

Teaching Greek while Celebrating Saturnalia

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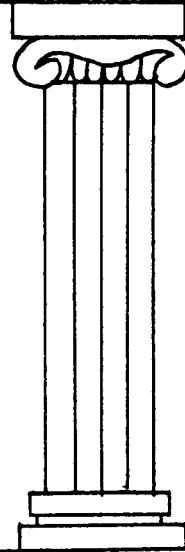
CHAPTER V

DECEMBER--GIFTS AND THE SATURNALIA, Dona et Saturnalia

"di magni, horribilem et sacrum libellum!
quem tu scilicet ad tuum Catullum
misti, continuo ut die periret,
Saturnalibus, optimo dierum!..."

"great gods, that blessed, horrible book!
which you, naturally, sent to Catullus
to bore him to death,
on the very next day, on Saturnalia,
the best of days!..."

Catullus, 14



For the Romans, December was the month for giving gifts, just as it is in this country. Latin teachers don't play tricks at Saturnalia, as Calvus did above. Instead, they offer gifts which will spice the necessary drills and repetition. Students will love understanding how the Greeks influenced the Romans, knowing the Greek alphabet, learning about the feast of Saturnalia and singing Christmas carols. Make your objectives for this month:

1. Understanding the influence of the Greeks on the Romans.
2. Learning the Greek alphabet.
3. Studying Greek roots and derivations.
4. Learning about Saturnalia.
5. Celebrating Saturnalia.
6. Singing Christmas carols in Latin.

THE GREEKS AND THE ROMANS

In 750 B.C., at a time when the Romans were still warring with the Etruscans for supremacy, the Greeks were colonizing Sicily and parts of southern Italy (Magna Graecia), building temples of breathtaking

beauty. While the Romans were still struggling to control the Italian peninsula, the Greeks had already developed a democratic way of life, had studied science and mathematics systematically, and had given rise to the first great dramatists, historians, philosophers and poets.

Expansion and a desire for supremacy over the Mediterranean drew Rome into the three Punic Wars. After gaining Sicily, Corsica and Sardinia as a result of the first Punic War (264-241 B.C.) and Spain and Carthage after the Second (218-201 B.C.) and Third (146 B.C.) Punic Wars, Rome began to expand eastward. In 146 B.C., two years after making Macedonia a province, the Roman armies swept into southern Greece. They destroyed Corinth, thus completing their conquest of the Greek mainland.

The Greek civilization had a profound and continuing influence upon its conquerors. The Romans admired the literary forms, architecture and art of Greece, studied her philosophy and even took some of her very words into the Latin language. Wealthy Roman boys often had a Greek slave as paedagogus and teacher; to know the Greek language and literature was considered essential for a cultured Roman. So widespread was the use of Greek, the sister language of Latin, that Caesar mentions in De Bello Gallico that at the end of the Helvetian campaign a census list was written in Greek. The Greek language had been by then extended even into Gaul.

Although the language and literature of the province to the east were much admired, the customs and habits of the Greeks were not. Cato the Elder warned his fellow citizens against becoming contaminated by the culture and styles of the Greeks. Their dining and other personal habits were abhorrent to that conservative isolationist. Many other Romans also felt a distaste for the Greek culture taking over the City, but this influence in the end proved irresistible. Horace weaves this twist of fate into verse in the Ars Poetica Epist. II, iii 156-157:

"Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes
Intulit agresti Latio..."

"Conquered Greece captured her rude conqueror
And introduced the arts to rustic Latium..."

It is not surprising, therefore, that more than 15% of our English words are Greek in origin. Many Latinized Greek roots and words have come to us from the ancient Romans. Furthermore, the Christian Church took words from the Greek where the Latin was lacking, and in the fifteenth century the Revival of Learning accelerated at full-speed the borrowing of Greek words. Today it is a regular practice for the scientific disciplines to express new concepts and technical language by utilizing ancient Greek. And so, students today can increase their English vocabulary by learning some Greek words and by becoming familiar with the meaning of a few Greek prefixes and suffixes. Knowledge of the Greek alphabet forms part of a Latinist's background and is the first step toward becoming a classicist. Students should learn this precursor to the Roman alphabet so they will be at ease with it from the beginning to the end -- from the alpha to the omega.

THE ALPHABET

1. The Greek alphabet has twenty-four letters:

FORM	EQUIVALENT		NAME	SOUND
Α α	a	ἄλφα	<i>alpha</i>	ă: papa; â: father
Β β	b	βῆτα	<i>beta</i>	be
Γ γ	g	γάμμα	<i>gamma</i>	go (also sing, 21)
Δ δ	d	δέλτα	<i>delta</i>	do
Ε ε	ë	εἶ, ε̂, ε̃ ψῖλόν	<i>epsilon</i>	let
Ζ ζ	z	ζῆτα	<i>zeta</i>	gaze
Η η	ë	ἦτα	<i>eta</i>	<i>French</i> fête
Θ θ	th	θῆτα	<i>theta</i>	thin
Ι ι	i	ἰῶτα	<i>iota</i>	ī: <i>French</i> petit; I: pique
Κ κ	k, c	κάππα	<i>karpa</i>	kill
Λ λ	l	λά(μ)βδα	<i>lambda</i>	land
Μ μ	m	μῦ	<i>mu</i>	men
Ν ν	n	νῦ	<i>nu</i>	now
Ξ ξ	x	ξεῖ, ξῖ	<i>xi</i>	wax
Ο ο	ö	οὔ, δ, δ μῖκρόν	<i>omicron</i>	obey
Π π	p	πεῖ, πῖ	<i>pi</i>	pet
Ρ ρ	r	ῥῶ	<i>rho</i>	run
Σ σ ς	s	σίγμα	<i>sigma</i>	sit
Τ τ	t	ταῦ	<i>tau</i>	tell
Υ υ	(u) y	ῦ, ῦ ψῖλόν	<i>upsilon</i>	<i>French</i> u, <i>German</i> ü
Φ φ	ph	φεῖ, φῖ	<i>phi</i>	graphic
Χ χ	ch	χεῖ, χῖ	<i>chi</i>	<i>Scotch</i> loch
Ψ ψ	ps	ψεῖ, ψῖ	<i>psi</i>	gypsum
Ω ω	ö	ῶ, ῶ μέγα	<i>omega</i>	tone

HOW TO TEACH THE GREEK ALPHABET

Work with the minuscule letters only; the majuscule letters can be learned quickly later. On yellow or red poster board write the Greek alphabet in letters 5" or 6" high, about 3" apart. Display the alphabet in the front of the classroom. Have the students copy three Greek letters each day in their Board Notes. The students can look up the letters for homework (alpha, beta, gamma on Day One, etc.), and add the meaning and derivation to the Board Notes. Discuss the students' findings at the beginning of the next class; write three more letters in the Board Notes, practice the alphabet, as far as you have worked on it, and continue in this fashion until the class is thoroughly familiar with the entire alphabet.

GAMES FOR THE GREEK ALPHABET

- dictate various letters.
- point to letters and have students pronounce them in Greek.
- time the students as they say the alphabet. Use a stop watch.
- say sections of the alphabet backwards.
- team work:
 - a. put into Greek letters - logos (word) = $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$
 - bios (life) = $\beta\iota\omicron\varsigma$
 - patēr (father) = $\pi\alpha\tau\eta\rho$
 - b. transliterate: $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma, \mu\epsilon\gamma\alpha$ etc.
 - c. explain the meaning of the following:
 - not a jot
 - beta (second in order)
 - from the Alpha to the Omega
 - the delta of a river
 - delta (as used in geometry)
 - what word does θ stand for in Greek? (thanatos, death) and you may find others to add to this list.
 - d. give a derivative:

The following are two pages which comprise a mini-course in ancient Greek. Each student should have a copy to put in the Board Notes section of his or her notebook.

Nomen: _____

MINI-COURSE IN ANCIENT GREEK

<u>Greek word</u>	<u>Transliteration</u> (n)	<u>English</u>
Α ἄγγελος	aggelos	messenger
αἶθρη	aithēr	upper air
ἄκμη	akmē	peak
ἄνθρωπος	anthropos	man
ἀρχή	archē	beginning
ἀσθμα	asthma	asthma
αὐτοματον	automaton	self-moving
Β βίος	bios	life
Γ γαστήρ	gastēr	stomach
γῆ	gē	earth
Δ δέκα	deka	ten
δερμα	derma	skin
Ε ἔθνος	ethnos	race, nation
ἐν	en	in
ἕξ	hex	six
ἐπιστολή	epistolē	letter
Ζ ζῶη	zoē	life
Θ θεός	theos	god
θερμός	thermos	hot
Ι ἰατρός	iatros	doctor
ἴσος	isos	equal
Κ κῶμα	koma	deep trance
Λ λόγος	logos	word, study
Μ μέγα	mega	great
μικρός	micro	small

