

The National Identity of Ancient and Modern Greeks

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The issue of national identity in ancient Greece played an important role during periods of war due to the absence of a unifying political authority. Ancient Greece was organized along the lines of independent city-states with different political systems. However, in two wars, they were able to unite to combat a common enemy of Greece. In the Greek-Trojan War, the Greeks were the aggressors, and many Greek city-states responded to the call for joint action. In the Greek-Persian War, the Greeks defended their homeland. Once again, the Greek city-states, primarily Athens and Sparta, joined forces to repel the Persian invasion of mainland Greece. Homer, in his Iliad, and Herodotus, in his Histories, provide definitions of what Greek national identity was all about. By the time of the civil war, i.e., the Peloponnesian War, there appears to be a paradigm shift in what constitutes Greek national identity. The best definition within the context of this paradigm is given by Isocrates. This paper examines the national identity of Greeks as proposed mainly in the works of Homer, Herodotus, and Isocrates. It also explores the 19th-century controversy regarding whether modern Greeks have the same national identity as their ancient counterparts.

Keywords: national identity, education, Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, Isocrates, virtue, ancient Greeks, modern Greeks.

Introduction

The Trojan War, which took place in the late part of the 2nd millennium BCE, was fought between Hellenes and non-Hellenes, as eloquently depicted in Homer's *Iliad*. This epic poem, dated 8th century BCE, is the first written source that defines a Hellenic national identity, using the common Greek language as the primary criterion.¹

It was left to Herodotus (484-425 BCE), though three centuries after Homer, to provide a precise definition of what it means to have a common national identity in his book *Histories*. His definition has survived to modern times, but in ancient times, it was challenged by Isocrates (436-338 BCE), a well-known Athenian rhetorician who was influenced by Socrates, Plato, and one of the leaders of the

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¹In this paper, I will be using the words 'Greeks' and 'Hellenes' interchangeably, as they have exactly the same meaning, i.e., a common national identity. Both terms coexist today. 'Greeks' is used by the Western (English-speaking) world, 'Hellenes' by Greeks themselves, and 'Ionians' by Persians, Turks and Arabs.

Sophist school, Gorgias. Isocrates emphasized a common pedagogy, defined as education with virtue, as the criterion that distinguishes Greeks from non-Greeks.²

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the ancient debate about what determines a national identity by examining various ancient contributors, such as Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, Socrates, Xenophon, and finally Isocrates. This analysis takes into consideration the historical conditions shaped by the Greek-Trojan War, the Greek-Persian War, and finally the war between Athens and Sparta. These historical battles have been remarkably preserved for eternity by Homer, Herodotus, and Thucydides respectively.

Of course, aside from the wars where national identity became very clear, another significant event in ancient Greece was the Olympic Games, which were held every four years in Olympia, an area in central-western Peloponnesus. According to Herodotus, only Greeks were allowed to participate in the games, as we will discuss further below. This serves as another source of information to illuminate the Greek national identity.

This paper is divided into six sections, beginning with this brief introduction. The next section examines Homer's *Iliad*, the earliest known source to use the term "Hellenes" to describe a distinct national identity, with the primary criterion being a common language. The third section of the paper briefly explores Hesiod's initial use of the term "Greek" (Γραικός) as well as the word "Hellenas." The fourth section discusses the four criteria proposed by Herodotus for determining a common national identity. The fifth section delves into the definition provided by Isocrates, placing emphasis on education as the criterion for a common national identity. The final section concludes by discussing common characteristics of national identity in modern times.

Barbarians and Hellenes

The *Iliad* is an epic poem that describes a war between the ancient Greeks and the Trojans. The expedition to Troy began with the gathering of various Greek tribes (φύλα) in central Greece, specifically at Aulis, not far from Athens. In total, 29 contingents were assembled from all over Greece, including Crete, Cyprus, and Asia Minor.

Homer used different names to refer to all Greek tribes. The terms Achaeans, Danaans, and Argives were used interchangeably many times in the *Iliad*. All of these represented distinct Greek tribes (φυλές).

The Achaeans were the most prominent Greek tribe, and their members could be found throughout Greece. According to *Homeric Lexicon* (Pantazidou, 1888), Achaean members were present in various regions, including Thessaly, Crete (as mentioned in the *Odyssey*, τ175), and Ithaca (as mentioned in the *Odyssey*, α90), but they were primarily concentrated in all areas of the Peloponnesus.

²It is not clear whether this is an additional criterion or the sole criterion. For example, if a Greek, as defined by Isocrates, does not possess pedagogy, can he be considered a Greek or a barbarian? This question remains unanswered.

According to Greek mythology, Achaïos was the son of Xuthus and the grandson of Hellenas. Consequently, the Achaeans were a tribal group that descended from the Hellenes. Hellenas had two more sons: Dorus and Aeolus. From Dorus, the Greek tribe of the Dorians emerged, and from Aeolus, the Greek tribe of the Aeolians was formed.

Thus, all Achaeans were Hellenes, but not all Hellenes were Achaeans. Most likely, Homer was aware of this, which is why he used the term 'PanHellenes' to refer to all Greeks (*Iliad*, B530). He also used the term 'PanAchaeans' (*Iliad*, B404, Ψ236, and *Odyssey*, α239, ξ369).³ As mentioned earlier, the Achaeans were likely the most populous Greek tribe.

What did all these Greeks have in common to be considered part of the same race called Hellenes? It's not entirely clear what Homer had in mind when he used the words 'Hellenes' and 'PanHellenes.' Presumably, they shared the same language because Homer explicitly mentioned that some of the individuals fighting on the side of the Trojans did not speak Greek. In *Iliad* (B 867), Homer states that,

Nastis was the leader of the barbarian speaking Carians
[Νάστης αὖ Καρῶν ἡγήσατο βαρβαροφώνων]

It is assumed that the Carians were not Greek because they didn't speak Greek; instead, they spoke a 'barbarian' language, making them 'barbarophone.' Homer did not specify that they were speaking Carian but rather a 'barbarian' language.

On the other hand, he made no reference to the language spoken by the Trojans. Most likely, the Trojans spoke Greek, either as their mother tongue or due to trade and other interactions with the Greeks. This is evident from the many conversations between the Greeks and the Trojans throughout the entire *Iliad*. On the Trojan side, there were various tribes with languages different from the Trojans', which posed a disadvantage in their battle against the Greeks, who shared a common language. Orders likely had to be translated into multiple languages.

In concluding this section, it is evident that Homer considered all the different tribes who fought outside the walls of Troy for ten years to be Greek, with language being the criterion he used. While they also shared a common religion, so did the Trojans. Reading the entire *Iliad*, it becomes clear that Greeks and Trojans shared many common customs to such an extent that they could be considered part of the same race. The only evidence provided by Homer's *Iliad* is in the line where he regards the Carians as speaking a different language. Homer uses the term 'barbarian' not with the negative connotation it carries today, but simply to emphasize that they spoke a non-Greek language.

³The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are two distinct epic poems. The first celebrates heroic actions in times of war, while the second extols the virtues of peace, family, and effective management of both the household and the city. My interpretation and reading of Homer and Hesiod have been elucidated in Papanikos (2021b). The decision-making process in the *Odyssey* is detailed in Papanikos (2021a).

Graikos became Greek in English

In his two works, *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, Hesiod does not make any reference to Hellenes.⁴ In the first work, he emphasizes cosmogony (the creation of the world) and theogony (the creation of gods). In the second work, Hesiod explains economic, ethical, political, and social relations, while also providing some useful meteorological information and advice.

Hesiod wrote other works of which only fragments have survived, and many scholars doubt whether they belonged to the same author as *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. In one such work, *The Catalogue of Women* (Ἡοῖαι), which appears to be a continuation of *Theogony*, Hesiod discusses the creation of mortals resulting from the coupling of male immortals with mortal women.

In the first fragment of this work, Hesiod explains the reason for such couplings. At this early stage, gods and mortals lived together, sharing common dinners and living spaces. According to Hesiod, love was easily found. The first such birth mentioned in fragment 2 (5) is someone named Graiko (Γραικό), the son of the father of the gods, Zeus (Δίας), and the daughter of Deucalion (Δευκαλίων), Pandora (Πανδώρα).

It is this name, Graiko, that the Latins used to refer to all Hellenes, which later became the name used by the Western world for Greeks today.⁵ Greek was another name for Hellenes. In fact, Aristotle (*Meteorology*, A 352b) writes that the name Graikoi was the initial name for the Hellenes:

... they were called then Graikoi and now Hellenes
[...οἱ καλούμενοι τότε μὲν Γραικοὶ νῦν δ' Ἑλληνας]

Homer and Hesiod do not provide a clear criterion to distinguish between Greeks and non-Greeks. Although Homer appears to use language as a criterion, if Trojans spoke Greek, as it seems to be the case, then Homer's term 'PanHellenes' does not include all Greeks because Trojans were excluded. In any case, it is Herodotus who provides a concise definition of Greek national identity. The Herodotean approach will be examined in the next section.

Herodotus' Four Criteria of National Identity

The most comprehensive definition of national identity was articulated by Herodotus, and this is no mere coincidence. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43), the Roman philosopher, and statesman, hailed Herodotus as the Father of History. However, he could equally be acknowledged as the Father of Anthropology, particularly in the realms of social, political, and cultural anthropology. Having

⁴I have thoroughly examined Hesiod's *Works and Days*; refer to Papanikos (2022a, 2022b, 2022c, and 2022d).

⁵Not all nations use the name Greeks, including the Greeks themselves. Even today, Greeks refer to themselves as Hellenes. In contrast, countries like Turkey and Arab countries call the Greeks Ions, a name first used by ancient Persia.

traversed extensively across the then-known world, Herodotus documented his observations from diverse lands and gleaned insights from conversations with influential figures of his time, all chronicled in his historical works. Against this rich tapestry of knowledge and experiences, it is unsurprising that he offers a precise definition of what constitutes national identity.

Herodotus is renowned for his account of the Greek-Persian world, providing compelling reasons for the decade-long war. From the renowned Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE to the naval engagement at Salamis in 480 BCE and the conclusive Battle of Plataies in 479 BCE, the Greek-Persian war presented an occasion for Greeks to unite, reminiscent of the Trojan War. However, unlike the cohesive Greek front in the Trojan War, this time there were divisions, with regions like Boeotia and Macedonia siding with the Persians.

It was at a crucial juncture in the war with Persia when Xerxes, the ruler of Persia, sent Alexander,⁶ the King of Macedonia, to propose to the Athenians on behalf of the King of Persia that they surrender, promising to respect their independent government and their land. Alexander addressed the general assembly of Athenian citizens, who had also invited Spartans to hear Xerxes' proposals. The Spartan delegation, fearing the peril to their city-state if Persia and Athens reached a peace agreement, spoke out. They urged the Athenian citizens not to surrender to the barbarian and jeopardize Hellada (Greece) (*Histories*, 8.142). It's noteworthy that Spartans referred to the Persian King as a barbarian and considered themselves, along with Athens and many other city-states, part of Hellada (Greece). Importantly, Spartans did not label Alexander a barbarian but rather a tyrant. They argued that it was only logical and expected for a tyrant like Alexander of Macedonia to befriend the Persian tyrant Xerxes. They questioned why Athens shouldn't become friends with Xerxes. The Spartans provided a response that remains unchanged through time (*Histories*, 8.142):

barbarians are not trustful and do not respect the truth
[βαρβάρουσι ἐστὶ οὐτε πιστὸν οὐτε ἀληθές οὐδέν]

The Athenians then responded to both Alexander and the Spartans. They warned Alexander not to come to Athens with such a proposal, suggesting he might encounter an unfortunate incident. To the Spartans, among other points, they replied as follows (Herodotus, *Histories*, 8.144.3):

...and then Hellenism, a world that has the same blood in its veins and that speaks the same language and has in common the worship centers of the gods and sacrifices and customs the same and unchanging—the betrayal of all these would be a disgrace to the Athenians. [αὗτις δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐὼν ὁμαιμὸν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἡθεὰ τε ὁμότροπα, τῶν προδότας γενέσθαι Ἀθηναίους οὐκ ἂν εὖ ἔχοι]

⁶This Alexander belonged to the same generation as Alexander the Great, who ascended to the throne of Macedonia 150 years later in 336 BCE. We will discuss him later in this section.

In addition to what was previously mentioned (αὐτίς), it is affirmed that we are Greek (Ἑλληνικὸν ἔθνος) for the following four reasons:

1. We share the same blood (ῥμαιμόν)
2. We speak the same language (ὁμόγλωσσον)
3. We worship the same gods in common temples (θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ)
4. We have a common way of life (ὁμότροπα)

The final sentence of the above citation states that Athenians would never betray all these. The phrase "the same blood," of course, implies belonging to the same race—the Greek race. This was deemed more crucial than anything else, as many 'barbarians' could speak Greek, making language an unreliable distinguishing factor. As mentioned earlier, the Trojans likely spoke Greek proficiently, but Homer does not clarify whether it was their first language or not. Similarly, the shared religion is not a robust criterion, as it is not today. Trojans also adhered to the same religion, evident in their affinity for the so-called Trojan horse, which led to their demise. Presently, Greeks and Russians, despite both being Christian Orthodox, cannot be argued to share a common national identity.

It is true that the ancient Greeks had a unique common way of living. One manifestation of this shared culture was their love for theaters and sports. They also enjoyed listening to stories from rhapsodists like Homer and Hesiod, and participating in symposiums and other festivities. The best example of this common way of living is, of course, the Olympic Games, which were also a religious festivity devoted to Olympian Zeus.

As mentioned in the introduction, only Greeks were allowed to participate in the Olympic Games. Herodotus further enlightens us on this issue. Alexander I⁷, King of Macedonia, expressed a desire to participate in the Olympic Games, but some questioned whether he was Greek or not. In an excellent quotation, Herodotus tells us that he was judged to belong to the Greek race because all his ancestors were Greek (Histories, 5.22.1-5.22.2):

How Greek these descendants of Perdiccas⁸ are, as they themselves claim—I am in a position to confirm it. In the subsequent part of my narrative, I will demonstrate not only their Greek lineage but also highlight a decision by the organizers of the Greek games in Olympia that affirms this. When Alexander decided to participate in the games and descended [to Olympia] for that purpose, his Greek competitors in a road race attempted to disqualify him, arguing that the race was intended for Greek athletes, not barbarians. Alexander, by proving his Argive origin, persuaded the judges of his Greek heritage. Consequently, he participated in the one-stadium foot race and finished simultaneously with the leading athlete. That's the account of how it transpired.

[Ἑλληνας δὲ εἶναι τούτους τοὺς ἀπὸ Περδίκκεω γεγονότας, κατὰ περ αὐτοὶ λέγουσι, αὐτὸς τε οὕτω τυγχάνω ἐπιστάμενος καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐν τοῖσι ὀπισθε λόγοισι ἀποδέξω ὡς εἰσι Ἑλληνας, πρὸς δὲ καὶ οἱ τὸν ἐν Ὀλυμπίῃ διέποντες ἀγῶνα Ἑλληνοδίκαι οὕτω ἔγνωσαν εἶναι. Ἀλεξάνδρου γὰρ ἀεθλεύειν ἐλομένου καὶ καταβάντος ἐπ' αὐτὸ

⁷This is the Alexander I, an ancestor of Alexander III, also known as the Alexander the Great.

⁸This is Perdiccas I, the founder of the Macedonian dynasty in the 7th century BCE.

τοῦτο, οἱ ἀντιθευσόμενοι Ἑλλήνων ἐξεῖργόν μιν, φάμενοι οὐ βαρβάρων ἀγωνιστέων εἶναι τὸν ἀγῶνα ἀλλὰ Ἑλλήνων: Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ ἐπειδὴ ἀπέδεξε ὡς εἶη Ἀργεῖος, ἐκρίθη τε εἶναι Ἕλληνα καὶ ἀγωνιζόμενος στάδιον συνεξέπιπτε τῷ πρώτῳ.]

The criterion questioned by others was the shared blood, as the issue revolved not around language, religion, or way of living, but common ancestors. As argued in Papanikos (2018), Macedonia was and is a geographical area that does not determine national identity. Many in ancient and modern Macedonia may speak Greek, share the same religion, and have similar ways of living, but they do not necessarily share the same blood. This was the crux of the matter concerning Alexander I's participation in the Olympic Games.

To prove his eligibility, Alexander I had to establish that he was of Greek blood, a determination made by a jury known as the Ἑλληνοδίκαι. The etymology of the term is intriguing; it signifies the jury (δίκαι) of Greek (Ἕλληνο). Their role was to assess the Greekness of an individual. In the case of Alexander I, they concluded that he was Greek because he belonged to the Greek race of Argives, as mentioned in the second section of this paper.

Herodotus also recounts another incident involving Alexander I just before the Battle of Plataea in 479 BCE when he urged the Athenians to surrender to Persians. Before the battle, he approached the Athenian army and conveyed to them the following (*Histories*, 9.45.2):

Being of Greek descent myself, I do not want to witness Greece go from being free to becoming enslaved.

[αὐτός τε γὰρ Ἕλληνα γένος εἰμι τῶρχαῖον καὶ ἀντ' ἐλευθέρης δεδουλωμένην οὐκ ἂν ἐθέλοιμι ὄραϊν τὴν Ἑλλάδα]

This is an important sentence because it reveals not only the objective criteria of being considered Greek but also the subjective aspect—how individuals regarded themselves as part of the same race. The quoted passage explains why Alexander I, the King of Macedon, betrayed Persians by providing crucial information to the Athenians just before the pivotal Battle of Plataea.

One should interpret this definition of national identity within the context of the historical times and the significant threat posed to all Greek states by Xerxes, the King of Persia. These were illustrious years not only for the Greek race but also for democracy and freedom⁹, as portrayed by the Athenian Politeia. However, changes occurred in the second half of the 5th century BCE, which will be examined next.

⁹Democracy relates very much to the national identity of Athenians, as is discussed later in this paper. I have examined this important issue elsewhere; refer to Papanikos (2020b, 2022e, 2022f, and 2022g) and the comments by Petratos (2022) and Meydani (2022).

A Paradigm Shift and Isocrates' Definition of Greekness

Isocrates (436-338 BCE) was an Athenian orator influenced by Socrates, Plato, and Gorgias. By the mid-5th century BCE, the political, moral, and social environment in Athens had changed dramatically compared to the one that existed during the glorious years of Herodotus, marked by victorious battles against Persia. Now, Athens emerged as the new and undisputed leader of the Hellenic world. It became the center of the known world, and under Pericles, the city reached what is now known as the golden age of Athens.

As Thucydides powerfully explained in his masterpiece on the Peloponnesian War, following the Greek-Persian wars, the Greek city-states were divided between Athens and Sparta, and civil war seemed imminent. The two great ancient Greek powers were trapped in an irreversible process that made war inevitable. Graham Allison (2017) coined this situation as 'Thucydides' Trap.

This required a new (ideological) explanation, and a paradigm shift emerged. The noble Greeks fighting the barbarian Persians were justified in terms of the Herodotean national identity definition of Greekness. However, how could one justify this civil war? I believe the best explanation can be found in Pericles' Funeral Oration during the first year of the Peloponnesian War, honoring the first casualties of the conflict.

Pericles' speech is cited in Thucydides (*The Peloponnesian War*, B.35-B.46). Athens is now at war with another Greek city, and Pericles praises Athens, providing several reasons for its superiority. I have included a few citations from Pericles' Funeral Oration, demonstrating that although Athens shares Greek origins, its city-state is superior to all others, including its Greek adversaries.

1. We have a system of governance, and our laws are exemplary, with nothing to envy in comparison to others. Instead of imitating others, we serve as examples for them. [Χρόμεθα γὰρ πολιτεία οὐ ζηλούση τοὺς τῶν πέλας νόμους, παράδειγμα δὲ μᾶλλον αὐτοὶ ὄντες τισὶν ἢ μιμούμενοι ἑτέρους] (B37).
2. However, we also differ from our opponents in the way we handle matters of war. Our city is open to the world; we never expel foreigners from learning or seeing. [Διαφέρομεν δὲ καὶ ταῖς τῶν πολεμικῶν μελέταις τῶν ἐναντίων τοῖσδε. τὴν τε γὰρ πόλιν κοινὴν παρέχομεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτε ξηνηλασίαις ἀπείργομέν τινα ἢ μαθήματος ἢ θεάματος] (B39)
3. We love beauty while remaining simple. We love to philosophize without weakening ourselves. [Φιλοκαλοῦμέν τε γὰρ μετ' εὐτελείας καὶ φιλοσοφοῦμεν ἄνευ μαλακίας] (40)
4. In summary, I say that our city as a whole serves as a school for Greece. [Ἐυνελὼν τε λέγω τὴν τε πᾶσαν πόλιν τῆς Ἑλλάδος παιδευσιν] (41)
5. That is precisely why I spoke more thoroughly about the city, to help you understand that we are not fighting for the same things as those who lack what we have here. [Δι' ὃ δὴ καὶ ἐμήκυνα τὰ περὶ τῆς πόλεως, διδασκαλίαν τε ποιούμενος μὴ περὶ ἴσου ἡμῖν εἶναι τὸν ἀγῶνα καὶ οἷς τῶνδε μηδὲν ὑπάρχει ὁμοίως] (42)

Pericles is clear: Athenians are Greeks, but they differ from all other Greeks in several ways. Firstly, Athens boasts a superior system of governance known as democracy, a feature lacking among the Spartans and their allies. Athens has nothing to envy in comparison to others; on the contrary, others strive to imitate Athens.

Secondly, Athens is open to the world, welcoming all foreigners to come and learn, in stark contrast to the Spartans who practice expulsion of foreigners (*ξενηλασία*). Sparta feared that outsiders would introduce customs that might corrupt their frugal way of living. Additionally, there was concern that foreigners could spy on Spartan military training and strength.

Thirdly, Athens has a distinct appreciation for aesthetics. During the years of Pericles' reign, numerous monuments were created, including the iconic Parthenon. Moreover, Athenians had a passion for philosophy, with symposiums and various artistic and sports competitions making Athens the place to be for those who cherished wisdom.

Fourthly, Athens was the educational center of the world. Pericles rightly claimed that Athens was instructing the rest of the world. It was during his era that figures like Socrates shone, attracting numerous scholars to teach in Athens. Notable examples include Herodotus and Protagoras. Plutarch informs us that Pericles himself had great teachers such as Zeno and Anaxagoras.

Fifthly, Pericles makes it clear that the Peloponnesian War is being fought for all the advantages that Athens possesses relative to its Greek opponents.

There is a paradigm shift in the utilization of the idea of a common national identity. Greekness no longer served the purpose of winning a civil war. Something else had to be invented. This paradigm shift does not emphasize the four criteria of national identity in Herodotus but rather focuses on other criteria, including freedom, democracy, philosophy, education, virtue, etc.

Many prominent Greeks began to have second thoughts about the advantage of a Greek national identity. Isocrates, who was only five years old when the two great cities of Athens and Sparta, along with their allies, started a long civil war from 431 to 404 BCE. He was likely very skeptical. He believed that merely being Greek was not sufficient. Athenians were the teachers of the known world, and if others learned from them, the distinction between Greeks and barbarians would disappear, or more accurately, it would not be the decisive factor in determining civilized from non-civilized people. This marks a paradigm shift. In Homer's time, a barbarian was someone who did not speak Greek. In Isocrates' time, Greekness meant someone who was superior in terms of intellect and virtue. However, not all Greeks who share the same blood possessed such superiority. It was not acquired by birth but through hard work in obtaining *paideia*.

A work appeared in 420 BCE, when Isocrates was 16 years old, explaining the difference. In a book entitled 'The Athenian Constitution' (circa 420 BCE), attributed to Xenophon, the following was stated (see Pseudo-Xenophon, *The Athenian Constitution*, 2.8):

...and the other Greeks share similar dialects, lifestyles, and dressing styles, while the Athenians have an amalgamation of influences from both Greeks and barbarians. [...καὶ οἱ μὲν Ἕλληνας ἰδίᾳ μᾶλλον καὶ φωνῇ καὶ διαίτῃ καὶ σχήματι χρῶνται, Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ κεκραμένη ἐξ ἀπάντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ βαρβάρων]
(underlying added)

It is important to note, first, that pseudo-Xenophon does not question the Greekness of the Athenian citizens. However, there has been a change. Athenians now presumably possess a superior culture because they are able to blend (κεκραμένη) Greek and barbarian cultures.¹⁰

It is not stated whether this is better or worse relative to the other Greeks. However, taking into consideration the entire work, Pseudo-Xenophon's approach is from an oligarchic point of view, and most probably this was considered as something that marks the beginning of the end of Athenian democracy and superiority. The reader is left with a mixed feeling about what the author really wants to say about the Athenian constitution. I am sure that around this period, Isocrates was participating in the symposia and the general assemblies of the city of Athens where these issues were discussed and most probably fiercely debated.

In one of these symposiums, Isocrates might have heard Socrates arguing that he does not accept the idea of national identities based on heredity. This quotation is preserved for us by Plutarch, lived in the first and second century AD, in his work *On Exile*. It presents a strong argument against any kind of racism, and I dare to say against the entire idea of a national identity, whether considered as an ontological or deontological concept. Using sources from the late 5th and 4th centuries BCE, which corresponds to Isocrates' dates, Plutarch states the following (*On Exile*, 555-556):

The homeland does not exist from nature, just as there is no house, farm, coppersmith or doctor's office from nature, as Ariston said. On the contrary, each of them becomes, or rather is named, in relation to the one who lives there and uses them. Since man, as Plato also says, "is not an earthly or immobile plant, but a heavenly one, with the head holding the body towards the sky". Therefore, Hercules rightly said that he is not an Argive or Theban, but every Greek city is to him a homeland - and Socrates even more correctly said "I am neither an Athenian nor a Greek, but a citizen of the world", because he did not confine himself to Sounio, Tainaro¹¹ or Kereunia Mountains.¹² "Do you see the boundless ether above, Holding the earth in its soft embrace"?

These are the borders of our homeland, and here no one is an exile, a stranger, or a foreigner. Here is fire, water and air itself. The same are the rulers and the governors

¹⁰Most probably, this marks the beginning of eclecticism in political practice, but it was preceded by theoretical thought (philosophy). It may not be a coincidence that a pioneer in adopting this approach was Zeno, as mentioned above, who happened to be Pericles' teacher.

¹¹This is Cape Tenaro, situated at the southernmost point of mainland Greece in the region of Peloponnesus.

¹²In today's southwest Albania.

and the prefects, the Sun, the Moon and the Augerinus.¹³ The laws are the same for all, and come from the same precept and principle, the solstices, the equinoxes, the Pleiades, Arcturus, the seasons of sowing and planting. And one is the king and lord, God, who holds the beginning and the middle and the end of all things. He is followed by Justice, who is the punisher of those who fall short of divine law. This Justice is our nature to observe by all men towards all men as if they were our fellow-citizens.

[...Φύσει γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι πατρίς, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ οἶκος οὐδὲ ἀγρός οὐδὲ χαλκεῖον, ὡς Ἀρίστων ἔλεγεν, οὐδὲ ἰατρεῖον· ἀλλὰ γίνεται, μᾶλλον δὲ ὀνομάζεται καὶ καλεῖται, τούτων ἕκαστον εἶαι πρὸς τὸν οἰκοῦντα καὶ χρώμενον. ὁ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος, ἢ φησιν ὁ Πλάτων, “φυτὸν οὐκ ἔγγειον” οὐδὲ ἀκίνητον, “ἀλλ’ οὐρανόθεν” ἐστίν, ὥσπερ ἐκ ρίζης τὸ σῶμα τῆς κεφαλῆς ὀρθὸν ἰστώσης, πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνεστραμμένον. ὅθεν εὖ μὲν ὁ Ἡρακλῆς εἶπεν «Ἀργεῖος ἢ Θηβαῖος· οὐ γὰρ εὐχομαι μιᾶς· ἅπας μοι πύργος Ἑλλήνων πατρίς», ὁ δὲ Σωκράτης βέλτιον, οὐκ Ἀθηναῖος οὐδὲ Ἑλληνας, ἀλλὰ “Κόσμιος” εἶναι φήσας, ὡς ἂν τις “Ρόδιος” εἶπεν ἢ “Κορίνθιος,” ὅτι μηδὲ Σουνίῳ μηδὲ Ταινάρῳ μηδὲ τοῖς Κεραυνίοις ἐνέκλεισεν ἑαυτόν. «Ὅρᾳς τὸν ὑποῦ τόνδ’ ἄπειρον αἰθέρα, καὶ γῆν πέριξ ἔχονθ’ ὑγραῖς ἐν ἀγκάλαις;».

οὔτοι τῆς πατρίδος ἡμῶν ὅροι, καὶ οὐδεὶς οὔτε φυγὰς ἐν τούτοις οὔτε ξένος οὔτε ἄλλοδαπός, ὅπου τὸ αὐτὸ πῦρ, ὕδωρ, ἀήρ, ἄρχοντες οἱ αὐτοὶ καὶ διοικηταὶ καὶ πρυτάνεις· ἥλιος, σελήνη, φωσφόρος· οἱ αὐτοὶ νόμοι πᾶσιν, ὑφ’ ἐνὸς προστάγματος καὶ μιᾶς ἡγεμονίας· τροπαὶ βόρειοι, τροπαὶ νότιοι, ἰσημερία, Πλειάς, Ἀρκτοῦρος, ὦραι σπόρων, ὦραι φυτειῶν· εἷς δὲ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἄρχων, “θεός, ἀρχὴν τε καὶ μέσα καὶ τελευτήν ἔχων τοῦ παντός, εὐθείᾳ περαίνει κατὰ φύσιν περιπορευόμενος· τῷ δὲ ἔπεται Δίκη τῶν ἀπολειπομένων τοῦ θεοῦ νόμου τιμωρός,” ἢ χρώμεθα πάντες ἄνθρωποι φύσει πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὥσπερ πολίτας.]

In the above quote, Socrates says, "I am neither Greek nor Athenian, but a citizen of the cosmos (world)" [..οὐκ Ἀθηναῖος οὐδὲ Ἑλληνας, ἀλλὰ Κόσμιος], a message conveyed to Isocrates at an age less than forty.

When Socrates was sentenced to death by the Athenians, Isocrates was 37 years old. If he had heard Socrates' Apology and/or read it and/or heard it from Plato, then it's not surprising that he began to think that sharing the same blood may not be so important after all. Something else must be more crucial, and for Isocrates, that was pedagogy. While Athens was considered superior to other Greek and non-Greek (barbarian) cities, Isocrates believed that this difference could be explained only by the distinction of Athenian paideia. Athens has now surpassed all other cities, and the reason is its paideia. In Isocrates' own words (*Panegyricus*, 50):

Our city has surpassed all others in intellectual development and the art of speech to such an extent that its students have become teachers to others. And the name 'Hellenes' no longer merely symbolizes a common race but, rather, the intellect. Those who embrace our method of education, learning and virtue are now more appropriately called Hellenes than those who share our same origin (nature).

¹³The name of the planet Venus (Aphrodite) is used when it appears in the sky in the morning, a phase referred to as the 'morning star.' Venus played an important role in Greek mythology because it is the third brightest object in the sky, following the sun and the moon.

[τοσοῦτον δ' ἀπολέλοιπεν ἡ πόλις ἡμῶν περὶ τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ λέγειν τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, ὥσθ' οἱ ταύτης μαθηταὶ τῶν ἄλλων διδάσκαλοι γεγόνασιν, καὶ τὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὄνομα πεποίηκεν μηκέτι τοῦ γένους, ἀλλὰ τῆς διανοίας δοκεῖν εἶναι, καὶ μᾶλλον Ἑλληνας καλεῖσθαι τοὺς τῆς παιδείσεως τῆς ἡμετέρας ἢ τοὺς τῆς κοινῆς φύσεως μετέχοντας.]

The criterion that distinguishes Greeks from non-Greeks is no longer a common origin. The Greek term for this criterion is 'φύσεως,' meaning nature. So, what is the criterion now? The Greek term is 'διανοίας,' which encompasses the concepts of perception, intellect, genius, and intelligence. How does one acquire intellect? According to Isocrates, it is a matter of education and virtue. The original Greek term is 'παιδείσεως,' the outcome of a process known as *paideia*. This outcome comprises education, learning, and virtue. This is the interpretation that Plato assigns to the term, and it specifically pertains to the upbringing of the youth.

Today, the use of the word "education" usually implies the acquisition of skills that help someone to practice a profession, and virtue is often left aside. The problem is whether virtue can be taught to someone or is something that is possessed by his/her nature, and education cannot do much in this regard. This debate is best demonstrated in Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*, which took place one or two years before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (433-432 BCE). In this dialogue, Socrates argues that virtue cannot be taught. In Socrates' own words (*Protagoras*, 319e-320c):

... the wisest and most worthy citizens this virtue they possess cannot transmit it to others; behold, the father of these youngsters here, Pericles, gave them a good and solid education above what they could take from their teachers; but over that which he himself is wise, he neither educates them himself, nor trusts them to anyone else, but wanders hither and thither by themselves and grazes like the absolute beasts—lest somewhere by chance they meet virtue. And a second example: this same man, Pericles, undertook to raise Cleinias, the younger brother of Alcibiades. Well, fearing that Alcibiades—we know him—would lead him into corruption, he cut him off from him, put him as a boarder in the house of Ariphron, and tried to educate him. Six months did not pass and Ariphron brought him back to him, because he did not know what to do with him. I can tell you a bunch of others who were worthy of them themselves, but they never made anyone better, neither their relative nor a stranger. These things therefore I observe, Protagoras, and I conclude that virtue is not taught; but when I hear you say the contrary, I am shaken, and believe that your words conceal some truth; for I have formed the opinion that you have learned many things by experience, many from the teachers, and others you discovered yourself. Well, if it is easy for you to prove to us more clearly that virtue can be taught, do not deny, but prove it.

[οἱ σοφώτατοι καὶ ἄριστοι τῶν πολιτῶν ταύτην τὴν ἀρετὴν ἣν ἔχουσιν οὐχ οἷοί τε ἄλλοις παραδίδοναι· ἐπεὶ Περικλῆς, ὁ τούτων τῶν νεανίσκων πατήρ, τούτους ἃ μὲν διδασκάλων εἶχετο καλῶς καὶ εὖ ἐπαίδευσεν, ἃ δὲ αὐτὸς σοφός ἐστιν οὔτε αὐτὸς παιδεύει οὔτε τῶ ἄλλῳ παραδίδωσιν, ἀλλ' αὐτοὶ περιμόντες νέμονται ὥσπερ ἄφετοι, ἐάν που αὐτόματοι περιτύχωσιν τῇ ἀρετῇ. εἰ δὲ βούλει, Κλεινίαν, τὸν Ἀλκιβιάδου τούτου νεώτερον ἀδελφόν, ἐπιτροπέων ὁ αὐτὸς οὗτος ἀνὴρ Περικλῆς, δεδιὼς περὶ αὐτοῦ μὴ διαφθαρῆ διὰ ὑπὸ Ἀλκιβιάδου, ἀποσπᾶσας ἀπὸ τούτου, καταθέμενος ἐν Ἀρίφρονος ἐπαίδευε· καὶ πρὶν

ἔξ μῆνας γεγονέναι, ἀπέδωκε τούτῳ οὐκ ἔχων ὅτι χρήσαιτο αὐτῷ. καὶ ἄλλους σοὶ παμπόλλους ἔχω λέγειν, οἱ αὐτοὶ ἀγαθοὶ ὄντες οὐδένα πάποτε βελτίῳ ἐποίησαν οὔτε τῶν οἰκείων οὔτε τῶν ἀλλοτριῶν. ἐγὼ οὖν, ὦ Πρωταγόρα, εἰς ταῦτα ἀποβλέπων οὐχ ἡγοῦμαι διδακτὸν εἶναι ἀρετὴν· ἐπειδὴ δέ σου ἀκούω ταῦτα λέγοντος, κάμπτομαι καὶ οἶμαι τί σε λέγειν διὰ τὸ ἡγεῖσθαι σε πολλῶν μὲν ἔμπειρον γεγονέναι, πολλὰ δὲ μεμαθηκέναι, τὰ δὲ αὐτὸν ἐξηγηκέναι. εἰ οὖν ἔχεις ἐναργέστερον ἡμῖν ἐπιδειῖξαι ὡς διδακτὸν ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρετὴ, μὴ φθονήσης ἀλλ' ἐπίδειξον]

On the other hand, Protagoras argues that he can teach someone how to be a useful citizen. It seems that the debate ended in a draw, but now we know better: education does not guarantee that the recipient will become a virtuous citizen.

Since antiquity, many crimes have been justified by asserting the superiority of one national identity over another. Wars rooted in religious, racial, and social or political differences have been fought, resulting in the loss of millions of lives. The next section briefly discusses the idea of national identity, using the case of Greece as a point of reference. Similar arguments can be applied to other races as well.

The Greek National Identity Today

This section examines the idea of national identity in light of the Herodotean and Isocratic approaches. The current discussion, much like in ancient Greece, carries significant political repercussions and is, of course, relevant to groups of people who believe that something unites them, thereby granting them the right to self-determination. The issue of national identity is intricately connected to concepts such as nationalism, ethnicism, patriotism, etc. as summarized by Miscevic (2023).

What is the Greek national identity today? Are modern Greeks descendants of ancient Greeks? Do they share the same national identity as their ancient counterparts? We address these questions by first applying the four criteria suggested by Herodotus.

The Greek language has evolved over this extended period of 2500 years. Naturally, the meanings of words have changed, making it very difficult to understand what Homer and Hesiod were writing if you have learned 21st-century Greek. Although different, both are forms of the Greek language. Consequently, one may conclude that modern Greeks share the same language as their ancient counterparts. This can be contrasted with Latin and Italian, which are similar but not identical. Newton (1960, p. 124) summarizes the language difference as follows:

Perhaps the most amazing thing about Greek is that in the period over which our written records extend-in over three millennia, since the decipherment of Linear B-it has changed so little. Whereas a student of Latin would be ill-equipped to read a modern Italian newspaper, a person with a good working knowledge of classical Greek would not only find an Athenian newspaper intelligible for the most part, but would be amazed at the remarkable likenesses between the ancient and the modern languages. For the vocabulary of a Greek newspaper is probably 99 per cent of classical origin and modern Greek has retained much of the cumbersome grammar of the ancient language-and ancient Greek has got a cumbersome grammar, when we

consider that its verb has over four hundred forms as compared to sixty or so in French and two in Afrikaans.

The next criterion suggested by Herodotus is the same way of living, customs, and culture. Do modern Greeks have the same way of living as ancient Greeks? When I read Hesiod, Homer, and especially Aristophanes, I cannot distinguish the modern Greek way of living from that of ancient Greece. I propose an Aristophanic explanation for the similarity between ancient and modern Greeks in terms of their culture. According to my Aristophanic hypothesis, a civilization spanning three millennia may lose its virtues but never its vices, as the latter tend to persist. This is evident in both formal and informal cultural institutions. Alesina & Giuliano (2015) have argued that institutions and cultural traits tend to persist for hundreds of years. Modern Greeks have retained all the vices of ancient Greeks. Reading Hesiod's monumental work on *Works and Days*, where the corruption of archons is stigmatized and work is praised, one can draw parallels to what happens in modern Greece.

On the issue of religion, Greeks have adopted Christianity, but their adaptation is closely aligned with what existed in ancient Greece. Christianity was blended with ancient Greek philosophy, resulting in the Christian Orthodox Church. A prime example of the connection between ancient Greek religion and Greek Christian Orthodoxy lies in the concept of polytheism. In ancient Greek religion, numerous Gods and Goddesses were worshipped. In the Greek Orthodox religion, this polytheistic aspect has persisted in the form of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Greek Orthodox Church venerates a multitude of saints, including the Holy Mother.

Technically, all saints and the Holy Mother are believed to perform the same functions as the Father God and the Son. They protect devoted Christians and are believed to perform miracles, mirroring the roles of ancient Greek Gods. However, a significant distinction exists. In the Greek Orthodox religion, all Gods and Saints collaborate to safeguard devoted Christians, without conflicts between saints and, of course, no conflict of interest between the God, His Son, the Holy Mother, the Holy Spirit, and the Saints. This was not the case in ancient times. In the works of Homer, Gods are portrayed as possessing virtues and vices similar to those found in mortals, and conflicts among the Gods were common.

Oberhelman (2020) compares ancient Greek religion with Christianity, noting, "There are similarities, however, between Asklepios and Panagia. First, both can help when doctors cannot" (p. 32) and "Another point of similarity between Asklepios and Panagia is that illness is not the only reason why they are petitioned. Lost items can be recovered; lost people can be found" (p. 34).

The last criterion suggested by Herodotus is a common origin or a shared common blood. This is very difficult to verify because, as Miscovic (2023) has stated, "...the commonality of origin has become mythical for most contemporary candidate groups: ethnic groups have been mixing for millennia." In the Greek case, this has been a subject of debate among historians since the 19th century, particularly after the Greeks achieved their liberation from the Ottoman yoke. One notable figure in this debate was the German historian Jacob Philipp Fallmerayer,

who in 1835 argued that the Greeks had disappeared from Peloponnesus and were replaced by Slavs who were later Hellenized. The book was translated into Greek in 1984.

Fortunately, today we can test the theory proposed by Fallmerayer using genetic tests. A study to assess this hypothesis was conducted by Stamatoyannopoulos et al. (2017). They found that their results "...are incompatible with the theory of the extinction of the medieval Peloponnesians and their replacement by Slavic and Asia Minor settlers" (p. 642). Furthermore, their evidence shows that "...Peloponnesians are genetically placed very close to the Sicilians and Italians" (p. 641). This can be, of course, explained by the significant Greek migration to southern Italy, to the extent that the area is called Magna Grecia. This was also confirmed by Tofanelli et al. (2016). They concluded (p. 436) that, "Despite the multiple alternative explanations for historical gene flow, it is relevant to stress here that a signature specifically related to the Euboea Island in East Sicily was consistently found at different levels of analysis, in line with the historical and archaeological evidence, attesting to an extended and numerically important Greek presence in this region. It is interesting to note that in Calabria, Italy, there are Greeks who have preserved a Greek dialect called Greco, as demonstrated by Sarno et al. (2021).

It seems that Herodotus' criteria are applied even today to determine national identities. Share of common blood, language, religion, and culture (way of living) are used to define race and ethnicity. If viewed from a different perspective, what I would term the natural or Socratic perspective, all these criteria appear as excuses to divide people. Historically, these criteria often led to conflicts, such as the religious wars in Europe, the Crusades, Islamification (jihad), and the Nazi ideology promoting the superiority of the Aryan race.

On the other hand, Isocrates' criterion has been completely ignored. Education and virtue are not used to separate people. This is best demonstrated in the political process. As I have argued in a series of articles, education is the pillar of democracy. Only people who have reached a certain level of knowledge should be eligible to vote. The world should be divided between educated and non-educated people. If non-educated people cannot obtain education due to objective reasons, then it is the 'race' of educated people who should finance the education of the non-educated.

Education is the easy part in Isocrates' definition of 'national identity.' The second criterion was virtue. The Greek word for that is arete (ἀρετή), and in Plato's dialogue of Protagoras, it was linked to a good (virtuous) citizen who can serve his/her city-state. It did not mean morality and ethical behavior in the abstract. It had a practical application in the political process. Those who, in the Athenian Politeia, were elected or selected through a draw to serve the city-state were questioned for their arete, as stated in Aristotle's Athenian Politeia (55.3-55.4):

When the judgment is made, they ask: "Who is your father and what municipality (demos) do you belong to and who is your grandfather, who is your mother and who is your mother's father and from which municipalities?" Then they ask him if he participates in the worship of Patrous Apollo and Herkeius Zeus and where their

sanctuaries are located. Then if he has family graves and where they are, then if he takes care of his parents and if he pays his taxes and if he has served his military service After he (the president) addresses these questions to him, he says to him: "Now call witnesses for what you have said." And when he presents his witnesses, they ask, "Has anyone any charge against him?" And if there is an accuser, the court gives him the floor and then the accused apologizes. Then the parliament decides by a show of hands and in the court by a vote. If no accuser is presented, the vote is taken immediately.

[ἐπερωτῶσιν δ', ὅταν δοκιμάζωσιν, πρῶτον μὲν «τίς σοι πατήρ καὶ πόθεν τῶν δήμων, καὶ τίς πατρός πατήρ, καὶ τίς μήτηρ, καὶ τίς μητρός πατήρ καὶ πόθεν τῶν δήμων;» μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα, εἰ ἔστιν αὐτῷ Ἀπόλλων πατρῶος καὶ Ζεὺς ἐρκεῖος, καὶ ποῦ ταῦτα τὰ ἱερά ἐστιν, εἴτα ἡρία εἰ ἔστιν καὶ ποῦ ταῦτα, ἔπειτα γονέας εἰ εὖ ποιεῖ, καὶ τὰ τέλη <εἰ> τελεῖ, καὶ τὰς στρατείας εἰ ἐστράτευται. ταῦτα δ' ἀνερωτήσας, «κάλει», φησίν, «τούτων τοὺς μάρτυρας». ἐπειδὴν δὲ παράσχηται τοὺς μάρτυρας, ἐπερωτᾷ «τούτου βούλεται τις κατηγορεῖν;» κἂν μὲν ἦ τις κατηγορός, δοὺς κατηγορίαν καὶ ἀπολογίαν οὕτω δίδωσιν ἐν μὲν τῇ βουλῇ τὴν ἐπιχειροτονίαν, ἐν δὲ τῷ δικαστηρίῳ τὴν ψήφον· ἐὰν δὲ μηδεὶς βούληται κατηγορεῖν, εὐθὺς δίδωσι τὴν ψήφον.]

This "interrogation" served the purpose of revealing the virtue of the candidate for political office. In ancient Athens, parents had a moral obligation to raise their children according to their means, and when the children grew up, they had an obligation to take care of their elderly parents. It is also important to note that the judgment was based on whether the candidate paid his taxes and served his country as a soldier. This 'interview' served the purpose of determining the virtuousness of the citizen who would be chosen to serve in political office. This is consistent with Isocrates' definition of pedagogy. Only Athenians had such a process of choosing their rulers.

In modern Greece, there was a notable Greek scholar who lived in the 18th-19th century and is considered by many as the best representative of Greek enlightenment. Adamantios Korais was a strong believer in education and virtue. In Papanikos (2021c, p. 10), I concluded that, "Adamantios Korais rightly connected the liberation of a people with his education. An uneducated people cannot be free. Additionally, an uneducated people cannot prosper either materially or morally." In the case of Greece, he was totally vindicated. Greece was liberated from the Ottoman yoke but found another master, as predicted by Korais. It goes beyond the scope of this paper, but a quick look at Greek history after its liberation in 1821 will show that the role of education was fundamental in promoting political and economic flourishing. As for virtue, this has to wait.

Conclusions

Ancient Greeks developed certain criteria to determine who belongs to the Greek race. Awareness of the Greek identity was considered important in times of war. The most famous wars of ancient Greece were, of course, the Greek-Trojan War, the Greek-Persian War, and the Peloponnesian War. The latter was a civil war between Athens and Sparta.

Homer used the language criterion to distinguish between Greeks and barbarians in the book of *Iliad*. Herodotus, in his book *Histories*, employed four criteria (common blood, language, religion, and way of living) to differentiate between Greeks and "the barbarians." By the time of the Peloponnesian War, many began to have second thoughts about the importance of the four Herodotean criteria. Education and virtue (*arete*) were emphasized as distinguishing factors between barbarians and non-barbarians. Isocrates is credited with providing a precise definition of Greekness using the criteria of education and virtue. However, during the second half of the 5th century BCE, many politicians and philosophers used these two criteria to distinguish between advanced (civilized) and non-advanced (barbarian) people.

This discussion unavoidably leads to the debate that emerged in the early 19th century when some historians claimed that the recently liberated Greece from the Ottoman yoke was no longer inhabited by Greeks but by Hellenized Slavs. Despite the fact that language, religion, and way of living were pretty much similar between the ancient Greeks and the 19th-century Greeks, the argument was that they did not share the same blood. For whatever value this has, biology in the 21st century can test this hypothesis. Studies have shown that the Peloponnesians have very little genetic relation with Slavs. It seems that they share many commonalities with South Italians, the so-called *Magna Grecia*.

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