

# **Attic Inscriptions: Education**

## **5. Reading and Writing in Ancient Greece**

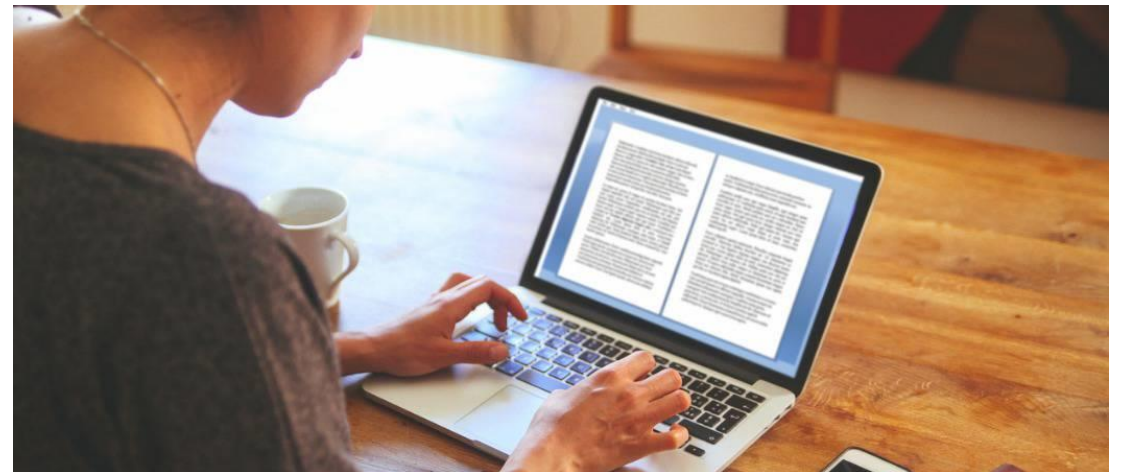
# Reading and Writing

When we write things down we use:

- Pens and pencils
- Paper and Notebooks

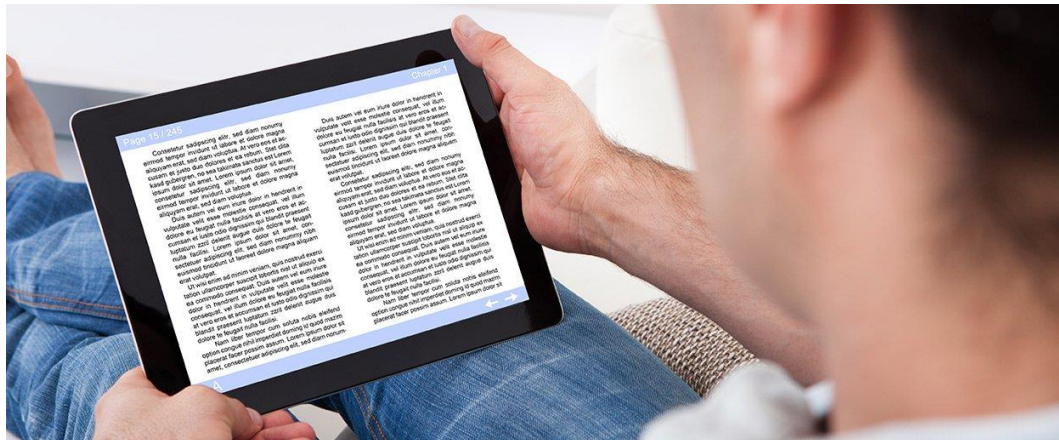
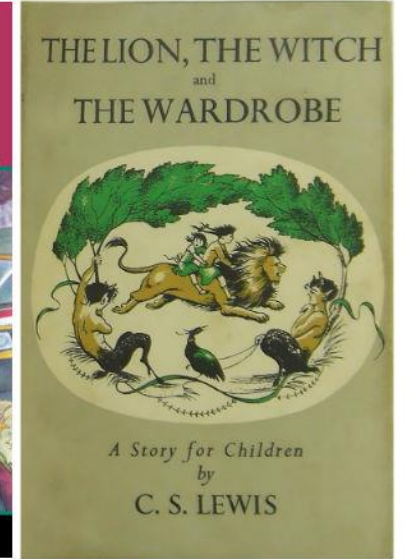
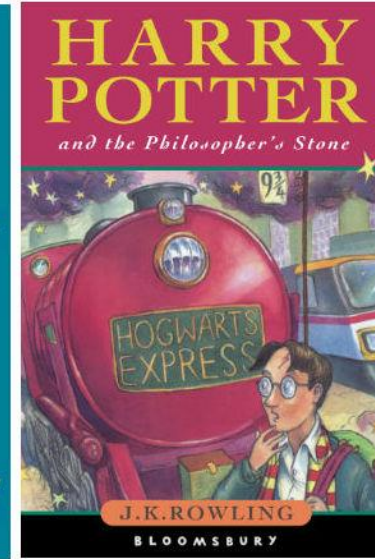
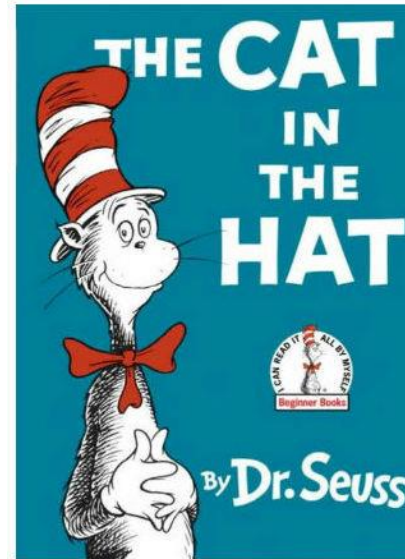


We also type things on computers and tablets:



# Reading and Writing

- We read things:
  - Printed in books
  - In magazines and newspapers
  - On screens
  - On buildings
  - On signposts

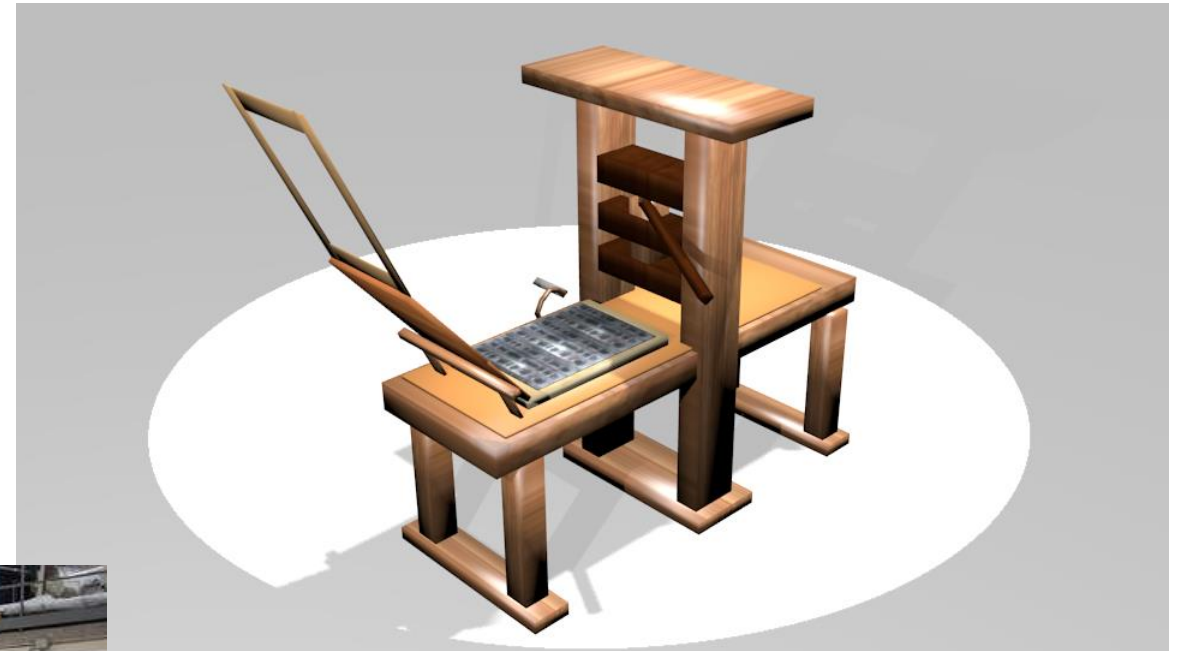


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# Books

- In the modern world we have books.
- They are printed out using machines known as printing presses.



Thousands of books can be printed every hour.

# How did ancient Greeks read and write?



The Greeks have an alphabet with 24 letters.

Some are the same as ours and others are different.

## The Greek alphabet

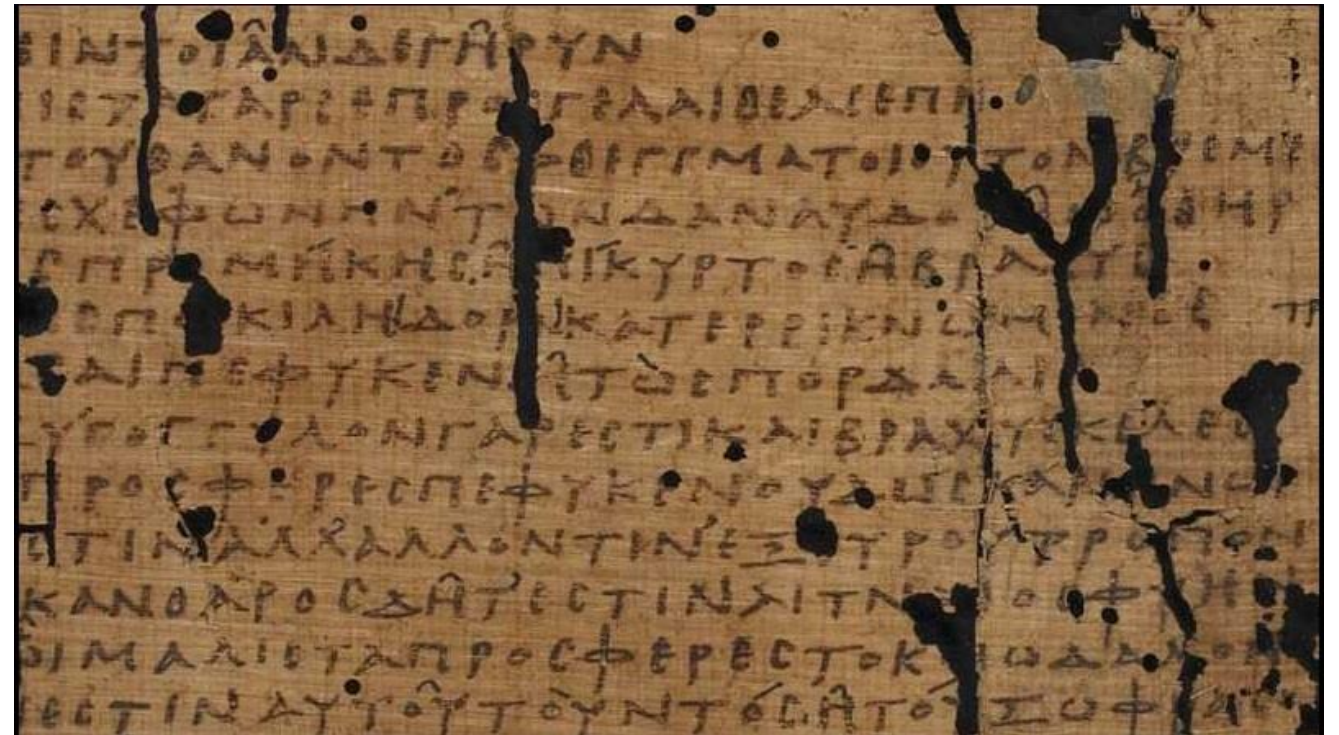
A α	alpha	a	N ν	nu	n
B β	beta	b	Ξ ξ	xi	x
Γ γ	gamma	g	Ο ο	omicron	short o
Δ δ	delta	d	Π π	pi	p
E ε	epsilon	short e	Ρ ρ	rho	r
Z ζ	zeta	z	Σ σ ς (at end of word)	sigma	s
H η	eta	long e	Τ τ	tau	t
Θ θ	theta	th	Υ υ	upsilon	u
I ι	iota	i	Φ φ	phi	ph/f
K κ	kappa	k	Χ χ	chi	ch
Λ λ	lambda	l	Ψ ψ	psi	ps
M μ	mu	m	Ω ω	omega	long o

# Ancient Greek Writing

- Ancient Greeks did not have books or printing presses.
- They wrote lots of things down on different surfaces.

# Papyrus

- Papyrus was a form of paper.
- It was made from papyrus plants.
- They grow by river banks in Egypt.
- The stems are flattened to make a surface that can be written in with ink.







# Papyrus scrolls

- Ancient Greeks did not have books but they made scrolls out of papyri



- Libraries full of scrolls would have looked rather different to our libraries.
- The ancient Greek word for library is βιβλιοθήκη (*bibliothēke*), literally 'a container for books'.

# Parchment

- Parchment is another form of writing material used by ancient Greeks.
- Like leather, it is made out of dried animal skins.
- Before use it has to be stretched, dried and cleaned.



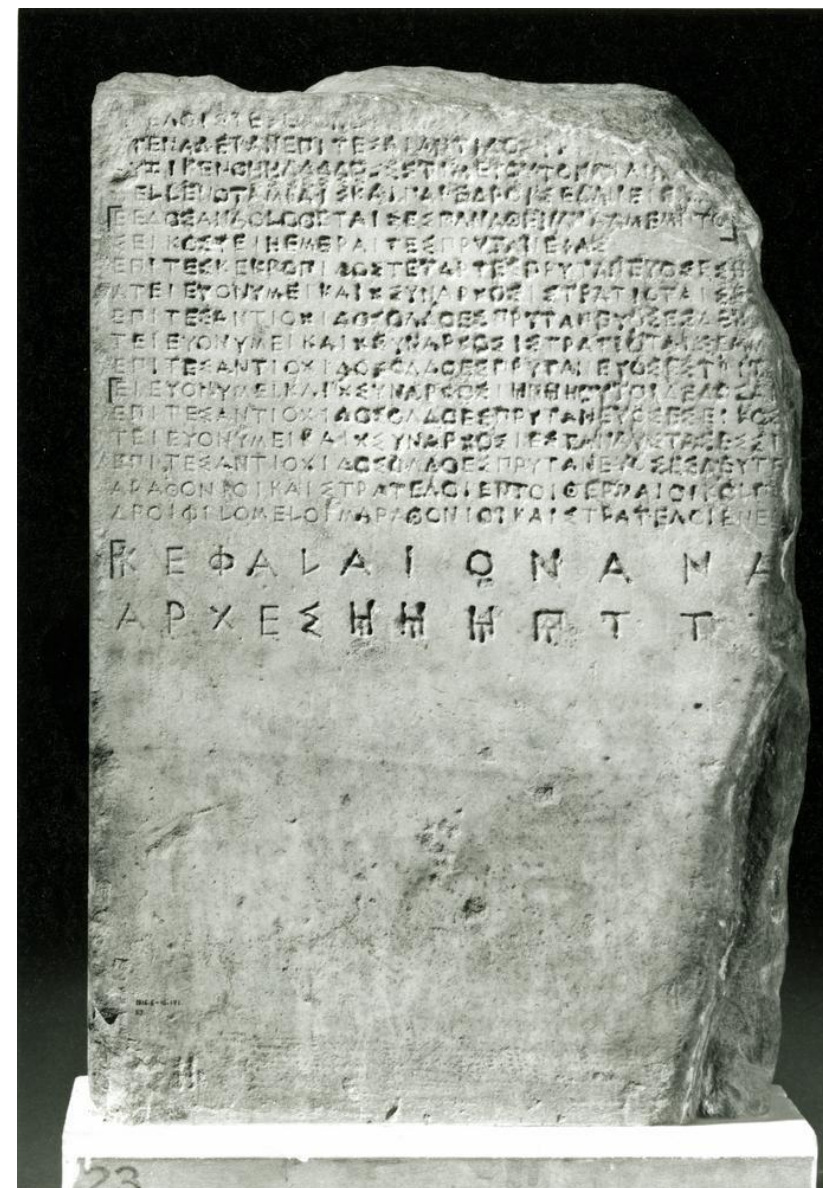
# Inscriptions

- Greeks also wrote things on hard surfaces like stone and metal.
- These are known as inscriptions.
- Many thousands of Greek inscriptions survive today and about 20,000 from Athens alone.
- This is an example of a name-tag belonging Timodemides from the Athenian village of Paiania.



# Stone inscriptions

- The Athenians wrote their inscriptions on blocks made of a stone called 'marble'.
- They used marble from the quarries in the mountainous areas of their land.
- They went to great lengths to find high-quality marble in their mountainous areas in places called quarries.



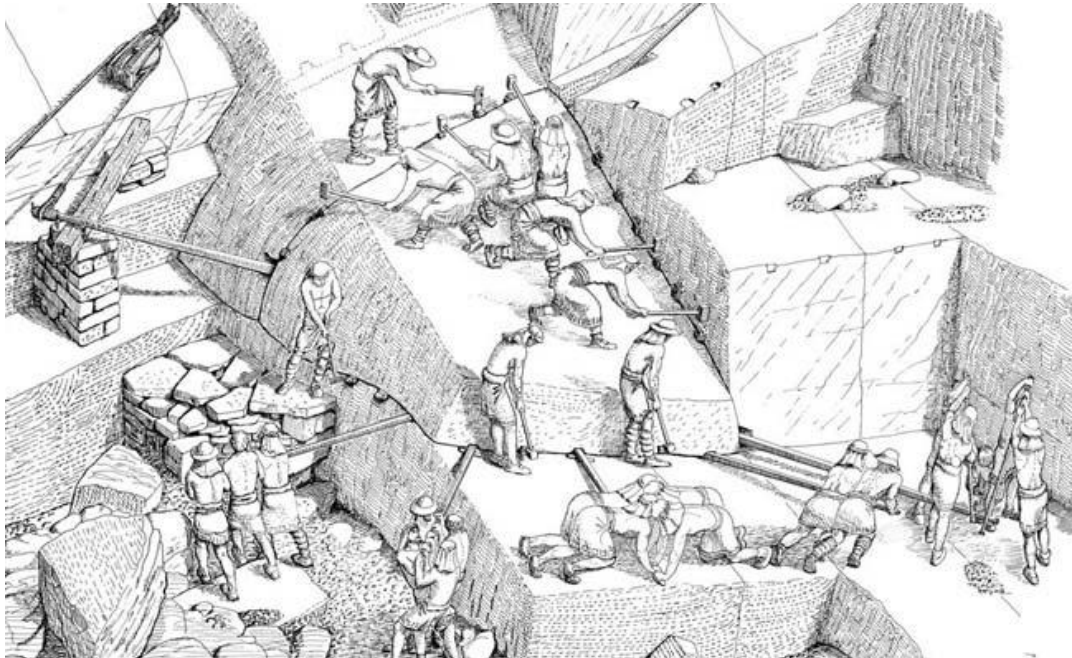
# Sources of stone: Mount Penteli, Mount Hymmetus



# Marble quarries in Mount Penteli

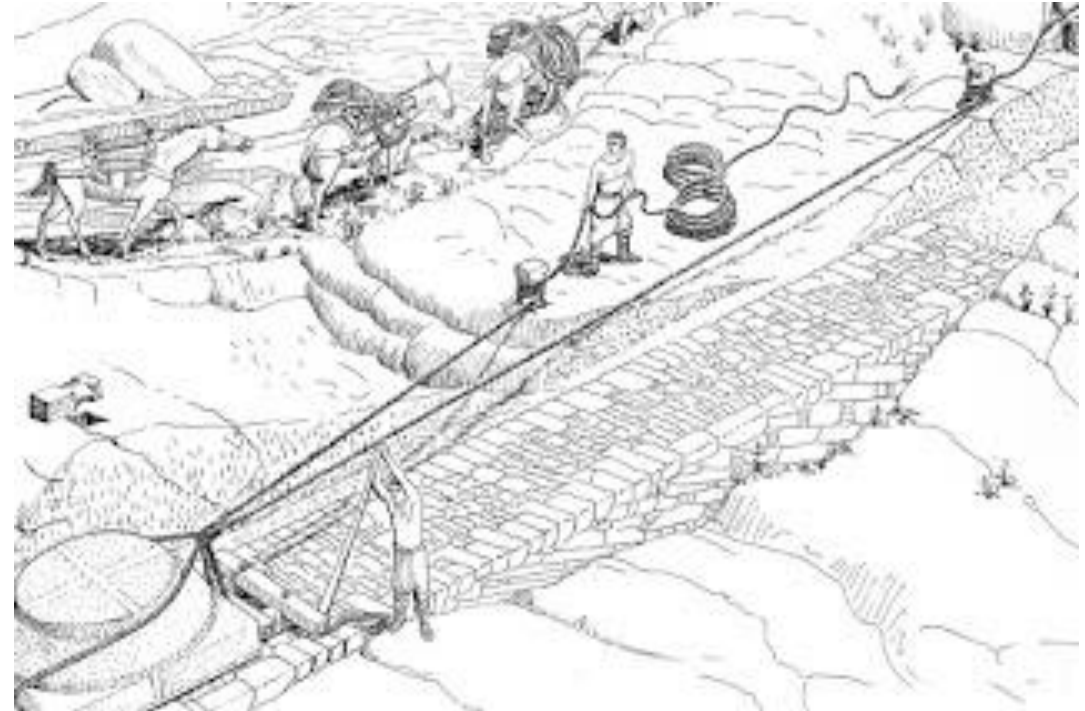


# Cutting marble at the quarries





It would be carried down the mountain 6 miles to central Athens using a specially-constructed road.



# The stone cut into blocks.



# Writing inscriptions

Greeks used chisels and punches to write things down on hard surfaces.

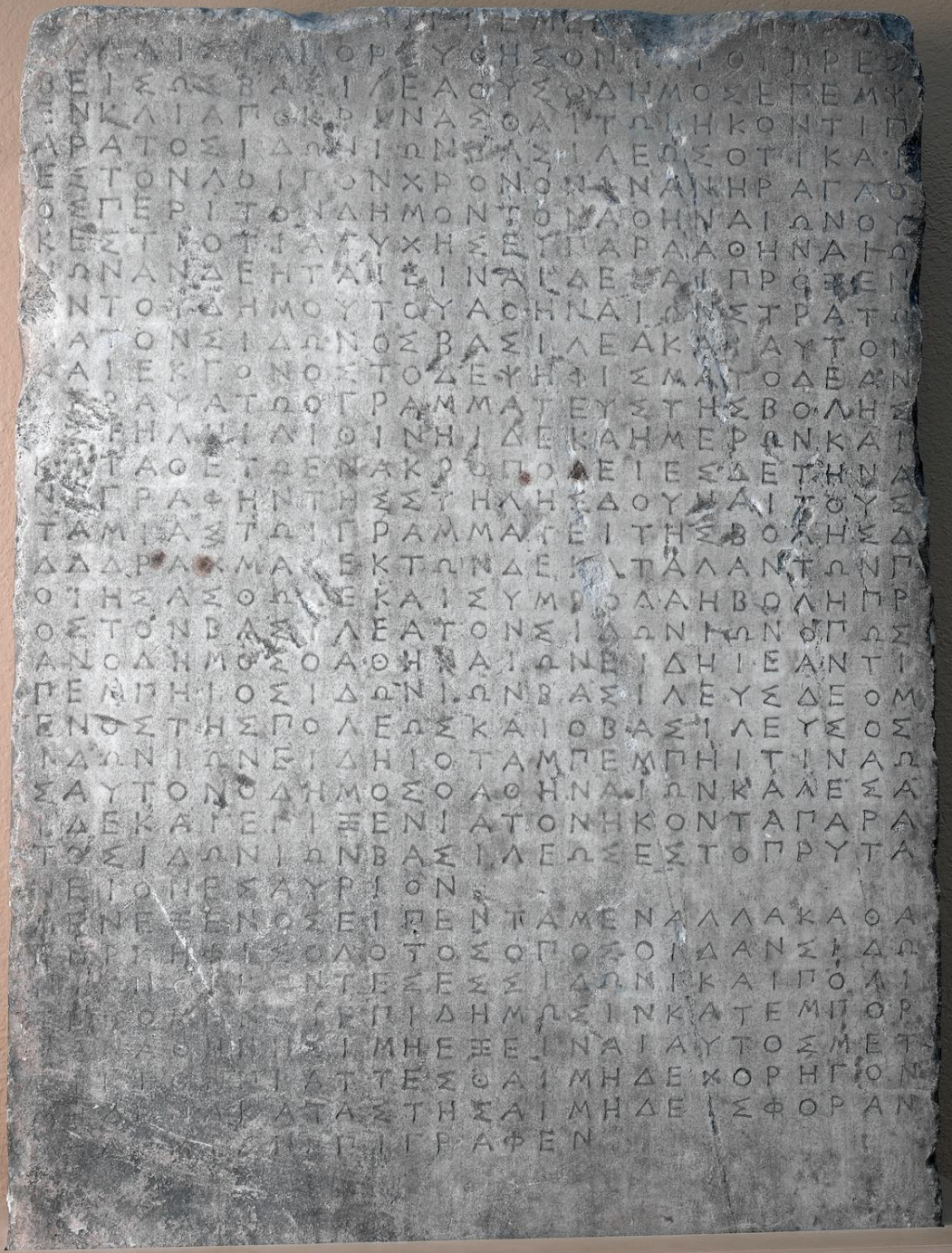
Marble can be carved using metal tools: it was commonly used for inscriptions.



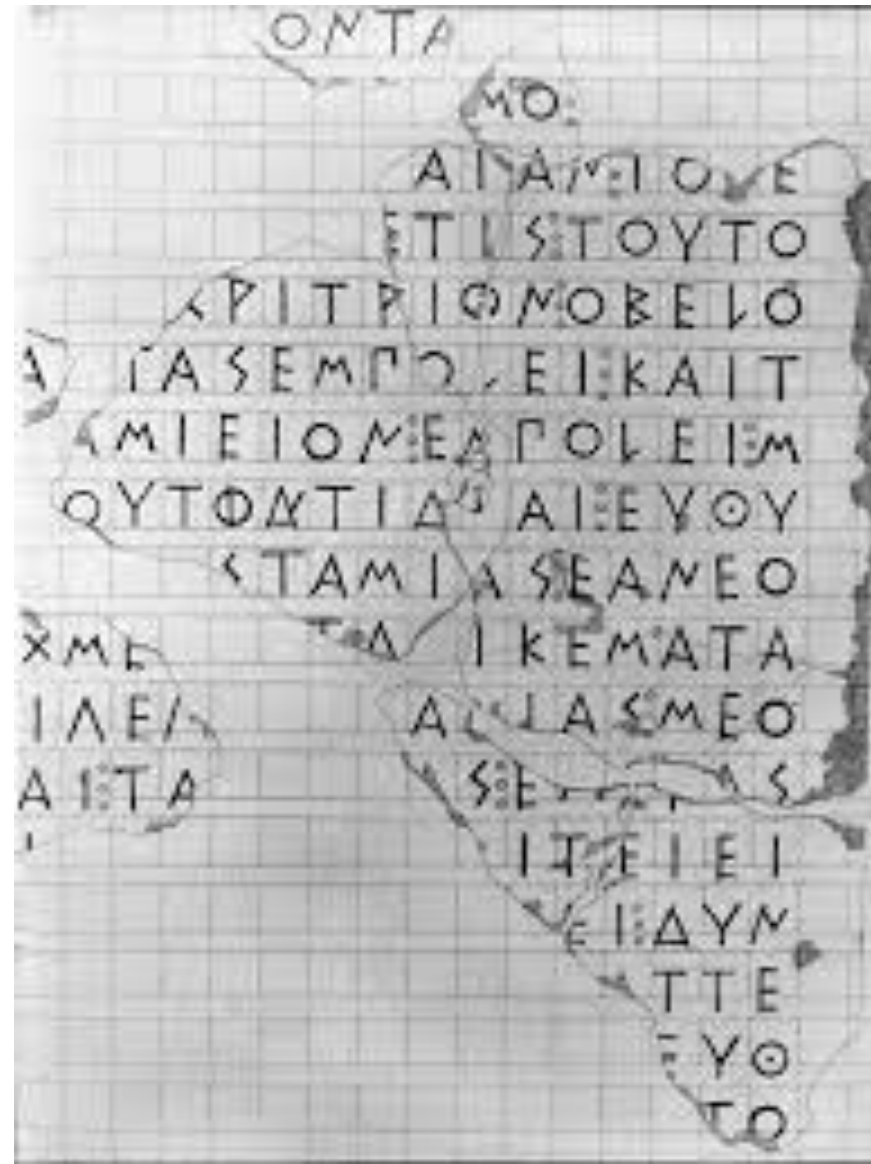
Here's a short [video](#) on making inscriptions.

What do you notice about the way that this inscription is written?

Would it be easy to read this inscription if you knew Greek?



# Stoichedon style



Drawing of a stoichedon inscription by P.A. Butz, showing checkerboard layout in *The Art of the Hekatompedon Inscription and the Birth of the Stoichedon Style*.

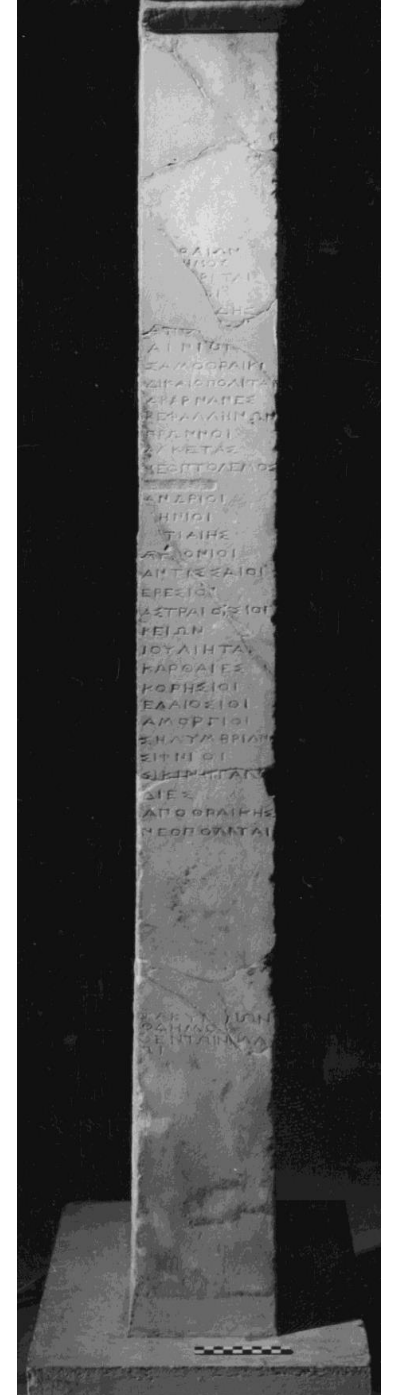
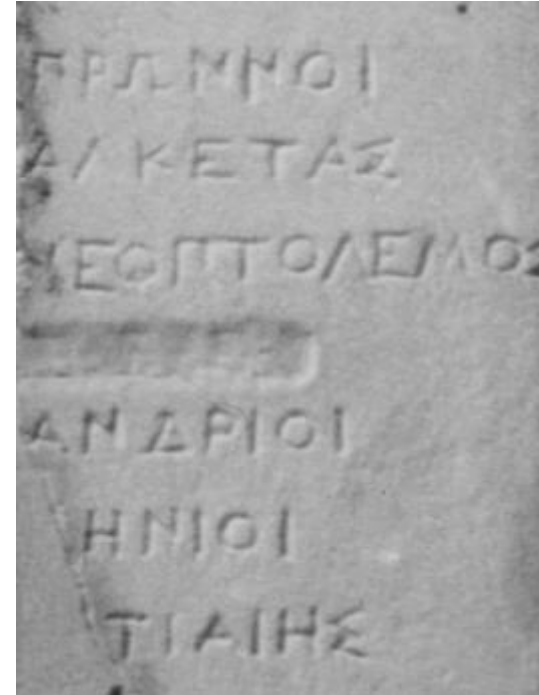
# Mistakes

- When we make a mistake we cross things out, use a rubber, or press 'delete'
- How did the ancient Greeks deal with mistakes?



# Mistakes

- It is hard to correct mistakes on an inscription.
- Sometimes we can see that mistakes have been chiselled out on ancient inscriptions.
- Sometimes the Athenians would chisel out words when they changed their mind about something.



# Left-to-right; right-to-left

- Most ancient Greek inscriptions read left-to-right, like we do.
- But some ancient Greek inscriptions read right-to-left.
- Can you think of other languages that read right-to left?





# An unusual form of writing: *boustrophedon*

- Some inscriptions were written ‘like a cow turning’: this meant that they started off from the left side of the stone, but then changed direction at the end of each line!



THIS EXAMPLE OF BOUSTROPHEDON TEXT WAS  
AIDEPKIW EHT ROY YLIACIFICALLY FOR THE WIKIPEDIA  
ARTICLE ON THIS OX TURNING METHOD OF  
COVERING A WALL IN ANCIENT  
GREECE AND ELSEWHERE

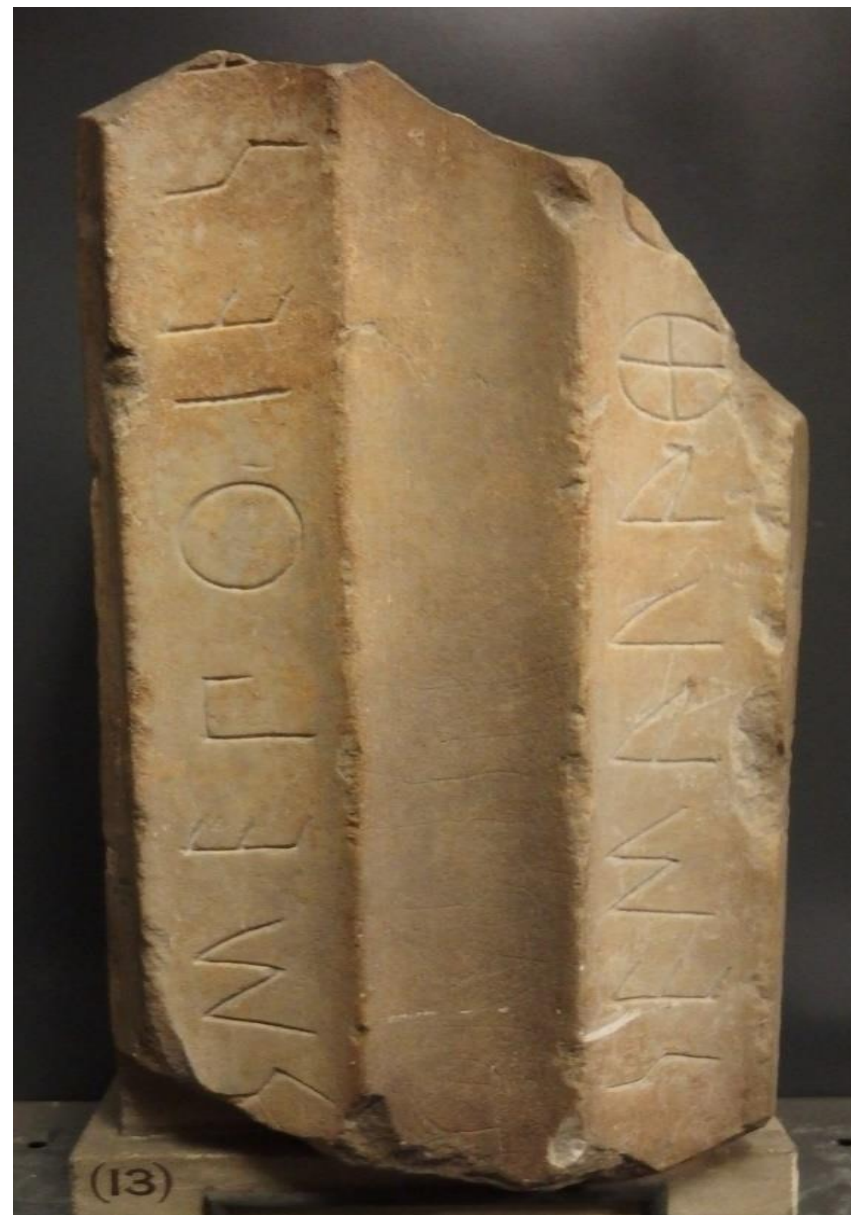
ΘΑΝΟΔΙΚΟ  
ΚΟΜΙΟΤΙΜΕ  
ΡΑΤΕΟΣΤΟ  
ΗΥΥΟΚΟΡΠ

*Ionic Greek inscription in boustrophedon,  
Sigeion stela*

# Vertical writing

A few Greek inscriptions are written from bottom to top: in this case the letters are written along the flutes of a column.

This style is known as *kionedon*.



# Writing in ancient Greek

- You might be interested in our slides on literacy. See Resource 6.
- You might like to try our name-tag (*pinakion*) activity! See Resource 7.

# Images

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