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# Hellenism

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## HELLENISM

With the Archaic period and with the development of Panhellenic institutions, like the Olympic games, and the rise of enemies, like Persia, who helped to crystallize ideas of "the fatherland in danger," we may begin to pose questions about Greek self-consciousness, as in the famous speech by the anonymous Athenian speakers in Herodotus (8.144.1-3), who name the four markers of the Greek nation as shared lineage, language, religion, and customs. In Archaic and Classical Greece (776-323 BCE), the polis membership and the metropolis-colony relationships are preferred criteria of identity.

In Hellenistic times a distinction appears between a political and a cultural Hellenism. Whereas Greek historiographers of the Hellenistic Aegean recognized Greek identity as rooted only in the Greek poleis of the homeland and stressed the "otherness" of the Macedonians, in the Macedonian kingdoms of Ptolemaic Egypt and Seleucid Asia, Greek language and culture survived as shared links to the cities of the Greek homeland, kept alive both by the Ptolemaic royalty, who imitated the high culture of the Greeks as insignia of nobility, and by the ruling Greeks, who immigrated to the ends of the Macedonian kingdoms for better job opportunities. Though creating Greek identity in the remote new colonies was difficult, imitation of Hellenism induced by incentives of high administrative posts is attested, along with an inevitable fusion between Greek civilization and the local traditions. Greek became the lingua franca of the Hellenistic kingdoms.

During the period of Roman rule (31 BCE-324 CE), the collision with and subjugation to Rome affected Greek self-perception in various ways, producing multiple levels of classification. An individual could be identified as Athenian in Alexandria but as Greek in Rome. The elite had different notions of ethnic identity than did the uneducated mass, who still identified more with their clan and families. Roman nobility imitated classical Hellenism privately but acted publicly according to Roman decorum.

The Roman senate upheld the Roman mores and values and criticized Greek extravagance. Among Roman intellectuals, Classical Greece was admired as the cradle of civilization. And the Greek intellectuals of the Second Sophistic classicized their Greek identity and thus were also pleasing to the Roman elite. Although a hybridization of Greek and Roman culture and cult was widely observed during Roman rule, there was hardly any linguistic hybridization.

During the long period of the Byzantine Empire (312-1453), our sources, representing a small erudite elite, indicate that the political identity of Byzantium was Roman, its religious identity Orthodox Christian, and its cultural identity Greek. By the time of the Fourth Crusade (1204-1261), when the political *Romanitas* was attacked by the Latin-speaking Western invaders, a sense of shared Greek identity prevailed among the Greek-speaking Byzantines. This was further enhanced during the Paleologan Renaissance (1261-1453), when the classical cultural heritage of the Byzantine Empire was foregrounded at the expense of the Roman administrative heritage, and the Latin language became obsolete in the drastically reduced Byzantine territory, a process that had begun gradually as early as in the sixth and seventh centuries. Constantinople was founded in 324 CE by Constantine as the new Rome, but within a century it was viewed as the new Jerusalem of the second covenant. By the time of the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453, Byzantine *Christianitas* had paired with a shared Greekness, downgrading its *Romanitas*. Still, the "Byzantines" continued to call themselves "Romans" up to the end (and beyond).

The continuum of collective identity afforded all Orthodox Christians since the Byzantine period a concrete sense of belonging that lasted throughout the period of Ottoman rule. The patriarch of Constantinople was the spiritual leader of the multiethnic, multilingual, self-governing Orthodox Christian commonwealth in the Balkan peninsula and Anatolia. With the advent of Western ideas of nationalism, the classical revival program propounded by the Western intellectuals, and their

call to the Greek people to revolt against the Ottoman oppressors, the patriarchate sensed its faltering grip on its Orthodox dominion. During the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), Greece first fought as a nation-state against another Christian neighboring state, Bulgaria, thus asserting the decisive victory of nationalism over the prenational community of Orthodox Christendom presided over by the patriarchate of Constantinople. The hitherto Christian geography and calendar were nationalized, and language and culture were given priority over religion.

In the postindependence period the Greek written language was purged of all European and Turkish loanwords and was formulated into a new artificial “purified” Greek (*katharevousa*). Similarly, the Greek landscape was “relieved” of memories of its most recent past, giving precedence to relics of the ancient world. Greek language and geography were essentially re-Hellenized and the concept of Hellenism nationalized, offering a new ideology of Greekness (Hellenicity) founded on the idea of the continuity of the Greek nation from the Classical to the modern age.

The focus on the Greek people encountered during the Byzantine years of the Orthodox Christian commonwealth was reintroduced by the demotists (proponents of the vernacular *dēmotikē*) and later taken up by the modernist poets and popular musicians who immortalized *Romiosyne* in their artistic output, reclaiming a diachronic link to Christian Byzantium as the Eastern Roman Empire and to the Ottoman centuries over the pre-Christian Hellenism of the Western archaizing intellectuals, who were in turn criticized for attempting to subjugate the masses with imported elitist ideas. The eventual cohabitation of Hellene, Romios, and Orthodox Christian in the Greek collective identity attests to the success of the national imagining project that produced a diachronic pluralistic self-representation for the Greeks.

Greece is now transforming into a multicultural society and a country of emigration. A necessary makeover of its international image is taking place so as to address the needs for this new age,

an age in which the Classical Greek currency is no longer as potent. Greece is still negotiating claims of the universality of its classical heritage with claims of the individuality of this same culture and its rightful possession by the Greek state, claims behind its campaign for the return of the Parthenon Marbles from the British Museum to the new Acropolis Museum at the foot of the Acropolis in Athens.

[See also Byzantium; Classical Tradition; Christianity; Constantinople; Greece; Greek, *subentry* The Greek Language; Panhellenism; and Second Sophistic.]

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