

Chapter 5

Transcribing Difficult to Read Text

By now you are familiar with reading a typical minuscule hand. You know how to transcribe the text of a manuscript, record page layout information and tag basic corrections. In this chapter you will be shown how to handle difficult to read text. A basic explanation can be found in **5.4 Difficult to Read Text** of the *Transcription Guidelines* but this chapter provides some examples and an exercise in tagging such text.

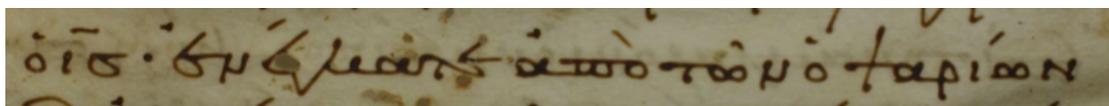
Sometimes it is very difficult to decide what a scribe actually wrote. Parts of letters may be missing, or very faded for various reasons, the script itself may be illegible, the image you are using may be very poor, or there may be ink blots and other marks obscuring the text. There are two ways that you can flag such difficulty, as **uncertain** or **illegible**.

Uncertain Text

Sometimes text is damaged but the letters are still legible. There can be no discrepancy about what the letter is.

For example, folio 289 of G/A 2561 has insect damage,¹ see line 11 of F 289v which contains part of John 21.10

(http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_2561/GA_2561_0291b.jpg)



On this line the second ε of ενεγκατε has a hole in it but it could only be ε. It could be no other letter. It is therefore simply transcribed as ενεγκατε. (Note the form of the final ε of ενεγκατε which you will not have met in G/A 713.)

|L|o ιζ ενεγκατε απο των οψαριων

However, on line 12 of the same page (also of the same verse) is a letter that is so damaged that several interpretations are possible:



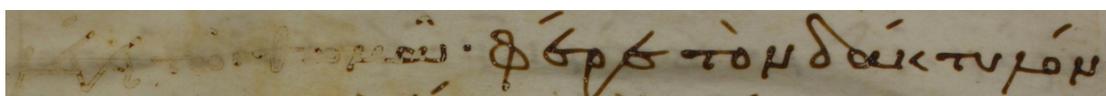
Here two holes in the manuscript obscure part of the word επιασατε. The letters ε, π, ι, α, τ and ε are clear. A tiny bit of the σ is missing, but it is clear that it is a σ, it can be

¹ Note that the folio numbers do not match the page number that forms part of the web address. You will see the correct folio numbers appear in the top right hand corner of the recto pages of this manuscript.

no other letter. However, what remains of the next character could be an α but it is not certain; it could be part of a different letter. Therefore, this letter is marked as ‘uncertain.’ This is done by placing a dot beneath the uncertain letter. (Note that if the insect hole was so big that **none** of this letter was still extant, it would be considered a ‘lacuna’ and tagged differently, see next chapter.) A full list of letters with dots underneath is available for copy and paste from the *Items for Copy and Paste* document. Alternatively it can be created by inserting Unicode character 0323, Combining Dot Below from the Character Palette/Map on your computer, immediately after the letter. This line is therefore transcribed as:

|L|ων επιασατε νυv

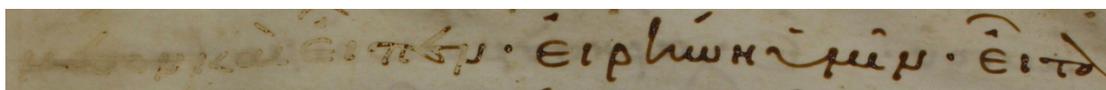
Some of the text on F 288v of the same manuscript is faded, see http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_2561/GA_2561_0290b.jpg



While the beginning of the line 2 (from John 20.27) is faded, it is legible when enlarged and is simply transcribed as:

|L|λεγει τωι θωμα φερε τον δακτυλον

The beginning of line 1 of the same page is also faded (from John 20.26-27), but certain letters are more difficult to read when you enlarge the image.



Sometimes the exposure or colour balance of an image can be changed and the difficult to read characters become clear. If these measures don’t help, however, place a dot beneath letters that are present but that cannot be read with certainty, for example:

|L|μeσον και ειπεν ειρηνη υμιν <V 27> ειτα

Illegible Text

If it is clear that there is text present, but it is now completely illegible (as distinct from simply uncertain), tag the text as illegible with the following tag which can be copied and pasted from the *Items for Copy and Paste* document: [ill] [vill].

The following example is from G/A 872, F 178r, column 2 (not available online) and contains part of John 12.9:



Some of these letters may reasonably be regarded as uncertain, and so should be underdotted, others are completely illegible.

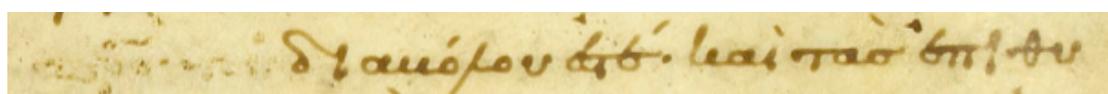
[L|vov αλλ ιv[ill]α και τον[ill]

If it is not possible to reconstruct the text with any degree of certainty, for example, if the base text contains 15 characters and the area of illegible text is not large enough to contain 15 characters, put the approximate number of illegible characters in ‘illegible’ tags.

Difficult to Read or Illegible Text in Corrections

Go to line 8 of G/A 713, F 313r at

http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Peckover_Greek_7/Page_313r/viewer/



At the beginning of this line from John 8.44 you will see that a corrector has erased some text written by the first hand. Sometimes it is impossible to discern what has been erased, at other times the erased text is still legible. Using this line as an example, what follows are three ways of tagging such text in a correction, all of which record &om; for omitted within the corrector tags:

A. An experienced transcriber, by enlarging the image and perhaps altering the contrast and/or colour balance, will be able to see that the words that have been erased are πρς του and so will transcribe as

[L[[app][*]πρς του[ill][C]&om;[ill][\app] διαβολου εστε και τας επιθυ=

B. A less experienced transcriber may decide that the letters are uncertain and so want to place underdots beneath some or all of the erased text. In such an instance, this line may perhaps be transcribed as

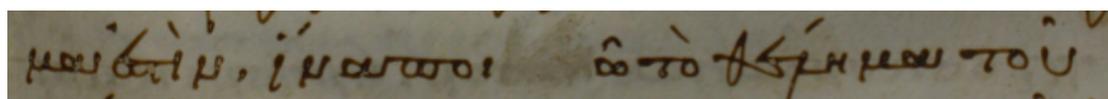
[L[[app][*]πρς του[ill][C]&om;[ill][\app] διαβολου εστε και τας επιθυ=

C. Another transcriber may decide that while part of the text is uncertain, part of it is completely illegible. Illegible text must be reconstructed, if possible, and supplied within ‘illegible’ tags as, for example:

[L[[app][*][ill]πρς [ill]το[ill]υ[ill][C]&om;[ill][\app] διαβολου εστε και τας επιθυ=

Go to line 16 of G/A 2561, F 243v at

http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_2561/GA_2561_0245b.jpg



It is clear here that a corrector has erased some text. Most of the erased text is virtually impossible to read. At places like this (and of course any place with a correction you are uncertain about) it is always worth consulting the apparatus of the majuscule edition of John at

<http://arts-itsee.bham.ac.uk/AnaServer?majuscule+0+start.any>

Type in the chapter and verse number you are looking at (in this case John 4.34) and check the apparatus at ποιω. You will see that many witnesses have the reading ποιησω. It is possible that this was written by the first hand of G/A 2561 and a corrector subsequently erased it. However, there is no clear evidence and the space itself looks too big. Here the text cannot be reconstructed with any degree of certainty, so the approximate number of illegible characters should be put in an ‘illegible’ tag and this line should be transcribed as:

|L|μα εστιν ινα [app][*]ποι[ill]2-3[\ill]ω[*][C]ποιω[\C][\app] το θελημα του

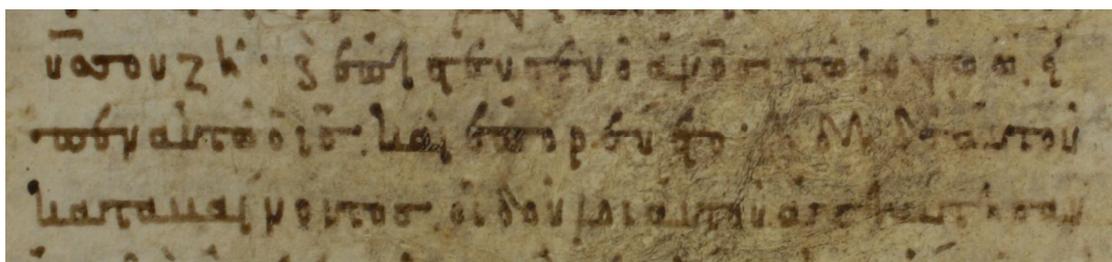
As you will probably realise, there is a certain amount of individual interpretation about what text is unclear and what text is illegible so do whatever you think best. When two transcriptions of the same manuscript text are compared, variations – including variations about what one person may perceive as illegible and another as unclear – will be resolved by the editors of the transcription.

Exercise

Transcribe the following pieces of text in this format

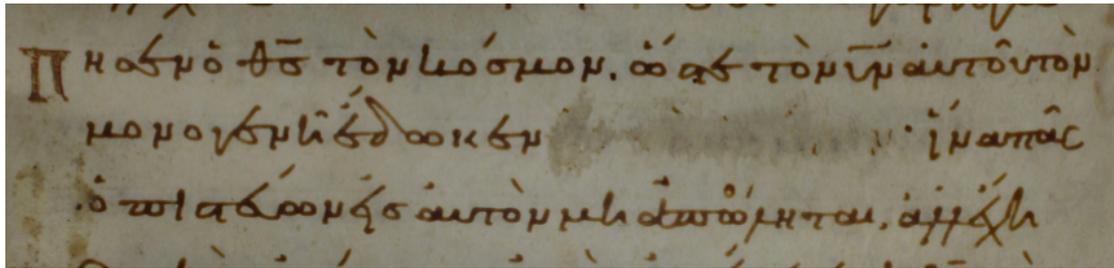
|F *folio number*|
 |L|*text*
 |L|*text*
 |L|*text*

1. These lines are from F 137r of G/A 1424 at http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_1424/GA_1424_0137a.jpg (from John 4.50-51.) This manuscript is a 9th century commentary manuscript in quite a different hand. The commentary on the biblical text is written in the left hand margin of the verso and the right hand margin of the recto and is heavily abbreviated. Only the biblical text in these manuscripts is transcribed.



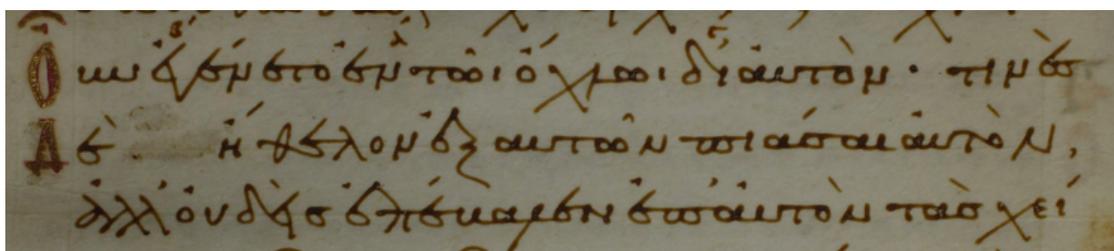
Note the double sigma of υς σου and the και ligature that looks like a ‘3’ on line 1.

2. These lines are from F 240r of G/A 2561 at http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_2561/GA_2561_0242a.jpg and are from John 3.16.



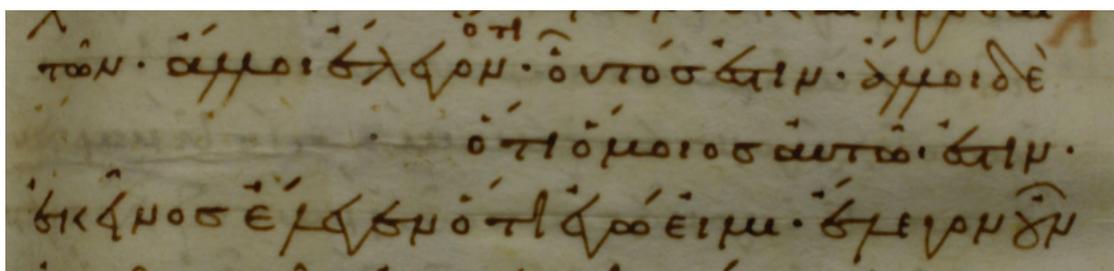
(Note how the σ, τ and ε of ωστε on the first line are formed.)

3. These lines are from G/A 2561, F 256r at http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_2561/GA_2561_0258a.jpg and are from John 7.43-44.



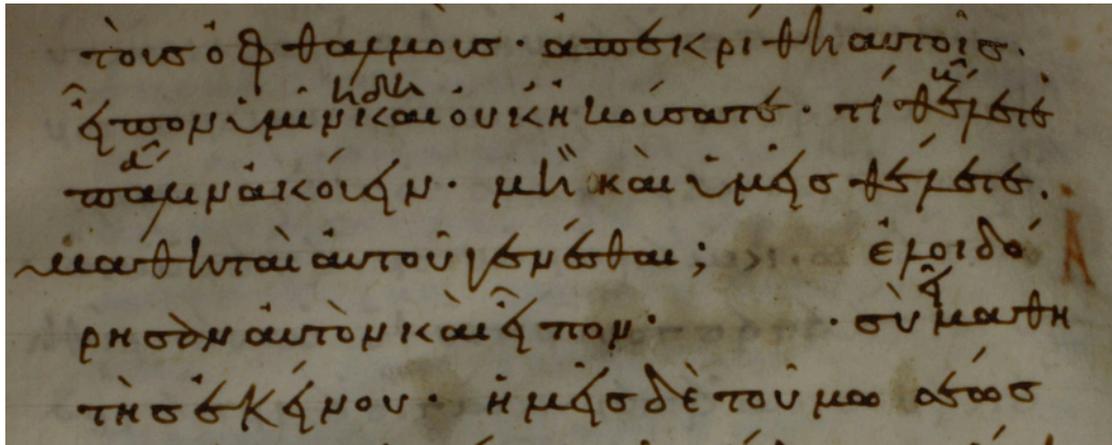
Apart from the erasure on the second line, note the tiny letters β, α and γ above the words on the first line. These are corrector's marks, indicating a corrected word order: α should go first, followed by β, followed by γ. Take a look at John 7.43 on <http://arts-itsee.bham.ac.uk/AnaServer?majuscule+0+start.any> for help if necessary, and bear in mind that 'γ' doesn't need to go in corrector tags as the positioning of this word is unchanged.

4. These lines are from G/A 2561, F 260v at http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_2561/GA_2561_0262b.jpg and are from John 9.8-10.



The erased text has been very well erased and the text on the recto can be seen quite clearly.

5. These lines are from the same manuscript, F 262r at http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_2561/GA_2561_0264a.jpg and are from John 9.27-28.



There are several corrections on these lines, including a transposition of words marked by β above θελετε on line 3 and α above παλιν on line 3. Think carefully how you might tag the 'ειπον' correction on line 5. A question you need to think about: Do you think the πον of επον was written by the first hand or a later corrector? One of the best ways of determining whether a correction was written by a different hand is by looking at the colour and weight of ink and shapes of the letters in comparison to the first hand text.

Send your transcription of these pieces to r.kevern@bham.ac.uk before moving onto the final chapter of this tutorial, and it will be checked and returned with comments.

Chapter 6

Omissions and Lacunae

In this final chapter you will learn about omissions and lacunae and gain experience of recording them in a transcription.

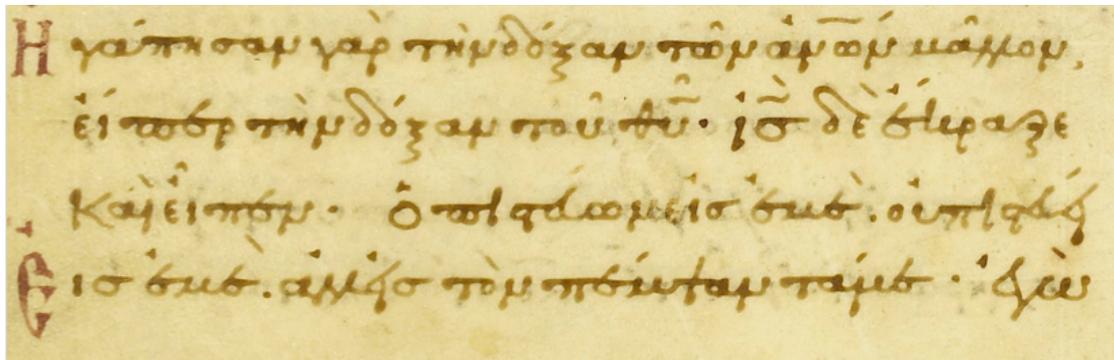
Omissions

Omissions can be defined as places where the text is present in the base text but not in the text of the manuscript you are transcribing. If the omission consists of less than one verse, the omitted section is simply deleted from the transcription. The only time that an omission of less than one verse is indicated in a transcription is when the omission is part of a correction and it becomes necessary to record it in order to clearly present the reading of the correction. You will already be familiar with this from chapter 4 of this tutorial.

In the case of an omission of an entire verse, the text of the entire verse is deleted but the block marker is retained and a reference to the omission is added in brackets/curly brackets in the following way: {om}, for example, <V 17> {om}. If a block of verses is omitted, delete the omitted text but retain each verse block marker followed by a reference to its omission, without adding new line breaks, as, for example, [L|των προβατων <V 12> {om} <V 13> {om} <V 14> {om} <V 15>

Go to the bottom of F 325r at

http://vnr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Peckover_Greek_7/Page_325v/viewer/



This text is 12.43-44 and the first word of verse 46. Verse 45 has been omitted. This section is transcribed as:

[L|<V 43> ηγαπησαν γαρ την δοξαν των ανων μαλλον
[L|λειπερ την δοξαν του θυ <V 44> ις δε εκραξε
[L|και ειπεν ο πιστευων εις εμε ου πιστευει
[L|εις εμε αλλ εις τον πεμψαντα με <V 45> {om} <V 46> εγω

Lacunae

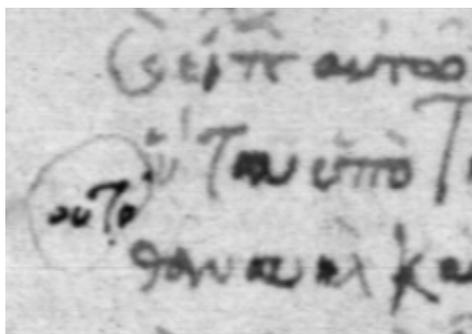
A lacuna, for the purposes of transcribing, can be defined as a section of text that is missing because the material on which the text is written is missing. Reasons for missing material include: a leaf, leaves, or part of a leaf might have been removed or

partially destroyed by rodent damage, fire, etc.; there may be a flaw in parchment in the form of a hole.

A lacuna is different from an omission in that an omission is when text is present in the base text but not in the text of the manuscript you are transcribing because the scribe left it out. It is also different from illegible text because the material upon which illegible text is written is still extant, as we saw in chapter 5.

There are a number of ways of tagging lacunae, depending on the type of lacuna. The section **5.3.2 Lacunae** in the Transcription Guidelines provides a very comprehensive explanation of these ways, including a number of examples and so should be read carefully before doing the following exercises.

In the following example (F187r, G/A 1253, not available online) you can see a hole in the manuscript and ουτο(v) from the next recto showing in the hole. The lacunose letter here is reconstructed as ‘ο’ and the line is tagged as |L|[°]ο[°]ντα υπο τ... See ‘Partial Line Lacuna [°]’ under **5.3.2 Lacunae** in the Transcription Guidelines for further information on using this lacuna tag.



The most common form of lacuna in minuscule manuscripts occurs as a result of a leaf or leaves being cut out of a manuscript. You can often, but not always, see the remains of a page or pages that has been removed. For example, see the cut leaves between F 319v and F 320r of G/A 713

http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Peckover_Greek_7/Page_320r/viewer/



Detailed instructions on how to record the text that would most likely exist on these lacunose leaves can be found at ‘The &lac; Entity’ under **5.3.2 Lacunae** in the Transcription Guidelines, specifically ‘Example 1’ and ‘Example 5’. Ensure you

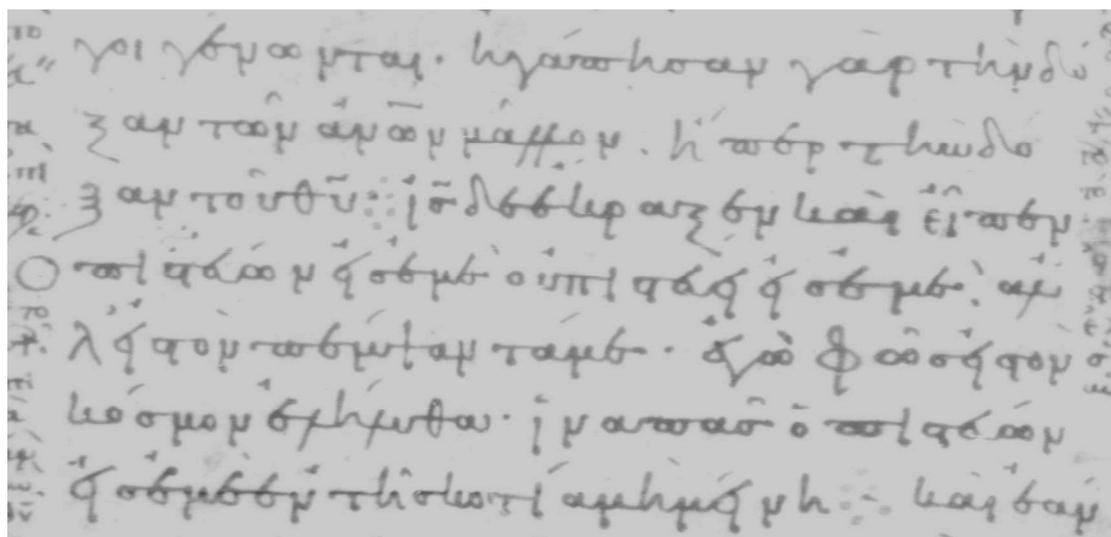
understand the logic of the instructions by comparing the images of F 319v and F 320r with the following transcription:

[L]πιστευετε ου γαρ εστε εκ των προβατων
[L]των εμων καθως ειπον υμιν <V 27> τα προ=
[L]βατα τα εμα της φωνης μου ακουει
[F 319v+
[L]&lac; {10.28-11.13}
[F 320r-|
[L]<K 11> <V 14> &lac;
[F 320r|
[L] τοτε ουν ειπεν αυτοις ο ις παρρησια λα=
[L]ζαρος απεθανε <V 15> και χαιρω δι υμας ινα πι=
[L]στευσητε οτι ουκ ημην εκει αλλ αγωμεν προς

Finally, bear in mind that often in places where text is difficult to read, completely illegible, or lacunose, you will frequently need to use a combination of ways of recording such text. For example, often the letters immediately preceding or following a lacuna or illegible text are difficult to read and so may require an underdot to indicate uncertainty. Also, the lacuna tag [°] [°], like the illegible tag [ill] [ill] and the underdot, can be used within corrector tags and, like the illegible tags can contain numbers instead of reconstructed text.

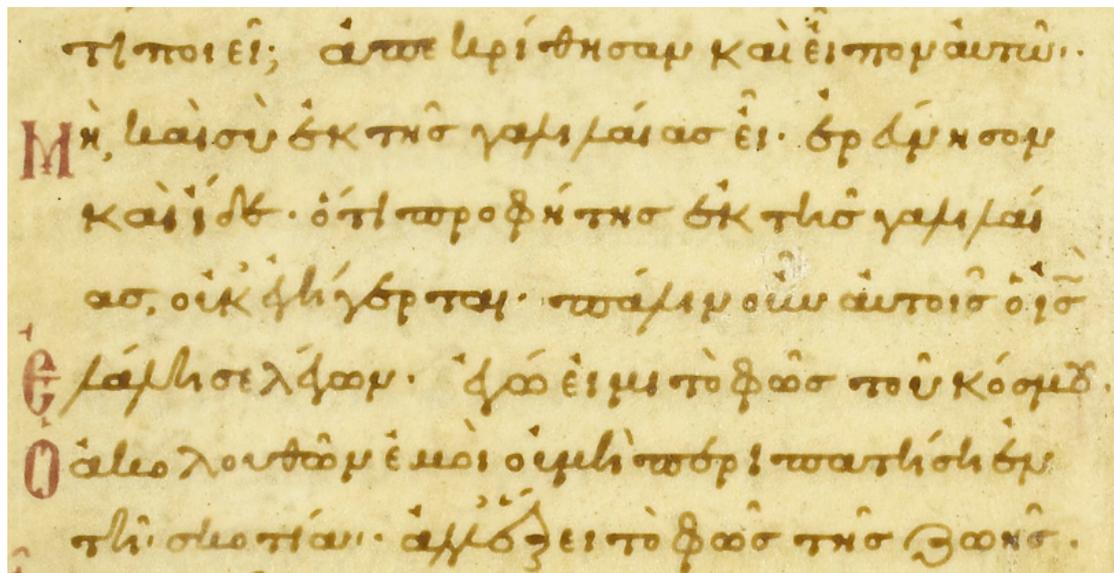
Exercises

1. Transcribe these 7 lines of F 251v of G/A 1293 (not available on line). The text begins at the end of John 12.42. A single verse has been omitted. The tiny text to either side of the biblical text is commentary text and can be ignored, but note the large omicron at the beginning of line 4; it is biblical text that juts into the commentary text.

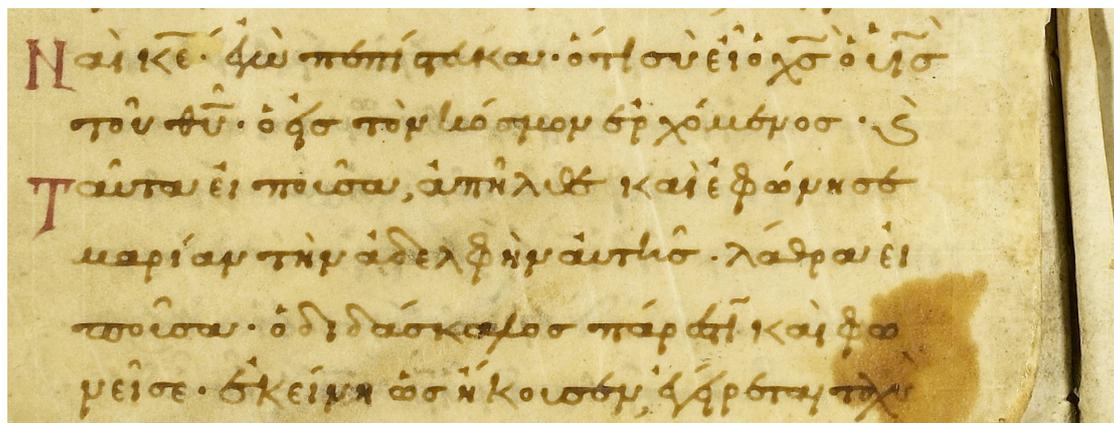


2. Transcribe the first 7 lines of F310v in G/A 713, see http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Peckover_Greek_7/Page_310v/viewer/

The text begins at the end of John 7.51. It contains a long omission of several verses, so when you arrive at unexpected text, you will need to work out which verse the unexpected text belongs to. This is a fairly commonly omitted pericope!



3. Transcribe the last 6 lines of F 320v and the first 6 lines of F 321r of G/A 713, see http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Peckover_Greek_7/Page_320v/viewer/



and

http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Peckover_Greek_7/Page_321r/viewer/

The text begins with John 11.50. A leaf has been cut out between these two pages. Note the kai compendium on line 2 of F 268v, and the final nu overlines at the end of the last line of F 268v and on the sixth line of F 269r.

Congratulations! You have completed this online tutorial in transcribing Greek minuscule manuscripts! Send your final practice pieces to r.kevern@bham.ac.uk and they will be checked and returned. Please also indicate whether you would be interested in volunteering your newly acquired skills in transcribing to the IGNTF (www.igntf.org) and a real transcription will be allocated to you.

Obviously every single aspect of transcribing could not have been covered in this tutorial. If you are working on a real transcription and come across something you are unsure about, you will often find the answer in the Transcription Guidelines. Other times, you will find that your own developing experience of transcribing becomes your best teacher. If you are really stuck, email r.kevern@bham.ac.uk with your query.

Abbreviations have not been covered in this tutorial, and many manuscripts, particularly later ones, are heavily abbreviated. Instructions on transcribing abbreviations can be found at **5.8.5 Nomina Sacra, Abbreviations and Ligatures** in the Transcription Guidelines. Helps include:

T.W. Allen, 'Abbreviations in Greek Manuscripts' in A.N. Oikonomides (ed.), *Abbreviations in Greek: Inscriptions: Papyri, Manuscripts and Early Printed Books* (Chicago, 1974)

C. Faulmann, *Das Buch der Schrift*, Section: 'Griechische Schrift des Mittelalters' pp.171-177, Vienna (1880) available at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Das_Buch_der_Schrift_%28Faulmann%29_186.jpg to http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Das_Buch_der_Schrift_%28Faulmann%29_192.jpg

V. Gardthausen, *Griechische Palaeographie* (2nd ed.), 2 vols., Leipzig (vol 1: 1911, vol 2: 1913)