

ABSTRACT

The subject of the work is a long debated problem which is still controversial today: the problem represented by the double denomination used in the ancient world and continued into the modern world, regarding the ethnicity of the Greeks and of Greece. On the one hand, in fact, we have the autonym Hellenes and Hellas, while on the other we have, among the Latin writers and the Italic world, the Latin ethnicities of *Grai*, *Graeci* and *Graecia*. This is certainly a heteronym but likewise it is found in Greece as Graia, Graikoi and Graikes, although in a restricted territorial and ethnical setting, a well-defined area of western, central and northern Greece. The problem of its etymology and of its relation with Hellenes, of the ways and times of its spread to the west, arise from here.

The problem was already confronted in part in antiquity and has been taken up again, in the modern world. It was necessary to start a new discussion after the first deciphering of the documents in linear B from Knossos and Pylos, and again after the publication of the tablets from Thebes.

Thus, the alternatives *Graecia*/Hellas and Graikoi/Hellenes have been investigated many times but here they are compared in a new way, through a systematic lexical investigation, careful of the contextualisation and also the political significance of the occurrences, since, as the author demonstrates, until the III century BC using Hellenes in the place of Graikoi “in no way means the same thing”. Thus, investigation starts with the root γραϜ-, probably already present in the Mycenaean Age and passes to the use of the term in Homer and Hesiod; in parallel it analyses the presentation of Graikos in the *Ehoiai* and of Hellenes, Ellopes and Ellopia in archaic poetry with special attention given to Elloi/Helloi in Pindar. The zonal and chronological distribution of the terms is carefully analysed: Graikoi appears, thus, to be present in the Euboic/Boeotian area, an area already connected, in ancient times, to the Epirotic region to the west. Aristotle locates the predecessors of the Hellenes in the zone of Dodona. The oldest tradition, however, does not acknowledge them as being from in this area. The only people recorded here are Pelasgians and the Helloi priesthood. The fact that Graikos was linked in the Catalogue with Deukalion, father of Hellen, through a daughter of who was loved by Zeus, and in the same way the Catalogue links Magneties and Makedonians through another daughter of Deukalion, also loved by Zeus, on the one hand puts the Graikoi in parallel but subordinate with respect to the Hellenes, and on the other alligns them with the Makedonians. Thus, we may understand how and why the pro-Macedonian Aristotle, and nobody prior to him, located them as the predecessors of the Hellenes, in turn related to Hellopia and to the Hellenes.

In Homer, in contrast, the term Hellenes, is linked only to the Thessalian region of Phthia. From here the term starts to spread slowly through the frequentation of the the two amphictonies, first that of Anthela, then that of Delphi. The Hesiodic Catalogue reflects this in the famous genealogical tables of the bloodlines descending from the single forbear, Hellen, who is linked to Dorians and Eolians, through Xutho, Acheians and Ionians. The parallel literary evidence shows that the process of dispersion is completed during the VII century and is prior to the Hesiodic genealogical table; the term then expands to indicate both the Dorians who move from the south towards the Peloponnese, and the Athenians. Therefore, one may follow the expansion of the Hellenes, starting from Herodotos, until their superposition and almost cancellation of the Graikoi ethnos in the V century, an ethnonym reused later, in the III century, when the two terms became almost equivalent, each having now lost each its original value.

In order to explain the passage of the ethnos to Italy, as well as to Epiros, one must think rather to the connections along the Euripos testified by the Euboians, in particular the Eretrians and the Graikoi of Oropos and Tanagra, the same peoples who worshipped Demeter *Graia*, who is connected to the foundation of Cuma. The fact that the ethnos later appears with the Etruscans and one may think that through them it is passed on to the Latins makes no difference. In the final verses of the Hesiodic Theogony the Latins and Thyrrenians appear indissolubly linked. What is difficult is the role attributed to Eretria: Pithecusa was founded by Eretria and Khalkis. As for Cuma Dionysius of Harlicarnassus, who is known to have used the so-called Cronaca Cumana, testifies that both the cities had part in its fondation.

The ethnonym Hellenes in particular is also analysed in relation to the ethnic “Pelasgian” and to the identity the latter carries. Concerning the Pelasgians present next to the Helloi in Epiros, stress is given to the double face which they had in their evaluation of the Greeks. This term reveals the otherness of the Hellenes with respect to what antiquity considered a Barbarian past. In Homer the Pelasgians are an ethnos counterposed to the Hellenes and connected to a restricted area, but little by little, starting from Hesiod and then definitively with Herodotus, they become a “precedent” and an indicator of a past which must be recovered so as to really be Hellenes, in particular among the Athenians. However, to the extent to which the Pelasgians resist taking the language and identity of the Hellenes, they remain different and are to be considered Barbarians. This is not the same at Dodona where they carry out a leading role in the formation of the Greek religion.

This research, starting from a linguistic base, carries out a precise examination of the historical moments of reference, to the settings in which the terms are used; it takes into account Pindar’s patrons, the public to which Herodotos addresses himself and the political personalities of V century Athens, all elements which allow specifying and understanding the “uses” and the reality, and also the ideological value of the two ethnonyms.

Keywords: Graikoi – Hellenes – identity – Hellas – Pelasgoi