Transcribing Greek Minuscule Manuscripts

Chapter 1:
Getting Started

This is the first page of the Gospel of John in a twelfth century minuscule manuscript called Peckover Greek 7, or G/A 713 (It is also called Algerina Peckover 561). It is part of the Mingana Collection of manuscripts held at The University of Birmingham, UK, see http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Peckover_Greek_7/

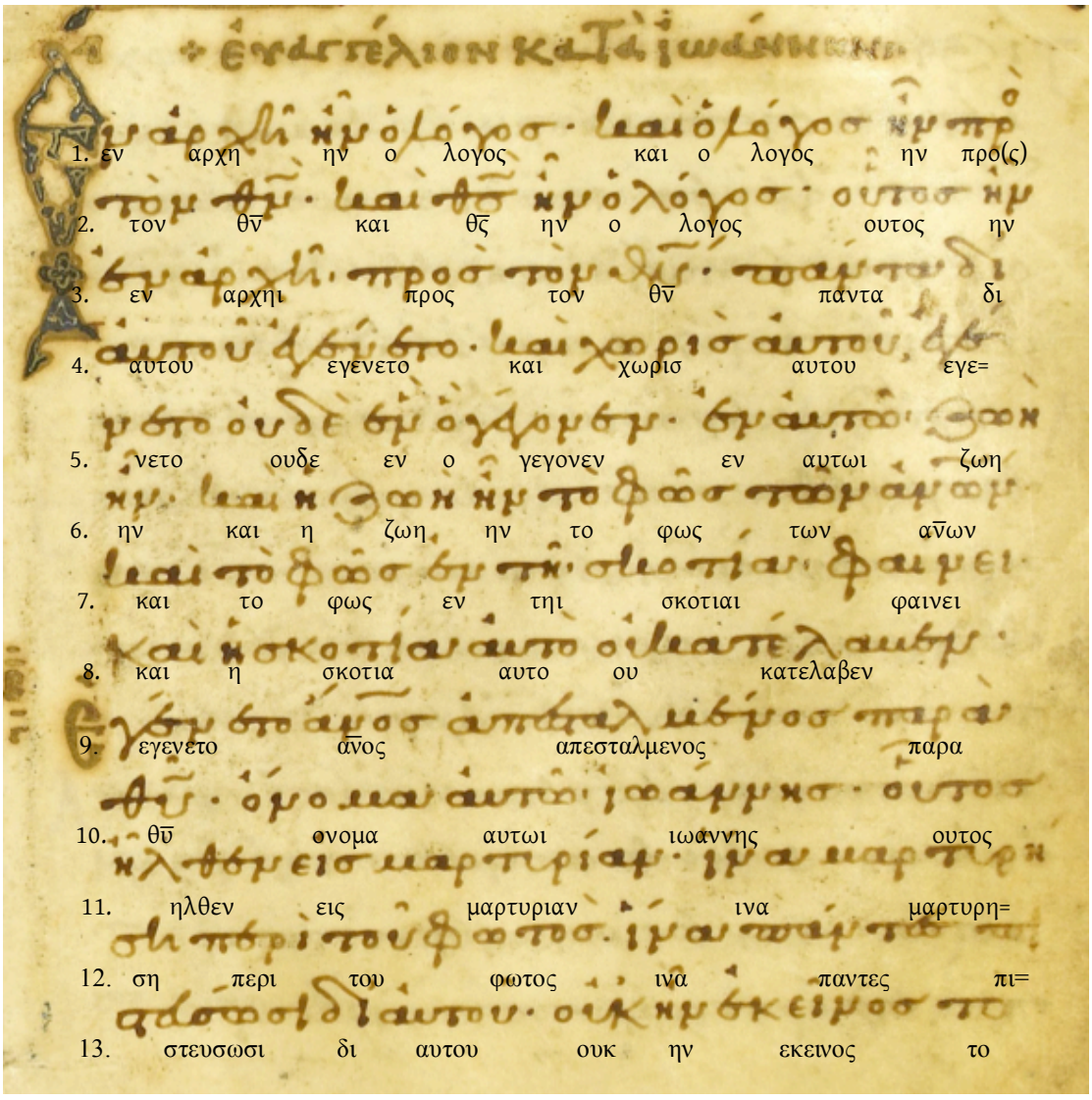
Features of the Page

- At the top of the page is a chapter or section heading, written in gold ink and called a kephalaion.
- In the top right hand corner is the folio number, written in pencil.
- Underneath is a decorative header, often found at the beginning of a new book, particularly a new gospel.
- Underneath the decorative header is the book heading, written in gold ink.
- The text begins with an enlarged, illuminated initial letter E.
- In the left hand margin are the Eusebian canon numbers.

Reading the minuscule hand

The earliest biblical manuscripts were written in majuscule hands, a style of writing that is the source of modern Greek capital letters. An increase in demand for books in the Byzantine empire during the course of the tenth century led to the abandonment of this style of writing in favour of a more compact and economical style, known as minuscule, sometimes called cursive, or running script. Minuscule manuscripts account for the vast bulk of extant biblical Greek manuscripts and can take a while to get used to as, over time, more and more abbreviations and ligatures are included as the need for copies of the bible increases.

The best way to learn to read the minuscule hand is to simply start reading. What follows is the first page of G/A 713 (John 1.1-8) with an interlinear transcription. By reading the handwriting and comparing it to the electronic text, you should be able to see how the letter forms match.



Some things to note

Line 1:

- Note the enlarged letter E at the beginning of the line. This is simply recorded as a regular ε.
- Accents and punctuation are not recorded in a transcription.
- Note the different ways that η has been written at the end of αρχη and at the beginning of the next word, ην.
- Final sigma (ς) is used at the end of a word in a transcription, but in minuscule manuscripts the regular sigma is often used throughout, see λογος.
- The last letter of the last word of the line has not been written by the scribe. In such abbreviated words, the missing letter is recorded in parentheses in the transcription: προ(ς).

Line 2:

- Some words, such as θεος, υιος, κυριος, χριστος, ουρανος and ανθρωπος are contracted in Greek manuscripts, that is, they are shortened, and in place of the missing letters an overline is written. In this line, θεον is contracted to θν̄ and θεος is contracted to θς̄. These contractions are called *nomina sacra*.

Line 3:

- In some minuscule manuscripts, what we regularly see as iota subscript is written as iota adscript. In this line, εν αρχῃ is written as εν αρχηι, with a very small iota (they are often smaller than a regular iota). Iota adscript should be recorded. Ignore iota subscript.
- Note the rather elaborate θν̄. The ν is written very much like a capital N.
- The π of παντα can be mistaken for an ω. Compare the π on this line with the π of προς on the same line and with the ω of χωρις on line 4.

Line 4:

- The εγε of εγενετο is a common construction. See it again at the end of the line.
- Words often get split across two lines. This line ends with εγε, which continues on the next line with νετο. A word split is recorded with the equals sign: =, so εγε=νετο.

Line 5:

- Note the two styles of ε in ουδε and εν.

Line 6:

- ανθρωπων has been contracted to αν̄ων, and an overline added. See also αν̄ος on line 9, which is a contraction of ανθρωπος. In transcriptions, overlines are always added above the second letter of a contracted word.

Line 7:

- Sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish between α and αι as the tail of the α is often pronounced. Compare the α in σκοτιαι and the αι in φαινει (the iota adscript in σκοτιαι is separate from the α in this instance). If ι follows α, the

nib leaves the page at the bottom of the vertical stroke. If there is only α, the nib leaves the page at the top of the vertical stroke.

Line 8:

- ου κατελαβεν appear as one word, the υ joining the next word. This is quite common, particularly with υ.
- Note the way β is written; it looks more like a Latin u. This is very common. It also looks one of the ways a Greek μ is written, see the μ in απεσταλμενος on the next line. There is another form of β that looks more like you would expect but there is no example on this page.

Line 9:

- This type of enlarged letter at the beginning of a line is common. Simply record as a regular letter.
- Note how the letters εστ in απεσταλμενος run together. This is a common letter form.

Line 13:

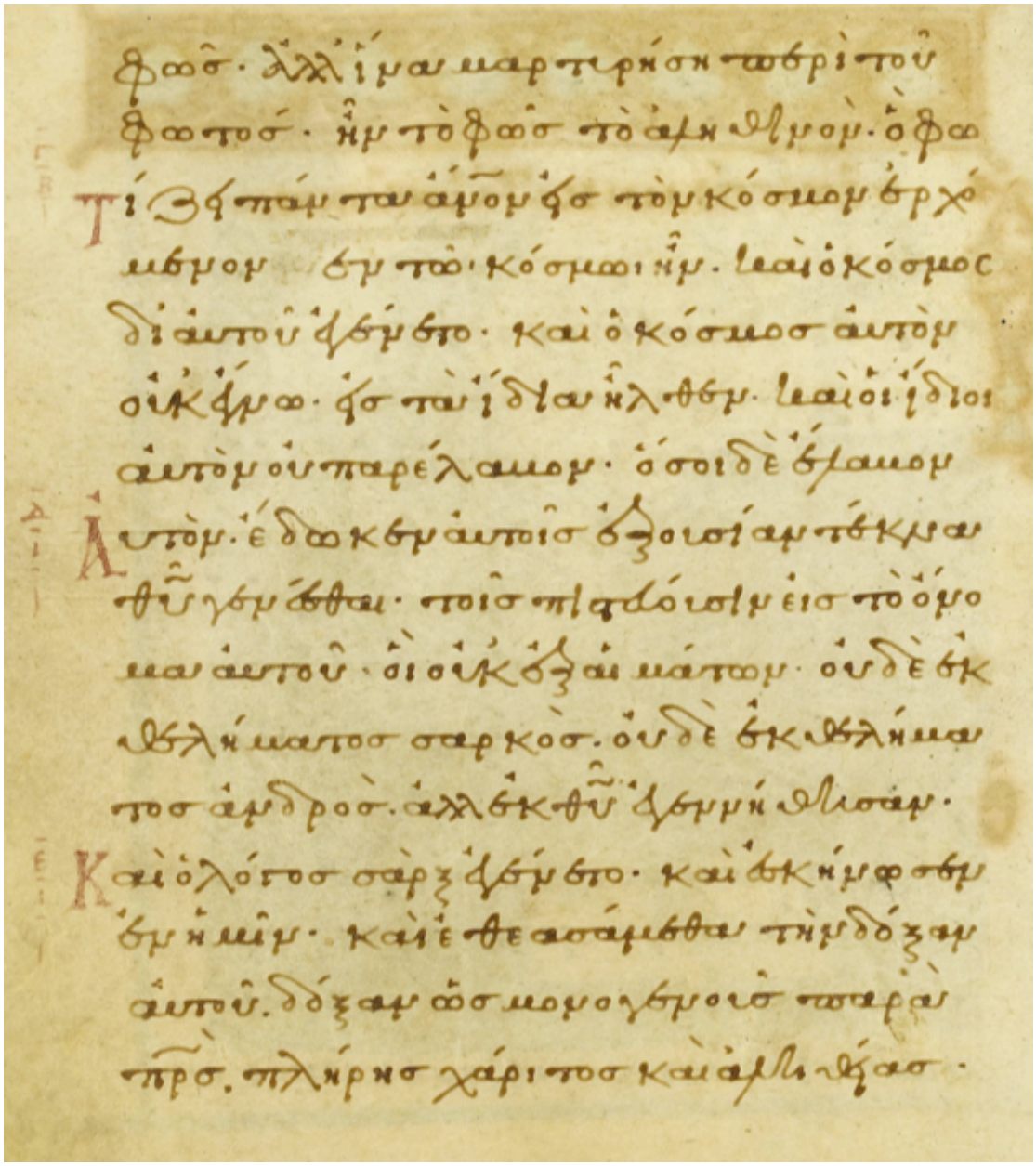
- Note how the letters στ and ευ of πιστευσωσι run together. These are common letter forms.
- Note also that there is no final nu in πιστευσωσι.

As you can see, much of the text becomes easy to read once you get used to the style of the scribe. Some of the letter formations are unusual and take some getting used to.

Exercise

Look at the image on the next page (it is the next page of G/A 713 and contains John 1.8-14) and identify the following words:

μαρτυρηση	αληθινον	φω=τιζει	κοσμον
εν τωι κοσμωι	εγενετο	ουκ εγνω	ιδια
παρελαβον	εξουσιαν	τεκνα	γενεσθαι
πιστευουσιν	θεληματος	εγεννηθησαν	σαρξ
εσκηνωσεν	ημιν	εθεασαμεθα	αληθειας



The answers can be found at the end of this tutorial.

Chapter 2
Making a transcription of the first two pages of G/A 713

A transcription of a biblical book of a manuscript is made by adapting a base text of that book, altering it where necessary to conform to the text of the manuscript. The base text used is the Textus Receptus, which generally needs less alteration than any other base text. The base text contains tagged book, chapter and verse numbers and the most common *nomina sacra* in abbreviated form.

The transcriber compares a word or few words of the manuscript image (or the manuscript itself) with the base text and where there is a difference, alters the base text. Location markers (usually folio, column and line) are entered by means of tags. Corrections – where a corrector alters the text of the first hand – are also added by means of tags. Before a transcription is started, it must be named and a status note must be filled in, providing details of the manuscript to be transcribed.

Preparing the Transcription

- Before starting a transcription, follow instructions in chapter 1 "Preliminary Steps before Transcribing" in the *Transcription Guidelines* and ensure that you have received relevant documents such as the Base Text, *04-TRns-Unicode*, and *Items for Copy and Paste*.
- Chapter 2 of the *Transcription Guidelines* is a reference chapter of symbols used in transcribing and an example page. It is useful to always have at hand.
- Read chapter 3 "Preparing a Transcription" in the *Transcription Guidelines*.
- Rename the Base Text by clicking 'Save As'. Your file should be called 04_307130_*your initials*.
- Fill in the Status Note at the top of your renamed file. The Status Note should initially look like this:

{Status:
G-A Number: 713
Name of book transcribed: Gospel of John
First folio transcribed: 238r
Base text used: TRns

Transcribed by: *your name*
Transcription begun: *the date*
Transcription finished:

Does this manuscript contain (delete and complete as appropriate):
Lectionary annotations - Yes No
Initials and other enlarged letters - Yes No
Diples (>) - No Yes on the following folios 00r, 00v ...
Obeloi (†) - No Yes: on the following folios 00r, 00v ...

Other remarks: }

As you work your way through the transcription, you will be able to answer the questions about the contents of the manuscript.

Recording Folios and Lines

Read Chapter 4 "Recording Folios, Pages, Columns and Lines" in the *Transcription Guidelines.*

Thumbnail images of each page of G/A 713 are available online here. You can either scroll down to the first page of text of John at Page_283r or view it here. Images can be enlarged and dragged enabling you to examine text at high magnification.

As you have already seen, G/A 713 has folio numbers at the top right hand corner of the recto sides. In your transcription, both sides of each folio must be given a folio number. The recto is tagged as |F 283r| and the verso as |F 283v|.

Each new line should be preceded by a line tag. So, the base text

<B 04>
<K 0>
<V 0> το κατα ιωαννην αγιον ευαγγελιον

is changed to this:

|F 283r|
|L|<B 04> <K 0> <V 0> ευαγγελιον κατα ιωαννην

Note that the inscription must also be altered to match the manuscript text.

Transcribing F 283r and F 283v

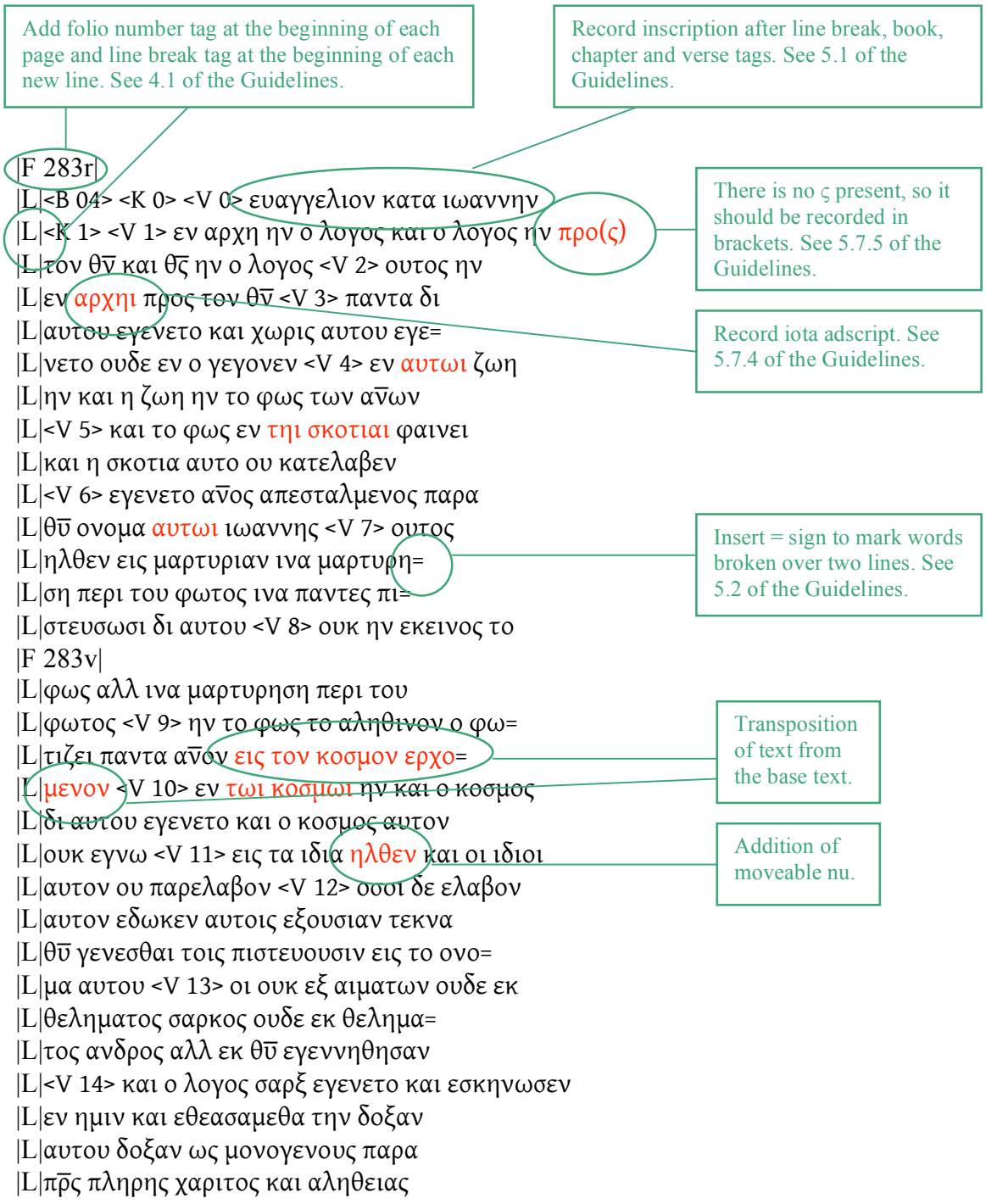
Once you have renamed your file, completed the status note and begun your transcription, transcribe the text of F 283r and F 283v, not forgetting to insert the new folio tag at the beginning of F 283v.

Your transcription of the first two pages of G/A 713 should look like the transcription on the next page. Changes to the base text are highlighted in red. Note:

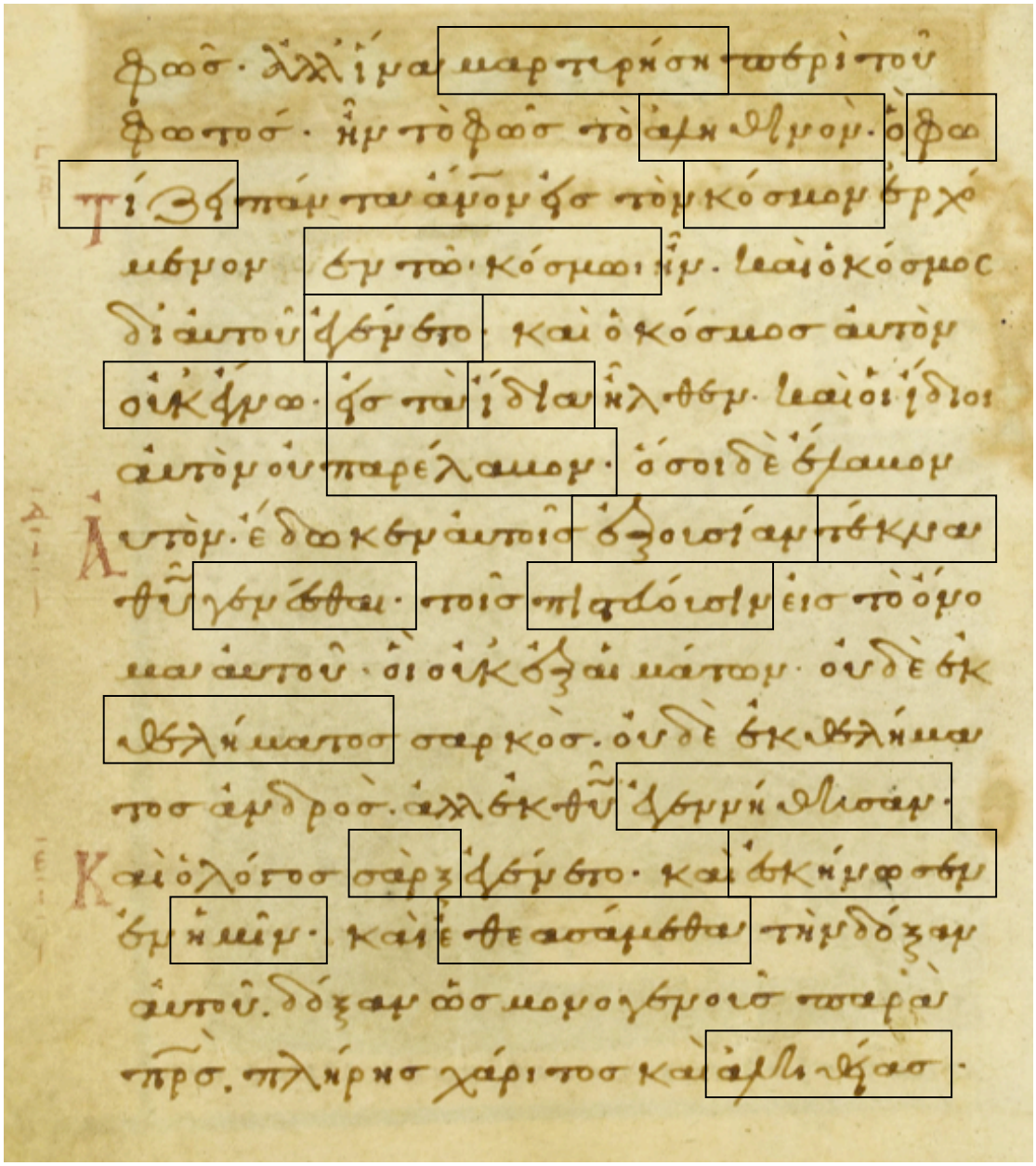
- the location markers – folio and line tags.
- the = at the end of a line when a word is broken over two lines.
- the words highlighted in red are changes to the base text.

Ignore:

- the enlarged letters at the beginning of some lines.
- the Eusebian Canon Numbers in the left hand margins (see Features of the Page in chapter 1).



You have now worked through two pages of text, matching the script to the base text and edited your transcription where necessary.



These are the answers to the Exercise in Chapter 1.