was written down, and it remains with us today. That group was the Goths, which eventually split into two distinct groups called the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths. Now these Goths played a major role in the eventual fall of the Roman Empire. But at this early stage they migrated southeastward into the region of the Black Sea and eventually into the Balkans. Now the Goths were pagans, but once they settled into Balkan region, they began to

encounter the early Christian missionaries. And a Goth named Wulfilas was exposed to Christianity in Constantinople. He became a Christian and was eventually consecrated a bishop for the purpose of spreading Christianity to the Goths.

As part of his mission, Wulfilas translated the Bible into Gothic. And this is not just a interesting historical side note. It represents one of the most important events in the study of Germanic languages because the Gothic Bible represents one of the earliest detailed writings in a Germanic language. Most of what we know about the long extinct Gothic language comes from this source. Many parts of this Gothic translation actually still exist, including more than half the Gospels, a large portion of the Epistles, and some portions of the Old Testament.

And here is the other important point. In addition to the Gothic Bible, Wulfilas also created a Gothic alphabet. Previously, the Germanic tribes had used runic symbols for writing. But the alphabet created by Wulfilas was a combination of the Greek alphabet and the runic alphabet. And this blended alphabet came about because Wulfilas had to borrow from the Greek alphabet to properly translate the Bible given some of the inherent limitations of Runic writing.

As I said, this Gothic Bible, translated near Greece from Greek with a blended Greek-runic alphabet, gives us the oldest attested written Germanic language. It pre-dates all of the other written Germanic languages. And it predates the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain by more than a century. It therefore gives us a glimpse of what the Germanic languages looked and sounded like shortly after the end of the original common Germanic language spoken in Scandinavia.

So this provides us with a nice transition from Greek to the language and peoples of western Europe, including the Latin-speaking Romans, the Celtic tribes, and those early Germanic tribes. The history of these three groups is interconnected. But I am going to begin by looking at the early Romans. So next time we will look at the settlement of Latin-speaking Indo-Europeans into Italy. We will also look at the early Etruscan civilization which pre-dated and heavily influenced the rise of Rome. And I will look at the transition of the Greek alphabet from the Greeks to the Etruscans and then to the Romans. And we will look at the rise of Rome as a major regional power. Along the way, I will look at some of the many Latin words which have found their way into Modern English.

So, until next time, thanks again for listening to the History of English Podcast.