

Why study Greek?

What have the Greeks done for us? Mythology, architecture, poetry, philosophy, mathematics, biology, psychology, history, politics—all these are Greek words, and in some cases, essentially Greek inventions. Mythical and historical figures like Achilles, Odysseus, Pericles, Sophocles, Socrates, Plato, Alexander the Great continue to inspire the contemporary imagination, from the movie *Troy* to Seamus Heaney’s “Theban” plays to Mark Zuckerberg’s private reading. Simply stated, the Greeks laid the foundations for European culture, and to study ancient Greek is therefore not at all to study a “dead” language: it opens a window onto an impressively rich period of human history, one that continues to resonate today. Even as a non-spoken language, ancient Greek is incredibly beautiful, flexible and expressive. If you are interested in languages and literature, then Greek is a must!

The BA in Maynooth caters to the interdisciplinary richness of ancient Greece, offering a survey of the ancient Greek language and its literature from Homer to the New Testament. In the first year, students will work through much of the JACT *Reading Greek* course, with adapted readings from Homer, Plato, Euripides, Aristophanes, Demosthenes, and others. This introduction prepares for modules in second and third year, which concentrate on major Greek authors, in both prose and poetry. Here Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Herodotus’ *Histories*, tragedies of Euripides, dialogues of Plato, Xenophon’s histories and other select works are read (in Greek and English translation) with a view both to language and cultural contexts. Greek authors were already “classics” for the Romans and through them for the whole European tradition into the twentieth century. Through direct study of the Greek originals, students will gain an intimate knowledge of major writers, periods, and themes of Greek civilization as a whole in its most creative Archaic and Classical periods. Even students who complete just the first-year language module will have an excellent introduction to Classical literature and society—the “golden age” of Pericles.

Study of ancient Greek language—whether through a major, minor, or single, first-year module—is an excellent complement to other studies and opens a door onto a tradition that has united the European continent from antiquity to the present. It is said that “the past is a foreign country,” and the Greek past is exceptionally exciting for the hardy traveller. In the Europe and job-market of today, knowledge of Greek can be way to distinguish your CV, particularly if you are interested in education, curatorship, journalism, librarianship, publishing, translation, the civil service, law—even politics! A rich and subtle language, Greek fosters analytical skills, attention to detail and nuance that is valued by a wide range of employers.