



The Romaic Variant of Lucian Pronunciation

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[Original article written about Lucian Pronunciation.](#)

[The Ranieri Ancient Greek Pronunciation Guide.](#)

ABSTRACT

Lucian Pronunciation is a spectrum of pronunciation variants, from conservative to innovative, each of which represents the sound of Ancient Greek at some point in its development from Classical to Mediaeval times (the Koine Greek literary period). The variant which contains most of the transitional sounds between more archaic and more recent pronunciations of Greek is called *Standard Lucian Pronunciation*. Standard Lucian tends to be readily comprehensible to most who study Ancient Greek; however, it contains certain sounds that may be difficult to reproduce for those without sufficient phonetics training. Thought to be most useful, Standard Lucian is the only variant that has been hitherto clearly delineated; more conservative and more innovative variants are possible and aspects of them have been suggested, but none has been codified in full by the original authors prior to the composition of this essay.

Recognising that the vast majority of students and teachers of Ancient Greek in the world outside of Greece are familiar with Erasmian Pronunciation, the present endeavor, called *Romaic Lucian Pronunciation*, is an attempt to clarify a more conservative variant of Ancient Greek pronunciation within the spectrum of Lucian Pronunciation, one that likely would have been current in part or in full for native Latin speakers in the Late Roman Republic and Early Roman Empire.

Romaic Lucian is roughly similar to most varieties of Erasmian Pronunciation, with the following notable exceptions:

- 1) Phonemic vowel and syllable length is *strictly* maintained, as is pitch accent.
- 2) Monophthongs are seldom treated with their English language “equivalents” (e.g. the word <μη> [mɛ:] *in no way* rhymes with the English word <may> [meɪ]).

- 3) The digraph <ει> represents the long monophthong [i:] in all positions, and *never* the diphthong [eɪ] (a sound that from the times of Classical Greek to the present it never had).
- 4) The recommended pronunciation of letter <ζ> is [z:] or [z:].

Quick Romaic Lucian Pronunciation Reference (see the end of the document for comparison chart).

Greek letter	Classical Latin Equivalent	<u>International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbol</u>	Pronunciation Description
Α α	a	a	does not occur in US or UK English; <a> in Italian <i>amare</i> Spanish <i>amar</i> ; long version <ᾱ> is identical in quality, but held longer.
Β β	b	b	as in English <i>bit</i>
Γ γ	g	g	as in English <i>get</i>
Δ δ	d	ɖ	not found in English, since English uses alveolar equivalents; <d> in Italian <i>dai</i>
Ε ε	e	ɛ̄	equivalent to English <i>bed</i> ; in Spanish <i>es</i> , Modern Greek <i>σε</i>
Ζ ζ	z	z̄:*	not found in English; in Modern Greek <ζ> but always geminated; *see discussion below
Η η	ē	ɛ̄:	Identical to <ε> in quality, but always long in duration.
Θ θ	th	θ*	<th> in English <i>thesis</i> ; *see discussion below
Ι ι	i	i	in English <i>machine</i> ; long version <ῖ> identical in quality, but held longer
Κ κ	k	k	in English <i>scare</i> (unaspirated); never aspirated as English <i>cat, kill, accrue</i> , etc.
Μ μ	m	m	in English <i>mat</i>
Ν ν	n	n	in English <i>not</i>
Ξ ξ	x	kɣ̄:	as Modern Greek <ξ>; equivalent to English <x> but the [ɣ̄] sound in Greek is retracted.
Ο ο	o	ɔ̄	not found in US & UK English; equivalent to Spanish <i>como</i> and Modern Greek <i>όχι</i>

Greek letter	Classical Latin Equivalent	<u>International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbol</u>	Pronunciation Description
Π π	p	p	in English <i>spin</i> (unaspirated); never aspirated as English <i>pan</i> , <i>appear</i> , etc.
Ρ ρ	r	r̥~r, r ^h ~r	not found in US & UK English; for [r̥] and [r ^h] see below; [r] as Italian and Spanish <i>ara</i> .
Σ σ/ς	s	ɣ̞~z̞	retracted [ɣ̞] as in Castilian Spanish, Icelandic, and Modern Greek
Τ τ	t	t̪	not found in US & UK English, which use alveolar equivalents, and aspirate word-initially and before stressed syllables; <t> in Italian and Spanish <i>te</i>
Υ υ	y	y	not found in US & UK English; in French <i>lune</i> and German <i>Tschüß</i> ; long version <ū> is identical in quality, but held longer.
Φ φ	ph	f*	in English <i>fit</i> ; *see discussion below
Χ χ	ch	x*	not found in US & UK English; in Scots <i>loch</i> , German <i>Bach</i> ; *see discussion below
Ψ ψ	ps	pɣ̞	like English <i>hops</i> but with retracted [ɣ̞]
Ω ω	ō	oː	not found in US & UK English; equivalent to Spanish <i>como</i> and Modern Greek <i>όχι</i> , but always long in duration.
εἰ	ī*	iː	in English <i>machine</i> ; *see discussion below
ου	ū	uː	not usually found in English; in Italian & Spanish <i>su</i> ; always long in duration.
αι	ae	aɛ̞	equivalent to English <i>eye</i> , Italian <i>dai</i>
αυ	au	aɯ̞	in Italian <i>Laura</i> ; equivalent to English <i>house</i> .
ευ	eu	eɯ̞	not found in US & UK English; in Italian & Spanish <i>Europa</i>
οι	oe	oɛ̞	equivalent to English <i>coy</i> , Italian <i>corridoì</i>
‘	h	h	in English <i>hat</i>

INTRODUCTION

In the year and a half since Raphael Turrigiano and I first developed and proposed the Lucian Pronunciation for Ancient Greek, we have been overjoyed by the [positive response](#) it has received from academics, enthusiasts, and even native Modern Greek speakers in great numbers. During this time, we have observed that it is relatively easily understood by a wide range of people in practical situations of both recitation and conversation, meeting one of its core aims.

Lucian Pronunciation was developed as a means to balance the *quadrivium* of ancient language conventions: *science* (historical accuracy) + *art* (subjective aesthetics) + *pedagogy* (ease of learning and teaching) + *politics* (acceptability particularly to those who feel a cultural tie to the language). We touted Lucian Pronunciation as inherently capable of satisfying all four elements of the quadrivium, since the nature of the system is adaptable: indeed, we described more than what we call *Standard Lucian*, the pronunciation I use most often in speaking and reciting Ancient Greek, but also variants that are more archaic or more innovative, to be employed as desired by the speaker.

For example, the diphthong αἰ is [æ̥] in my recitations, but one could choose a more archaic sound and like [ai̯], perhaps closer to the sound of 5cBC Classical Attic. Or one could evolve this into the monophthong like the vowel quality in Both Koine or Modern Greek and read it [ɛ:]. We attempted to give context for how and why these changes would occur and therefore what other differences would exist in these variants. There are two reasons not merely to permit, but to encourage this sort of diversity:

- 1) Ancient Greek literature ranges over a millennium from the 8cBC to the 6cAD (this end date is moved left or right on the timeline by different scholars), and in that enormous span of time the pronunciation most certainly changed;
- 2) we have found sufficient evidence both for more innovative and more conservative variants extant in any given century simultaneously, due either to differences in geography (the Egyptian Koine is highly innovative, in some ways even more than Modern Greek, while Koine era Attic was conservative), or other diastatic or diaphasic variation. Thus to claim “this is *the* pronunciation of all Koine Greek” is a foolhardy pronouncement in our estimation; variety existed, and hopefully one’s best efforts to use the tools intrinsic to Lucian Pronunciation will allow individual voices today to represent some of that florid diversity in Antiquity.

Ancient Greek was spoken by many people of many classes in many places for many centuries; yet, it is pedagogically impractical to expect a student or teacher to change pronunciations depending on the author of the text recited. This means that one must choose for oneself a pronunciation that can be used for all Ancient Greek recitation and

communication; being able to perform in multiple Ancient Greek pronunciations is best left to the historical phonology enthusiasts like myself and Raphael Turrigiano.

The genesis of devising Lucian Pronunciation — that is, why we decided a new convention, or spectrum of conventions, was needed — was to establish a system both practical in the classroom and consonant with historical evidence, a sound intermediate between the popular standards, ideally centered on the time of Classical Rome (1cBC-2cAD). Why 1cBC-2cAD, the time of Classical Latin literature? There are three reasons:

- 1) unlike 5cBC Classical Attic, where certain letters' exact pronunciation, such as <ζ>, are not easily determined with available evidence, Koine Greek in the time of Latin literature allows us to compare with Latin transcriptions, and also to heed the advice of Latin grammarians who wrote about contemporary Greek phonology, and thus much more precisely define a common pronunciation of the language in that age;
- 2) many who wish to learn, recite, and speak Ancient Greek already know Latin and use the Classical Latin Pronunciation of the 1cBC-2cAD; and
- 3) Ancient Greek as a literary and common tongue reached its zenith in the Mediterranean of Classical Rome, during which time Greek interacted with Latin freely.

And why an intermediate sound? Before the introduction of Lucian Pronunciation, there were effectively four standards; the most conservative system is 5cBC Restored Classical Attic Pronunciation, and the most innovative is that of Modern Greek.

5cBC Restored Classical Attic Pronunciation. 5cBC Restored Classical Attic Pronunciation, as popularized by W. Sydney Allen in his book *Vox Graeca* and regularly performed by the Podium-Arts.com YouTube channel, is fascinating and lovely, but presents great difficulties, particularly since almost no one interested in speaking Ancient Greek is capable of reproducing the aspirates [k^h t^h p^h] for <χ θ φ> with any consistency, and so intelligibility — and therefore pedagogical utility — is dashed.¹

¹ I regret pronouncements I once ardently made, such as in [this video](#) about the phonology of <χαῖρε>, after which people actually tried to take my advice to pronounce <χ θ φ> as aspirates; however, a number of these well-meaning folks only made a mess of their utterances since, without intense phonetics training, almost every person who followed my recommendation ended up merging <χ θ φ> with <κ τ π> and thus rendered themselves utterly incomprehensible. I now *vehemently discourage* the aspirate pronunciation of <χ θ φ> *even if* the speaker is accurately and consistently reproducing the phonemes [k^h, t^h, p^h], respectively, since nearly as much phonetics training is required for the *listener* to be able to follow a discourse peppered with aspirates.

Modern Greek Pronunciation. Modern Greek (also called Reuchlinian) Pronunciation has the advantage of sounding like a version of actual Greek, as all its phonemes are part of the history of the Greek language, albeit in the past several centuries only; however, iotacism quashes the pedagogical utility of using Modern Greek Pronunciation since, as is commonly noted, <ῥμεῖς> “we” and <ῶμεῖς> “you (pl.)” sound identical, among a countless number of other mergers. Moreover, Modern Greek Pronunciation makes no attempt to retain phonemic vowel or syllable length, which is the most important feature of Ancient Greek grammar and literature.

Buth Koine. Buth Koine makes some excellent attempts to reconstruct a sound of Greek from late Antiquity, but has nearly as many mergers in vowels as the Modern Greek pronunciation. Unfortunately, vowel mergers are especially problematic in Ancient Greek, since the language communicates tense, mood, and aspect primarily based on slight variations in vowel quality and quantity; in Buth Koine, phonemic vowel and syllable length is ignored as in Modern Greek, which of course makes it unsuitable for the vast majority of Ancient Greek literature.

Erasmian Pronunciation. The acknowledged difficulties of employing the three historically rooted conventions listed above make the *least* “real” of all the pronunciations, Erasmian, quite attractive pedagogically: in theory, it eliminates most mergers, and uses fricatives for <χ θ φ>. In our opinion, aspirates [k^h t^h p^h] for <χ θ φ> are unsuitable for Ancient Greek communication today since they are so poorly understood when uttered, and usually done so incorrectly and inconsistently; thus any pronunciation system, like 5cBC Classical Attic, that employs them is not something I recommend for most practical uses.

Yet, I have openly lambasted Erasmian Pronunciation in the past for both its historical asymmetry, and more damningly, the fact that any given country’s academia will use their own native phonology anyway, be it English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Dutch, etc., then call the resulting hodgepodge “historical,” and as a result generate tremendous confusion when speakers of these languages come together to chat in Ancient Greek. Remarkably, they find themselves having difficulty comprehending one another despite all using “Erasmian” pronunciation systems. Interestingly, the Restored Classical Pronunciation of Latin, which might also be called Erasmian Pronunciation of Latin as it also has its origins with the great Renaissance scholar, seems not to create these difficulties between Latin speakers around the world. I venture to guess that this is due to Latin’s less complicated vowel system and relatively higher number of consonants per word.

Despite the historical inaccuracies, the spelling-pronunciation of Erasmian has obvious benefits, and even the use of known phonology (such as the limits of one’s first language or of a well-known second language) is hardly a bad idea when it comes to conventions.

This has led me to put Lucian Pronunciation, particularly the Standard Lucian Pronunciation I use on a daily basis, in a skeptical light for the sake of philosophical and pedagogical consideration: *What about it is not easy to produce for the speaker?*

The simple answer is: *anywhere the pronunciation differs from Restored Classical Latin phonology*. While the subtleties of Latin phonology in history are a deep and never-ending fascination of mine, the basic sound system is quite simple, containing fewer sounds than those of Italian Ecclesiastical Pronunciation. I enjoy the latter as well for its richness, but the tremendous simplicity of one-sound-one-letter, which is how most people understand the surface of Classical Latin phonology, is readily apprehended and applied.

In Latin, the diphthong <au> is [au̯]. In Standard Lucian <au> it is [aβ^w, aφ^w]. This intermediate sound of [aβ^w, aφ^w] allows listeners to interpret what they are hearing as [au̯] if they are more familiar with Erasmian or 5cBC Classical Attic pronunciations, or [av, af] if they use Buth Koine or Modern Greek pronunciations, which is why I feel it makes for a great compromise. And while the historical validity of this phoneme as a transition between earlier [au̯] and later [av, af] is linguistically verifiable, those who attempt Standard Lucian probably don't have [aβ^w, aφ^w] in their native language or in a language they already know. While it is possible to train oneself to make these sounds, as I have, and the result is very aesthetically pleasing to me personally and many others, I accept the reality that most people will just default to [au̯] or [av, af] since these phonemes exist in most languages. The same assessment can be made for <ευ>. Yet more challenging is the pronunciation of palatalized velars, like <κε> [cɛ̟] and the rather difficult <γε> [jɛ̟]; in Standard Lucian, these are pronounced the same as in Modern Greek, but they are not as easily understood when heard, nor accurately reproduced if one does not know Modern Greek or does not speak a language with similar palatalization.

In many ways, the rich complexity of sounds like <au> [aβ^w, aφ^w], <κε> [cɛ̟], <γε> [jɛ̟], etc., makes Standard Lucian Pronunciation sound like a *real language* (in my subjective estimation), more than a mere convention. Nevertheless, in honest analysis I can admit that these unfamiliar phonemes provide a compelling argument for why Standard Lucian, while an excellent historical foundation and readily understood by nearly everyone whatever their background in Ancient Greek, may not be best recommended as the system to be employed by most native speakers of English, Italian, French, and German. I still believe that <au> [aβ^w, aφ^w], <κε> [cɛ̟], <γε> [jɛ̟], and other phones in Standard Lucian are easier to master than the aspirates [k^h t^h p^h] for <χ θ φ>, but I confess that one requires a good deal of training to get the phonemes right. And, as I have frequently emphasized, Ancient Greek and Latin literature demand of us a competent and intuitive understanding of phonemic vowel and syllable length above all; the qualities of vowels and consonants are much less important.

Therefore, since those who adopt Lucian Pronunciation may actively seek a variant that is less transitional in character and easier to reproduce with respect to their native phonology, or will attempt and fail at Standard Lucian, perhaps not even aware they have missed the mark

since their phonetics training may be insufficient (which is true for the vast majority who study Ancient Greek in the world), the result may just end up being like Erasmian anyway: a hodgepodge of phenomena that are historically and linguistically asymmetrical — a pronunciation for convenience merely inspired by restored historical phonology but hardly loyal to it.

Which got me to thinking: surely the Romans themselves had similar difficulties. And then I reflected upon one of my personal safety nets for Lucian Pronunciation that I had told myself and Raphael Turrigiano from the beginning: “If we have failed to represent the sound of native Greek speakers in Classical Rome, then at least we will have very nearly approached the accent of Latin-speaking Romans!” There is good evidence for something like <av> as [aβ^w, aφ^w] for native speakers of Greek in the Classical Roman period, since transcription errors occasionally show a fricative; however, the grammarians don’t mention anything other than the true diphthong [au]. This is also true for <ev>.

What about the rest of Greek words in Latin? Latin transcriptions regularly retain the peculiarities of contemporary Greek no matter the century, thus native Latin speakers wrote Greek words like this: <ī> for <ει>, <y> for <υ>, <ch> <th> <ph> for <χ> <θ> <φ>, <rh> for <ρ>, etc. (from the 2cAD <φ> is rendered more and more frequently with Latin <f>, demonstrating a true fricative pronunciation for most contemporary Greek speakers by this time). This means we can rather easily reconstruct Ancient Greek with a Classical Latin accent — an *Erasmian type pronunciation* of convenience, but deeply rooted in the history of the language as used by some of its most ardent enthusiasts: the Latin-speaking Romans.

This leads to the presentation of a clearly defined variant in the spectrum of the Lucian Pronunciation system: the *Romaic variant*. “Romaic” is from the Greek adjective for “Latin” : Ῥωμαϊκός. Thus the scope for Romaic Lucian is to present the ultimate compromise within the bounds of historical possibility: since you likely already know Latin, just use the prescribed Classical Latin pronunciation of Greek words. This has the effect of rather dramatically reducing the complexity of the Lucian Pronunciation with respect to its standard variant.

Indeed, Romaic Lucian Pronunciation is essentially a conservative variant: all the diphthongs are true diphthongs as in Classical Latin, and there is no palatalization of velars before front vowels. Thus in Romaic Lucian we pronounce Ancient Greek just as Greek words are regularly transcribed in Latin, e.g.:

Athenaze vol 1

Ὁ Δικαιοπόλις ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ πονεῖ· τὸν γὰρ ἀγρὸν σκάπτει. Μακρὸς ἐστὶν ὁ πόνος καὶ χαλεπός.
Ho Dicaeópolis en tō agrō ponē; tòn gàr agròn scáptī. Macrós estin ho pónos caè chalepós.

John 1

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος, καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος.

En archê ên ho Lógos, caè ho Lógos ên pròs tòn Theón, caè Theòs ên ho Lógos.

Apology of Socrates, Plato

Ὅτι μὲν ὑμεῖς, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πεπόνθατε ὑπὸ τῶν ἐμῶν κατηγορῶν, οὐκ οἶδα· ἐγὼ δ' οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπ' αὐτῶν ὀλίγου ἐμαυτοῦ ἐπελαθόμεν, οὕτω πιθανῶς ἔλεγον.

Hóti mèn hýmîs, ô ándres Athēnaēoe, perónthate hypò tōn emōn katēgórōn, ūc oēda: egō d' ūn caè autòs hyp' autōn olígū emautū epelathómēn, hūtō pithanōs élegon.

Odyssey, Homer

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ
Ándra moe énnere, mûsa, polýtropon, hōs mála pollà

πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν·
plánchthē, epì Troéēs hieròn ptolíethron épersen;

πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
pollōn d' anthrōpōn íden ástea caè nóon égnō,

πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν,
pollà d' hó g' en rōntō páthen álgea hōn catà thýmōn,

ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.
arnýmenos hēn te psýchēn caè nóston hetaérōn.

Ἄλλ' οὐδ' ὡς ἐτάρους ἐρρῆσατο, ἱέμενός περ·
All' ūd' hōs hetárūs errhýsato, hīémenós per;

αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο,
autōn gàr sphetérēsīn atasthalíēsīn ólonto,

νήπιοι, οἳ κατὰ βούς Ὑπερίονος Ἡελίοιο
népioe, hoè catà būs Hyperíonos Ēelíoio

ἦσθιον· αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀφείλετο νόστιμον ἦμαρ.
ésthion; autàr ho toêsīn aphíleto nóstimon êmar.

τῶν ἀμόθεν γε, θεᾶ, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπέ καὶ ἡμῖν.
tōn hamóthen ge, theá, thýgater Diós, ipè caè hēmîn.

In this way we have a one-to-one correspondence of Latin phonemes with Greek ones: the student of Latin and Ancient Greek needs to master essentially just one sound system instead of two. As I write this I hear the echo of the old refrain, *When in Rome, do as the Romans do!* We could certainly do worse.

PHONEMIC VOWEL AND SYLLABLE LENGTH: STRICTLY MAINTAINED

The most important aspect of both Latin and Ancient Greek phonology as well as literature in Antiquity is phonemic vowel length, along with the consonant clusters that make syllables long. Since it is the foundation of both languages, it is given first position of import in Lucian Pronunciation whether Romaic or otherwise.

NATIVE LATIN CONSONANTS IN ROMAIC LUCIAN

The voiceless stops <c t p> are [k t p] in Restored Classical Latin, and these are the sounds of Greek <κ τ π> in all virtually all pronunciation schemes.

Rather than employing fricatives [χ ð β] for <γ δ β>, few languages of people interested in Ancient Greek have all three in their native phonologies save Spanish speakers². While Latin definitely had geographical and historical variants where <g d b> experienced similar frication, in Restored Classical Latin Pronunciation they are merely [g ð b] and are retained thus in Romaic Lucian.

The letters <m n l> in Latin are the same as <μ ν λ> and rendered as [m n l].

The letter <s> in Classical Latin, as explained by me and Raphael Turrigiano [in this video](#), is retracted [s̠], just as it is in Modern Greek and in Ancient Greek of all periods.

GREEK VOWELS IN LATIN

Classical Latin has 14 phonemic vowel sounds natively that are applicable to Greek, including 10 monophthong vowels and four diphthongs:

Classical Latin Monophthongs

a	ā	e	ē	i	ī	o	ō	u	ū
[a	a:	ɛ	ɛ:	i	i:	ɔ	ɔ:	u	u:]

Classical Latin Diphthongs

ae oe au eu

² In my opinion, Spanish speakers who tend to use native [χ ð β] intervocalically for <g d b> in Latin should continue to do so for their Ancient Greek since the transition of <γ δ β> into fricatives is attested by the times of Classical Rome.

[aɛ̄ oɛ̄ aū eū]

The qualities listed above for these vowels are consistent with the [Calabrese Pronunciation System of Latin](#); while the qualities in Classical Latin may have raised or lowered depending on the time period or provenance of the native speaker, the *phonemes* of the monophthongs are universally recognised to fit this 10-vowel scheme, whatever subtleties in quality may have existed.

If we map the Greek letters onto the Latin vowels according to Classical Latin transcriptions of Greek words, we get this:

α	ᾱ	ε	η	ι	ī/ει	ο	ω	∅	ου
a	ā	e	ē	i	ī	o	ō	u	ū
[a	a:	ɛ̄	ɛ̄:	i	i:	ɔ̄	ɔ̄:	u	u:]

αι	οι	αυ	ευ
ae	oe	au	eu
[aɛ̄	oɛ̄	aū	eū]

ON THE DIGRAPH <ει>

From the times of Classical Greek (5cBC) to the present day, <ει> has *never* represented the sound of the diphthong [eɪ]³, as outlined in [this video](#). The diphthong pronunciation [eɪ] for <ει> is, I believe, the most egregious affront to be found in the continued employment of the Erasmian Pronunciation today, since it is both contrary to the best historical reconstructions of Ancient Greek for over a century, and also defies the Latin transcriptions and Roman grammarians which were well known to Erasmus. In 5cBC Classical Attic Greek, <ει> was pronounced [e:], a long close-mid vowel, contrasted with <η> [ɛ:] the long open-mid vowel.

From the 4cBC onwards, <ει> becomes confused with <ī> regularly before consonants, whereas this does not occur yet before vowels (confusion with <η> occurs in these positions; see *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers* by Geoffrey Horrocks for more). By the 1cBC, Latin transcriptions confirm the Hellenistic pronunciation, and universally show <ī> for <ει> before consonants, and often retain <ē> for <ει> before vowels. Compare <Dēiōpēa> (Vergil, Aeneid I.72) from <Δηϊόπεια> with <paradīgma> from <παράδειγμα>.

³ It is worth noting that <ει> does not represent [ej:] before vowels; we can be sure of this because Latin writes <Pompeia> [pɔ̄mpɛj:a] yet <Dēiōpēa> [dɛ̄:iɔ̄pɛ̄:a] from <Δηϊόπεια>; if Greek <ει> represented [ej:] before a vowel, then it would have been spelled <Dēiōpeia>, along with <Alexandrea>, <mūseium> etc.

However, during the 1cBC many instances of <ει> before vowels show [i:] both in contemporary Greek due to spelling confusion with <ῑ>, as well as in Latin transcriptions of <ει> as <ῑ> in all positions. The muse <Κλειώ> is <Clīō> and not <Clēō>, and <ἀκαδήμεια> is only ever found as <acadēmīa> and never <acadēmēa>. The word <μουσεῖον> is attested both as <mūsēum> and <mūsīum>. One of best and most telling statistics is the frequency of <Alexandrēa> versus <Alexandriā> for <Ἀλεξάνδρεια> before the 3cAD:

Alexandrēa: [52x](#)

Alexandriā: [205x](#)

The earliest literary Latin attestation of <Alexandriā> is in fact [Cicero himself](#), in his speech *In Verrem* from the year 70 BC. Some authors like Caesar only attest <Alexandriā> ([15x](#)), while Cicero has <Alexandriā> [18x](#) alongside the more conservative spelling <Alexandrēa> [31x](#). Given that certain authors switch using one or the other spelling through their lives, we can see this was a time of transition for the pronunciation of this word, and therefore the sound of <ει> before a vowel in all words, in both Latin and Greek during the Classical Roman period. Thus we have two options in Romaic Lucian:

- 1) pronounce <ει> as [i:] in all positions.
- 2) pronounce <ει> as [i:] before consonants and [e:] before vowels.

Option #2 is a more conservative pronunciation, and would be correct for at least some speakers of Latin and possibly also Greek throughout the Classical Roman period. However, this means that anyone today employing this peculiarity would have to say the digraph <ει> differently depending on what follows the it. Since one of the goals of Romaic Lucian versus Standard Lucian is to reduce this sort of complexity⁴, I recommend option #1: pronounce <ει> as [i:] in all positions.

GREEK LONG DIPHTHONGS IN LATIN

Up to this point we have satisfied all vowel and consonant sounds in Ancient Greek that can be directly mapped onto Classical Latin phonemes. Now we examine the long diphthongs <α η ω>. With the exception of a few Latin words borrowed from Greek prior to the Classical Period, such as <cōmoedia> from <κωμωδίᾱ>, starting from the 1cBC forward the long diphthongs of an earlier age, orthographically marked by the iota subscript in standard

⁴ An important example of the relative complexity of Standard Lucian is that the velars <κ, γ, χ> must be palatized before front vowels, similar to the pronunciation of <c, g> in Ecclesiastical Latin.

orthography, are rendered as *long monophthongs* in Latin, such as ῥαψῳδός > rhapsōdus, and μελωδίᾱ > melōdia. Thus:

ᾱ	ῆ	ῶ
ā	ē	ō
[a:]	[ɛ:]	[ɔ:]

This choice is consistent with most pronunciations of Ancient Greek today⁵, including Standard Lucian.

GREEK LETTERS IN LATIN: Y, Z

Classical Latin adopted two Greek letters in order to spell and therefore pronounce sounds for which there was no native equivalent. The vowel <y ῃ> is [y y:] in Classical Latin, and it is so in Romaic Lucian.

υ	ῶ
y	ῃ
[y	y:]

This letter may form a diphthong <υι>, such as in the word <υῖός> “son.” In Romaic Lucian this is prescribed as [y:] but [yj:] is also possible.

The consonant <z> in Latin represents Greek <ζ>. The pronunciation of this letter in 5cBC Classical Attic is often treated as [zd] as proposed by W. Sydney Allen in *Vox Graeca*. However, while this may have been a pronunciation of some speakers in Antiquity, the development of a fricative-plus-occlusive from a historical affricate is linguistically unlikely; indeed, Allen himself demonstrates (*Vox Graeca* p. 56) that, despite a few examples such as Ἀθήνᾱζε < Ἀθήνᾱς + δε, most <ζ> are etymologically [d̪z:], from an earlier [d̪j]. One can see this by comparing <Ζευς> next to genitive <Διός>, both from Proto-Hellenic *dzéus, from Proto-Indo-European *dyéws.

Nevertheless, as Allen points out, the letter <ζ> most often behaves as if its first element is fricative even in Classical Greek, due to loss of preceding nasals, (*Vox Graeca* p. 56); and in any case the Latin grammarians identify the letter Z as being <ss> but voiced (*Vox Graeca* p. 59), thus

⁵ Most who attempt to pronounce <ᾱ ῆ ῶ> as long diphthongs [a:ɪ ɛ:ɪ ɔ:ɪ] fail utterly, merging them with [aɪ ɛɪ ɔɪ]; therefore, I vehemently discourage people from attempting the long diphthongs unless they have had very intense phonetics training in this specific area.

[z:], a geminated retracted sibilant, seems to be the best representation of <z> in Latin, and is prescribed as the sound of <ζ> in all variants of Lucian Pronunciation.

Although, as noted by Allen (*Vox Graeca* p. 59), Koine era Aeolic may have retained [zd]. Equally, Late Latin speakers must have known some Greek dialect that used [d͡z:], since this voiced affricate remains the sound of <z> in many Italian words, and has been used as an affricate in other languages like Old Spanish and Modern German.

Since a definitive and unambiguous universal pronunciation of either <z> or <ζ> cannot clearly be determined for any point in Antiquity, I can merely provide my ranking and therefore recommendations for the pronunciation of this Greco-Roman letter, particularly for the 1cBC-2cAD of Classical Rome:

<z> & <ζ>

1) [z:] most likely, #1 recommended⁶

2) [d͡z:] possible

3) [zd] least likely, but theoretically possible for some speakers given transcriptions of Koine era Aeolic

Most Latin speakers today who use the Restored Classical Pronunciation use option 1) or 2) for <z>, and thus are encouraged to maintain this habit for <ζ> since the purpose of Romaic Lucian is to leverage one's familiarity with Classical Latin phonology.

ASPIRATION: RH

The case for <ρ> intervocalically is straightforward: it is [r] in Latin as well as Ancient Greek, the same sound found intervocalically for <r> in Italian and Spanish. But initial <ρ> is noted with the rough breathing mark since this was [the voiceless trilled-r sound](#) [r̥]. For this reason Latin transcribes it as <rh>. Training oneself to add a puff of air to approximate the voiceless trill is certainly what the Ancient Romans did, and is not especially hard for most

⁶ Papirianus, a 5cAD grammarian, corrects a barbarism called iotacism (different from the iotacism of Greek) where <ti> followed by a vowel (V) is pronounced /tiV/ instead of /tsjV/ (the pronunciation of <tiV> as an affricate /tsV/ or /tsjV/ had existed since the 2cAD, and likely had been the only pronunciation of native speakers of Latin from the 4cAD). Papiriarnus makes this correction by saying "Jūstītia cum scrībītur, tertiā syllabā sīc sonat quasi cōnstat ex tribul litterīs T Z I." His reason for using <z> instead of <s> may have been because <z>, which long ago came from the affricate [d͡z:], still had the force of a non-retracted sibilant due its once being a dental affricate, unlike Latin and Greek <s> which was of course retracted. Thus one may use a non-retracted [z:] in Romaic Lucian and likely be within the bounds of historical probability.

people to learn. Moreover, geminated <ρρ> was also voiceless, as is shown by Classical Latin transcriptions with aspiration: <rrh>.

ASPIRATION: RH, CH, TH, PH

And now we finally get to the pronunciation of <χ θ φ>, which are transcribed as <ch th ph> in Latin. The aspirate pronunciations [k^h t^h p^h], as stated above, are not acceptable for communicative Ancient Greek. Yet they are normally prescribed for Classical Latin; nevertheless, few people produce them accurately or consistently in Latin — this failure to hit the mark with aspirates is in fact historically valid, as it would be a feature of a native Latin accent of the Classical Period, and for that reason alone might be worthy of imitation. Nevertheless, we are seeking to *reduce* confusion by employing this Romaic Lucian Pronunciation, and we are doing so through the sampling of sounds of Antiquity for our own practical and pedagogical purposes, and not merely to make specific ancient accents alive again (although the careful study and employment of any variant of Lucian Pronunciation provides the foundation to develop such a skill).

Thus we have two and a half options⁷: 1) in your Romaic Lucian, use the aspirates [k^h t^h p^h] for <χ θ φ> as you do in your Latin for <ch th ph>; 1.5) most likely, you actually use occlusives without aspirated contrast for the first two and a labiodental fricative for the third, like most Latin speakers do, thus use /k t f/; 2) use the fricatives [x θ φ/f], all of which were

⁷ Another possibility exists, given that <χ θ φ> were originally pronounced [k^h t^h p^h] archaically, and later by Modern Greek are pronounced as fricatives [x θ φ/f]. Standard Lucian chooses the fricatives, but this is not the transitional pronunciation; most likely the aspirates [k^h t^h p^h] would have been affricates [kx tθ pφ] before becoming fricatives [x θ φ/f]. This may also be true for <γ δ β> which were [g d b] then [g̃ d̃ b̃] before becoming [ɣ̃ δ̃ β̃]. These affricates are not normally recommended since their pronunciation requires great precision, but they have the distinct advantage of being acoustically intermediate between the modern and archaic phonology, and thus may aid listeners to understand discourse no matter what their background. I have experimented some with using them and found this to be the case. Nevertheless, I hesitate to use them in recitation or encourage their use since few would be able to produce them correctly, even fewer than the six fricatives which at least all exist in Modern Greek.

likely extant if not current by 2cAD Greek⁸, and thus reasonably adopted even for words used in Classical Latin (depending on the education and provenance of the speaker)⁹.

Due to the fact that Romaic Lucian is meant to be highly useful for pedagogy, we should acknowledge that even the more convenient fricatives [x θ φ/f] for <χ θ φ> still present some problems. From the point of view of the native English speaker, [θ] is of course natural; and since most people in the world learn English, this can be regarded as a known phoneme for all students of Ancient Greek. Remarkably, most English speakers seem to be able to pick up [x] rather quickly; this may be because, as Simon Roper has [recently demonstrated](#) in his video, [x] was actually a phoneme in the voices of a majority of English speakers until a couple centuries ago, and some native speakers (such as in Scotland) still retain this phoneme today. The bilabial fricative [ɸ] is a sound I regard easier to learn than [p^h] and also easier to recognise when heard. Nevertheless, it seems very likely that, if native Latin speakers used [f] for <f>, that their Greek <φ> would also come out as [f].

Research done by W. Sydney Allen and Geoffrey Horrocks strongly suggests that the voiced occlusives <γ δ β> developed into fricatives before the aspirates <χ θ φ>. This is a key reason why both Buth Koine and Standard Lucian use the 6-fricative system for <γ δ β χ θ φ>,

⁸ In addition to the [tantalizing suggestion](#) in Catullus 84 that <χ> before front vowels could have been [ç] by the 1cBC for some speakers, a sound potentially confused with [h] (in fact many native English speakers today realize <he> /hi/ as [çi]), the Chēruscī tribe, Greek <Χηροῦσκοι>, first attested by Caesar had a Proto-Germanic (P.G.) era name from the root **heru-* that almost certainly started with [x] (this later developed into [h]); likewise also the [Chatti](#) <Χάττοι> from P.G. **hattoz*, and Chaucī <Χαῦκοι> from P.G. **haukoz*. Given that 1cBC Latin retained [h] for <h>, including and especially that of the well educated urban Roman Gaius Julius Caesar who is responsible for the Latin spellings of these tribes' names, the digraph <ch> in Latin must have made sense as the fricative [x] for at least some uses, including Greek words transcribed into Latin. Although, even if <ch> was meant by most authors to represent the foreign sound [x], Latin speakers who did not have [x] natively might have had trouble realizing [x], and would have rendered it [k^h] or [k], just as English speakers say the name Bach as /bak/ instead of /bax/.

Since the <ch> of the Germanic tribes mentioned almost certainly stands for [x], we can reasonably extend the fricative pronunciation to all three of the “aspirates” <χ θ φ> as the pronunciation of at least some Classical Romans, whether native speakers of Greek or Latin.

⁹ If someone using Romaic Lucian pronounces <χ θ φ> as the aspirates [k^h t^h p^h] with consistency, then this characteristic may represent at least some of not many Roman voices from Antiquity. Such a pronunciation seems perfectly valid historically; I do not recommend the aspirates on pedagogical grounds. Indeed, avoiding the aspirates and finding a time period when fricatives were known to be current, which is indeed at least the latter part of the Classical Roman period, was a key pedagogical motive for establishing the Standard Lucian Pronunciation.

identical to Modern Greek (except where Standard Lucian has <φ> as [ϕ] and not [f]). Nevertheless, Latin grammarians of Classical Rome do not appear to emphasize anything other than identity between <g d b> and <γ δ β>. Amazingly, the change of intervocalic Latin from [b] to [β] appears to occur at the exact same time that Greek <β> makes the same transition during the 1cAD. Confusions within both languages (see J.N. Adams *Social Variation and the Latin Language* as well as W. Sydney Allen *Vox Latina* in addition to the sources mentioned above) are established for this time period. Whether this is due to the hypothetical ancient Mediterranean sprachbund (a group of languages which are not necessarily related sharing features of phonology, grammar, and vocabulary, such as the famous [Balkan sprachbund](#)) or mere coincidence is unclear. In any case, if we assume that the general pronunciation of <g d b> in Classical Latin is [g ɖ b], then Latin-speaking Romans upon hearing Greek uttered with voiced fricatives [ɣ ð β] for <γ δ β> may simply have heard them as their native equivalents. This is often true of Anglophones, who upon hearing Spanish intervocalic <g d b> which for most speakers is [ɣ ð β], render them as [g ɖ b], such as the regular English pronunciation of borrowed words “amigo,” “bodega,” “nada,” “adobe,” etc., while the fricative <j> is regularly a fricative when borrowed into English, such as “mojito.”

ASPIRATION: H

The rough breathing <‘> elsewhere should be treated exactly as [h] is treated in Classical Latin: the rules of elision and muting are identical. A note of caution: many speakers of Ancient Greek frequently merge <χ> with <‘>, and this is *absolutely unacceptable* for communication, since it creates numberless mergers where they never occurred historically. While English speakers are occasionally guilty of this, it is especially frequent for native Spanish speakers; Spanish speakers are thus advised to allow <‘> to be mute and render <χ> as their native <j> if they are not confident in the consistent pronunciation of [h].

Interestingly, Latin transcriptions often include <h> within Greek words where they are not normally marked in standard Ancient Greek orthography: thus <Πολυΰμνια> is <Polyhymnia> in Latin, and <Ἄνυδρος> is <Anhydros>. As noted above, <ρρ> is sometimes written <ῥῥ> in Ancient Greek orthography, showing us that the phoneme is voiceless; and Classical Roman transcriptions regularly show <rrh>. It may be likely then that the aspirate [h] within words was not only retained in the Latin, but also audible in the Greek of 1cBC-2cAD, and therefore we should pronounce <συνῆκα> “I have understood” as <synhēka>, and even consider writing it <συνῆ̣κα> with word-internal rough breathing. It is also possible that the Latin <h> in <Polyhymnia>, <Anhydros>, etc., is entirely etymological, and was never pronounced. However, given that the Latin transcription <rrh> is meant to represent the true Greek pronunciation, just as <y> and <z>, it is worth exploring that the <h> spellings where <‘> does not normally occur in standard spelling are indicative of true Greek pronunciation. This question requires more research.

PITCH ACCENT

Lucian Pronunciation's two most emphasized characteristics are phonemic vowel and syllable length, as mentioned above, as well as pitch accent. Pitch accent is difficult to realize for most people without leveraging stress accent, unless they are very familiar with non-stress-accent pitch languages such as Japanese. For this reason, Standard Lucian uses pitch accent supported by stress: that is, loudness as an additional marker simultaneous with pitch accent is not prohibited; the pitch differential is still the main accentuating factor.

This is consistent with the Latin grammarians' understanding of Greek pitch accent, and thus is also the recommended pronunciation for Romaic Lucian. However, since Romaic Lucian is essentially Ancient Greek with a native Latin accent, any time pitch accent is produced inaccurately by the speaker of Romaic Lucian, it may of course be forgiven, for this could be no worse than the average student of Greek who was born in Ancient Rome.

CONCLUSION

So in the end, what do we have? In effect, Romaic Lucian is the "Erasmian" Pronunciation of the Ancient Romans: compromised and simplified in many of the same ways. In the below chart, you can see the differences between General Erasmian, Romaic Lucian, and Standard Lucian; and the prescribed phonemes are more similar between General Erasmian and Romaic Lucian than Romaic Lucian is to Standard Lucian. It is hoped that this will provide a more historical compromise for the speaker of Ancient Greek.

The biggest thing to get used to for the former user of traditional Erasmian Pronunciation is the change $\epsilon\iota$ from the historically invalid [eɪ] to the well-established [i:] for the Classical Roman period. If one adapts one's Erasmian in this one way, while also maintaining phonemic vowel length and attempting pitch accent, then the one will have achieved sound very much approaching that in Antiquity.

Greek letter + C = before a consonant + V = before a vowel	General Erasmian	Romaic Lucian	Standard Lucian
α	a	a	a
ε	ɛ	ɛ	ɛ
ι	i	i	i
ο	ɔ	ɔ	ɔ
υ	y	y	y

Greek letter + C = before a consonant + V = before a vowel	General Erasmian	Romaic Lucian	Standard Lucian
ᾱ	a:	a:	a:
η	ɛ:	ɛ:	ɛ:
ει + C	eῖ	i:	i:
ει + V	eῖ	i:	i:
ῑ	i:	i:	i:
ω	ɔ:	ɔ:	ɔ:
ου	u:	u:	u:
ῥ	y:	y:	y:
αι	aῖ	aɛ	æɛ
αυ	aῡ	aῡ	aβ ^w , aφ ^w
ευ	eῡ	eῡ	ɛβ ^w , ɛφ ^w
οι	oῖ	oɛ	øɣ
υι	y:	y:	y:
α	a:	a:	a:
η	ɛ:	ɛ:	ɛ:
ω	ɔ:	ɔ:	ɔ:
ᾱυ	aῡ	aῡ	aβ ^w , aφ ^w
ηυ	eῡ	eῡ	ɛβ ^w , ɛφ ^w
ωυ	ɔ:	ɔ:	ɔ:
‘	h~∅	h~∅	h~∅
ζ	dz	z:	z:
σ	s~z	s~z	s~z
γ + back V	g	g	ɣ (or ɣ̣) (/g/ after /ɣ/)
γ + front V	g	g	ɟ (/j/ after /ɣ/)

Greek letter + C = before a consonant + V = before a vowel	General Erasmian	Romaic Lucian	Standard Lucian
δ	ḍ	ḍ	ð (or /ð/) / (/d/ after /n/)
β	b	b	β (or β) / (/b/ after /m/)
χ + back V	x	x	x
χ + front V	x	x	ç
θ	θ	θ	θ
φ	f	φ/f	φ
κ + back V	k	k	k
κ + front V	k	k	c
τ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ
π	p	p	p
ρ	r~r,	r̄~r, r ^h ~r	r̄~r
ξ	kɣ	kɣ	kɣ
ψ	pɣ	pɣ	pɣ
λ	l	l	l
μ	m	m	m
ν	n	n	n