



ALL ABOUT THE EXHIBITION...

How it starts

Showcases 1 – 2

The new exhibition of the Geneva Library tells the importance of Greek language and culture in Geneva history.

Let's go back to the 15th century. Immigrated to Italy after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Byzantine intellectuals made the Latin world rediscover the classical authors who had sunk into oblivion. This is the Renaissance. During the next decades, the tendency spread through Europe.

The Renaissance is one of the factors that contribute to the emergence of the Reformation. By advocating for a return to

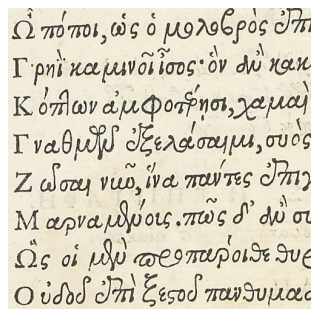
the original texts, the Reformers strive against the preeminence of the Vulgate, which is a translation of the Bible done by Saint Jerome in the late fourth century and the only version acknowledged by the Church of Rome. In order to understand the Old Testament, a command of Hebrew is necessary, and a command of Greek to read the New Testament.

The Reformers in Geneva are no exception, and when in 1559 they found the College and the Academy, that are aimed to the education of the local youth and the French-speaking ministers, they include in the Order of the College (organizational rules) not only the study of the Greek language, but also the

reading of the great classical authors, who are tackled one after another according to their rank of difficulty. The learning of Greek starts in the fourth grade (approx. 12-13 year old) through the reading and the learning of the declensions and conjugations. In the fifth grade, the students learn the grammar and read the first authors. In the sixth grade, they broach the Greek historians (Xenophon, Polybius, Herodian) and the poets, above all Homer, in addition to the Gospel according to St. Luke. The last grade studies Demosthenes, Homer and the Epistles of Apostles. In other words, the interest for the classical authors goes way beyond their sole usefulness for the study of the biblical texts (showcases 1 – 2).

The « Grecs du Roi »

Shows 3 – 7



The taste for the Greek idiom is so well entrenched in Geneva because it was promoted through the production of excellent books. In the 16th century, the printers are much more than simple craftsmen. They are also scholars who have a broad humanistic culture, and a great command of philology and paleography. They are able, by basing themselves on various manuscripts of a same work, to prepare a version that will be the most rigorous and the closest possible to the original text.

A pivotal event was the arrival in Geneva of the Parisian Robert Estienne, persecuted by the doctors of the Sorbonne because of his

rather unorthodox views on the Vulgate. In his luggage, he takes the « Grecs du roi », that is to say the particularly elegant typefaces made of lead that had been engraved by Claude Garamond according to the design of Cretan calligrapher Angelo Vergecio, an employee at the royal Library of Fontainebleau. As of 1551, books are issued in his Geneva workshop. Other printers follow his footsteps. Together with Basel, Geneva very quickly becomes (and will remain until the mid-17th century) a Mecca for the printing of works in Greek. Robert Estienne and his son Henri, as well as Jean Crespin and others, collaborate with the professors of Greek of the Academy – François Portus, Isaac Casaubon (Henri Estienne’s son-in-law) – in order to produce good editions of the great classics, as well as bilingual Bibles (in Greek and Latin), such as the famous translation of the New Testament by Theodore de Bèze, which can be seen in one of the showcases (showcase 3). Other showcases display side by side some manuscripts that Henri Estienne acquired during his trips and the editions that he issued from them (showcases 4 – 5); the visitor will also see the superb edition of the poets of 1566, with the calligrams by Simmias of Rhodes, as well as the lexicographic works of Genevan scholars, in particular the monumental Greek Thesaurus by Henri Estienne that remained the basis for the Greek studies in Europe for centuries (showcases 6 – 7). A manuscript that is ascribed to the great humanist Guillaume Budé is displayed here for the very first time.

After the Reformation

Shows 8 – 11

As of the late 17th century, the teaching of Greek undergoes a slow decline in Geneva, although it does not disappear. The interest from the scholars is still lively. The Library buys catalogues of Greek manuscript collections from foreign libraries, as well as the Greek Paleography by the Benedictine

monk Bernard de Montfaucon (1708). These magnificent in-folios are exhibited in two showcases (showcases 8 – 9).

At the College and the Academy, the students benefit from the teaching of professors who are often of foreign origin. Isaac Prestreau, a citizen from Nîmes who took refuge in our city, publishes the *Principes raisonnés de la langue grecque... à l'usage du Collège de Genève* in 1767. For the first time, the language of reference in a Greek handbook is French (showcase 10). Beforehand, one would learn Greek.... in Latin. The visitor will discover several notebooks that some bored pupils have covered with sketches and witticisms when studying Homer or Sophocles (showcases 10 – 11).

Papyri, papyri

Schowcases 12 – 14

In the 19th century, the opening of Egypt to Western scientists and scholars ensures the renewal of Greek studies. Protected by the sand the drought, any number of texts on papyrus are discovered and studied with enthusiasm by the Hellenic scholars. Indeed, as Greek had been Egypt's official language for almost a millennium, texts of all kinds, as well literary as administrative, legal or more personal ones, offer a wealth of sources that seem abiding. Just like all their fellows, Geneva professors Jules Nicole, a Hellenist, and Édouard Naville, an Egyptologist, make the most of the opportunity and acquire batches of documents that they bring back to Europe with the local authorities' agreement.

The exhibition shows a selection of about fifteen papyri composed of all kinds of fragments of texts, literary (a comedy by Menander, The Iliad, Hesiod, Antiphon), biblical (Psalms), legal (minutes of a trial, marital status of an ephebe, complaint for violence), administrative (receipt for the

selling of a plot of land, letter on a issue related to technical unemployment), and scientific (geometry exercise) (showcases 12 to 14). This selection was made by Paul Schubert, professor of Greek and papyrology at the University of Geneva, who is nowadays the best specialist of this collection.

Highlighting papyri

Schowcases 15 – 16

The history of the Genevan collection of papyri cannot be separated from the name of Jules Nicole (1842-1921), professor of Greek at the University. Two showcases present his personal archives, now kept at the library, and show how a researcher integrates in a local network of fellows and more prominent personalities, as well as an international network of scholarly fellows he shares scientific comments with. The visitor will discover letters that were exchanged with the director of the library, the president of the State Council, the secretary of H.H. the Khedive, the Egyptologists or Hellenic scholars or Bernard Pyne Grenfell or Bernard Haussoullier, all oriented on Nicole's works (showcases 15 – 16).

Back to the Greek studies

Schowcases 17 – 20



The study of Greek constitutes the cultural foundation that is common to the intellectual elite of Geneva at the late 19th century and

the early 20th century. For a personality such as the future linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who is undoubtedly the greatest Genevan intellectual of the early 20th century, Greek makes the intelligence – and even the imagination – blossom. Thanks to his rich collection of personal papers, we discover the translation of the chant XIV of the Odyssey that he did when he was 16 years old, bursting with strokes of inspirations and humor. The story of the swineherd Eumaeus who welcome Ulysses upon his return to Ithaca inspires him with a series of very funny drawings in which one can perceive the regular consultation of Rodolphe Toepffer's albums. De Saussure indulged himself in the pleasures of translation for all his life (showcases 17 – 18).

works of the Hellenists of our University (Victor Martin, Olivier Reverdin, Jean Rudhardt, André Hurst, Bertrand Bouvier), recalling that the Bodmer Foundation and the Hardt Foundation offer favourable surroundings to their research, and paying tribute to the numerous secondary school students and teachers that today devote themselves to the learning of Greek. (showcases 19 – 20). It is not a coincidence that the *Grammaire du grec ancien* by Alexandra Lukinovich and Madeleine Rousset has been reedited for the third time and that it has been translated into Italian and Japanese!

With such a legacy, it is hardly surprising that Greek studies still bear fruits in the 20th century. Two showcases call to mind the

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Course of the exhibition

Alpha, beta, gamma... Greek Studies in Geneva

