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A. N. Jannaris on the Unity and Pronunciation of Greek

*(From the preface of his *Historical Greek Grammar*)*

The following are some excerpts from the *Preface* of Antonios N. Jannaris in his monumental work, *An Historical Greek Grammar*, 1897. This work, written 110 years ago, has proved its worth. It is still being reprinted by the important Publishing House of Georg Olms, Hildesheim, Germany. According to a recent letter received from Dr W. Georg Olms, a new reprint of Jannaris' Grammar is being planned for the next year or so. Serious scholars and research students ought to possess a copy of this Grammar and are therefore urged to obtain one as soon as it becomes available again.

There is no other Greek Grammar like this one. It is the only one of its kind ever written. It ought to be on the desk of every serious student of Greek. I do not say of classical or Byzantine or Neohellenic Greek, but of Greek period.

Jannaris was one of the most brilliant scholars of a century ago. He left behind him an impressive legacy: *Neugriechische Grammatik; Method for Learning German; Method for Learning French; Deutsch-Neugriechisches Handwörterbuch; Concise Dictionary of the Modern Greek and English Languages; a Lexicon of Ancient Greek* (2880 pages!) and many other books and articles. His *magnum opus* was his *Historical Greek Grammar*. He died in 1909 56 years of age!

In this Grammar, which is not geared specifically to the New Testament, but which contains many observations relevant to the New Testament, the reader will be confronted with what many Hellenic scholars have been saying, sc. the unity of Greek from its first beginnings to the present. Here, too, the reader will find an excellent statement about the falsity of the Erasmusian pronunciations of Greek and the evidence for the pronunciation current in ancient times, which the present Author has termed *The Historical Greek Pronunciation*. In recognition of the abiding value of Jannaris' work, the present Author dedicated his *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, etc. to the memory of Antonios N. Jannaris (as well as to the memory of another great scholar, the Father of the science of Linguistics in Hellas, George, N. Hatzidakis).

Also in further recognition of Jannaris' contribution to the study of Greek and its literature, the present Author plans a Symposium to be held at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, where Jannaris taught. If the necessary funds are found, the Symposium will take place in June 2009 to mark the 100th anniversary from his death.

Here follow the excerpts from the Preface of Jannaris' *Historical Greek Grammar*. They should be pondered by every student of Greek:

“Though the Greek language in its classical period has been, ever since ancient times, a field of almost constant research and study, so that the grammars and treatises on the subject, if merely catalogued, would fill up many bulky volumes, an ‘historical’ grammar, tracing in a connected manner the life of the Greek language from classical antiquity to the present time, has not been written nor even seriously attempted as yet.¹ The reasons are not far to seek. First, the origin and prehistoric stages of Greek are matters of vague speculation. Next, the so-called ‘post-classical’ or Alexandrian and Roman periods have been at all times overshadowed by their surpassing ‘classical’ predecessor. Then the post-Christian or Byzantine and mediaeval ages, far from meeting with any sympathetic interest on the part of classical students, have on the contrary at all times been branded with unmerited reproach and scorn. Finally, modern Greek has not even succeeded in assuming a clear and definite idea in the mind of classical scholars, or is often made the object of ridicule and discredit.

“It is true that considerable interest has of late been awakened in ‘post.classical’, Byzantine and even modern Greek, and that a number of valuable articles and treatises have appeared (p. vi) on special points; but the history of Greek remains still unwritten, and cannot be writtenn without a previous thorough knowledge of popular Byzantine, or which amount to nearly the same, of Neohellenic speech. It is obvious that the task of such a work devolves upon native Greek scholars (witness the

¹ At this point Jannaris has the following note: «PKretchmer’s recent volume *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Griechischen Sprache* (Göttingen, 1896) is not what the title professes to be. It is virtually an attempt to fix the original seat of the Aryan (Indo-Germanic) race in Europe and particularly in Germany (p. 60), and then an ethnological study of the various non-hellenic races (βάρβαροι) which in prehistoric times occupied countries north of Greece and Asia Minor. As a matter of fact, there is not a single paragraph in the book about the Greek language in its historical period». [\[Does this recall the way General Linguistics works? C. C. C.\]](#)

labours of EASophocles, ΔΜαυροφφύδης, and GHatzidakis), such native Greek philologists as are equiped with classical education, trained in critical research, and, what is indispensable also, emancipated from national prejudices.

“... Since the entire Greek language from its ‘classical’ period down to the present time forms an unbroken continuation of classical Attic, the scope of my research still remains wide, covering as it does the whole range from classical intiquity to the present time, and thus includes modern Greek. ... (p. vii) I have considered or rather laid under large contribution popular Neohellenic speech, first because it constitutes a lineal and unbroken continuation of classical Greek, preserving all the fundamental features of ancient grammar, in its wide sense, and thus throwing much light upon many problems and innumerable details of classical Greek; next because, unlike prehistoric or Indo-Germanic Greek, with its conjectural data, modern Greek with its actual data forms a sure basis for scientific or critical reseach; finally, because this often misjudged language proves to be the oldest living tongue, and thus deserves far more consideration than any Romanic or Teutonic tongue, however old, can claim in matters of comparative philology.

“My original plan was to adhere as much as possible to the methods and theories generally received in our leading grammars, adopting even the Erasmian pronunciation (to which, when an undergraduate in German universities, I had become a sincere convert) ... But I had not advanced far in my research when I began to light upon phenomena which could not fit in well with the received theories. And as these anomalies steadily increased in number, my old beliefs, especially that in the Erasmian pronunciation, grew weaker in proportion. ... It is in this way, and not by a preconceived plan, that the range and system of the present work gradually grew in

my hands; and with my present experience, I am not sure whether it might not have been better still if I had gone even further in the direction of emancipation. ... After all the grammar of the Greek language has not been written. The ancients (p. viii) began to write grammatical treatises on ‘classical Greek’, that is on the artistic form of Greek which had perhaps at no time reflected faithfully the living language of the people. ... These brief compedia ... began to be copied generation after generation down to modern times, when the Greeks, with the capture of Constantinople, lost their national unity. Some learned fugitives among them then came to western Europe and introduced the rudimentary Greek grammar inherited from their ancestors and laid the seeds of the ‘Western’ school. **The first act of this school, still in its infancy, was to do away with the traditional pronunciation—which reflects perhaps the least changed part of the language—and then to declare Greek a dead tongue.** In this way, being cut off from all direct connection with ancient Greek, from all assistance and advantage offered by the surviving tongue, and finding utterly insufficient the traditional compedia handed over to them, they began to construct a Greek grammar on a novel basis, by laying under contribution the mute texts and adapting their system to the principles and the spirit of their own tongues, that is to the principles of alien languages. ... (p. ix) I have considered Greek in its distinct individuality, and striven to the best of my ability to search the causes of each phenomenon or anomaly rather within its own domain and history than embark in alien and often indemonstrable speculations.

“After the Introduction and the chapter on the Pronunciation which, I trust, **will prove acceptable to many an earnest and unprejudiced student,** I take up every grammatical phenomenon and follow its gradual evolution down to the present time. ...

“It will be seen that my main object has been not to prove, or to attempt to prove, that ancient Greek is living in (p. x) modern Greek but to show how much of the former is still surviving in the latter, and how much has become extinct. ... I have ... made no preferential distinctions among classical, post-classical, Greco-Roman, Byzantine, and Neohellenic forms of the language, but throughout considered it in its unbroken continuity, where every single form is entitled to the same regard and appreciation, whether it marks, in the literature, a stage of growth or decay. ... *Speaking of modern Greek in particular, it will be remembered that besides its intrinsic value for the history of Greek, it possesses the merit of having been the very language spoken by nearly all the commentators and copiers through whom classical literature has reached us.* These ‘Byzantine’ scribes (excerptors, commentators, copiers, etc.), it is well known, often deemed themselves competent to slightly revise or correct the MS before them, and so studiously or unconsciously imparted to the texts copied or commented upon the spelling and diction or even the grammar of their own time, so that an editor or critic now cannot well afford to dispense with Byzantine or modern Greek. ...

“(p. xi) ... *It will be found that in numerous cases classical Greek receives new light from its post-classical and even modern phases*”².

² Jannaris, *An Historical Greek Grammar*, pp. v-xi.