



Twining Project: Greek Heritage in European Culture and Identity (GrECI)

Research Meeting IV

‘Greek Sources in the Reformation and Confessional Debates: Role and Place of Classical and Patristic Writings’

21-23 May 2025

Marie and Louis Pasteur University, Besançon

The fourth research meeting of the GrECI consortium took place in Besançon at the Marie and Louis Pasteur University on 21, 22, and 23 May 2025. The meeting focused on “Greek Sources in the Reformation and Confessional Debates: The Role and Place of Classical and Patristic Writings.” The workshop’s main aim was to promote a comprehensive examination of the role of both classical and patristic Greek sources in the reformist writings and confessional debates that characterized sixteenth-century Europe. The workshop sought to understand how the ancient Greek language and culture introduced new subjects of study and questions to the men and women of the Renaissance and how, in this process, positioned Greek culture as a vital source for examining religious conflicts and enriching the arguments and debates of the Reformation period. This set of questions are linked to the third research focal point of the GrECI project, titled “Greek and Greek Texts in Religious Polemics and Confessional Strife (Intellectual History and Reformation Studies)”.

Organised into seven sessions and divided over three days, the meeting featured twelve papers and a keynote lecture that presented case studies on how Greek sources—both classical and patristic—were employed in confessional debates in early modern Europe. Papers were in either English and French with simultaneous translation of both the papers and the discussions that followed each session. The conference was hybrid, and three papers were delivered through Zoom.

The conference was opened by **Hugues Daussy**, President of the Marie and Louis Pasteur University and Professor of Early Modern History at the same university. Prof. Daussy’s words of welcome were followed by an introduction to both the conference and the GrECI project by the three Principal Investigators of the research consortium: **Marie Barral-Baron (Marie and Louis Pasteur University)**, **Natasha Constantinidou (University of Cyprus)**, and **Han Lamers (University of Oslo)**.

Welcome and introduction were followed by the **first session**, chaired by Han Lamers, and consisting of two papers on the role of Greek learning in the work of Luther and Erasmus, respectively. In his paper titled “L’influence du Nouveau Testament grec dans l’émergence de la nouvelle théologie de Luther, 1515-1519”, **Matthieu Arnold (Université de Strasbourg)** explored the influence of the Greek New Testament in some of Luther’s texts: the lessons on the epistle to the Romans, the commentary on the epistle to Galatians and the use of the Greek text in some later publications addressing the





question of the Humility of the Virgin Mary and the question of marriage as a sacrament. From the study of these texts and questions, he analysed Luther's relationship with Greek translations, as well as the ideas of Erasmus, and examined their profound impact on the development of Luther's thought and theology. In her paper titled "La place des sources grecques dans le combat d'Erasmus contre la Réforme", **Marie Barral-Baron** explored the significance of the Greek language and Greek authors—both classical and patristic—whom Erasmus consistently engaged with and translated in shaping his vision of Christianity and the Christian life. Marie Barral-Baron demonstrated how Erasmus drew upon Greek philosophy and wisdom as a means to address religious dissent and to formulate the appropriate attitude for believers. In the face of confessional conflicts, Erasmus continually referenced and advocated for Greek sources, both in his writings and correspondence, where he identified examples of the ideal believer's stance and the resolution of conflicts through harmony.

The **second session**, chaired by Bruce Gordon (University of Yale), featured two papers on the use of Greek in the work of Philipp Melanchthon. In his paper titled "Greek Maxims in Melanchthon's Annotations on Proverbs," **William Weaver (University of Texas)** examined Philipp Melanchthon's incorporation of ancient Greek maxims in his annotations on the Proverbs. He emphasized Melanchthon's perception of Greek authors as 'teachers', introducing the notion of *genus didaskalikon* (the 'teaching kind' of rhetoric). Weaver illustrated how Melanchthon explained the literary and rhetorical aspects of Greek maxims while drawing out their moral implications and aligning them with Christian doctrine. He further demonstrated that, over time, Melanchthon adopted a less philological and more philosophical approach that integrated Aristotelian influences and catered to a more erudite audience. In her paper titled "Melanchthon and Aristotle: A Dynamic Relationship," **Nicole Kuropka (Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal)** examined Melanchthon's adaptations of Aristotelian dialectical methods through his works *Compendaria dialectices ratio* (1520), *De Dialectica* (1527-1542), and *Erotemata dialectices* (1547-1559), highlighting the intricate genesis and printing histories of these texts. For each work, she focused on four key areas: the evolving content of Melanchthon's dialectic, changes in his attitude towards and use of Aristotle, the printing history of his dialectic textbooks, and the theological and Church-political context. Her analysis illustrated how Melanchthon's approach to dialectics evolved under Luther's influence and how he ultimately embraced Aristotle as a teacher of dialectic.

The **third session**, chaired by William Weaver, included two papers that continued the discussion on the influence of Greek learning in Melanchthon's work and his broader circle of students. In her paper titled "Natural Law and the Loci Method in Melanchthon's Commentary on Theognis' *Sententiae*," **Eleni Leontidou (University of Cyprus)** explored the role of ancient Greek poetry in Philipp Melanchthon's educational project. She argued that while Melanchthon viewed ancient philosophy as distinct from biblical wisdom, he simultaneously recognised that it could nonetheless convey divine law and moral





principles within a Christian framework. This was illustrated through her study of the *Explicatio sententiarum Theognidis* (1560); her analysis underlined the moral and rhetorical use of Theognis' poetry, rich in moral content and its alignment with divine law through the use of commonplaces (the 'loci method'). In his paper titled "Technical Terminology and Confessional Conflict: The Consequences of Greek Learning in Lutheran Intellectual Culture," **Tomás Antonio Valle (University of Hamburg)** analysed the use of Greek terminology in Protestant scholarship, particularly in Melanchthon's circle at the University of Wittenberg. His analysis focused on specific terms, such as *logos*, used in Latin works of Melanchthon's circle without translation. Valle argued that this practice was more than mere Latin-Greek code-switching or an expression of erudition; it reflected an intellectual habit, a shared confessional culture, and a deeper engagement with Greek vocabulary. He positioned this within the context of Melanchthon's dialectical method, which emphasised precision of terminology.

The **fourth session**, chaired by Max Engammare (University of Geneva), featured two papers shedding light on the role of Greek and Greek sources in the Swiss Reformation, focussing on the work of Ulrich Zwingli. In his lecture titled "The Greek Heritage in Ulrich Zwingli's Reformation," **Peter Opitz (Université de Zurich-Institut d'histoire de la Réforme)** examined the influence of Greek language and literature on Zwingli's life and work. Opitz discussed Zwingli's engagement with Greek literature, particularly his appreciation for Pindar and his preface to the edition of the poet by Ceperinus. He showed that for the Swiss reformer, poets such as Pindar were valuable not only for learning Greek but also for interpreting Scripture in terms of language, style, and rhetoric for both the Greek and Hebrew texts. In this way, Opitz showed that Zwingli's principle of *sola scriptura* did not undermine the value of ancient wisdom. Rather, he emphasised Zwingli's belief that knowledge of Greek language and literature served as a key to understanding Holy Scripture as the sole source of true knowledge about God. In her lecture titled "The Role of Greek in the Correspondence of Zwingli and Oecolampadius," **Sharon van Dijk (University of Groningen)** explored the use of Greek in the letters exchanged between Zwingli and Oecolampadius. Emphasising that proficiency in Greek was essential to the Reformation as it facilitated access to Scripture, Van Dijk presented multiple examples from their correspondence, illustrating how Greek was variously used for advancing arguments, self-presentation, and even maintaining privacy in theological discussions.

The **fifth session**, presided over by Marie Barral-Baron (University Marie et Louis Pasteur), featured a keynote lecture by **Bruce Gordon (Yale University)** titled "The Complex Legacy of Chrysostom among the Reformers." Gordon explored the reception of St Chrysostom during the English Reformation, emphasising the challenges reformers faced as they encountered his writings, which were both supportive and contradictory to their theological positions. He illustrated how Chrysostom's works were used by various factions in confessional debates, addressing issues such as the episcopal order, the role of Scripture in the English Church, and theological confrontations between William Fulke





and Gregory Martin. Gordon's lecture showed how Chrysostom's image evolved throughout the Reformation and how his works were used in different and sometimes conflicting confessional arguments.

After the keynote lecture, attendees enjoyed an exhibition of Greek religious books from the Library of Nicolas and Antoine of Granvelle at the **Bibliothèque Municipale**, presented by **Antoine Pietrobelli**, Professor of Greek Language, Literature, and Civilization at the Marie and Louis Pasteur University. The day concluded with a visit to the **Musée du Temps**, located in the Palace of the Granvelle Family.

The **sixth session**, chaired by Natasha Constantinidou, featured two papers on the Greek learning of John Calvin and Gentian Hervet. In his paper titled "Les usages du grec biblique chez Calvin" **Max Engammare (University of Geneva)** analysed Calvin's relationship and use of Greek sources through the study of Calvin's library and the presence of Greek quotations and sources in some of his texts such as the *Institution chrétienne* or the *Comma Joanneum*. Calvin's analysis of Greek and Greek translations in matters such as the death of Judas allowed him to address and answer the question of whether or not Calvin was a Hellenist. **Maria Fallica (Sapienza University of Rome & Florida State University)**, in her paper titled "Graeca veritas pro salute et dignitate ecclesiae: Clement of Alexandria and Gentian Hervet," demonstrated how the Roman Catholic theologian and classical scholar Gentian Hervet used his edition and commentary on Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* to present an alternative view of Christianity that was accessible to all through serious study and scholarship. She illustrated that Clement's work was not just used as a goldmine of classical citations, as previous scholarship assumed, and argued instead that it played a philosophical role in the confessional debates of Hervet's time.

The **seventh and final session**, chaired by Peter Opitz, consisted of two papers addressing different aspects of Greek learning in early modern confessional contexts, covering both the Low Countries and France. **Pierre-Olivier Lehot (Institut Protestant de théologie de Paris)**, in his paper titled "De l'identification des 'Ελληνισται (Act 6) à la 'querelle hellénistique' (1580-1650). Enjeux théologiques et confessionnels d'un débat philologique" addressed the issue of Hellenic Judaism, specifically the study of the Bible within a form of Judaism that used the Greek language in the Hellenistic Jewish milieu, during the first half of the seventeenth century. Through an analysis of the works of authors such as Joseph Scaliger and Richard Simon, he illustrated what he referred to as the linguistic turn of the seventeenth century, highlighting developments in biblical lexical analysis and the examination of Greek texts. Finally, in her paper "Politique d'unité et concorde face à la rupture de la Réforme: la place des sources grecques dans la pensée de Loys Le Roy", **Ana Carmona Aliaga (Marie and Louis Pasteur University)**, analysed the political response that the humanist Loys Le Roy proposed to the religious schism in France. Her examination of Le Roy's works, encompassing both personal writings and Greek translations from the 1560s, revealed how he grounded and legitimised his





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political stance on the classical sources, particularly the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.

On behalf of the Marie and Louis Pasteur University and the GrECI project, Professor Marie Barral-Baron thanked the participants and concluded the three-day conference.



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