

Greek Ethnicity and the Greek Language

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Abstract: This paper argues that in antiquity Greeks primarily defined their ethnicity by the Greek language. In essence, a Greek knew a Greek when he heard one. Greek speech and Greek ethnicity were seen as intimately connected, and even though this connection was often described as primordial, Greek ethnicity could be acquired by those who assiduously adopted the language. This association of Greek language and ethnicity developed because, despite the many different dialects and political divisions within the Hellenic world, this predominantly oral society, thanks to its wandering poets and singers, its national religious festivals, and its widespread commerce among the various Greek states, maintained a high level of language comprehensibility among those who proclaimed themselves Greeks.

Various definitions of ethnicity have been offered over the past few decades. While many of these have addressed objective criteria, it is generally acknowledged today that the ultimate basis of ethnicity is perception.¹ Objective similarities are only important, if they are deemed significant by those in question, and acknowledged by others. Of these attributes, five in particular are often identified as meaningful in defining ethnicity. These five are perceptions of (1) common ancestral origin, (2) similar culture, (3) shared religion, (4) common race, (5) similar language.² This list corresponds remarkably to that which Herodotus (8. 144. 2; cf. 7. 9b. 2) has the Athenian ambassador

¹ Barth, 1969, 10–15; Just, 1989, 74–5; Eriksen, 1993, 20–2, 38; Renfrew, 1998, 275–7.

² These are the most referenced in Isajiw's (1974, 117) survey of listed ethnic identifiers found in the literature. My reading of more recent papers finds that this list is in the main still reflective of the literature. Haarmann (1986, 257–8) and others do emphasize the "ecology of ethnicity", pointing out that ethnicity depends on the interplay of a number of factors, each of whose importance is relative to the particular group.

present to the Spartans in 479 B. C. This fifth century B. C. historian speaks in this passage of the kinship of all Greeks in blood, speech, religious institutions and practices, and pattern of living. Yet, while Herodotus does mention these four criteria, most often he refers to the Greek language as the defining element of Hellenism.³ This sense of a common tongue was the decisive criterion for determining who were Greeks.⁴

The role of language in defining origins, in the expression of culture, and as the carrier of phenomenology is generally recognized,⁵ and while its link to any particular ethnicity is not inevitable, it is likely, and in the case of the ancient Greeks, clear. As Corrado Bologna (1978, 305) states, “E’ ancora il linguaggio che separa il Greco ed il Barbaro, prima di qualsiasi altra qualità e categoria”. Likewise, Edith Hall (2004, 5): “No other ancient people privileged language to such an extent in defining its own ethnicity”. Jonathan Hall (2002, 191–2), however, argues that Herodotus’ use of the phrase “Hellenic tongue” “is not based on any empirically-derived observations ... [but] is rather an abstract reification that assumes the prior existence of an ‘imagined community’ defined according to other criteria”. It will be shown that the ancient Greeks valued language, not as an abstraction, but as the clearest concrete criterion of ethnicity within a broader cultural context, and while it has been argued that this self-concept changed in the fourth century B. C., as a result of the transformed world brought about by Alexander’s conquests, from a definition based on “blood” to one of cultural

³ Hdt. 2. 30. 1, 56. 3, 59. 2, 112. 1, 144. 2, 153. 1, 154. 2; 3. 26. 1; 4. 23. 2, 52. 3, 78. 1, 106, 108. 2, 109, 110. 1, 117, 155. 3, 192. 3; 6. 98. 3; 7. 9b. 3; 8. 135. 3, 144. 2; 9. 16. 2, 110. 2 (see Hinge, 2006).

⁴ Anna Murpurgo Davies (2002, 156) speaks of the “abstract notion of Greek as a common language”. The importance of language in the definition of ethnicity is generally recognized. See Romaine, 2000, x; Haarmann, 1986, 40, 83, 261; Giles, Bourhis, Taylor, 1977, 307–8; Fishman, 1983, 128.

⁵ See in particular, Fishman, 1977, 25–6, 41; Giles, Bourhis, Taylor, 1977, 307.

attributes,⁶ language was the key to defining Greek ethnicity from the beginning of “Greek” history.

This primacy of language in determining “Hellenicity” will be shown to be true even though the “Greeks” had no true “common language” prior to the fourth century B. C., if then, with virtually every “Greek-speaking” community possessing its own characteristic speech (Palmer, 1996, 82, 174). These variations often were perceived as distinctive regional speech patterns that “remained recognizably and intelligibly Greek for many hundreds of years.”⁷ Strabo, writing during the early Roman Empire, speaks of three or four basic dialects (8. 1. 2; 14. 1. 3, 5. 26),⁸ while one modern commentator lists twenty-four (Coleman, 1963, 113). While Herodotus routinely refers to “Greek speech,”⁹ he is, nonetheless, cognizant of the many variations in the Greek language during the fifth century, and while Plato has Socrates speak of “Greek speech” (*Crat.* 409e, 410a), he also acknowledges that Greeks differed in their speech (*Crat.* 385e). Our sources routinely refer to “Boeotian speech” (φωνή),¹⁰ “Laconian speech” (φωνή) (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 26. 11),¹¹ “Dorian speech” (φωνή),¹² “Aeolian speech” (φωνή) (Paus. 9. 22. 3), “Chalcidian speech” (φωνή) (Thuc. 6. 5. 1), “Phocian speech” (φωνή) (Aesch. *Supp.* 563–4), “Arcadian speech”

⁶ Language determined who were considered “Greeks” or “Egyptians” in Ptolemaic Egypt (Goudriaan, 1988). In general, see Malkin, 2001, 7–8; Cohen, 1990, 219–20.

⁷ Finley, 1975, 122.

⁸ Strabo (14. 5. 26) in his calculation of four dialects separates Athenian from Ionian, even though he proclaims that the two were the “same people in ancient times”. Most modern commentators list four basic dialects: Ionic, Doric, Aeolic, and West Greek.

⁹ Hdt. 1. 57. 2, 3, 58. 1, 110. 1; 2. 30. 1, 56. 3, 59. 2, 112. 1, 137. 5, 143. 4, 144. 2, 153. 1, 154. 2; 3. 26. 1; 4. 52. 3, 78. 1, 108. 2, 110. 1, 155. 3, 192. 3; 6. 98. 3; 7. 9b. 3; 8. 135. 3, 144. 2; 9. 16. 2, 110. 2.

¹⁰ Xen. *Anab.* 3. 1. 26; Arr. *Anab.* 6. 13. 5; Paus. 9. 34. 2.

¹¹ Or “τῶν Λακῶνων ἢ γλῶσσα” (Paus. 3. 15. 2); The Messenians apparently spoke the same dialect as their Spartan oppressors (Thuc. 4. 3. 3).

¹² Thuc. 3. 112. 4; 6. 5. 1; Pl. *Crat.* 409a; Paus. 2. 29. 5; 5. 15. 12; 9. 22. 3; also, γλῶσσα (Paus. 3. 22. 1; cf. Paus. 2. 37. 2).

(φωνή) (Paus. 8. 23. 3), and “Attic speech” (ἄττικὴ φωνή), etc.¹³ It was even understood that different dialects could merge into new dialects, as was the case in Himera, which was founded by Zancle and included Chalcidians and Syracusans, where the speech became a mixture of Chalcidian and Doric (Thuc. 6 5.1). In spite of this recognition of particular “speech”, Greeks at least from the fifth century B. C. forward used the verb *hellenizein*, “to speak Greek” (Thuc. 2. 68. 5; Pl. *Alc.* 111c; *Charm.* 159a; *Meno* 82b; Arist. *Rhet.* 1413b 5; Xen. *Anab.* 7. 3. 25).

Greek authors, including Herodotus, typically saw language in terms of comprehension, not just as some sociological or anthropological category of ethnicity.¹⁴ Herodotus (4. 24. 1) relates that the Scythians transacted business at the Pontus ports “with seven interpreters and in seven languages”. The Egyptians referred to those who did not speak Egyptian as “*allophones*” or other speakers (Hdt. 2. 158. 5). The Egyptian Pharaoh Psammetichus I sent a number of Egyptian boys to his Ionian mercenaries to be taught Greek. From these, continues Herodotus, the class of later interpreters was descended (2. 154. 2; cf. 2. 125. 6, 164. 1), and the Scythian king Ariapithes was taught to speak and read Greek by his mother (Hdt. 4. 78. 1). When the prophet of the temple of Apollo Ptous spoke in Carian, the three Thebans could not understand the message for it was not in “Greek” (Hdt. 8. 135. 3). The Persian sharing a couch at dinner with Thersander, spoke to him in Greek, and was, thereby, understood (Hdt. 9. 16. 2). When Histiaeus, the Milesian, was overtaken in his flight by a Persian, he shouted his identity in the Persian language and was saved (Hdt. 6. 29. 2). Cambyses, as a preliminary to his planned attack into Ethiopia, sent spies who understood the Ethiopian language (Hdt. 3. 19. 1). Aeschylus (*Ag.* 1254) has Cassandra speak of her ability to identify “Helle-

¹³ Dem. *Exordid.* 8. 2; *Meg.* 16. 2; Pl. *Crat.* 398d; cf. Thuc. 7. 57. 1, 63. 3; Athen. 3. 126E; also, ἡ γλῶσση ἡ Ἄττικὴ (Hdt. 6. 138. 2; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 12. 4; Xen. *Mem.* 3. 14. 7; Paus. 5. 15. 7).

¹⁴ For example, Thuc. 2. 68. 5; 6. 5. 1; 7. 57. 2, 63. 3.

nic speech” when she hears it; Ps.-Euripides’ (*Rhes.* 294) shepherd knows that Thracians are not speaking Greek.

In spite of the apparent diversity of speech amongst Greeks, there existed enough commonality in these dialectical variations to permit understanding.¹⁵ While Hall (2004, 116) sees little evidence to evaluate the difficulty or ease of communication between speakers of different Greek dialects, it appears that among the Greeks of the fifth century there was a remarkable ability for most Greek speakers to understand other Greeks from varying parts of the diverse Greek world.¹⁶ The Persian commander Mardonius (Hdt. 7. 9b. 2) is made to comment that all the Greeks speak the same language. The context clearly refers to comprehension. Even though Herodotus (1. 142. 3–4) describes the “Greeks” of Ionia as not sharing a common language, but speaking in “four different ways”, the differences in the Ionian dialects did not apparently hinder communication between the various peoples. Indeed, Herodotus regards the Ionians as being the same *genos* (1. 143. 2; cf. Hdt. 1. 143–147), having originated in Athens (1. 147. 2; cf. 5. 66. 2), and with the exception of the Ephesians and Colophonians, who were excluded for sacrilege, all kept the festival of the Apaturia (1. 147. 2).¹⁷ The Ionians met in common assembly at Panionion, where no communication problems were noted (cf. Hdt. 1. 170. 1–3; 6. 7. 1, 11. 1–4). Moreover, before their conquest by the Persians it was suggested that all Ionians either collectively evacuate Asia and sail to Sardinia, or that they create a common government (Hdt. 1. 170. 3).

Xenophon’s account of Cyrus the Younger’s ill-fated attempt to overthrow his brother in 401 B. C., presents the clearest picture of the ability of Greeks to understand one another. During and after this abortive coup the “Greek” mercenaries often met

¹⁵ While Homer refers to the Greek forces as Danaans, Achaeans, and Argives, and not ever to them collectively as Hellenes, recently, Shawn Ross (2005, 299–316) has argued that Homer did envision a “pan-Akhaian” language in contrast to “the cacophony of the Trojan host”.

¹⁶ Commented on by Finley, 1975, 122.

¹⁷ See Burkert, 1985, 55.

in assembly, and despite coming from areas of the Greek world as geographically disparate as Ionia (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 1. 7), Boeotia (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 1. 11; 5. 6. 21), the Chersonese (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 1. 9), Thessaly (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 1. 10; 2. 5. 31), and the Peloponnesus,¹⁸ there is never a word about translators or of miscommunication despite this diversity in the Greek military body.¹⁹ Xenophon is not here being remiss in omitting such translators, for he often refers to the interpreters used by the Persians or other non-Greeks to communicate with the Greeks.²⁰ The Greeks also had interpreters of their own who were used to communicate with Persian-speakers (Xen. *Anab.* 2. 5. 35; 4. 2. 18, 5. 10, 34), and other non-Greek peoples (Xen. *Anab.* 5. 4. 5; 7. 2. 19, 6. 8). From this evidence it would appear that most dialects of Greek had enough in common that those from different regions of the Greek-speaking world could readily

¹⁸ Xen. *Anab.* 1. 1. 6; 2. 5. 31; 3. 1. 34, 47. "Greeks" are noted as Peloponnesians (1. 1. 6; 6. 2. 10); Eleans (3. 1. 34; 2. 2. 20; 7. 4. 16 [Macistians]; 7. 4. 18 [Epitalians]), Lacedaemonians (Laconians) (1. 1. 9, 2. 9, 21, 3. 2, 3; 2. 1. 5; 4. 1. 18; 4. 8, 18; 5. 1. 15; 5. 3. 4 [Asinaeans]), Thessalians (1. 1. 10; 2. 1. 5; 1. 2. 6; 6. 1. 7 [Aenianians]; 1. 2. 6 [Dolopians]; 6. 1. 7 [Magneians]), Argives (4. 2. 13, 17), Boeotians (1. 1. 11; 5. 6. 21; 2. 1. 10 [Thebans]), Achaeans (1. 1. 11; 3. 1. 47; 5. 6. 14, 27; 6. 1. 4, 2. 9, 16; 3. 4. 47 [Sicyonians]; 7. 8. 1 [Phliasiens]), Arcadians (1. 2. 1, 9; 2. 1. 10, 5. 33; 3. 3. 5; 4. 1. 18; 5. 6. 14; 6. 1. 11, 12, 2. 9, 16; 6. 1. 11 [Mantineans]; 1. 1. 11; 2. 5. 37; 3. 1. 31; 4. 1. 27, 7. 13; 6. 1. 30, 2. 7 [Stymphalians]; 4. 1. 27, 6. 20, 7. 9, 12, 13 [Methydrians]; 2. 5. 37; 4. 8. 18 [Orchomenians]; 4. 1. 27, 7. 8; 6. 1. 7 [Parrhasians]; 4. 2. 21, 7. 11, 12, 6. 40 [Lusians]), Athenians (1. 8. 15; 2. 1. 11; 3. 3. 20; 4. 2. 13, 5. 24; 5. 6. 14; 6. 5. 11), Milesians (1. 2. 2, 9. 9), Megarians (1. 2. 3), Olynthians (1. 2. 6; 7. 4. 7), Cretans (1. 2. 9; 3. 3. 7, 15; 4. 2. 28; 5. 2. 29), Syracusans (1. 2. 9, 10. 14), Aspendians (1. 2. 12), Samians (1. 7. 5), Ambraciots (1. 7. 18), Rhodians (3. 3. 16, 4. 15, 5. 8), Trapezuntians (5. 4. 2), Temnians (4. 4. 15), Chians (4. 1. 28, 6. 20), Temnians (4. 4. 15), Oetaeans (4. 6. 20), Acarnanians (4. 8. 18), Thurians (5. 1. 2), Locrians (7. 4. 18), and Dardanians (3. 1. 47; 5. 6. 19, 21, 37; 6. 1. 32; 7. 1. 40, 2. 1, 3. 18, 5. 4). Prior to the expedition against Cyrus' brother these troops had served separately (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 2. 3, 6, 9, 3. 3, 4. 3), with many of them coming from garrisons scattered throughout Asia Minor (*Anab.* 1. 1. 6, 2. 1, 3).

¹⁹ For example, see Xen. *Anab.* 1. 3. 3-7, 9-20, 4. 12.

²⁰ Xen. *Anab.* 1. 2. 17, 8. 12; 2. 3. 17; 4. 2. 18, 4. 5, 5. 34; 7. 6. 8, 43; Cyrus' chief interpreter was Pigres (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 2. 17, 8. 12), and Glus, the son of Tamus, the Egyptian, may have been another used by Cyrus. The latter is sent to the Greeks with a message (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 4. 16), and on another occasion is associated directly with Pigres (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 5. 7).

comprehend one another.²¹ However, those Greeks from more remote and less urbanized areas often spoke dialects that were difficult for other Greeks to understand.²² The Eurytians, the largest Aetolian tribe, spoke a tongue hard for other Greeks to comprehend (Thuc. 3. 94. 5). Yet, Thucydides regards the Aetolians, with the exception of the “majority of the Amphilocheians”, as Greeks.²³ Greeks long separated from their homes could also maintain their language and hence their ethnicity. Herodotus (6. 119. 4) relates that Darius settled the Eretrians within his empire, and while they continued to live there into the author’s time, they nonetheless kept their “ancient language”.²⁴

Language was much like the concept of Greek nationality itself, a notion that existed both symbolically and as a reality. The Greeks or Hellenes acknowledged a common Panhellenic nationality,²⁵ invoking the myth of the Trojan War and a largely mythical version of the Persian War as examples of Hellenic unity. Greek genealogical-ancestral myths had been recorded at least by the 6th century B. C. (West, 1985, 127–30, 169–71). Thucydides (1. 3. 4, 12. 2; cf. Hdt. 1. 3. 2) regarded the Trojan

²¹ The only evidence for difficulty in comprehension involving the main dialects occurs in Plato. In the *Protagoras* (341c), Aeolic is apparently referred to as a “barbarian” tongue. However, Plato elsewhere refers to both Aeolic and Doric as *xenika* (*Crat.* 401b–c, 407b, 412b, 419a), and the clear meaning then is that they are not equivalent to contemporary Attic.

²² This was likely the case with respect to the Macedonians, who apparently spoke a dialect of Greek, which was hard for other Greeks to comprehend, and was partially responsible for the Macedonians not being perceived by the Greek world in the Classical Age as truly Greek (see Anson, 2004, 202–3, 206–11).

²³ Thuc. 2. 68. 5; cf. 3. 112. 7. The Amphilocheian colony of Argos had joined with the Ambraciots and subsequently “became Hellenes and learned their present Hellenic speech, but the rest of the Amphilocheians remained barbarians” (Thuc. 2. 68. 5). Euripides (*Phoen.* 138) implies that the Aetolians were “half-barbarians”, and the second century B. C. historian, Polybius (18. 5. 8), ostensibly quoting Philip V, states that most of the Aetolians were not Greeks.

²⁴ Diodorus (17. 119) says that some Boeotians, settled by Xerxes beyond the Tigris, were still speaking their ancient language when Alexander arrived.

²⁵ Aesch. *Pers.* 232; *Supp.* 235; Hdt. 2. 105. 1; Thuc. 1. 2. 1, 3. 2, 6. 1, 2, 12. 2, 4, 13. 1, 17. 1, 77. 6, 124. 3, 143. 1; 2. 8. 1, 4, 11. 2; 6. 17. 5; 7. 63. 3; Eur. *Hec.* 1114; Ar. *Av.* 999; *Pax* 59, 644; Isoc. 15. 46; 12. 11; Dem. 18. 59; Arist. *Rh.* 1396a18; Apollod. *Epit.* 5. 19. 235.

War as the first "Hellenic enterprise", and many Greeks based their claims of Hellenic ethnicity on their descent from those who had participated in the war and been recorded in Homer's catalogue of ships in the *Iliad* (2. 494–759).²⁶ The Persian War, likewise, came to be seen as a national war of the "Greek nation". After the murder of the generals, Xenophon in his *Anabasis* reminded the "10000" of the Persian War and the actions of their "forefathers" (3. 2. 11–13). "It is from such ancestors, then, that you are sprung" (3. 2. 13). Of course, not all of these Greeks had ancestors who fought against the Persians. Many of their home cities had remained neutral during the Persian invasion, and others, including Thebes, and the Aeolian and Ionian cities actively or passively participated on the side of the Persians. Clearly Xenophon is associating all Greeks in the victory, which was actually won by a minority of their number.²⁷

Moreover, political unification into one national state was never a goal of any but a very few ancient Greeks (Perlman, 1976, 3, 5, 30; Finley, 1986, 121–2). The Spartans regularly purged their society of non-Spartans,²⁸ and the Athenians in 451/0 enacted Pericles' citizenship law, which mandated that only those who could prove that both parents were citizens could be Athenian citizens (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 26. 3; Plut. *Per.* 37. 3). Regional loyalties were also important. Even after Xenophon's success in helping to organize the retreat of the "10000" from the heart of the Persian Empire, the Arcadians and the

²⁶ On this passage, see the commentary in Gomme, 1971, 1:99. Even into the Roman period determinations of ethnicity were based on Homer's statements (Paus. 8. 22. 1; Str. 8. 3. 3).

²⁷ Only 31 peoples joined the coalition against the Persians. These were the Lacedaemonians, Athenians, Corinthians, Tegeans, Sicyonians, Aeginetans, Megarians, Epidaurians, Orchomenians, Phliasiens, Troezenians, Hermioneans, Tirynthians, Plataeans, Thespians, Mycenaean, Ceans, Melians, Tenians, Naxians, Eretrians, Chalcidians, Styreans, Eleans, Potidaeans, Leucadians, Anactorians, Cythnians, Siphnians, Ambraciotes, and the Lepreates (*GHI* 1. 27). The Thebans and the Thessalians fought on the side of the Persian army (Hdt. 9. 31); the Aeolians supplied sixty ships, the Ionians, 100, and the Dorians of Asia, 30, to the Persian fleet (Hdt. 7. 93–95).

²⁸ Thuc. 1. 144. 2; 2. 39. 1; Ar. *Av.* 1012–13; Xen. *Lac.* 14. 4; Pl. *Prt.* 342 a–d.

Achaeans refused to follow him further, in part, because he was an Athenian (Xen. *Anab.* 6. 2. 10).²⁹ Arcadian and Achaean were regional designations for areas that contained numbers of independent city-states. There were even designations for areas within these broader regional designations. Certain of the Arcadians are designated as Parrhasians, the inhabitants of the Arcadian region of Parrhasia;³⁰ Maenaliens, those Arcadians in the Maenalian plain (Paus. 8. 27. 3, 36. 7); Aegyptians, Eutresians, Cynurians, Orchomenians, and Tripolitans (Paus. 8. 27. 4).³¹ Xenophon clearly recognized that individual Greeks could possess local, regional, and national ethnicities (Roy, 1972, 132). The clearest testimony to the strength of these regional loyalties is the case of the Aetolians. This region prior to the fourth century B. C. was characterized by unfortified villages (Thuc. 3. 94. 4; cf. Xen. *Hell.* 4. 6. 14) and tribal organization.³²

Of Herodotus' list of ethnic criteria, "perceived kinship" is the most often cited attribute of Greek ethnicity by modern commentators.³³ Herodotus (7. 145. 2) relates how those Greeks who had decided to resist the approaching Persian invasion in 481 sent ambassadors throughout the "Greek" world appealing to those of "common kinship". The ancient Greeks created

²⁹ This regional identification, however, did not eclipse the primary loyalty to the city-state. These Achaeans and Arcadians are usually designated by Xenophon as coming from particular communities within Arcadia and Achaia. Among the Achaeans are noted those from Sicyon and Phlius (*Anab.* 7. 8. 1); among the Arcadians, those from Mantinea (*Anab.* 6. 1. 11), Stymphalus, Methydrium, Orchomenus (*Anab.* 2. 5. 37; 4. 1. 27, 8. 18), Lusi (*Anab.* 4. 2. 21–2).

³⁰ Xen. *Anab.* 1. 1. 2; 4. 1. 27, 7. 8; Paus. 8. 27. 4; Thuc. 5. 33.

³¹ These regions also contained independent communities (Paus. 8. 27. 4), which in the case of Parrhasia were called *poleis* by Thucydides (5. 33. 2).

³² In general, see Larsen, 1968, 78–9. It is difficult to know the exact nature of Aetolian unity in the 5th century or earlier, but their level of cooperation surprised the Athenian Demosthenes and led to the failure of his expedition into Aetolia in 426 B. C. (Thuc. 3. 94–98). Thucydides (3. 96. 3) points out that all the Aetolians united to resist this invasion. Earlier the Aetolians collectively had sent three ambassadors to Corinth and to Sparta. The three representatives are identified as coming from the three main Aetolian tribes, the Ophionians, the Eurytians, and the Apodotians (Thuc. 3. 100. 1).

³³ Hall, 2002, 191–2; Isaac, 2004, 163–6; Harrison, 2002, 13; Fishman, 1977, 17.

genealogical myths to link the different Greek-speaking communities together,³⁴ even associating dialectical differences with separate eponymous ancestors and histories.³⁵ Hellenes were those descended from Hellen, their supposed forebear (Apollod. 1. 7. 2–3; Pind. *Ol.* 9. 40). The three traditional Greek tribes, also representative of three of the major dialectical divisions of the Greek language, the Aeolian, Dorian, and Ionian, were the descendants of Hellen's sons, Aeolus and Dorus, and his grandson Ion (Hes. *Catalogue of Women and Eoëae* Frg. 4).³⁶ Regional distinctions were also typically associated with dialectical differences as well.³⁷ The Athenians claimed connection to Ion,³⁸ who according to one Athenian tradition migrated to Athens and became their war leader against Eleusis (Paus. 1. 31. 3; 2. 14. 2; 7. 1. 5). These mythic connections were not simply of cultural importance. Thucydides (7. 57. 1–9) in his description of the participants in the Athenian expedition against Syracuse notes

³⁴ A point emphasized by Hall, 1997, 43, 48.

³⁵ Hdt. 1. 143–153; 7. 176. 4; cf. Thuc. 4. 42. 2; Apollod. 1. 7. 3; Paus. 3. 1. 6; 4. 21. 5, 30. 1; 5. 1. 26, 4. 9; 5. 3. 5–7; 7. 1. 4, 5–9, 2. 1–4, 3. 9; 8. 5. 1, 6; 10. 8. 4. Herodotus (1. 56. 2) refers to the Dorians and Ionians as *genē*. While the significance and usage of these particular linguistic and quasi-ethnic distinctions diminished in the fourth century (noted by Said, 2001, 277), they did not disappear completely. Xenophon refers to both Aeolians and Aeolian cities (*Ages.* 2. 11; *Cyr.* 6. 2. 10; *Hell.* 4. 8. 33); Aeschines (2. 116) and Xenophon (*Ages.* 2. 11; *Cyr.* 6. 2. 10; *Anab.* 1. 1. 6, 8; *Hell.* 3. 1. 3, 2. 12, 17) to Ionians and Ionian cities; Plato (*Leg.* 3. 680c) to Ionian lifestyle, and to Dorians and Dorian lifestyle (*Leg.* 3. 685d, e, 692d; [Pl.] *Ep.* 7. 336).

³⁶ While Hellen's third son, Xouthus was not associated with a dialect, his son Ion was (Paus. 1. 31. 3; 2. 14. 2, 26. 1; 7. 1. 2; Apollod. 1. 7. 3). Euripides (*Ion* 10–11), however, presents Ion as the son of Apollo. This sort of ambiguity is also seen with respect to the Macedonians. "The district Macedonia took its name from Macedon, the son of Zeus and Thyia, Deucalion's daughter, and she conceived and bore to Zeus who delights in the thunderbolt two sons, Magnes and Macedon, rejoicing in horses, who dwell round about Pieria and Olympus..." (Hesiod, *The Catalogue of Women and Eoëae* Frg. 3). By this tradition, the ancestor of the Macedonians was the nephew of Hellen. By the end of the 5th century B. C., Hellanicus makes Macedon the son of Aeolus and hence places him in the direct line of Hellen (*FGrH* 4 F–74).

³⁷ Boeotia is associated with "Boeotian speech" (see note 10), Arcadia, with "Arcadian speech" (Paus. 8. 23. 3), and Macedonia with "Macedonian speech" (Plut. *Alex.* 51. 11; *Eum.* 14. 11; *Ant.* 27. 5; Athen. 3. 122A; *PSI* XII 1284; cf. Curt. 6. 9. 35).

³⁸ Hdt. 8. 44. 2; Apollod. 1. 7. 3; Paus. 2. 14. 2; 7. 1. 2.

that the Athenians were Ionians and the Syracusans, Dorians (7. 57. 1-2). He continues that, while the Eretrians, Chalcidians, Styrians, Ceans, Andrians, Tenians, Milesians, Samians, and Chians were subjects and allies of the Athenians, they were also Ionians fighting against Dorians (7. 57. 4). Thucydides (7. 57. 5-6) even feels obliged to explain why the Aeolic Methymnians, Tenedians and Aenians fought against their Aeolian founders, the Boeotians, and the Plataeans against their fellow Boeotians; why the Rhodians and Cytherians, both Dorian peoples, the former "Argives", the latter, Lacedaemonian colonists, fought with the Athenians; and in particular, why the aforementioned Rhodians bore arms against their own colonists, the Geloans, who were allied with the Syracusans.³⁹ Greeks frequently cited these genealogical myths to make legal and political points. Claims with respect to territory made by Greek communities often hinged on these mythic relationships.⁴⁰ But even those Greeks who firmly believed that their ethnicity was biological, most often attributed ethnic differences to the environment, rather than to descent.⁴¹ This was in a sense necessary because Greek genealogy listed many progenitors of Greek peoples as foreign in origin. The legendary "Greek" heroes Pelops, who gave his name to the Peloponnesus, Cadmus, the founder of Thebes, and Aegyptus, whose son became the first of the Danaan dynasty of Argive kings, were respectively, a Lydian (Paus. 5. 1. 6; Isoc. 10. 68), either a Phoenician or an Egyptian (Paus. 9. 12. 2; Isoc. 10. 68), and an Egyptian (Isoc. 10. 68; Pl.

³⁹ Thucydides 1. 124. 1 relates that Potidaea was also a Dorian city besieged by Ionians.

⁴⁰ For example, see Hdt 5. 94. 1-2; 7. 161. 3; Plut. *Sol.* 10. 1. During their second invasion of Attica in the Peloponnesian War, the Spartans avoided devastating the region of Tetrapolis because the mythic Heraclids, the descendants of Heracles, Spartan ancestors, had once dwelt there (Diod. 12. 45. 1).

⁴¹ Aristotle (*Pol.* 1327b 23-28) and others probably influenced by the Hippocratic writers (*de Aeribus* 12) argued that northern Europeans because of the cold climate were energetic, but unintelligent; Asians, because of their hot climate, intelligent, but lacking in spirit; the Greeks, just right. Herodotus proclaims that the Egyptians "are black because of the heat" (2. 22. 3), and that their skulls are thicker than those of the Persians, again, because of the sun (3. 12).

Menex. 245d; Apollod. 2. 1. 4, 2. 1). Moreover, Greek colonists were almost exclusively men, acquiring their wives from the native population of their new homelands (Anson, 2004, 198–9). This was believed to be the case with the original Ionian settlers as well (Hdt. 1. 146. 2).

Herodotus and Thucydides, however, make it clear that Greek ethnicity was far more complicated and less deterministic than simple genealogy. Both historians recognized that ethnicity could change over time. Herodotus believed that non-Greeks could become Greeks through the acquisition of the Greek language and other cultural attributes. According to tradition many of the inhabitants of the “Greek” peninsula, including the Athenians, were originally Pelasgians, “a non-Greek people” (Hdt. 1. 56. 2, 57. 2–3; 58; 8. 44. 2),⁴² the supposed autochthonic inhabitants of these lands, but through the adoption of the Greek language and culture they had become “Hellenes”.⁴³ The Arcadians were also believed to be of Pelasgian descent,⁴⁴ and, likewise, to have been assimilated into the Hellenic world.⁴⁵ As with the Athenians, Herodotus describes the origin of the Ionian branch of the Hellenic family (*genos*) (1. 143. 2), as derived

⁴² The “Pelasgians” are arrayed with the Trojans in the *Iliad* (2. 840; 10. 429).

⁴³ Hdt. 1. 57. 3; cf. Hdt. 7. 161. 3; Thuc. 1. 3. 2–4, cf. 2. 17. 1. For a full discussion of Herodotus 1. 56–58, and the textual and interpretive issues involved, see McNeal, 1985, 11–21; cf. McNeal, 1981, 359–61. Herodotus associates the Athenians with the Ionians, who were in their entirety Pelasgian in origin (1. 56. 2, 143. 2). Pausanias (9. 1. 1) also declares the Plataeans to be autochthonic. However, Plataea is listed by Homer among the Boeotians in his catalogue of ships (*Il.* 2. 504). By one tradition the Achaeans were autochthonic as well (Paus. 5. 1. 1), but more commonly they were believed to have been descended from Hellen (Apollod. 1. 7. 3; Paus. 7. 1. 2–3).

⁴⁴ Hdt. 1. 146. 1; 2. 171. 3; Apollod. 3. 8. 1; Paus. 8. 4. 1; Lemnos and Imbros were reputedly still inhabited by Pelasgians in the 5th century B. C. (Hdts. 5. 26. 1; 6. 138. 1–4, 136. 2; Paus. 7. 2. 2), until the Lemnians, and, perhaps, the Imbrians were expelled by the Athenians (Hdt. 6. 140. 1–2; cf. Diod. 10. 19. 6; Paus. 6. 19. 6).

⁴⁵ According to one tradition, Pelasgus was an Arcadian (Paus. 8. 4. 1; cf. 10. 9. 1), and either autochthonous, or the son of Zeus and Niobe (Apollod. 2. 1. 1). The Arcadians are listed in Homer’s catalogue of ships (*Il.* 2. 612), and their Greek ethnicity was never questioned (Hdt. 8. 72. 1; Thuc. 5. 60. 3; 7. 58. 3).

from the Pelasgians (1. 56. 2). This view of the growth of Hellenic ethnicity through assimilation accords well with the general principle enunciated later by Isocrates, who states, "the title Hellenes is applied rather to those who share our culture than to those who share a common blood" (4. 50).⁴⁶ In a similar vein Thucydides (7. 63. 3) has Nicias, during the Peloponnesian War, in a speech prior to the attempt to break out of the harbor of Syracuse, refer to many of the rowers as, "those of you who through your knowledge of our language and imitation of our manners were always considered Athenians, even though not so in reality".⁴⁷

Herodotus sees the expansion of the Greek nation as a direct result of the absorption of other peoples. "But the Hellenic stock, it seems clear to me, has always had the same language since its beginning,⁴⁸ yet being, when separated from the Pelasgians, few in number, they have grown from a small beginning to comprise a multitude of nations ("πλήθος τῶν ἐθνέων"), chiefly because the Pelasgians and many other foreign peoples ("ἄλλων ἐθνέων βαρβάρων") united themselves with them" (Hdt. 1. 58. 1 cf. 8. 44. 2).⁴⁹ This is likewise the view of Thucy-

⁴⁶ This has been interpreted to mean "Greek with Attic culture" (Isaac, 2004, 113), but the context suggests the wider meaning.

⁴⁷ Xenophon regarded the Mossynoecians as the most barbaric of all peoples because they were the least Greek in their customs (Xen. *Anab.* 5. 4. 34).

⁴⁸ While Herodotus here proclaims that "the Hellenes have always spoken the same language", he obviously recognized that contact with other people could alter that language. This paradoxical view of language as primordial (Benedict Anderson [1991, 144–5] comments on the general primordial perception of language) and yet evolving is echoed through the fourth century. The "Old Oligarch" states, "The Athenians have mingled with various peoples ..., hearing every kind of speech, they have taken something from each; the Greeks individually rather tend to use their own dialect, way of life, and type of dress, but the Athenians use a mixture from all the Greeks and non-Greeks" ([Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 2. 8). Plato in the *Cratylus* has Socrates speak of the adoption by the "Greeks" of many "barbarian" words (409d–e, cf. 416a, 421c–d, 425e, 426c), and also of how words over time have changed their pronunciation (*Crat.* 398b, 401f, 418b–421d, 426c). In general, this dialogue assumes that the meaning of words has evolved over time (*Crat.* 398b, 418b, 419b, 421d, 422a–d, 425b, 433d).

⁴⁹ Loeb Classical Library translation, Godley, 1966, 1: 65.

dides (1. 3. 1–4): “... before the time of Hellen, son of Deucalion, no such appellation existed, but the country went by the names of the different tribes, in particular of the Pelasgian. It was not until Hellen and his sons grew strong in Phthiotis, and were invited as allies into the other cities, that one by one they gradually acquired from the connection the name of Hellenes; though a long time elapsed before that name could fasten itself upon all. By ‘Hellenic’ I mean here both those who took on the name city by city, as the result of a common language, and those who later were all called by the common name”.⁵⁰

It was to link these various “Greek ethnic groups” that the genealogical myths were created (Hall, 1997, 43, 48). But, as noted, the most often referenced tool of assimilation or of exclusion was language. Even the term for non-Greeks, *barbaroi*, was apparently linguistic in origin.⁵¹ In a letter ascribed to Plato (8. 353e), it is stated that, if the Carthaginians won completely in Sicily, over time the Greek language would disappear from the island, and with it Greek civilization. According to Herodotus (4. 108. 2), those who had been Greeks had in the past fallen from that status. The Gelonians, who, Herodotus relates, were in origin Greeks, still practicing some aspects of Greek culture and speaking a mixed language of Greek and Scythian,⁵² are associated by him politically and culturally with the non-Greek tribal peoples neighboring the Scythians (4. 102. 2, 119. 1, 136. 1).⁵³

The third claimed criterion of Greek ethnicity was “common temples and rituals”.⁵⁴ However, this was true only at “the highest level”, or those temples and rituals that were Panhellenic (Parker, 1998, 11). The “Greeks” of the “10000”, although re-

⁵⁰ A similar view is expressed by Euripides (frg. 228. 7 = Str. 8. 6. 9).

⁵¹ Noted by Denise McCoskey (2003, 95 n. 6) among many others.

⁵² Plutarch (*Lys.* 3. 2), perhaps reflecting his source, likewise implies that Greeks through association with other peoples could be “barbarized”.

⁵³ While serious doubts have been raised about the Greek origin of the Gelonians (see How and Wells, 1975, 340), what is important is Herodotus’ perception.

⁵⁴ On religion as “the great focus of group identity in the Greek world”, see Parker, 1998, 11, cf. 23–4.

presenting more than thirty distinct political entities,⁵⁵ did share much religiously. They accepted the same gods, to whom they collectively sacrificed.⁵⁶ The soldiers set aside a tithe for Apollo and for Artemis of the Ephesians from their booty (Xen. *Anab.* 5. 3. 4), celebrated “games” to honor the gods in common when they reached safety on their homeward march (Xen. *Anab.* 3. 2. 9; 4. 8. 25), and were *en masse* “purified” in a common rite (Xen. *Anab.* 5. 7. 35). Prior to the Battle of Cunaxa the watchword for the entire Greek army had been “Zeus Savior and victory” (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 8. 16). All of these troops raised the “*paean*” before battle, during and after sacrifices to the gods, and on many other occasions.⁵⁷ Yet, there were nuances in these shared religious practices. At Cotyora to honor the gods each “people” (*ethnê*) within the “10000” instituted their own procession and athletic contest (Xen. *Anab.* 5. 5. 5).⁵⁸ There were also distinctive “dances” associated with these. The Aenianians and the Magnesians, both Thessalian peoples, danced the “*car-paea*” (Xen. *Anab.* 6. 1. 7–8), and the “Mantineans and other Arcadians”, a dance common to that people (Xen. *Anab.* 6. 1. 11).⁵⁹

The “Ionians” commonly celebrated the Apaturia (Hdt. 1. 147; Burkert, 1985, 255), and the “twelve” Ionian cities of Asia and the islands built and maintained the Panionium temple, excluding all others including other Ionians (Hdt. 1. 143. 3). Five Dorian cities in Asia, known as the “Pentapolis”, likewise, excluded all non members, including other Dorians, from their temple at Triopium (Hdt. 1. 144. 1–3). Dorians were apparently forbidden to enter the Temple of Athena in Athens (Hdt. 5. 72. 3).

⁵⁵ For a listing of the different “Greeks” involved, see note 18.

⁵⁶ Xen. *Anab.* 1. 8. 16; 2. 2. 3; 3. 2. 4, 9, 10; 4. 8. 25; 5. 4. 22, 5. 3. 5; on sacrifice before battle in general, see Pritchett, 1974, 109–15.

⁵⁷ Xen. *Anab.* 1. 8. 17–18, 10. 10; 3. 2. 9; 4. 3. 19, 29, 31; 5. 2. 14; 6. 1. 5, 11, 5. 29; on the paean as part of Greek military culture, see Pritchett, 1974, 105–8.

⁵⁸ Xenias celebrated the Lycaean festival, an Arcadian celebration, at Peltae (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 2. 10).

⁵⁹ War and dance were closely associated amongst Greeks, see Wheeler, 1982, 223–33.

Indeed, each city-state had its own peculiar religious institutions with citizenship itself closely linked to these religious rights (Parker, 1998, 13). For example, only Argives could sacrifice at the Argive Heraion (Hdt. 6. 81).⁶⁰ Even within *poleis* religious divisions existed. In Athens, each *deme*, *phratry*, and tribe, including the artificial tribes created by Cleisthenes, had its own peculiar cult (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1990, 312–6).

But there were also various religious sites sacred to all “Greeks”. These “Panhellenic” centers featured festivals often associated with poetic and athletic competitions. The greatest of these were held at the great sanctuaries at Isthmia, Nemea, Delphi, and Olympia. However, even in the Panhellenic sanctuaries, someone not part of the local religious community, albeit a “Greek,” could only participate in these festivals as a “foreigner” (Sourvinou-Inwood, 1990, 295–7). These competitions, occurring at regular intervals, were commonly open only to those who could demonstrate their Greek ethnicity to the satisfaction of individuals commissioned by the festivals to make such determinations.⁶¹ But how was this Greekness determined? At Olympia to participate in the games an individual had to demonstrate that he was a member of a Greek city-state, and/or belong to a Greek tribe, and be of free and legitimate birth (Philostr. *Gym.* 25). These athletes, however, were not sent as teams by their home communities. No documents were presented. Any “Greek” athlete, who wished to compete, simply had to declare his intention to the appropriate officials at the site, and proclaim his “Greekness” (Crowther, 1996, 38). Moreover, these judges were not “professional” in the modern sense,

⁶⁰ Greek colonies, despite their customary political independence, often maintained close ties with their mother-cities with respect to religion. (Graham, 1964, 159–65, 213).

⁶¹ While only for the Olympic Games does direct evidence exist for such a body (Hdt. 5. 22. 2), it is very clear that the Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian Games were also exclusively for Greeks during this period (Dem. 18. 91; 9. 32; Plut. *Thes.* 25. 4; Aeschin. 3. 253–4). The games were viewed as a means of promoting Panhellenism (*FGrH* 257 F–1; Paus. 5. 4. 5, 8. 5; Lys. 33. 1–2; Ar. *Lys.* 1128–1134), and all of the attested victors up to and including the fifth century B. C. are “Greeks” (see Moretti, 1957, 1970).

nor was there an extensive bureaucratic apparatus supporting them (Kyle, 1990, 292, 301). Successful athletes were recruited by other peoples and *poleis*, to compete as their citizens. Sotades, the “Cretan”, was bribed by the Ephesians to compete as one of their own and won the *dolichos* at Olympia. He was subsequently banished by the Cretans (Paus. 6. 18. 6). Doreius competed both as a Rhodian and as a Thurian (Paus. 6. 7. 4).⁶² Except for the punishment dealt out by the offended *polis*, such transfers of allegiance were not challenged by the Panhellenic judges.

How then were athletes identified as Greek? While an argument from silence, it would appear that language must have been the major determinant. Most likely the judges accepted the statements of the participants unless contested by other competitors. When the Macedonian king Alexander I attempted to participate in the Olympic Games, his competitors challenged his standing as a Greek. Alexander satisfied the Hellenodicae that he was an Argive by descent and was permitted to compete (Hdt. 5. 22).⁶³ Alexander’s standing was challenged, because the Macedonians, in general, were not in the Classical Age accepted as full-fledged Greeks,⁶⁴ but rather as some sort of hybrid, related to the Hellenes, but distinct, speaking a Greek dialect difficult for other Greeks to understand (Anson, 2004, 200–1). The judges themselves would be hard pressed to dispute a competitor’s qualifications without the benefit of challengers. The most obvious way would be language. Did the individual speak Greek? Did his Greek reveal recent acquisition, and thus

⁶² For other examples, see Paus. 6. 3. 11, 13.1. The father of one athlete refused the bribe offered to change the proclaimed home city of his son (Paus 6. 2. 6).

⁶³ Herodotus reports that Alexander won, but his name does not appear on the victor list (see Moretti, 1957). Due to this omission and other problems with the text neither Badian, (1982, 46 n. 19), nor Borza (1990, 111–112), accept the historicity of Alexander’s participation, but believe it was part of Argead philhellenic propaganda. The participation is accepted by Hammond and Griffith (1979, 2:101).

⁶⁴ Aristotle (*Pol.* 1324b), for example, lists the Macedonians among the barbarians. See note 22.

identify the individual as a “barbarian”? Even those who became fluent in Greek, could still be despised as “barbarians”, because of their pronunciation and grammar.⁶⁵

But what of one whose fluency was complete? Whose native tongue was not betrayed by accent or grammatical error? Such an individual was Apollonides, an officer of the “10000”, who was accepted as a Greek by his fellow-soldiers, because he spoke “a Boeotian dialect” (βοιωτιάζων τῇ φωνῇ) (Xen. *Anab.* 3. 1. 26). He was discovered, however, to be “neither a Boeotian, nor from any part of Greece”, when it was pointed out that his ears were pierced and he was proclaimed to be a Lydian. Then, and only then, was he driven away by the assembled soldiers (Xen. *Anab.* 3. 1. 31–32). Admission to the mysteries at Eleusis was open to all those “who are not of impure hands or speak an incomprehensible tongue” (Schol. Ar. *Ran.* 369).⁶⁶

While language was then an *entrée* to Hellenization and the most obvious defining element, other factors were also considered important in the cultural transformation. Greeks were most often seen as residing in city-states, with those Greek speakers from more tribal and less urbanized areas frequently having their Hellenism questioned (Anson, 2004, 211–13). This prejudice was closely tied to the perception that to be a Greek was to be free, a citizen of a *polis*. In the words of Euripides, “Hellenes should rule barbarians, but not barbarians Hellenes, those being slaves, while these are free” (*IA*, 1400). For Herodotus a true Greek was “free” and willing to die to preserve that freedom.⁶⁷ Greeks who would give up their freedom were to be disparaged as cowards (Hdt. 1. 62. 1). Xenophon in the fourth century emphasizes that Greeks bow down before no man, but only before the gods (*Anab.* 3. 2. 13). Both Herodotus (7. 22. 1,

⁶⁵ Herodotus acknowledged that the same language could be spoken by people of different ethnicities (Hdt. 1. 171. 6).

⁶⁶ Mylonas, 1961, 247–8; Burkert, 1985, 285–6. Herodotus (Hdt. 8. 65. 4) and Isocrates (Isoc. 4. 157) state that the mysteries were open to all but “Persians and barbarians”.

⁶⁷ 1. 170. 2; 6. 5. 1, 11. 2; 7. 139. 5; 8. 77. 2, 142. 3, 143. 1; 9. 45. 1, 60. 1, 98. 2.

56. 1, 103. 4) and Xenophon (*Anab.* 3. 4. 25) describe how the “barbarians” “fight under the lash”, but the Greeks as free men. For Xenophon, even Cyrus, the brother of the King of Persia, despite all of his worthy qualities,⁶⁸ was still a slave (*Anab.* 1. 9. 29; 2. 5. 38). Xenophon even has Cyrus speak of the superiority of the Greeks to his own people, especially in that they possess “*eleutheria*”, a quality, says Xenophon, Cyrus would prefer to all he possesses (*Anab.* 1. 7. 3; cf. *Arr. Anab.* 2. 7. 4).

This perceived ethnic love of freedom was in the minds of the Greeks tied directly to their language. Themistocles had the herald sent by Xerxes, prior to the Persian War, to demand earth and water as signs of submission, arrested and put to death, “because he dared to prostitute the speech of Hellas to barbarian stipulations” (*Plut. Them.* 6. 2). A similar situation arose with Apollonides, that officer of the “10000”, who was discovered to be a Greek-speaking “barbarian”. Prior to this discovery, Xenophon had berated this individual for suggesting that the Greeks surrender to the Persians. “For the fellow is a disgrace both to his native state and to the whole of Greece, since, being a Greek, he is still a man of this kind” (*Anab.* 3. 1. 30). Alexander discovered in Sogdiana the descendants of the Branchidai, a Milesian clan, and massacred them, even though they had kept part of their Greek culture intact, including a “barbarized” form of Greek, and had surrendered enthusiastically to him, because their ancestors had betrayed Miletus to Xerxes.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Xen. *Anab.* 1. 9; cf. *Anab.* 1. 1. 4–7, 10, 2. 10, 3. 3, 12, 4. 8–9, 8. 16–17, 24. Many of these same qualities are also attributed to Cyrus the Elder by Xenophon (see Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*), and, indeed, it has been suggested that Xenophon’s description of the elder Cyrus is actually an amalgam of the younger Cyrus and others Xenophon admired.

⁶⁹ While Curtius’ text (7. 5. 28) states that they betrayed their city to Xerxes, Herodotus (6. 19. 3) states that the city was taken by Darius I (*Hdt.* 6. 18). Alexander had consulted the Milesians in his army concerning these individuals, but they were divided in their opinions; the decision to slaughter them as betrayers of a Greek city was Alexander’s (*Curt.* 7. 5. 28–34). The account in Curtius has been challenged by modern historians, but see Holt, 1988, 74–5.

Given their political and geographic diversity, how could the Greeks either maintain or create this basic understanding of a "common Greek language"? The answer is that this was first and foremost an oral society.⁷⁰ While for obvious reasons our evidence comes from written sources, these were read only by a very distinct minority of the population and in most cases written materials were meant to be performed orally. The key to the comprehensibility of the various dialects was apparently that many dialects came to be standard literary languages for wide regions in the Greek world (Palmer, 1996, 82). Poets spoke in particular styles and dialects to fit particular forms. For example, in Homer's epic poems and the Homeric Hymns the dialect is basically Ionic and the form hexameter (Palmer, 1996, 83–4; Nagy, 1990, 19). Corinna, the lyric poetess of Tanagra, was the victor in a contest over Pindar at Thebes, because she didn't compose in the traditional Doric dialect, but rather in Aeolic, and the Aeolic-speaking Thebans were appreciative (Paus. 9. 22. 3). Hecataeus and Herodotus wrote their works primarily in the Ionian dialect, which became the preferred dialect of prose writers.⁷¹

Oral performances at the various Greek sanctuaries were common at least by the eighth century B. C.⁷² As Gregory Nagy (1990, 56) relates, "a key to such Panhellenic synthesis is the ever-increasing social mobility of the poet or *aoidas*". In the *Odyssey* (17. 381–5), Odysseus is made to comment, "Who, pray, of himself ever seeks out and bids a stranger from abroad, unless it be one of those that are masters of some public craft, a prophet, or a healer of ills, or a builder, aye, or a divine minstrel, who gives delight with his song? For these men are bidden all over the boundless earth". Phemius, the son of Terpius, enter-

⁷⁰ W. V. Harris (1989, 13, 30–8, 46, 327–9) argues convincingly that throughout the Graeco-Roman period there was but limited literacy.

⁷¹ Buck, 1955, 14–15; Hainsworth, 1967, 73–4; Palmer, 1996, 152–3, 167.

⁷² Morgan, 1993, 18; Marinatos, 1993, 231. John Herington (1985, 163–6) has collected references to eighteen different festivals, scattered about the Greek world, at which, at least by the end of the fifth century B. C., oral performances were either a formal or an informal part.

tained the suitors in Ithaca (Hom. *Od.* 1. 154, 22. 330, 17. 263), and Demodocus at the court of Alcinous (Hom. *Od.* 8. 25, 254–63, 470–85). Later, Anacreon lived at the court of Polycrates, ruler of Samos, and Aeschylus and Simonides journeyed to Hiero at Syracuse (Paus. 1. 2. 3). Moreover, various works were regularly performed at the Panhellenic festivals. The poet of the “Homeric Hymn to Dionysus” (26. 12) speaks of returning annually to sing the god’s praises, and the poet of the “Hymn to Aphrodite” (6. 19) asks the goddess to grant him victory in his contest. This tradition of oral poetic performance continued into the fourth century and beyond (Nagy, 1990, 52–61). This is most clearly brought out in Plato’s dialogue *Ion*, where Ion, the Ephesian, has just returned from a successful competition (530a–531a). From this discussion it is clear that at least by the end of the fifth century, and most likely earlier, as well, *rhapsodes*, the oral interpreters of the great poets, were almost the equivalent of modern rock stars. While transportation would have limited the audience to those who lived in the vicinity or to those wealthy enough to travel to these performances, Ion apparently addressed “more than twenty thousand” frequently in his performances (Pl. *Ion* 535d). Local talent performed at these festivals, as well as the “stars”. In the “Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo” (3. 155–175), the singer-poet praises a girls’ chorus and asks that they remember him. Nor was orality limited to poetry. Herodotus performed parts of his history throughout the Greek world,⁷³ and even Thucydides’ history, it has been suggested, had various “display” pieces performed before the work was published (Hornblower, 1987, 29 and n. 65).

While the Greeks were certainly not aware of modern linguistic theory, they did recognize that there was a certain commonality among those who spoke variations of Greek speech. Additionally, they saw a close connection between Greek speech and Greek ethnicity. While this connection was often portrayed as primordial in origin, Greek ethnicity could be acquired by those

⁷³ Evans, 1991, 89–90, 99, 130; Marincola, 2001, 23; Stadter, 1997.

who assiduously adopted both the language and the culture. Further, this sense of commonality of language was certainly by the fifth century B. C., when the evidence becomes more readily available, but most likely from centuries before, a true reflection of the actual state of the Greek language. Despite the many acknowledged dialectical variations and political divisions, this predominantly oral society, thanks to its wandering poets and singers, its Panhellenic festivals, and its widespread commerce among the various Greek states, maintained a high level of language comprehensibility among those who proclaimed themselves Greeks.

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