Ok there are some things you gotta know up front

What is this Attic business?

So basically, as near as I follow, the ancient Greek language spanned hundreds of years. Over that time it changed a bunch, think of colonial American English is a way different beast than modern American English. From what I understand, you can work out the dialects if you know one so we start with one, and then branch out depending on what you want to read. Modern Greek is derived from ancient Greek but has changed a lot (similar to how French and Spanish come from Latin), so while it might make some sense, you aren’t going to be able to walk up to someone and say “Hey Baby, wanna show me your Acropolis?” I mean you could but you’re not likely to be well understood, or really appreciated at all.

Also called Classical Greek, Attic is the Greek spoken in Athens (and the Attic peninsula) in about 400-500 BCE. Why do we start here? Not because they were the best (though I’m sure they would say so!), but because the document sources are the best preserved. Mastronarde calls them “the most convenient form of ancient Greek”[Mastronard, p3 section 6]. While we know that other areas were similarly rich cultures their writings don’t survive well, so when you hear about “the Greeks did this”, they are often talking about the Athenians or maybe Spartans. But about other areas, particularly the ones the Athenians didn’t talk about much, we know less. Case in point Sappho was from Lesbos, about which we know little, and we don’t know if she was one person, or it was a title (like priestess or something) that was multiple people. Given the differences of how Athenian and Spartan societies are structured, there is a lot of speculation about other areas.

Thanks to the 1880s neoclassisits we have a pretty good idea of attic, and its readable. Once you get this down you can learn (I am told) the dialects to read things from other eras and areas.

Some examples

Epic Homer’s Iliad & Odyssey

Ionic Heroditus’ Histories

Doric Attic Tragidies, Pindar’s poetry

Aeolic Sappho’s poems

Kione The language spread by Alexander the Great, and in which the New Testament is written.

Studying Attic won’t make you able to read the above, but will give you the bread crumbs (and maybe some tools) to go further to read those.

References

* Mastronarde: Introduction
* Groton: Lesson 1
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_of_the_New_Testament>
* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient\_Greek