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AIRS, WATERS, METALS, EARTH

people and environment in Archaic and Classical Greek thought

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Introduction

“Do it, if you want. But be prepared to rule no longer but be ruled instead. For soft men tend to come from soft lands. It’s not common for marvelous fruits and men courageous in war to grow from the same earth.” The Persians agreed, defeated by Cyrus’ logic, and decided to return home. They thus chose to dwell in a poor land and rule rather than sow rich soil and be slaves to others. (Hdt. 9.122)

The notion that soft men come from soft lands seems to have been an idée reçue for Herodotus and has remained so in the myths of the American West, Orientalist constructions of the East, and Blut und Boden ideologies. It rests on the notion that there is a deep and abiding connection between humans and their land. In relationship to their land, a people were thought to have developed their character and culture. More than just character and custom, the land also affected physiques. The softness of the Persians inheres not only in their temperament but in their bodies as well. Herodotus suggests this physical softness when discussing how the environment, in this case the climate, affects Egyptian and Persians skulls (Hdt. 3.12.2–4):

They say that the cause of this phenomenon is as follows (and they persuaded me easily): The Egyptians, right from childhood, shave their heads and the bone is thickened in the sun. This is the same reason why they do not become bald—Egyptians have the fewest number of bald men out of all mankind. This, then, is why Egyptian men have strong heads. The Persians have weak heads because they wear felt hats from birth to shelter themselves from the sun.

Persian skulls are weak and soft, while Egyptian skulls are hard and strong (and haired). For Herodotus, customs developed among the Egyptians that used the harsh sunlight to strengthen their skulls, while the Persians had a custom of wearing hats to protect themselves from their climate—environment determines bodies, determines customs. Which comes first, custom or nature (nomos or phusis), is a hen-and-egg question, but clearly environment and culture
intersect to create identifying ethnic characteristics—skull density is an ethnic trait as all Egyptians have strong skulls, while all Persians have weak ones.\(^2\)

In this chapter, I explore three interrelated ways the Archaic and Classical Greeks conceptualized the relationship between environment and ethnicity: myths of metals, autochthony, and environmental determinism. I argue that these approaches to the relationship binding human and land attempt to rationalize human difference in a way that privileges indigenous status as well as hereditary superiority. This rationalization might be considered a type of ‘proto-social Darwinism,’ a organization of human diversity that ranks peoples on a scale from superior to inferior based on a normative standard of purity. This scale derives either from environmental metaphors or in direct relationship to the environment itself. For my purposes, I am limiting ‘environment’ to earth and its elements, its climate, topography, and geography. I will not consider built environments except in so far as they are intended to emphasize natural environments.\(^3\)

In what follows, I provide a series of case studies that explore different ways Archaic and Classical Greeks conceptualized human diversity in relation to environment, in particular, the land. These may not cohere into a single over-arching theory, but are nonetheless related. Each approach tries to reconcile the visibility of human difference, both physical and cultural, with the fact that humans are a single species who can, if they desire, sexually reproduce. The reconciliation works by organizing peoples into hierarchies based on purported inherent qualities, qualities that are derived from their locations of origin. These ideas offered a response to anxieties that may have affected the Greeks when faced with a world with frequent migrations. Kaplan shows that the Greeks may have assuaged this anxiety with migratory myths and traditions that posit horizontal kinship relationships between different sets of Greeks (as well as Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Persians) throughout the Mediterranean.\(^4\)

The environmental theories, on the other hand, offered an explanation for why these peoples should be differentiated and further justified antagonistic political realities even amongst the Greeks themselves. Kaplan’s “discourses of displacement” may have been more common in the mythscape for some Greeks, but discourses tying people to specific lands still operated and often existed side by side with migratory origin stories.

It is difficult to discuss identity without addressing the translation of the Greek terminology, in particular *genos* and *ethnos*, which are typically translated as ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ respectively.\(^5\) While the term ‘race’ frequently translates *genos*, this should not confuse us into thinking that it carries the baggage of the modern construct of scientific race as it appears in government census data and other official quarters, especially in the United States. The ancient Greeks did not have a concept of a ‘white’ or ‘black’ race, nor of ‘red’ or ‘yellow’ races.\(^6\) This does not mean, however, that they did not have some concept for groups of peoples defined through shared biological descent that can be approximated with non-scientific ‘race.’ The term *genos* is frequently used by the ancient sources in contexts of birth and descent. A *genos* is often linked by biology and genealogy, thus ‘race’ is not an inappropriate translation, even if it inadvertently assumes some modern baggage.

The connection between *genos* and kinship that we see in the texts discussed in this chapter might lead one to assume that *ethnos* is used when identity is defined through political and/or cultural associations and is therefore understood as a subset of *genos*. This is sometimes the case, but it is also clear that *ethnos* is used as well in the ancient sources to denote peoples linked biologically or through kinship. Both *genos* and *ethnos* can refer to groups defined by distant kinship even if *ethnos* in the texts discussed in this chapter is also suggestive of shared culture or political structures. An *ethnos* is usually a group of people who share a government—among Greeks, the *polis* of one’s origin is frequently an *ethnos*, while Hellene
is sometimes a *genos*, sometimes an *ethnos*, and Ionian can be a *genos*, an *ethnos*, or *phulē*. Thus, the ‘ethnic’ for a metic in Athens was typically something like “of Byzantium” or “of Miletus”, while their *genos* was likely Hellene, if they lived in a period when ‘Hellene’ was recognized as a universal category for those living in the Greek world, who shared certain cultural characteristics and descent. If one were a Hellene and not an Egyptian, Phoenician, or Persian, for example, their *phulē* would have, perhaps, been Ionian or Dorian. Despite this lack of consistency, I have elected to translate the term *ethnos* with ‘people’ (as a collective singular), a usage that includes under its umbrella cultural, political, and kinship associations. For clarity’s sake, however, I will include the Greek terms when they appear in each text for categories like race, ethnicity, tribe, or other similar affiliations.

What of the prejudices associated with modern categories of race and ethnicity? If there are no ‘race’ or ethnicity’ as we understand them in modern terms, is there racism or ethnocentrism? Here things are even more difficult to sort because there is evidence from antiquity of stereotypes and prejudices against groups based on kinship, physical appearance, perceived inherent character, gender, language (including accents), and social or economic class, almost all of which groups can be defined using the terms *genos* or *ethnos*. Thus, the prejudices associated with the terms *genos* and *ethnos* in antiquity are not limited to modern racism or ethnocentrism. The type of hierarchization I am arguing for in this chapter, however, might fall clearly under the terms ‘racism’ or ‘ethnocentrism’ today. Some of the responses to and manifestations of these prejudices could even be called ‘racialist,’ as with the 451 BCE Citizenship Law of Perikles in Athens. But my argument is not that the relationship posited by these texts between identity and environment are racist, racialist, or ethnocentric in the modern senses of the words, and one may ask why we even need to find a modern practice that corresponds exactly to ancient types of discrimination. The Greek texts offer a variety of ways for their audience to imagine, construct, and define their own identity and the identity of others based on different associations with place and space, some of which appear analogous to racism and ethnocentrism. They are not the same as our modern pseudo-scientific model of racism, but inherent in these ways of imagining are value judgments that classify people as superior or inferior, as part of in or out groups, in ways that could not easily be altered simply by moving to another climate or geographic location, environment at conception and birth mattered most. These value judgments are at first attached to consecutive *genē* of humans (as in Hesiod’s myth of metals), but soon are used to subdivide humanity just as the *oikoumenē* itself was divided. This division and the value judgments inherent in them begins with Hesiod, who presents us with an example of the notion of ‘purity,’ and who hints at a concept of anti-miscegenation that I think is one underlying current in the construction of ethnic identities in ancient Greece.

**Hesiod’s metal men**

Where did human beings come from? The Greeks told a number of different stories, some of which they derived from their eastern neighbors. In Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (*Op.* 109–201), the earliest of our Greek authors to speculate on the origins of people, humans are made by the Olympian gods (*athanatoi poiēsan*), presumably from earth and other natural elements. In fact, there are five attempts at creating humans, the first four of which end in mass extinctions. It has been long understood that the metallic associations of the five ‘races’ of mortal men (*genē*) reflects a valuation of the qualities of the humans made from them not only in life, but also in death. One aspect of this valuation, however, has been overlooked, and that is the purity of the metals and its significance. While the first two *genē* are pure metals, the other three races are
impure—they are either represented by alloys, are metals that require extensive refining and purification, or are products of miscegenation between two different genē. The status of pure or impure is reflected not only in their names, but in the way their lives and after-lives are represented. Purity equates with luxury, ease, and honors after death, while impurity equates with hard labor, lack, and no clear honor in death.

According to Hesiod, there are five gene: gold (chruseon), silver (argureon), bronze (chalkeon), “godlike race of hero-men” (andrōn hērōōn theion genos, 159) also called the “half-gods” (hemitheioi, 160), and iron (siderēon). The first two genē are marked by ‘pure’ metals, noble metals that can be easily extracted from ores and do not oxidize. The hallmark of these groups is the ease of their lives—the land yielded up its fruits spontaneously (automatē) and ungrudgingly for the golden genos, and gave them a life free of sorrow and pain, just as the gods had (hōste theōn), while the silver spent the bulk of its life in childishness, tended by their mothers (we have no idea who they are). Further, in death, both were marked as blessed and granted honors. The golden was honored as “pure mortal spirits” (daimonē hagnoi epichthonioi) and warders off of evil: “who watch over judgments and wicked deeds while clad in a mist, roaming everywhere upon the earth, granters of wealth” (Hes. Op. 122–6). The silver, while “by far worse” (polu cheiroteron) than the golden, “are called blessed mortals under the earth (hupochthonioi makares thnētoi)—in second place, but similar honor accompanies them” (141–2).

The next two races characterized by metals—the bronze and iron—live lives of violence and need. The bronze genos (145–55), made from ash trees (ek melian), is enamored of violence (hubris) and is characterized by its brute strength (megalē bie) and hardness of heart (adamantos kraterophrona thumon); it kills itself off (151–5). Their association with bronze emphasizes their love of weapons and warfare—Hesiod tells us that their weapons and armor are all made of bronze. Bronze also was not a ‘pure’ metal, but an alloy made by mixing different, weaker metals (copper and tin, primarily). If the metal signifies their inherent character, in this third generation, the metal also suggests an impurity or even degeneration of the genos.

The degeneration of the genē continues with the iron genos, another ‘impure’ metal that needs to be worked and refined—in order to be useable (174–201). This race, the one to which Hesiod himself is loath to belong (174–5), is defined by its lack—lack of ease (176–8), lack of respect and reverence (182–8), lack of honor or sense of justice (189–96). This lack highlights what makes each of the races distinct, what defines them, and what their valuation means. Better men live in ease and comfort, closer to the gods than not. Better men revere the gods, uphold oaths, are bigger, better, and stronger than others. Even in their childishness and love of violence, the silver and bronze races still were closer to the gods than the iron men. The earth gave up its bounty for them without suffering and toil, even if, as with the bronze race, the men did not eat grain (151). The iron men, however, must labor for their harvest, just as iron itself must endure a smelting process to remove its impurities—the hard work it takes to achieve useable iron characterizes the lives of the iron men.

Into this metallic hierarchy is inserted a fourth genos that is not characterized by a metal. These people, the hemitheioi, are hybrids born from the gods mating, it seems, with the genos of women descended from Pandora. This race, according to Hesiod here, while blessed in many ways, was destroyed in war, although Zeus whisked some away to the isles of the blessed “at the edges of the earth” (es peirata gaiēs, 168). Although Hesiod does not say in Works and Days, the hemitheioi are the result of procreation between gods and humans as opposed to the other genē who are made by the gods from earth or trees. This brings up two points of concern. First, they are not given a metal designation, but alone stand outside
of this earth-linked discourse—they are not “born of the earth” and so are not designated by an earthly metal. Second, they are a product of the miscegenation of two genē, the genos of the gods and the genos of women, the descendants of the earth-made Pandora, as is discussed further below. In what is likely a part of the Hesiodic Eoiae, it is Zeus himself who intends to destroy this particular genos of mortal men even as he fathered many of them (Berlin Papyrus 10560; Most Fr. 155, West Fr. 204; trans. Most):

δὴ γὰρ τότε μήδετο θέσκελα ἔργα 
Ζεὺς ὑψιβρεμέτης, μείζαι κατ’ ἀπείρονα γὰῖν 
τυρπᾶξας, ἣδε δὲ γένος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων 
πολλὸν ἀπόλυται σφεπῆ, πρ[όφασιν μὲν ὀλέσθαι 
ψυχὰς ἠμθεόν[ν .... ..... ]οιμὶ βροτοῖσα (100) 
tέκνα θεῶν μι[ . . . ][....ωφ]θαλμοῖσιν ὐρόντα, 
χωρίς ὀφ’ ἀν[θω]ρόπων[βιοτον κα]ὶ ἱδε’ ἕχοσιν 
tο[ι θ][θ]η[κ’] {ε} ἀθα[νάτω̣[ν τε ἰδὲ θ̣νητῶ̣[ν ἀνθρώπων 
ἀργαλέον πόλεμον.17

For high-thundering Zeus was devising wondrous deeds then, to stir up trouble on the boundless earth; for he was already eager to annihilate most of the race of speech-endowed human beings, a pretext to destroy [100] the lives of the semi-gods, [ ]to mortal children of the gods [ ] seeing with eyes, but that the ones blessed [ ] as before apart from human beings should have [life and] habitations. Hence [he established] for immortals and for mortal human beings difficult warfare”

The key element of the above fragment is that this race was destroyed because it was godly, but not godly enough (something we should keep in mind when thinking about discriminatory laws). It was miscegenation with the gods that Zeus sought to end, miscegenation that created a lesser people. Here, as with the use of bronze and iron metals, there is a hint of impurity about this genos that, perhaps, explains why they are destroyed—as inferiors to the gods through miscegenation with humans, they are not worthy of the honors of the purer genē of gold and silver, even though some are granted an afterlife beyond the boundaries of the earth. It also establishes the principle that miscegenation between genē is bad and produces inferior, impure, peoples. A similar dynamic appears, as we shall see, in discussions of the various peoples born from Pandora’s descendants and after the great flood. There we see numerous autochthonous groups emerge, some then “mixing” with others, some seeming not to have.

**Born from the earth**18

Although it is not explicitly stated, except with the bronze genos made from ash trees, it can be assumed that the other metal genē were made or ‘born from the earth’ (gēgenesis or autochthony) through the agency of Zeus and the other gods.19 This idea that peoples emerge from or are made from the land that they then inhabit has a long tradition, starting with Hesiod’s Pandora (Th. 570–93; Op. 60–105) and continuing throughout the classical period. In the section that follows, I argue that this distinction as a type of ‘earth-born’ people emphasizes a hierarchy rooted in a notion that the land in which one is born was thought to imbue the peoples there with specific innate characteristics, just as the metal that designated the metal genē was a mark of their inherent value and genos-purity. These innate characteristics,
I suggest, were thought to be suited to and shaped by specific landscapes and were not transferable to another space. Furthermore, to be ‘mixed’ was to be impure and so inferior, which meant restricting interactions between those not born of that land and the indigenous, or risk a deterioration of the innate character and integrity of a people (deterioration such as could occur with iron through oxidation). There is also an element of manufacture—the less labored earth-born are superior (as with the gold, silver, and bronze races), while the more wrought or labored are inferior (as with the iron race and the hemitheoi); peoples who use technē to alter or combat nature are inferior to those whom nature properly endows. In these approaches, we see the conceptualization of identity through the relationship to environment as forming hierarchies among different peoples based upon not only the earthly elements from which they emerge or are made, but the geographic space whence they came.

Part of the process of creating hierarchies resides in the double meaning of autochthony in our classical Greek sources. It can mean both ‘born of the earth,’ arguably its secondary meaning, or ‘always having the same land,’ i.e., indigenous. As Rosivach has discussed at length, the earliest meaning of the term autochthon is most likely the latter and the term only acquired its connection to being born from the earth (gēgenesis in other sources) in the peculiar Athenian context where the earth-born early king Erichthonios (or sometimes Erechtheus) becomes the progenitor of all Athenians, who also lay claim to being the earliest and only true inhabitants of their land. Thus is born the notion of Athenian exceptionalism that they used frequently to set themselves above not only non-Greeks, but other Greeks as well, in ways that other ‘born of the earth’ peoples did not. I begin with pre-Athenian representations of gēgenesis and then discuss within this thought-scape the particular instance of Athenian indigenous status, one of the most prominent identities formed through connection with environment from the Greek world.

**Hesiod’s Pandora and her descendants**

The genos of woman, according to Hesiod in Theogony, is “molded from earth” (gaiēs gar sumplasse, Th. 571), “wrought as an evil for men” (teuksen kakon anthropoosi, Th. 570). She is not named Pandora here, but is dressed up with all the gifts of the gods, including silvery garments, a veil, garlands of flowers, and a golden crown decorated with terrible wild creatures (knōdala deina) nourished by land (épeiros) and sea (thalassa) (Th. 582). As Loraux points out, the creation of woman is in addition to man and with her comes the need for sexual reproduction—gēgenesis of humanity stops with the generation of woman. In Works and Days, Pandora’s creation from the earth is also recounted. In this instance, Zeus orders Hephaistos to “mix earth and water” (gaian hudei phurein, 61) from which to make a “beautiful form of a maiden” (partheikēs kalon eidos, 64). Hephaistos obliges and “molds from the earth (ek gaiēs plasse) a likeness to a tender maiden” (70–71). In both accounts, the genos of women is an evil (kakos) or a trick (dolos) for men. This genos is a calamity (pēma), something denoted in Works and Days more explicitly because the earth itself is “mixed.” Phurein, although frequently treated as a neutral term in translations, is not. Phurein means to defile something, to pollute the earth with the water, to confuse or confound. Like the bronze and iron races of men who were generated before, woman is impure and a product of technē, and, as such, is an inferior genos, an inferior genos that taints even the gods, producing the hemitheoi. From the time of Pandora, the risk of impurity lingers for all peoples who must reproduce sexually. The symbolism of Pandora’s pithos as a womb has often been noted—to open it is to release evils upon the world.

It is important to note that for Hesiod and other Greeks, women were imagined as a separate genos, a “race apart.” There are ‘tribes of women’ (phula) who make up the genos (Th. 591).
phula whom Hesiod described at some length in his Catalogue of Women (Ehoiae). These tribes include Greek heroes born from the affairs of gods and the genos of women, presumably the men of the fourth, ‘heroic’ race. These peoples also seem to include such foreign ethnoi as the Scythians, Ethiopians, Pygmies, and Makrokephaloi, all peoples who lived on the edges of the world and who differed markedly in the appearances and cultures from the Greeks. In this tradition, then, whether for good or ill, human variation derives from the ‘mixed’ earth-made genos of women. And yet, the descendants of woman cannot account for all peoples of the world nor did all Greeks admit descent from the evil gift of Zeus to man. Instead, there are numerous stories of other generations of earth-born peoples, generations that had no connection to Pandora and her kind.

After the flood

After Zeus depopulated much of the earth with a great flood, one group of people was regenerated by Deucalion and Pyrrha. This pair were told to toss stones onto the earth and these stones became humans. According to Pindar, it happened at the village of Opus (Olymp. 9.40–46): “Deucalion and Pyrrha, by the decree of lightening wielding Zeus, descended from Parnassus and first established their home. There they asexually (ater eunas) created a unified people (homodamos), made from stone, a people [laos] named from the stone (laas).”

Pindar’s laoi are a unified, autochthonous people who are worthy to open his song. Their status as earth-born descendants of the legendary Deucalion marks them as both indigenous to their land and the progenitors of great men, such as Epharmostus, the victor celebrated in the ode. From the laas-born peoples came “your bronze-shielded ancestors from the beginning” (54–5) who were “always indigenous true-born (egchorōioi) kings” (57). This strand of indigenous people was “improved,” as Pindar tells us, when Zeus decided to infuse their stock with his own seed and transport the daughter of Opus to Locrus, which then opened its gates to “foreigners” (xenoi). Locrus becomes a haven for immigrants and foreigners and is derived from a mixed people, while Opus retains its pure, autochthonous status—and it is from there that the victor derives his ancestry, not from Locrus.

Although Pindar emphasizes the indigenous nature of the laas-born and the presumably superior status this connection confers, Hesiod, quoted by Strabo, links these stone-born men to the Leleges and calls them a “mixed people” (migadas), because Leleges derives from legein, “picked.” Furthermore, it is their mixed status that Strabo suggests was the cause of their extinction; “on account of this [being mixed] the genos died off (ekleloipenai)” (Strabo Geo. 7.7.2). But the tension between their ‘native’ and ‘mixed’ statuses suggest that lines of descent linking a people back to autochthons somehow confers a superior status on them over other men, while being mixed is considered weakness. The most well-known example of this dynamic comes from Athens.

Athenian indigenous status and autochthony

Athenian autochthony is the most well-known and discussed version of the earth-born myths. Athenian myths, however, must be contextualized within historical rationalizations or discourses on indigenousness. The myth of Athenian autochthony, found fully developed and embedded in civic discourse from the Peloponnesian War on, sanctioned views of Athenian exceptionalism and ethnic distinctiveness; other Greeks were descended from an Athenian and a foreigner (as in Euripides’ Ion), whereas Athenians themselves came from the very soil of Attica and the gods (e.g. Pl. Crit. 109d) and were the only Greeks to have
always inhabited their land (e.g. Isoc. Pan. 4.24–5). Even if Gruen is correct to say that “autochthony was hardly the prevailing notion,” or that “[a]utochthony did not have much purchase in Hellas as a marker of identity,” it mattered to the Athenians in their definition of citizenship and ‘purity.’

The Athenians laws imply that they believed their autochthony meant that they were a ‘pure’ people. Such a view was, of course, contradicted in reality and in many of their other traditions. Nonetheless, autochthonous purity remained powerful on an ideological level. Susan Lape refers to the type of citizenship that evolved in Athens in the classical period as “racial citizenship,” a term meant to capture the focus on a purity of descent that the autochthony myths conjured up. The Athenians need not have believed the comic story of Hephaistos’ attempt at wooing Athena to believe they were an exclusive and privileged people. Legislation intended to enforce this vision acted to limit citizens in Athens to those born of two citizen parents. This type of legislation rests on the idea that Athenian blood was superior to non-Athenian and that mixing of Athenian blood would weaken the city. Furthermore, foreigners and those who had mixed with foreigners were considered less loyal or even incapable of loyalty to the city. They could hardly be good citizens. The underlying logic rested in part on the view that autochthony tied every Athenian to the land, and the myth’s greatest development coincided with the expansion of the citizen population of Athens to include non-land-owning Athenians. Their link to the land was mythical, ideological, and perpetual, not material and limited to those who owned land. Autochthony filled the gap between citizens and their land.

Herodotus discusses Athenian indigenous status as part of his tale of Croesus, who decided, in his power struggle with Cyrus, to befriend the most powerful Greeks (1.56.2):

Doing some research, Croesus discovered that the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians were preeminent among the Greeks. The Lacedaemonians were preeminent among the Dorians, the Athenians among the Ionians. They were the foremost peoples in antiquity as well—the Athenians among the Pelasgian peoples, the Lacedaemonians among the Hellenic peoples (ethnoi). The Pelasgian Athenians had never moved anywhere, but the Hellene Lacedaemonians wandered a great deal.

In this passage, Herodotus acknowledges two things—first, that the Athenians were not originally Hellenes, and second, that they are indigenous (autochthonous). Were the Athenians Pelasgians, then? Herodotus notes later that the Pelasgians he refers to “arrived at some point in the past and merged with the Athenians” (1.57.2). There were, therefore, Athenians in Attica already. Whether they were Hellenes or not, Herodotus does not say. One must assume that they were not Hellenes in the sense that they were descended from Hellen or from other Greeks. Instead, Herodotus tells us that, “if the Pelasgian language was common here and the Attic peoples (ethnoi) were once Pelasgian, then it seems clear that they changed their language at the same time as they became Hellenes” (1.57.3). To be a Hellene was cultural for the Athenians, not biological. Herodotus never explains where those Athenians who preceded the appearance of the Pelasgians came from, but they have no language of their own and so take up Pelasgian as their native tongue. The Athenians must have been indigenous—Herodotus offers us here nothing to show otherwise—and twice took on new cultural identities when they adopted new languages. Thus Herodotus acknowledges Athenian claims to autochthony, while culturally situating them as Hellenes. As Rosiland Thomas points out, Herodotus furthers this Pelasgian-to-Hellene narrative later when he recounts that the Pelasgian Athenians were once called Kekropidae (after King Kekrops), but became Athenians with the arrival of Erechtheus.
According to Thucydides, Athens alone of other Greek poleis still held its original inhabitants (anthrōpoi ōikoun hoi autoi aiei, 1.2.5), but it increased its population in the earliest days through accepting immigrants (metoikoi) into the citizen community (1.2.6). This situation, however, did not prevent later Athenians from treating their indigenous and earth-born status as a type of purity, a purity that they contrasted with “mixed” (migadas) peoples (Isoc. Pan. 24). Consistent with the logic behind the myths of metals, a “mixed” status is worthless, a fact Theseus reminds Adrastus of in Euripides’ Suppliants (ca. 423 BCE) (Eur. Suppl. 219–25):

You, Adrastus, appear to me to be a fool along with this company. You followed the oracles of Apollo and gave your daughters to foreigners to marry, as if gods, not mortals, decided marriages. But doing so, you have mingled (summeixas) your clear line (lampron) with a muddy one (tholerōi) and sorely wounded your house.

Theseus points here to a concept that was embedded in the Athenian consciousness and that had been codified into law in 451 BCE. That year, at the urging of the politician Perikles, the Athenians passed a law that limited citizenship to those born from both citizen fathers and mothers (Pl. Per. 37.1–5). Up until this time, only the father had been required to hold citizenship. Although the enforcement of this law went into abeyance during the Peloponnesian War for a variety of reasons, ideologically, the city continued to promote in public images, architecture, and performances the idea of the ‘pure’ Athenian of indigenous and earth-born descent. To be an Athenian citizen meant to be a part of Attika, and this bond was not something that could be shared by anyone of non-Athenian decent, who would, thereby, not be descended from indigenous stock.

This notion is captured best in the representation and use of the myth of the Erechtheids. As Clements discusses, the landscape of Athens itself was enlisted to tell the tale of its identity. Such a bond between landscape and identity in this myth was further enacted on the tragic stage in two plays by Euripides, the Erechtheus and Ion. I pass over the Erechtheus because only fragments remain and its treatment of the myth is unclear. The Ion, however, shows clearly the connection made between landscape and identity, embedding Athenian identity within the soil of Attica itself.

**Euripides’ Ion**

*Ion* tells the tale of Erechtheus’ daughter Creousa, who was, prior to the action of the play, raped by Apollo and impregnated. She had exposed the child upon birth, but Hermes, at the request of Apollo, had secreted the child away to Delphi, where he grew under the name Ion as a temple attendant. As the play begins, Creousa has gone with her husband, the Achaean Xouthous, to Delphi to ask the god about their childlessness. Apollo has planned to send his son by Creousa back to Athens with her to resume his rightful place. Before this can happen, however, Creousa attempts to kill Ion (and he her) before it is revealed to her and Ion that they are mother and son. Tension over Athenian ethnic identity and descent run throughout the play—Creousa worries about her husband’s foreignness, Ion is concerned about being accepted in Athens as a foreigner, and Creousa utterly rejects what she sees as a foreign takeover of Athens by Xouthous and Ion (when Ion is mistakenly thought to be the son of Xouthous). The identity of the Athenians—and the royal family in particular—is bound to its place; to be of Attica’s soil alone marks one as belonging in Athens.

Scholars disagree whether *Ion* critiques or supports Athenian autochthony. Lape recently argued that “Characters in the play both embody and act out the belief that citizens were
thought to inherit patriotism and special characteristics that qualified them for citizenship.”

Similar to other scholars’ discussion of autochthony, Lape focuses on the ideological implications of descent and purity of descent within the framework of citizenship. What are the implications of the myth for the construction of indigenous status and its relation to the land? What does Attic soil, and by implication the soil of other lands, imbue its people with? It is more than a democratization of aristocratic eugeneia; it binds the people to their native soil. Ion (and autochthony broadly) is not only about ethnic purity, but about ensuring that people are where they belong. It is about binding a particular people to their environment, even after they leave it, and about privileging those people who ‘belong’ and are rooted in a place, not necessarily in a line of descent.

This dynamic of privileging indigenous inhabitants over immigrants appears vividly in Euripides’ play where Creousa, Ion, Xouthous, and their respective descendants are associated with and disassociated from Athens. When Ion first meets Creousa in the temple of Apollo at Delphi, their exchange establishes the status of Creousa as a descendant of the earth-born Erichthonios. Erichthonios, her grandfather, “sprouted from the earth” (ek gēs . . . eblasten, 267) and into the same earth, Erechtheus returned: “Is your father truly covered over by a chasm in the earth,” (chasma . . . kruptei chthonos, 281). Her family emerged from and will return to the Attic soil. Creousa claims to have gained no good fortune from this miraculous birth of her grandfather (268), although Ion tells her that she has a noble bearing (gennaiotēs), which proves her superior birth (eugenēs) (236–40). This superiority is linked explicitly to her autochthonous status, a fact revealed in the discussion of Xouthous’ identity and his relationship to Athens.

When Ion inquires of Creousa who among the Athenians is her husband, she tells him that he is not a citizen (astos), but an “import” (epaktos) from another land (291). Ion is puzzled at how a foreigner (xenos) could marry a “native” (eugenēs) (293). The answer is that Creousa was given, she says, as a “dowry (phernas) and spear-prize (doros labōn geras)” and she seems none too pleased about it. In fact, she was given to him in return for the help Xouthous gave the Kekropidae in conquering a foreign land (Euboea). Xouthous, regardless of his own high birth (he is the son of Zeus), is not considered by Creousa (or Ion) to have married into Athens. Although she calls him her “well-born husband” (eugenēs posin, 392), divine ancestry does not trump place of birth for the indigenous. Even once Ion has been given to believe that he is Xouthous’ son, he fears rejection by the Athenians, who are “not an imported race” (ouk epeisakton genos, 590). The language of “importing” is contemptuous even when used by Ion of his newly found father, whose status as an import will negatively impact Ion’s own status in the city: “I would be attacked having two diseases (duo nosō): the foreignness (eupaktos) of my father and my own bastard birth (591–2).”

This language of importing juxtaposed with the discourse of autochthony suggests that there is something dangerous and invasive about even the well-intended xenos. The fact that Creousa’s and Xouthous’ subsequent children will all leave Attica to found other Greek tribes, the Dorians and Achaeans (1589–94)—a narrative that aligns with the migratory origin stories of those peoples—suggests that they do not belong in Athens. Of Ion himself, Athena states that he should be returned to Athens, the land of Erichthonios, as it is just (dikaios) that he rule over her land (archein tēs emēs hode chthonos, 1572–4). He will bear four sons, “four born from a single root” (miās rhizēs) who will give their names to the peoples who dwell in her cliffs (1575–8). The land is Athena’s and those who dwell in it must be her children, her chosen ones. The repetition of “my” and “mine” as she speaks of the place that shares her name is emphatic. She will also further lay claim to the land known as Ionia through the grandsons of Ion (1581–8), but they are not imports to these lands; they are simply inhabiting land that rightly belongs to Athena already.
In *Ion*, we see the language of purity, indigenousness, and immigration all juxtaposed, suggesting that at least some Athenians understood themselves as exceptional and superior to other Greeks because they were not migrants, but of the land, perhaps literally. Such a view of themselves was not out of step with other contemporary trends in understanding identity, as seen in the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places*.

**Hippocratic environmental determinism**

The Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* (AWP) is the most explicit presentation of the relationship being imagined between identity and environment, though, in some ways, the most elusive. It posits multiple ways for humanity and nature to interact, but it begins from the premise that climate and geography shape human physiology and character. Thus, the text explains that peoples who reside in extreme climates and geographic points in the oikoumenē have radically different physical appearances from those living in moderate climates with central locations (i.e. mainland Greece). Further, the customs and the character of these peoples are shaped through adaptation to these climates. The author, however, does allow for custom to moderate the impact of climate, especially through the application of technologies to the body. I begin with a short overview of the general theory of environmental determinism in the text, then address two specific tribes: the Scythian Nomads and the Makrokephaloi, a Black Sea people who dwell near the border of Europe and Asia.

The author of *AWP* early establishes a direct connection between the environment and physique. If a city is situated where it is exposed to hot winds (*ta pneumata ta therma*), the water will be somewhat salty, near the surface, and hot in the summer and cold in the winter (*Aer.* 3.1). People living in such a city would as a result have heads full of phlegm (*phlegmatōdēs*) and their bodies (*ta eidēa*) would be rather flabby (*atonotera*) (*Aer.* 3.2). Cities situated exposed to cold winds (*ta psuchra*) would have cold and bitter (*sclēra*) water (*Aer.* 4.2), while the inhabitants’ bodies would be vigorous (*entonos*) and lean (*skeliphros*). Further, they are bilious (*cholōdēs*) and their heads hard. Inhabitants of these cities are said to have fiercer (*agriōtera*) instead of milder (*hemerōtera*) characters (*ta ēthea*) (*Aer.* 4.2–3).

Such relationships between the location and climate of a city and the physiology and character of its inhabitants continues with discussion of cities with an east-west orientation, whose people have good complexions (*euchroa*), and better (*beltiōn*) temperaments (*orgē*) and intelligence (*sunesis*). Further, in the case of east-west orientations, the quality of the people is explicitly understood of the same quality as “all other things that grow there” (*ta alla ta emphuomena*)—they are all “better” (*ameinō*) (5.4). In this case, as well as in the previous and successive examples provided by the author, the orientation and location of the city is linked explicitly to the quality of the water in the city and thereby directly to the health of the inhabitants. The health of the inhabitants is generally discussed with similar references—fertility, physical hardness or softness, cultural adaptation to the landscape—when the author constructs the ethnic stereotypes in the second half of the treatise (e.g. *Aer.* 15 on the Phasians, 19 on the Scythian Nomads).

At section 12, the author switches to a discussion of how geographic location at the extremes of either Europe or Asia impacts the inhabitants. Asia and Europe differ “in all ways” from each other, a fact that causes the peoples (*ethnē*) in each to also differ remarkably, particularly with regards physical form (*tēs morphēs*). According to the author, the impact of the environment is as follows: a temperate, warm, dry climate with no noticeable seasonal shifts, such as that in Asia Minor, leads to milder (*hēpiōteros*)—a term that frequently itself is used of weather and climate—and more even-tempered (*euorgētōteros*) peoples.
Physically, they will be tall and uniform in build. People in such a climate, however, will also be more subject to slavishness and pleasure seeking (Aer. 12). The people’s stature correlates with the vegetation (“everything in Asia is by far more beautiful and larger,” 12.2). There is a large section of text missing wherein the nature of the waters may have been discussed before the author shifted to Egypt (also missing). Given the discussion of waters earlier in the text, however, we can also likely assume that the waters of this region are sweet and engender the desire for pleasure. Peoples who live where Europe and Asia meet in the north, however, are fundamentally different: because the climate moves between extremes of cold and hot and the topography of the land is varied, the physical appearance and character of the peoples who live in the north varies greatly: “The natures of some of them resemble wooded and well-watered mountains. The natures of others resemble airy, dry lands, or marshy meadows, or bare, dry plains” (13.4). Also, variations in weather and landscape explain why “the physiques of Europeans show more variety than those of Asia and why their stature varies greatly even from city to city” (23.2).

The environment of Asia causes its peoples to be less warlike and more prone to live under a monarchy because the climate never changes (Aer. 16); stable climates induce sloth: “Laziness is inherent in a uniform climate. Endurance of body and soul comes from change. Also, cowardice increases both from softness and laziness, while courage increases from endurance and work ethic” (Aer. 23.3). The opposite is true of those peoples on the northern border of Europe and Asia, however, who experience regular shocks (ekplēksies), which results in “more deterioration in the congelation of the seed” (hai gar phthorai pleiones... tou gonou en ti ksumplēksei) as the weather and landscape change, thus making them courageous, antisocial, and passionate. These characteristics also make Europeans less responsive to monarchical governments and more independent (23.4). This focus on the impact of the climate and geography of the “seed” (gonos) as the point of impact is important and runs throughout the text. It is especially important in considering some of the more extreme people in the text, such as the Scythian Nomads and the Makrokephaloi. This discourse of the seed and its generation or deterioration is, I think, a fundamentally important, but underexplored aspect of the treatise that hints at a concept of ethnic purity that runs alongside the other forms of environmental determinism of the text.

While in the text the term ‘Scythian’ denotes the majority of the peoples (genē) of the Black Sea regions, they are divided into numerous tribes (ethnē), who differ from each other based on their climate and landscape. The Scythian Nomads inhabit the steppe and dwell the farthest north of all the Scythian tribes. According to the treatise, the Scythian Nomads are physically uniform as an ethnos because of the shared, stable climate; they are, as it were, “afflicted by cold” (Aer. 18.1). The harshly cold and wet climate of the region lasts year-round and so their summers and winters are the same. As a result (Aer. 19.5):

... they wear the same clothes, eat the same food, breathe the same damp air, drink from the same snow-and ice-melted water, and refrain uniformly from labor. It is well known that where there are no strong shifts in climate neither bodies nor souls can endure physical activity. By necessity, then, their bodies are stout, fleshy, jointless, bloated, and flabby, while their lower bellies are the most bloated bellies of all peoples. It is nearly impossible for a stomach to dry out in such a land with a nature and climate of this sort. And, because of their fatness and smooth fleshiness, the bodies of all, male and female, are identical to each other. Since the seasons are constant, their genetic materials undergo no decay or damage whey they merge, except through trauma or disease.
The Scythians have red hair and red skin because the cold burns them instead of the sun. The idea that cold burns and makes one red complements the commonplace in antiquity that Ethiopians and Indians were black-skinned because the sun had burned them. The culture, character, and physiology of the Scythian Nomads is unique among Scythians, but uniform among themselves due to the stability of the climate and the lack of shocks to alter the gonos, which would cause variety in physical form. Although climate does not shock the “seed” causing variation in Scythia (or in Asia, where the climate is equally uniform), cultural practices do impact the physiology and fertility of these nomads. The men are impotent because of their perpetual horse-riding coupled with poor medical practices, while the women, who lead a lethargic lifestyle in wagons, have bodies so obese that their uteruses are clogged and closed off to a man’s ejaculate (Aer. 21.2). This situation bodes ill for retaining a consistent population. However, the author says that some Scythian men avoid impotence and breed with slave-women (Aer. 21.3); presumably this is how they perpetuate their people. The consistently harsh climate itself, more extreme in the far north than elsewhere, can be assumed to impact the seed by creating physiques among the Scythians unique to their climate; its consistent cold ensures the uniformity of the physiques of Scythians even for children not born of Scythian women. The lack of decay noted in the above passage means that the seed does not change during coagulation to impact this uniformity, but the impact of the extreme climate still marks the bodies of the Scythian Nomads as abnormal.

The infertility of the Scythians is one mark not only of the impact of climate on custom (they live as nomads because they live in the Scythian desert, Aer. 18), but of the inferiority of the Scythian Nomads to their Greek counterparts who dwell in a properly moderate climate. This inferiority is further marked by the necessary use of technē in order for Scythians to adapt and ‘normalize’ their bodies. The author assumes that the cold and wet climate would make them “by necessity” appear as “marvels of flab and fat” (Aer. 20), a nature of the sort that is incapable of fertility (Aer. 21), and yet they do not; images of the Scythians found throughout the Greek world represent them as fit. The author instead imagines that the Scythian Nomads used cauterization in order to reduce the bloatedness in their shoulders, arms, breasts, hips, and loins. The evidence of this cauterization, according to Airs, is “obvious” when one looks at a Scythian and sees that he is not fat.

The author particularly singles out the Scythian Nomads and other peoples in the treatise as anomalous people because they differ greatly from Greeks and other northern peoples. The author states that he does not discuss others because he considers them similar to the Greeks. The implication, therefore, is a type of hierarchy or, at least, ranking, of sameness or difference. This difference and inferiority is further marked by the Scythians’ persistent infertility (and their failed cures for it) and their need for technē in order to appear ‘normal.’

A people similar to the Scythian Nomads in this regard are the Makrokephaloi. With the Makrokephaloi, we see two dynamics at play: first, the use of technology to alter their nature—a sign of lesser peoples—and, second, a recognition they can only maintain their adaptations of their bodies through restricting intermarriage with outside peoples. The physical changes enacted through technology could become heritable if the alteration through custom persisted over time and so long as they remained an insular people. According to Hesiod, the Makrokephaloi were born of the union of the genos of women descended from Pandora with the gods (Most Fr. 101 (Eratosthenes FGrHist. 224F 157a + f = Strabo 1.2.35). They apparently looked like everyone else in the beginning, with heads of standard shape. Conical-shaped heads, however, seemed to them more aesthetically pleasing, and so they began to massage the heads of their infants until they achieved a conehead. The new shape then became a heritable characteristic: “Custom worked in the beginning in such a way that it
forced nature to follow suit” (Aer. 14.3–4). It was only intermarriage with other tribes that eventually caused the cone shape to diminish.

The case of the Makrokephaloi is interesting and is one of a number of instances in *AWP* where human intervention alters the environmentally determined or ‘natural’ appearance of a people. This case is unique, however, in that over time, nature itself adapted the alteration and made it heritable. The Makrokephaloi themselves are fairly uniform in appearance—they live in a region along the Phasis River, an area identified as fairly uniform in climate. Thus, when they consistently work to alter their appearance, nature helps them retain this uniform shape since uniformity of shape is endemic to a stable climate such as they inhabit. This process was known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the heritability of acquired characteristics and was a hallmark of Neo-Lamarckian evolutionary theory. It was, in fact, the thing that made evolution possible. The Makrokephaloi manage to create such a consistent (and to them pleasant) adaptation that nature could not help but intervene. And yet, this preferred body shape was eventually lost because the Makrokephaloi became a mixed people through marriage outside of their group. Once again, we see hints of a concept of ethnic purity; even though the conehead would have been considered unpleasing to a Greek (Hesiod places them among the children of the *genos* of women and links them to other oddities of nature like the Pygmies and Kunokephaloi), to the Makrokephaloi and others, it was their defining characteristic—they are named for it, after all—and once they permitted intermarriage with non-Makrokephaloi, that defining characteristic is lost.

**Conclusion**

There are a number of ways in which the ancient Greeks imagined the relationship between identity and environment. They may appear on the surface wildly inconsistent and they certainly cannot be constrained into a single theory of identity and environment. Nonetheless, some underlying conceptual affinities and some modes of thought connect them. In each case, an ethnic group shares physical features and characteristics in part due to their relationship to the earth or environment. In each case, the ‘pure’ or ‘unmixed’ people are represented as better off or superior. Deviations from this ‘pure’ form are represented as ‘corruptions’ or ‘deteriorations’ of the human ‘seed’ (*gonos*), though further consideration of this idea in light of the medical texts and Aristotle is necessary. It is possible to say that the Greeks tended to understand that specific peoples were bound to specific lands, that the characteristics of particular lands and climates had determinative effects on human appearance, behavior, and moral character, and that some geographic and climatic locations were superior and others inferior. There is also sufficient evidence to suggest that some Greeks viewed intermarriage between ethnic or tribal groups as a risky venture because it could lead to degeneration of a people’s character and customs and a deformation of their physical appearance.

It must be admitted that this complex of ideas was not the only way to conceptualize the problem of human diversity, political and social status, marriage, and citizenship. There are other conceptualizations, e.g. the variety of migration stories also in circulation in antiquity, which coexist and even conflict with environmental ideas. But we can hardly expect consistency here. The Greeks were not a unified people and they interacted with a broad range of non-Greeks whose own ideas and customs varied greatly. To expect a singular mode of thought or a single theory of human diversity in this situation would be foolish. That said, although inconsistent, we *can* see throughout an interest in categorizing and ranking of peoples in a way that normalizes one’s own identity while marking that of others as defective or lesser. While some scholars prefer to link this interest to colonization and imperial
aspirations, these are not always underscoring Greek interactions with each other or non-Greeks. And even if it is linked to these dynamics in one manner or another, it isn’t the only or necessarily primary mechanism driving the formation of identity groups. The question of whether this ranking is racism, proto-racism, or ethnocentrism is, I believe, the wrong question. Rather, instead of attempting to discover if the ancients categorized foreign peoples in a manner similar to the way moderns do, we should focus on the processes of identity formation and try to engage the ancients on their own terms. As such, I think we can most safely link their ways of engaging with foreignness to a desire to know and understand that often emerges from a wide range of motivators including curiosity, wonder, and fear of difference or the unknown.68

Notes

1 All text for Herodotus follows Hude. Other texts will be noted when cited. All translations of ancient authors are my own unless otherwise noted.
2 See Thomas 2000, 31–2 for further discussion.
3 For discussions of built environment, see Clements and Spencer, this volume. On building programs as cultural enterprises that impacted ethnic identity in the ancient world, see, for example, Woolf 1994 (Roman East), Rowlandson 2003 (Alexandria and Egypt), and Andrade 2013 (Greco-Roman Syria).
4 Kaplan, this volume, and 2014.
5 For an overview of scholarship on the distinction, see Kaplan 2014 with bibliography and Gruen 2013. Fraser 2009 gives a full treatment to the use of various ethnic terminologies as a supplement to the Lexicon of Greek Personal Names.
6 Or, as they are now officially termed ‘Caucasian,’ ‘African,’ ‘Asian,’ ‘Native American,’ or ‘Hispanic.’ On the issue of ‘race’ as a modern, not an ancient category of thought, see Isaac 2004, 1–39; Hannaford 1996, 17–86, and McCoskey 2012, 1–34. Kametkar 2002 makes one of the sounder arguments I have seen for using the concept of race in studies of antiquity. On ‘whiteness’ as a non-racial category antiquity, see Dec 2003. Sassi 2001 discusses the gender status of whiteness extensively. The idea of a singular black ‘race’ in antiquity is disputed as well, though there is a good deal of scholarship on ‘blacks’ in antiquity, including Snowden 1970 and 1991, Thompson 1989, and Bindman, Gates Jr., and Dalton 2010. There has been a great deal of controversy surrounding the issues of race in antiquity, the result of assuming that modern categories and systems of thought are mirrored easily in antiquity. I do not intend to engage in a debate over ‘blackness’ or ‘whiteness’ as ancient racial categories. There is no evidence that they apply in the classical period except in the eyes of the modern scholar. ‘Blackness’ as an idea existed, but it was not a genos, ethnos, phulē, etc. On whether there was such a thing as ethnicity in antiquity, see Gruen 2013.
7 This is not an exhaustive list of terms that can be used of identity groups in the Greek sources. These are simply the most common. Herodotus 1.56 uses genos to refer to Ionian and Dorian, but ethnos for Hellene and Pelasgian.
8 On the idea that racism or ‘proto-racism’ could exist in antiquity while race did not, see Isaac 2004 and 2006 and the essays in Eliav-Feldman, Isaac, and Ziegler 2009. See contra Tuplin 1999. Gruen 2013, 2–3 suggests that the ‘ethnic’ turn in scholarship is an attempt to avoid the cultural discomfort with the concept of ‘race,’ a term McCoskey 2012 intentionally uses in order to cause her readers discomfort. He sees, however, no difference between ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity,’ as both focus on biological associations and heredity. See Hall 1997 and 2002 and the essays in Malkin 2001 for examples of reading modern concepts of ethnicity among the ancient Greeks.
9 For discussion of the use of the term ‘racialist’ to define the Citizenship Law, see Lape 2010, 31–41. Her decision to read the ancient Athenian myth of autochthony and to define its citizenship through the lens of modern race theory has been controversial. See, for example, the reviews of Vlassopoulos 2011 and Blok 2014.
10 Herodotus provides an example of how moving to a new geographic region would not change the essential culture of a people in his discussion of the Colchians (2.104–5), whom he asserts originated in Egypt based on their appearance (melagchoroes eisi kai oulotriches), on the practice of circumcision (which is shared with the Ethiopians), and on the way they work linen, which is unique to Egypt.
For Herodotus, the cultural practices are the most sure identifiers of ethnicity since, as he says, appearance does not necessarily tell him anything, “for others are also such.”

On the eastern origins of Hesiod’s genesis of metal men, see Van Norden 2015, 50 with notes and bibliography.

Gold and silver were extracted from lead, copper, and other ores through cupellation in antiquity. In cupellation, the metals are heated to high temperatures that separate off the precious metals (which melt at much higher temperatures) from the base metals. The process is rather simple—because the base metals oxidize while the noble metals do not, the metals separate easily (though gold and silver do not separate easily from each other).

Van Norden 2015, passim discusses Hesiod’s golden men at length and the legacy of the ‘Golden Age’ narrative that derived from him into future utopic literature in Greece and Rome.

Not to mention that fact that iron, until bronze, silver and gold, rusts. There are intriguing possible connections between Prometheus as master of fire and technai with his later mythology as creator of mankind. There may be some component of ascribing inferiority to Prometheus man versus Olympian-made man as well as connections of Prometheus’ granting fire to man with the creating of Pandora, the bane of humanity. In Prometheus Bound, Prometheus tells the chorus that he “planted blind hope within them” (tu̱phlas elpidas, 250), perhaps a reference to Pandora and the jar. Prometheus also notes in the play that it was he who led them to discover the metals hidden in the earth—copper, iron, silver, gold— and how to work them (Prom. 500–503). Surely, the play’s author is engaging the tradition of Hesiod and the relationship between the genē of men and Pandora. On Prometheus technai, see Calame 2010, 36–48.

They are said to have mothers, but where the mothers come from is unclear. The poem clearly states that Zeus made them, not that they were born.

I have retained the full Greek passage here because of its fragmentary nature.

This is not a comprehensive overview of stories of autochthony or gègenesis. Such a discussion would take up more than the allotted space for this chapter. I have attempted to highlight particularly informative passages that show intellectual consistency with each other. For a general introduction to autochthony and identity, see Morgan 2014.

The story of Prometheus as the maker of humans is a rather late invention, appearing for certain in Ovid (Met. 1.76–88) at the earliest, though it may possibly have been circulating in the fourth century BCE; there are hints of a creator-craftsman god in Plato’s Protagoras and Timaeus. See Stafford 2009, 430–43.

On the origins of the term autochthôn and its meanings, see Rossivach 1987.


From LSF: “mix something dry with something wet, mostly with a sense of mixing so as to spoil or defile (gaı̂n hudei)”, Hes. Op. 61.”

On the pithos as womb and sex as the source of evils, see Glenn 1977; Sissa 1990, 154–5; Zeitlin 1996, 59–60.

Louraux 1993, 88–102 discusses the distinction at some length, especially in connection with Semonides.

I discuss the Makrokephaloi and Scythians below. Most Fr. 98 (P. Oxy. 1358 fr. 2 col. I; 15: Strabo Geo. 7.3.7) suggests the Melanes (Black ones) and Ethiopians and amenēnoi (strengthless) Pygmies are born from Hephaistos with some unknown woman. The other distant peoples mentioned are the Hyperboreans, Laistrygonians, and Kephallians. Most Fr. 101 (Eratosthenes FGrHist. 224F 157a + f = Strabo 1.2.35) mentions the Makrokephaloï, Pygmies, and Half-Dogs (Hemikunias). On these peoples, see Garland, this volume.

Later versions of this story make the laas-born men the replacement for all humanity destroyed in the flood (Apoll. 1.7.2; Ovid. Met. 1.381–415).

Especially in funeral oratory and in public monuments like the Erechtheion (see Clements, this volume). I would even argue that the idea that all Athenians who died in battle should be returned and interred in Attic soil was a public/popular manifestation of this discourse. Practical considerations aside, the myth of autochthony had an ideological life of its own beyond the identity politics of the average Athenian; it was meant, in many ways, to supersede local identities that ere still strongly embedded among the classical citizenry long after the Cleisthenic reforms. On the funeral oration and autochthony, see still Louraux 1986. On the continuations of local identities as competitors with Athenian identity, see, on the Acharnians specifically, Kellogg 2013, Ch. 4, esp.

Gruen 2013, 4; See also Kaplan, this volume, and 2014. Gruen points to the criticisms of autochthony myth in Plato’s Menexenus as support for the lack of widespread support within Athens.
Lape 2010 argues, however, that the discourse of autochthony borrowed from elite discourses of descent and privilege. It may have been the crassness and even comic nature of the autochthony myth (and its democratizing impact) that elites such as Plato scorned, not the notion of Athenian exceptionalism or ‘purity.’ As Pelling concludes, in Athenian rhetoric, “autochthony was a good thing to have” (2009, 474). But it should not surprise us that they attempted to make their autochthony superior to that claimed by others. On negative types of autochthony, see Calame 1985.

We might consider those who believe absolutely that the United States a “white, Christian nation,” despite ample evidence that the country has been culturally, religiously, and ethnically diverse since its origins.


On the citizenship law and relevant bibliography, see Kennedy 2014, 12–25.


Bakewell 1999, 10; Kennedy 2014, chs. 2 and 4.

On landownership/agrarian ideology and citizen identity, see Morgan 2014, 68–73.

Meaning, it bound the landless craftsmen, sailors, and others to the city despite their lack of agrarian roots: Kennedy 2014, 8.

Strabo later asserts that the Pelasgians were Arcadians, citing Hesiod.

On the Pelasgians in Herodotus, see Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 and McInerney 2014.

And then added the name Ionians, when Ion, son of Xouthos becomes their leader (8.44.2): Thomas 2000, 120. Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 does not see the Athenians/Pelasgian connection incompatible with Athenians as Hellenes, Pelasgians being just another of the Greek ethnē (138–40, esp.).

On Thucydides’ use of the autochthony topos, especially with respect to non-Athenians, see Pelling 2009, 476–9.

Kennedy 2014, 17–19, with bibliography.

The right of enktesis is a manifestation of this connection—one may not own land, but they have the right to ownership. See Leão 2012 on enktesis and Euripides’ Ion.

See Clements, this volume.

For example, Saxonhouse 1992, 77 writes that Euripides’ decision to assert the importance of woman in preserving Athenian purity works against the idea of autochthony, which Loraux 1993 and others argue elides out women.

Lape 2010, 95.

See also 668–75 where Ion hopes that his mother is an Athenian since “a foreigner, even if a citizen in name, comes to that pure city (katharan polin), his tongue is slavish and he lacks parrhesia.”

See Kennedy 2014, 26–38 on a similar dynamic in Aeschylus’ Suppliants.

This phrase concerning the descendants of Ion as born of the same root recalls the entrance of Athena in Aeschylus’ Eumenides where she states that the land of the Troad had been given to her “root and stock for all time.” Her claims to land outside of Athens run deep. On Athena as synonymous with Athens in tragedy and civic discourse more generally in Athens, and for tragedy and Athena in particular as a vehicle for imperial expansion, see Kennedy 2009. On the colonialist roots of Apollo and the name Ion in the play, see Doughtery 1996, 260–62.

On water and health in AWP, see Jouanna 2012 See also Lincoln 2000, 15–20.

See Thomas 2000, 35–74, and Bosak-Schroeder and Almagor, this volume, for discussion of health as an ethnic category. On the gender implications of some of these stereotypes, see Sassi 2001, Ch. 3, esp., and King 1998, 21–39.

On the waters of Asia as inducing pleasure-seeking, see Harmon, this volume. An apt comparison is to the Lotus Eaters of Homer’s Odyssey.

Expanded upon at Aer. 24.
The text here recalls Cyrus’ admonition to his troops in Herodotus cited above. Herodotus considers such shocks resulting from climate shifts as the cause of ill health (2.77.3); just as they alter physical appearance, so too they cause diseases. It is only a short next step to equating visible ethnic differences with being diseased, or with monstrosity or deformity.

Roman authors such as Pliny (Natural History 2.80), Vitruvius (de Architectura 6.1.3), and Seneca (de Ira 2.15) who adhere to the environmental view of character, classify the Germans much like how Greek authors represent the southernmost of the northern tribes whose bodies undergo repeated shocks from the fluctuation of extreme temperatures and landscape. See Irby, this volume.

But it is not addressed in On the Seed and it is unclear to me yet whether the idea occurs outside of this text.

Perhaps a comparison with other Hippocratic texts or Aristotle’s embryology will elucidate the matter further, but that is for another study. Another comparata is the Aristotelian Problemata (3rd century BCE–5th century CE) 14, which lies outside the time frame of this paper. See recently, however, Leunissen 2015, 190–213. Ward 2002 also discusses the climatic impact on ethnē in Aristotle’s Politics, which appears to follow the Hippocratic tradition rather directly. The Problemata, as Leunissen remarks, is focused on “the causal interaction between the mixture of the environment and the mixture underlying the material properties of the peoples living in that environments” (190).

The fertility of the women in various climates is a focus throughout the work. Some modern studies of the impact of extreme obesity on fertility look backward to this text as early recognition of the connection. Quoting the description of the Scythian nomads specifically, one such study comments: “A thousand years ago [sic], Hippocrates has already recognized the influence of nutritional status and obesity on reproductive function . . .” (Diamanti-Kandarakis and Bergiele 2001).

On images of Scythians in Greek sources, see Ivanchik 2005.

This hierarchy is made explicit in the Roman authors who considered the temperate zone where Rome was located to be the best climate to produce the best peoples. See Spencer, this volume.

Aer. 22. The cure they use, according to the author, is to cut the vein behind the ears—this ‘cure’ is what actually causes the impotence, according to the text.

Possibly Hephaistos, in a transparent attempt to connect physical difference with deformity and the lame god. On deformity and associations with Hephaistos, see Garland 2010, 61–3, esp.

The ancient notion of heredity expressed in this treatise lacks a complete understanding as to what is and what is not a heritable quality and how something becomes so. For example: “If, then, bald children come from bald parents and grey-eyed children from grey-eyed parents and deformed children from deformed parents, and so on, would it not be the case with other physical characteristics?” (Aer. 14.4).

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Bibliography
Airs, water, metals, earth


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