

The controversy over Ancient Greek as a school subject: education, ideology, and politics in times of crisis*

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This article examines the controversy over Ancient Greek [AG] as a school subject, a controversy that re-emerged in 2016, when SYRIZA was in power. The issue is ideologically charged: classical antiquity has played a fundamental role in shaping modern Greek ethnic identity. The arguments for and against teaching AG as a school subject are analysed and explained in relation to the ideological preferences, strategies and interests of the involved agents. The polarization of the arguments is interpreted within the broader context of the financial crisis, as an attempt by the agents involved to reinforce the left/right divide, which was significantly blurred after the adoption of austerity policies by both the self-proclaimed leftist SYRIZA and the conservative New Democracy parties.

Keywords: Ancient Greek language; Ancient Greek teaching controversy; Greek financial crisis; ideology

Introduction

This article analyses the controversy over the teaching of Ancient Greek in secondary education in Greece, which re-emerged in 2016 when SYRIZA (Coalition of the

* An earlier version of this article was presented at the *Griekenlandcentrum* of Ghent University on 15 May 2019. I am grateful to Maria Tomadaki for providing me with sources of the controversy and for many fruitful discussions. My sincere gratitude to Peter Mackridge, Spiros Moschonas, David Ricks, and the anonymous reviewer for their useful comments and suggestions, as well as for the careful editing of my article. Many thanks also to Thomas Kalesios and Symeon Koniaris for helping me find books at a time when libraries were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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DOI: [10.1017/byz.2021.4](https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2021.4)

Radical Left) was in power together with the small right-wing ANEL party (Independent Greeks). The goal of this research was to gain an insight into why the proposed reforms acquired the character of an ideological struggle between tradition and progress, between right and left, viewed respectively as ‘sacred’ or ‘profane’, depending on the standpoint adopted. To that end, the article makes three main claims. First, that Ancient Greek (AG) as a school subject is ideologically charged, because classical antiquity constitutes the very foundation of the ideological schema of the unbroken continuity of the Greek nation. Second, that such debates and controversies reflect current trends in curricular and programme development, having to do not so much with the idealized classical past as with digital literacy, foreign language learning, international perspectives, and multiculturalism. Third, that the recent resurgence of this controversy over the teaching of AG can be adequately understood only in the wider context of the Greek debt crisis, which sheds light on the strategies and interests of the main political parties and professional agents that participated in this debate.

Ancient Greek: more than a school subject

Ancient Greek (AG) as a school subject in Greece carries strong ideological connotations and has a powerful emotional impact; the aim of teaching AG is not solely the learning of ancient Greek language and literature but the preservation and reinforcement of a sense of identification with glorious ancestors, even if this is not always consciously to the fore.¹ Classical antiquity occupies a distinct place in the modern Greek collective imaginary not only because of the cultural achievements of that period but, more importantly, because modern Greeks perceive themselves as direct descendants of the ancients. This perception has its roots in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the modern Greek identity was formed and established.² The link between the modern and the ancient Greeks was of vital importance for the justification of the Greek Revolution against the Ottoman Empire. Intellectuals influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment had prepared the ground by highlighting the role of classical knowledge in the ‘awakening’ of the Greek national consciousness.³ A lack of learning (ἀμάθεια), together with the

1 Sociologically speaking, the distinction here is between manifest and latent functions, see R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York 1968) 115–22.

2 The literature on the formation and content of the Greek national identity is vast. For a recent assessment, see R. Beaton, *Greece: biography of a modern nation* (London 2019). For the specific relationship between Greek language and identity, see P. Mackridge, *Language and National Identity in Greece, 1766–1976* (Oxford 2009); A. Liakos, “‘From Greek into our common language’: Language and history in the making of Modern Greece”, in A.-F. Christidis (ed.), *A History of Ancient Greek: from the beginnings to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2007) 1287–95.

3 Korais’ editions of ancient writers are a prime example, see P. M. Kitromilides (ed.), *Adamantios Korais and the European Enlightenment* (Oxford 2010).

interests of the great powers of the time, was commonly seen as the prime reason for Modern Greece's inferior status compared with its glorious ancient past.⁴

The process of identity formation was long and tense, and it issued in the so-called 'Language Question', the controversy over the appropriate official language of the newly liberated Greek state. Demoticists supported an everyday form of the Greek language, while archaists and purists advocated varieties of the ancient Greek language or a simplified imitation of it called *katharevousa*.⁵ The latter, though distant from the ideal model of Atticism, had been chosen as a kind of stepping-stone toward this final aim. Demotic, by contrast, was viewed as distorting the true national identity on the grounds that it included loan words from Turkish and other foreign languages. It is therefore not surprising that in early 1834 the newly formed state specified AG rather than the vernacular as the language of all school textbooks.⁶ Finally, the artificial and archaizing *katharevousa* became the official language of the state administration and education, a situation that lasted until the official establishment of demotic in 1976. During that period *katharevousa* continued to function as a status symbol, distinguishing the cultural and political elites from the lower social strata, which were deprived of that 'cultural capital'.⁷

The diachronic ideological charge of AG can explain why discussions about the content, the language (original vs translation), the teaching methods and even the number of teaching hours of this school subject lead to fierce public disputes. Of course, the broader socio-political context determines the form and the intensity of such controversies. Characteristically, the teaching of ancient Greek texts in the original prevailed during periods of nationalist fervour in the nineteenth, but also over most of the twentieth century, with the exception of the periods initiated by the legislative reforms of 1929, 1964, and 1976.⁸ The first two of these reforms introduced the teaching of ancient Greek texts in translation, but they were abandoned after a short implementation period. However, the educational reform of 1976 established the teaching of ancient Greek texts in the *gymnasio*⁹ through translation alone, leaving the teaching of the original ancient texts to the *lykeio*.¹⁰ This reform lasted for sixteen years. In 1992, during a surge of nationalism over the 'Macedonian Question', ancient Greek texts in the original were reintroduced in the *gymnasio*

4 See the words of the Philhellene and the enslaved Hellas (personified as a woman) in the pre-Revolutionary satirical poem *Ρωσσοαγγλογάλλος*, K. Th. Dimaras, *Ο Ρωσσοαγγλογάλλος: κριτική έκδοση με επιλεγόμενα* (Athens 1999).

5 For details see Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*.

6 *Op. cit.*, 162–3.

7 See P. Bourdieu, 'The forms of capital', in J. G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York 1986) 241–58.

8 See Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*, 294, 315–16, 319–20.

9 The *gymnasio* is a three-year junior high school (compulsory education).

10 The *lykeio* is a non-compulsory three-year secondary school following the *gymnasio*.

curriculum, this time alongside translated texts – a practice that still applies today, aside from variations in the allocation of teaching time.

The recent controversy: background information

The teaching of Ancient Greek reappeared as an issue in the public domain in May 2016 in the context of the National Dialogue in Education launched in December 2015 by the SYRIZA government.¹¹ The Special Committee for this dialogue justified the need for a general educational reform with reference to the ongoing financial crisis and to advances in science and technology.¹² The reform was framed as a prerequisite for overcoming the crisis and for reinforcing the democratic values of the *Μεταπολίτευση* (régime change) period¹³ in an era of great transformation: globalization, digital culture, flexible education. Very quickly, the issue of the teaching of AG acquired its own dynamic, becoming the focal point of a fierce politico-ideological controversy.

The flashpoint was an open letter signed by fifty-six Greek academics on 25 May 2016.¹⁴ They proposed that ancient Greek texts in the original should be replaced with works in translation and that more teaching hours of Modern Greek should be introduced into the *gymnasio* curriculum. However, they left open as a possibility the teaching of the original texts in the third year of the *gymnasio*. Antonis Liakos, professor of contemporary history at the University of Athens and head of this Special Committee, shared such views, proposing a ‘cross-section subject of history, culture, literature (*grammatologia*) and art’ in the *gymnasio*, and the systematic teaching of AG

11 The focus of my analysis on the period of the recent financial crisis by no means implies that this was the first reappearance of the issue after 1976. A lively public dialogue developed in 1986–7, when the Education Minister, Antonis Tritsis, raised the issue of the reintroduction of the original AG texts in the *gymnasio*: see D. Koutsou, ‘Ο διάλογος για τα αρχαία ελληνικά στην εφημερίδα Ελευθεροτυπία’, *Γλώσσα* 59 (2004) 75–83; Ch. Kosegian, ‘Αρχαία Ελληνικά: Προτότυπο ή μετάφραση; Η διαμάχη όπως αποτυπώνεται στα εκπαιδευτικά περιοδικά πριν τη μεταρρύθμιση του 1992’, in 6ο Επιστημονικό Συνέδριο Ιστορίας της Εκπαίδευσης *Ελληνική Γλώσσα και Εκπαίδευση* (Patras 2011).

12 See A. Liakos, ‘Ο εθνικός και κοινωνικός διάλογος για την παιδεία’, *Χρόνος* 32 (December 2015), available at <http://chronomag.eu/index.php/index.php/dialogos-paideia.html> [accessed 2 February 2020]; A. Liakos, ‘Εισαγωγή του Προέδρου’, in *Εθνικός και κοινωνικός διάλογος για την παιδεία. Πορίσματα*, 27 May 2016, available at https://dialogos.minedu.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PORISMATA_DIALOGOU_2016.pdf, 2–17 [accessed 2 February 2020]; N. Filis, *Μήνυμα του Υπουργού Παιδείας, Έρευνας και Θρησκευμάτων, Νίκου Φίλη*, available at <https://dialogos.minedu.gov.gr/μήνυμα-υπουργού-παιδείας-έρευνας-και/> [accessed 2 February 2020].

13 This is the period after the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974. There is no consensus about the exact end of the *Μεταπολίτευση* (1989? 2010?) or about its sub-periods; see further M. Avgeridis, E. Gazi, K. Kornetis (eds), *Μεταπολίτευση: Η Ελλάδα στο μεταίχμιο δύο αιώνων* (Athens 2015).

14 See ‘Αύξηση ωρών διδασκαλίας των Νέων Ελληνικών στο Γυμνάσιο και κατάργηση της διδασκαλίας των Αρχαίων Ελληνικών από το πρωτότυπο, προτείνουν 56 πανεπιστημιακοί δάσκαλοι’, 24 May 2016, available at <https://www.esos.gr/arhra/44174/ayxisi-oron-didaskalias-ton-neon-ellinikon-sto-gymnasio-kai-katargisi-tis-didaskalias> [accessed 2 February 2020].

in the *lykeio* as a ‘foreign language’ to pupils wishing to study humanities in higher education.¹⁵ These proposals aroused a great deal of public debate. But most of all, it was a phrase used by the Education Minister, Nikos Filis, that fuelled the controversy. In a public discussion (30 May 2016) he characterized as ‘παρά φύσιν’ (against nature) the teaching of three hours of Ancient Greek through original texts in the first year of the *gymnasio* compared with the two hours of Modern Greek.¹⁶ The phrase was reproduced by political opponents out of context, giving the impression that the minister stigmatized the teaching of AG in general as being *παρά φύσιν*.¹⁷

The reform proposals became the target of fierce public criticism, initially from traditionally zealous advocates of AG¹⁸ and from professional groups that represent the interests of language and literature teachers (*philologoi*)¹⁹ and appear in the public sphere as institutional guardians of classical studies. To name a few: the Department of Classical Philology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,²⁰ the Panhellenic Association of Philologists,²¹ and the Association of Greek Philologists.²² An important public intervention came from Professor Franco Montanari, president of the International Federation of Associations of Classical Studies, who addressed Minister Filis in an open letter, fiercely criticizing the proposed educational policies as a ‘severe blow to Classical Education’²³ and thus giving a broader (international) character to the reactions. The anti-reform group clearly tried to gain prestige and

15 A. Liakos, ‘Υπόμνημα: εμείς και τα αρχαία’, *Χρόνος* 38 (June 2016), available at <https://chronos.faired.net/liakos-emeis-arxaia> [accessed 2 February 2020]. All translations are mine, and the format of the original quotations (e.g., capitalization, emphasis) has been maintained.

16 ‘Ο Υπουργός Παιδείας για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά’ [video], 30 May 2016, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=640JvR3_TVc [accessed 9 February 2020].

17 For instance, the vice-president of New Democracy, Adonis Georgiadis, emphatically repeated: ‘the Education Minister has said that it is against nature for the Greeks to learn Ancient Greek, against nature’: ‘Ο Αδωνis Γεωργιάδης επιστρέφει δριμύτατος στην “Ελλήνων Έγερσις”’ [video], 3 June 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVpN0yLOV7U> [accessed 2 June 2020].

18 See the linguist Georgios Babiniotis’ public response to the letter of the fifty-six academics, G. Babiniotis, ‘Θα ξαναδιώξουμε τον αρχαίο λόγο;’, *Τα Νέα*, 28 May 2016, available at <https://www.arsakeio.gr/gr/latest/28264-8a-ksanadiwksoume-ton-arxaio-logo> [accessed 8 July 2020]. Babiniotis’ views are discussed in detail later in this paper.

19 In the Greek educational system, the *philologoi* teach Greek language and literature of all periods (Classical, Byzantine, and Modern).

20 ‘Κείμενο θέσεων για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά από τον Τομέα Κλασικής Φιλολογίας του Τμήματος Φιλολογίας της Φιλοσοφικής Σχολής του ΕΚΠΑ’, 31 May 2016, available at <https://www.esos.gr/arthra/44320/keimeno-theseon-gia-ta-arhaia-ellinika-apo-ton-tomea-klasikis-filologias-toy-tmimatos> [accessed 9 February 2020].

21 ‘Σκληρή γλώσσα φιλόλογον κατά Ν. Φίλη για τα Αρχαία’, 7 June 2016, available at <https://www.esos.gr/arthra/44437/skliri-glossa-filologon-kata-n-fili-gia-ta-arhaia> [accessed 9 February 2020].

22 ‘Υπόμνημα της Εταιρείας Ελλήνων Φιλολόγων προς τον Υπουργό Παιδείας για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά’, 4 July 2016, available at <https://www.schooltime.gr/2016/07/13/ypomnima-etairias-ellinon-filologon-pros-ton-ypourgo-paideias-gia-ta-arxaia-ellinika/> [accessed 11 February 2020].

23 ‘Greece introduces severe restrictions upon Ancient Greek in schools’, 5 September 2016, available at <http://fiecn.net.blogspot.com/2016/09/greece-introduces-severe-restrictions.html> [accessed 11 February 2020].

legitimacy through the promotion of this intervention. The dispute became increasingly politicized, and New Democracy (ND), the main opposition party at that time, placed itself at the forefront of the actors who opposed the reforms, thereby reinforcing the anti-SYRIZA block. An example of the politicization of the issue is the parliamentary debate that took place in September 2016 between the deputy minister of education and professor of philosophy, Theodosios Pelegrinis, and the right-wing politician and vice-president of ND, Adonis Georgiadis.²⁴ His political position, ideological views and professional interests made him an ideal person to lead the charge for AG: he is also manager of the Εκδόσεις Γεωργιάδης–Βιβλιοθήκη των Ελλήνων (Georgiadis Publications–Library of the Greeks), television books salesman, and founder of the Ελληνική Αγωγή (Greek Education) Studies Centre, which aims at promoting the ‘diachronic continuity’ of ancient Greek language and civilization, as stated on the Centre’s official website.²⁵ As he declares there, his ‘aim is to convey in practice the message that the Greek language is single (ενιαία), its ancient form is very much alive... it has pulse, strength, essence and is worthy to survive’.²⁶

In the end, the teaching hours of AG were reduced from three to two, and the subject was removed from the written examinations taken at school.²⁷ The debate continued even after the removal of Filis from his post as education minister: the general direction of the educational policy under the new minister, Kostas Gavroglou, did not change, and examination guidelines were revised accordingly, emphasis being placed on general comprehension over close translation of an AG set text.²⁸ With the same reform, Latin became an optional course in the third year of the *lykeio*, replaced by sociology for the National Examinations for admission to higher education institutions.²⁹ These

24 See ‘Επίκαιρη ερώτηση Άδωνι Γεωργιάδη για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά’ [video], 22 September 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RBwMdAhoPU> [accessed 11 February 2020].

25 See A. Georgiadis, ‘Ποιοι είμαστε’, available at <https://ellinikiagogi.gr/poioi-eimaste/> [accessed 11 February 2020].

26 *Op.cit.*

27 See the Greek Government Gazette of 9 June 2016, Issue No. 1640, available at https://www.esos.gr/sites/default/files/articles-legacy/fek_gymnasio.pdf [accessed 20 August 2020]; A. Lakasas, ‘Αλλαγές στο Γυμνάσιο: σε ποια μαθήματα θα εξετάζονται οι μαθητές – εκτός τα αρχαία και τα θρησκευτικά’, *Καθημερινή*, 8 September 2016, available at <https://www.kathimerini.gr/873908/article/epikairothta/ellada/allages-sto-gymnasio-se-poia-ma8hmata-8a-e3etazontai-oi-ma8htes---ektos-ta-arxaia-kai-ta-8rhskeytika> [accessed 20 August 2020].

28 ‘Πανελλήνιες 2019: Τέλος η μετάφραση στο γνωστό στα Αρχαία’, 30 August 2018, available at <https://www.iefimerida.gr/news/440509/panellinies-2019-telos-i-metafrasi-sto-gnosto-sta-arhaia-oles-oi-allages> [accessed 11 February 2020].

29 See ‘Νέο σύστημα για τις Πανελλαδικές: Σημαντικές αλλαγές ανακοίνωσε ο Κ. Γαβρόγλου’, 3 September 2018, *CNN Greece*, available at <https://www.cnn.gr/news/ellada/story/145205/neo-systima-gia-tis-panelladikes-simantikes-allages-anakoinose-o-k-gavrogloy> [accessed 5 June 2020]; ‘Στα μαθήματα επιλογής και τα Λατινικά’, 26 February 2019, *Kathimerini*, available at <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1011903/article/epikairothta/ellada/sta-ma8hmata-epiloghs-kai-ta-latinika> [accessed 5 June 2020].

changes provoked new reactions on the grounds that they further downgraded classical studies in secondary education.

Competing discourses: structure and strategies

Each side of the controversy put forward various arguments to support its preferred educational policy. Though their positions were diametrically opposed, their discourses displayed a remarkable common structure, attention to which exposes underlying ideological strategies.³⁰ Both sides appealed to science to legitimize their proposals; both emphasized the personal and social benefits of their proposals and conversely the dangers of their opponents' policy, concealing their own political aims and interests. It is noteworthy that they conceptualized the so-called fundamental categories of thought (time, personality, cause)³¹ differently, also emphasizing those values (notably equality and hierarchy) that purported to be the essential substratum of their proposal and of their broader outlook, while at the same time attempting to delegitimize the core values of their opponents. In doing so, they constructed a boundary between 'us' and 'them', representing the two groups as if they were fixed and homogeneous entities.³² This discursive strategy served their purpose of reinforcing highly charged politico-ideological currents and identities within Greek society, as we will see in the following sections.

The reformists justified their proposals with reference to 'scientific linguistic and pedagogical criteria'.³³ They argued that 'it is now scientifically proven that good knowledge and use of [modern] language contributes to the cultivation of all fields of knowledge'. By contrast, they alleged that the teaching of more hours of Ancient than Modern Greek was 'distorting the pupils' sense of language', as pupils now make 'constant arbitrary references and comparisons with the ancient and specifically with the Attic language, which is so distant from the modern language'. Moreover, they presented this negative consequence as the root cause of the 'inefficiency of Greek education in the contemporary world'.³⁴ This mode of thought³⁵ sets a positive value

30 According to John B. Thompson, ideology operates by representing a given situation as legitimate and natural, while it conceals the interests of the agents engaged in struggle: *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley 1984) 131, 136–7.

31 These are the Aristotelian and Kantian philosophical categories, which the French school of sociology investigated as a product of social factors; see e.g. E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York 1995) 8–9.

32 For the concept of the boundary, see A. P. Cohen (ed.), *Signifying Identities: anthropological perspectives on boundaries and contested values* (London 2000).

33 See 'Αύξηση ωρών διδασκαλίας των Νέων Ελληνικών'.

34 *Op.cit.*

35 I use this term in the Mannheimian sense, that is, as coherent sets of ideas and beliefs (*Denkweisen, Denkmodellen*) that different social groups develop within a specific historical context; see K. Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* (Frankfurt 2015), 4–5.

upon the present as the key to a bright future. More precisely, the conceptualization of the present has a twofold nature, referring both to structural changes (such immigration and social inequality) and to corresponding values such as efficiency, utility, multiculturalism, and equality. The demand is that the school curriculum reflect the cultural values of modernity and provide knowledge and skills that are regarded as essential for the present needs and the pupils' future career prospects. In this way, the argument runs, Greek society will be able to participate actively in a globalized world. Reform is thus presented as a favourable factor in the modernization of Greek education based on the values of equality and diversity: it will also help the integration of pupils who speak another language and come from disadvantaged social strata.³⁶

However, despite their emphasis on the present, the reformists also attempted to establish a connection with the ancient past, widely praised by Greeks as an inextricable part of their national identity.³⁷ One way of doing this was to present the reform as serving a better understanding of the past, a past to be analysed critically and without myths. Liakos, for instance, claimed that 'we will get rid of the delusion that Greeks are the unique heirs of the ancients and of ideas of biological continuity and racial superiority'.³⁸ Yet occasionally reformist politicians present themselves as belonging to the community that reveres antiquity in an attempt to repel the accusation of being unpatriotic and thereby reduce the political cost of the reforms. Minister Filis' emphatic public statement: 'I, too, am a worshipper of antiquity', is a characteristic example.³⁹

Supporters of the teaching of AG called into question the competence of their opponents, arguing that the majority of them served in academic positions that had no relation with the field of classical studies, nor with secondary education.⁴⁰ Furthermore, they accused them of promoting 'unscientific' and 'a-historical' views rejected both by the majority of Greek educators and by society at large.⁴¹ They even dubbed them 'deniers' (αρνητές),⁴² a highly charged word used to imply their distance from scientific truth and consequently their hidden ideological agenda. By contrast, they stressed the scientific credentials of their own preferred policy, portraying the benefits of learning Ancient Greek ('critical thinking, discipline in thought and discourse, ability to memorize..., acquisition of new knowledge')⁴³ as scientifically

36 See 'Αύξηση ωρών διδασκαλίας των Νέων Ελληνικών'.

37 Mackridge highlights this adoration of the past as follows: '[for Greeks] what is alive... is shunned in favour of what is dead', see P. Mackridge, 'The heritages of the modern Greeks', *British Academy Review* 19 (2011/12) 14–22 [18].

38 Liakos, 'Υπόμνημα: εμείς και τα Αρχαία'.

39 'Ο Υπουργός Παιδείας για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά'.

40 See 'Κείμενο θέσεων για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά'.

41 'Υπόμνημα της Εταιρείας Ελλήνων Φιλολόγων'.

42 *Op.cit.*

43 'Κείμενο θέσεων για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά'.

proven, and indeed ‘unquestionable’.⁴⁴ The implication was that the abolition of this subject would have the exact opposite effect of the reform goals: pupils would be deprived of ‘a tool tested over the course of time for its efficiency in these areas’.⁴⁵ Reference to the principle of utility aimed to refute the accusation that AG as a school subject is impractical and outdated. Belief in the benefits of AG is widely shared not only by the teachers of the subject,⁴⁶ but also by other individuals and groups in Greek society. Of course, the more you move to the right on the political spectrum, the more conservative and contested the arguments are. Georgiadis, for instance, resorts directly to biology in order to build the scientific image of his educational preference:

Recent neuroscience studies show that practising [the ancient Greek language] and [spending time in] the enriched [by AG Greek discourse] environment increase not only neuronal synapses but also neurogenesis itself. Research conducted among the students of our school... has shown the importance of learning the ancient Greek language in the early school years for effective cognitive development and the treatment of learning difficulties. Studies in foreign settings show comparable results.⁴⁷

Despite such scientific discourse, however, the past is the prevailing time-frame of this mode of thought. It is predominantly associated with classical antiquity, but also with Byzantium and modern Greek history, the historical periods that comprise the tripartite scheme of the diachronic continuity of Greek civilization, as elaborated in the nineteenth century by the historians Spyridon Zambelios and Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos.⁴⁸ Ancient Greek civilization is perceived as an exemplary model due to its exceptional accomplishments, while AG as a school subject is endowed with the broader mission of teaching pupils about the ‘uninterrupted cultural continuity through which we have passed from antiquity to modern Hellenism’.⁴⁹ This is regarded as a unique ‘privilege that the ancient Greek language offers only to us’, since we [the modern Greeks] are the ‘natural continuers’ of this language – ‘obviously we ought to take advantage of it’.⁵⁰ Therefore, contrary to the reformists who criticize adherence to the past, their opponents depict the teaching and learning of AG not as something behind the times but, on the contrary, as extremely timely, since it offers Greeks a competitive advantage that serves their present and future interests. They argued that ‘Culture is the greatest promotion of Greece, and the Humanities – the

44 ‘Υπόμνημα της Εταιρείας Ελλήνων Φιλολόγων’.

45 ‘Κείμενο θέσεων για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά’.

46 See e.g. S. Glavas and A. Karageorgiou, ‘Πανελλαδική έρευνα για το μάθημα της Αρχαίας Ελληνικής Γλώσσας στο Γυμνάσιο’, *Επιθεώρηση Εκπαιδευτικών Θεμάτων* 12 (2007) 5–23.

47 Georgiadis, ‘Ποιοι είμαστε’.

48 See E. Skopetea, ‘Ancient, vernacular, and purist Greek language’, in Christidis (ed.), *A History of Ancient Greek*, 1280–6.

49 ‘Κείμενο θέσεων για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά’.

50 *Op.cit.*

Greek Language and Literature in their diachrony as their epicentre – are the hallmark (δίνουν το στίγμα) of our civilization in the modern world'.⁵¹ In addition, they highlighted the inherent connection of AG with Greek collective identity on the grounds that 'for us, the modern Greeks, the ancient Greek language continues to be part of our life..., it is present unchanged beside us (see for instance the inscriptions at archaeological sites and museums)'.⁵² This is also an indirect reply to Liakos' proposal to teach AG as a 'foreign language',⁵³ which, for them, was an insulting proposal. They contended that since 'the [ancient] texts are written in an earlier form of... the [Greek pupils'] same mother tongue', with just 'a little effort' – compared with that of foreign pupils –, Greek pupils can enjoy the rich benefits of the subject.⁵⁴ Believing that 'αριστεία' (excellence) is an 'element of human nature',⁵⁵ they accused their opponents of downplaying excellence in favour of a 'form of educational populism'.⁵⁶ But from the standpoint of the reformists, excellence itself is a hidden ideology that sustains inequality: it blames pupils for not succeeding in AG at school, accusing them instead of putting in 'less effort'.⁵⁷ In order to refute the accusation of promoting inequality, the supporters of AG attempted in their turn to appropriate the modern value of equality, turning it now against the reformists. They argued that the teaching of AG only to those pupils choosing to study classics at university would produce an élitist culture, which would have disastrous effects on democracy itself; they saw the proposal as abolishing not just a school subject but also the spiritual, moral and cultural foundations needed for active citizenship.⁵⁸

‘Αρχαιολάτρεις’ (‘worshippers of antiquity’) versus ‘αρχαιομάχοι’ (‘fighters against antiquity’)

A variety of actors – politicians, intellectuals and ordinary citizens – played a significant role in the ideological polarization over AG. The controversy took the form of an ideological battle over antiquity itself, a battle between the ‘worshippers of antiquity’ and the ‘fighters against antiquity’, namely between those who protect and respect the sacredness of antiquity and those who impiously fight against it, or – when the evaluation of the terms is reversed – between those who obsessively invoke the

51 ‘Υπόμνημα της Εταιρείας Ελλήνων Φιλολόγων’.

52 ‘Κείμενο θέσεων για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά’.

53 Liakos, ‘Υπόμνημα: εμείς και τα Αρχαία’.

54 ‘Κείμενο θέσεων για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά’.

55 G. Babiniotis, ‘Η σωστή παιδεία προστατεύει έναν λαό από τον εθνικισμό’, *Τα Νέα*, 14 June 2019, available at <https://www.babiniotis.gr/dimosieumata/paideia/392-i-sosti-paideia-prostateyei-enan-lao-apo-ton-ethnikismo> [accessed 15 June 2020].

56 G. Babiniotis, ‘Προτείνω να κλείσουν τα πανεπιστήμια’, *Καθημερινή*, 22 April 2019 available at <http://www.kathimerini.gr/1020633/gallery/proswpa/geyma-me-thn-k/gewrgios-mpampiniwths-sthn-k-proteinw-na-kleisoyn-ta-panepisthmia> [accessed 15 June 2020].

57 See Liakos, ‘Υπόμνημα: εμείς και τα Αρχαία’.

58 See ‘Υπόμνημα της Εταιρείας Ελλήνων Φιλολόγων’.

glorious ancestors to prove the diachronic character of Greek identity and those who have a pedagogical attitude toward classical antiquity, recognizing its significance in terms of culture. This polarity had a double function: extolling the benefits of the preferred policy, while at the same time portraying the opponents negatively in an attempt to delegitimize their proposals.

Intellectuals and academics presented their views as detached from political interests. However, intellectuals cannot completely overcome their own political preferences and social attachments.⁵⁹ This becomes most obvious when they assist governments in formulating public policies or when they accept political appointments, thereby participating directly in the political struggle. The leading linguist Georgios Babiniotis is the most notable case. He has had a very active public role, serving in various institutional positions of academic and political authority: rector of the University of Athens, chairman of well-known institutions and councils, and Minister of Education and Religious Affairs in the provisional administration of the technocrat Lucas Papademos in 2012, to name but a few examples.⁶⁰ Babiniotis contributed to the emergence of the conservative current of the 1980s: he founded the Ελληνικός Γλωσσικός Όμιλος (Greek Language Association),⁶¹ which promoted a ‘return’ to the ‘roots of our spiritual tradition’ as a necessary presupposition for the improvement of the quality of the Greek language and for the preservation of the national identity.⁶² Moreover, as president of the Pedagogical Institute (1990–3), he undertook the ‘scientific responsibility’, as he put it, for the reintroduction of AG texts in the original into the *gymnasio* curriculum in 1992.⁶³ The fact that his dictionaries became best-sellers⁶⁴ and that he was editor and commentator on a number of broadcasts about the Greek language⁶⁵ attests to his popularity. Babiniotis took an active part in the recent controversy: apart from interviews and articles, he supported an online campaign for maintaining AG as a compulsory school subject.⁶⁶

One of Babiniotis’ leading ideas is that the Greek language and identity are in imminent danger as a result of foreign influences. This belief is expressed in discourse

59 For Mannheim, the intelligentsia is ‘relatively uncommitted’; see K. Mannheim, ‘The problem of the intelligentsia: an inquiry into its past and present role’, in E. Mannheim and P. Kecskemeti (eds.), *Essays on the Sociology of Culture: Collected Works of Karl Mannheim*, VIII (London 2003) 91–170 [105].

60 His biography is available at <https://www.babiniotis.gr/biography> [accessed 1 March 2020].

61 See Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*, 324.

62 See G. Babiniotis, *Ελληνική γλώσσα: παρελθόν, παρόν, μέλλον. Μελετήματα, διαλέξεις και άρθρα 1977–1993* (Athens 1994) 394, 289, 10, 19.

63 *Op.cit.*, 450.

64 His dictionary of modern Greek has gone through five editions and multiple reprints: G. Babiniotis, *Λεξικό της νέας ελληνικής γλώσσας: με σχόλια για τη σωστή χρήση των λέξεων* (Athens 2019).

65 For instance, *Ομιλείτε Ελληνικά;* (‘Do you speak Greek?’) and *Τη γλώσσα μου έδωσαν ελληνική* (‘Greek was the language given to me’). The latter is a line from the Nobel Prize-winning poet Odysseus Elytis, *Το Άξιον Εστί* (Athens 1979) 28.

66 G. Babiniotis, ‘Τα Αρχαία ως υποχρεωτικό μάθημα’, available at <https://www.babiniotis.gr/dimosieumata/paideia/360-ta-arxaia-os-yprochreotiko-mathima> [accessed 5 March 2020].

related to decay, impurity and illness. Terms such as ‘λεξιπενία’ (‘word poverty’), ‘αλλοίωση’ (‘adulteration’), ‘ρύπανση’ (‘pollution’), and even ‘νόσος’ (‘disease’), create a sense of urgency to defend the Greek language and the nation itself.⁶⁷ Babiniotis used the metaphor of the ‘κάστρο της γλωσσικής μας ρωμιοσύνης’⁶⁸ (‘fortress of our linguistic Romiosini’) to highlight the need for protection against both the invasion of foreign words and the traitorous action of today’s ‘Ephialtes’, that is, the nation’s ‘ξενομανία’ (‘xenomania’).⁶⁹ The implication is that there is an enemy within who undermines the fundamental foundation of the ‘fortress’, the diachronic continuity of the Greek language and nation. But for Babiniotis ‘if there is one feature of our Greek civilization that is easily and objectively identifiable, it is the *continuity of our language*’, since ‘to say ουρανός, θάλασσα, άνθρωπος, πέτρα, άνδρας, γυναίκα, παιδί, γη, κόσμος, έρωτας...and a thousand other words today that have been used over 3000 years with the same or modified form and meaning, is what distinguishes our language culturally’.⁷⁰ To strengthen this viewpoint, Babiniotis frequently refers to similar beliefs and ideas of the two Greek Nobel Prize-winning poets, Seferis and Elytis. It is the ideology of Ελληνικότητα (Greekness) with its emphasis on the diachronic continuity and existential meaning of the Greek language and identity that Babiniotis shares with the representatives of the ‘Generation of the 1930s’.⁷¹ For Babiniotis ‘Greekness is the knowledge and the lived experience (βίωση) of the Greek civilization in its great historical course, namely as history and as tradition. [It is] the knowledge of the language that diachronically expresses this [civilization], the lived experience of the place where it has been developed and generally the feeling of nationality (ιθαγένεια)...of the life of Greeks and of the Greek spirit’.⁷² The following passage

67 Babiniotis, *Ελληνική γλώσσα*, 19, 10.

68 The term *Romiosini* carries a sense of Greekness based on Orthodox culture and tradition, carrying connotations of exceptionality, suffering, diachronic resistance, heroism, and eternal existence, see R. M. Newton, ‘Ritsos: poet of Romiosini’, *Journal of Modern Hellenism* 17–18 (2001) 69–90; E. Kessareas, ‘Orthodox theological currents in Modern Greece after 1974: Ongoing tensions between reform and conservatism’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 33.2 (2015) 241–68.

69 Babiniotis, *Ελληνική γλώσσα*, 174. Now a synonym for traitor: Ephialtes betrayed the Spartan army to the Persians at the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BC). The term *ξενομανία* describes a belief and attitude that bestows more value to foreign than to national values and modes of life.

70 G. Babiniotis, ‘Χρειάζονται τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά στο σχολείο;’, *Τα Νέα*, 14 September 2013, available at <https://www.babiniotis.gr/dimosieumata/paideia/117-flinafimata> [accessed 5 March 2020].

71 For Elytis’ and Seferis’ perception of this continuity, see for instance O. Elytis, *Nobel Lecture*, 8 December 1979, available at <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1979/elytis/lecture/> [accessed 2 March 2020]; G. Seferis, *Δοκιμές*, I (Athens 1974) 177–8. For an overview of the Greekness of the ‘Generation of the 1930s’, see M. Jeffreys, ‘The criterion of Greekness in modern Greek literature’, *ARTS The Journal of the Sydney University Arts Association* 13 (1988) 1–16. For a detailed analysis, see M. Vitti, *Η Γενιά του Τριάντα: Ιδεολογία και μορφή* (Athens 1995) and more recently D. Tziouvas, *Ο μύθος της Γενιάς του Τριάντα: Νεοεπικότητα, ελληνικότητα και πολιτισμική ιδεολογία* (Athens 2011).

72 G. Babiniotis, ‘Συνέντευξη στο περιοδικό “Κ” της Καθημερινής και στη δημοσιογραφία Άννα Γριμάνη’, December 2008, available at <http://old.babiniotis.gr/wmt/webpages/index.php?lid=1&pid=18&apprec=5> [accessed 31 May 2020].

clarifies his perception of continuity: ‘Greek language is not an issue of fifty or of one hundred years! It has a constant route of 40 centuries of oral discourse and 28 centuries of written alphabetical tradition. It is therefore a linguistic set of SYNCHRONY + DIACHRONY that necessitates the Greeks being acquainted with “τα παλαιότερα Ελληνικά μας” (“our older Greek”) (Seferis) as much as possible’.⁷³

The deeper reason for the anti-reform stance of the supporters of this discourse was not just the negative consequences that the reform would have for the quality of the contemporary language (the basic argument being that a knowledge of etymology is essential for correct spelling of the modern language), but more importantly that reform will ultimately imperil the diachronic Greek identity. For Babiniotis the learning of AG is ‘a matter of spiritual survival and of safeguarding our national identity...[it] is a return to our roots...the roots of our spiritual, social and historical existence as a nation’.⁷⁴ The preservation of this identity makes the teaching of the continuity of the Greek language a ‘national, cultural and linguistic need’.⁷⁵ Those who fail to recognize this need are stigmatized as ‘αρχαιομάχοι’ (‘fighters against antiquity’) and ‘χρησιμοθηριστές’ (‘utilitarians’),⁷⁶ who have an ‘outdated ideological mentality’.⁷⁷ They stand accused of abolishing the teaching of AG (and Latin) in the name of a ‘supposedly anti-elitist gesture’, which in reality is ‘yet another subjection to utility (χρησιτικότητα) and – because of its replacement with sociology – [is] an attempt to ideologically influence education’.⁷⁸

But from the perspective of the reformists, those who are ideologically driven are their accusers. For Liakos, belief in a unitary and uninterrupted Greek language is an ‘ideological construction’ that places Greece outside history and modernity.⁷⁹ Accusing his opponents of having an essentialist and Hellenocentric perception of classical antiquity, Liakos points out that ‘Hellenism and classical studies are cultural constructions and elements of the Western identity’.⁸⁰ Liakos’ contrast between educational reform and ‘extremist ideologies’ and the ‘conservative mentality’ implies that the reform is both progressive and necessary.⁸¹ On this way of thinking, anti-reformists are ‘αρχαιολάτρες’ (‘worshippers of antiquity’), motivated by their

73 Babiniotis, ‘Τα Αρχαία ως υποχρεωτικό μάθημα’; See also Babiniotis, ‘Θα ξαναδιώξουμε τον αρχαίο λόγο από το Γυμνάσιο’.

74 Babiniotis, *Ελληνική γλώσσα*, 294.

75 Babiniotis, ‘Χρειάζονται τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά στο σχολείο’.

76 G. Babiniotis, ‘Οι Γάλλοι προστατεύουν τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά – εμείς’, 2 April 2019, available at <https://www.babiniotis.gr/dimosieumata/glossika-themata/347-oi-galloi-prostateyoun-ta-arxaia-ellinika-emeis> [accessed 5 March 2020].

77 Babiniotis, ‘Χρειάζονται τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά στο σχολείο’.

78 G. Babiniotis, ‘Μεταβολές που όζουν απαίδευσίας και ιδεολογικών εμμονών’, *Τα Νέα*, 8 September 2018, available at <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2018/09/08/greece/metavoles-pou-ozoun-apaideusias-kai-ideologikon-emmonon/> [accessed 15 June 2020].

79 Liakos, ‘Υπόμνημα: εμείς και τα Αρχαία’.

80 *Op.cit.*

81 *Op.cit.*

anti-SYRIZA feelings rather than by their genuine interest in AG, as one SYRIZA politician put it.⁸² Just as in the case of Babiniotis, Liakos' views were not detached from his own ideological preferences, professional values and political orientations: imprisoned by the military dictatorship in 1969,⁸³ he is an influential historian and intellectual of the Left. In 2019, he became member of the Political Council of the Central Committee for the Reconstruction of SYRIZA - Progressive Alliance.⁸⁴ The ideological label of ancestor-worship was also used to designate the boundary between an appropriate knowledge of AG and the spirit of backwardness that goes against the goals of the modern school: 'Of course, pupils should be taught Ancient Greek, but we should not make them worshippers of antiquity', Minister Filis stated.⁸⁵ But from the perspective of the supporters of AG, this formulation simply proves their opponents' hatred for 'our older Greek' and the idea of continuity.⁸⁶ It is worth mentioning here that such labels had also been employed in past disputes. For instance, D. N. Maronitis (1929–2016), a professor of Classics renowned for his translations of ancient Greek writers as well as chairman of the Centre of the Greek Language in Thessaloniki, defended the teaching of ancient texts in translation against those 'fanatical friends of antiquity' ('φανατικοί αρχαιοφίλοι') who alarm people with the claim that the removal of texts in Ancient Greek from the *gymnasio* curriculum has led to 'λεξιπενία' ('word poverty').⁸⁷

Although intellectuals played a crucial role in the construction and dissemination of the ideological character of the controversy, the contribution of members of the general public should not be underestimated. They participated actively in the public debate through various modern channels of communication (blogs, news websites and social media), motivated by a strong desire to express their personal beliefs, which they perceived as threatened by the proposals put forward by their opponents. In doing so, they discursively constructed the opponent as an enemy. Indeed, they expressed the ideological polarities more overtly and aggressively, often behind the mask that anonymity provides. The following comments are illustrative of the ways in which anonymous opponents of the reforms framed the dispute:

82 'Μιχελής: Δημιουργούν μπλοκ "αντι-ΣΥΡΙΖΑ" για ίδιον όφελος στην Παιδεία', 28 September 2016, available at <https://www.mag24.gr/michelis-dimiourgoun-mplok-anti-siriza-gia-idion-ofelos-stin-pedia/> [accessed 31 May 2020].

83 For more biographical information, see <https://antonisliakos.gr/about/> [accessed 31 May 2020].

84 See 'ΣΥΡΙΖΑ: Ανακοινώθηκαν τα 41 μέλη του Πολιτικού Συμβουλίου', 20 December 2019, available at <https://www.iefimerida.gr/politiki/syriza-41-meli-toy-politikoy-symboylioy> [accessed 19 September 2020].

85 Filis' statement is quoted by T. Theodoropoulos, 'Περί αρχαιολατρείας και άλλων δαιμονίων', *Καθημερινή*, 18 September 2016, available at <https://www.kathimerini.gr/875347/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/peri-arxaiolatrias-kai-allwn-daimoniwn> [accessed 31 May 2020].

86 See Babiniotis, 'Η σωστή παιδεία'.

87 See D. N. Maronitis, 'Ανοιχτά χαρτιά', 26 June 2005 and 'Αρχαιοφιλίας το ανάγνωσμα', 21 November 2004, both available at <http://users.sch.gr/symfo/sholio/e/arx25kimena.htm#02> [accessed 27 February 2020]. See also D. N. Maronitis, 'Language and translation', in Christidis (ed.), *A History of Ancient Greek*, 1296–300.

If [Minister Filis] does not restore the hours of Ancient Greek...the people will consider him εσαεί [forever] άπατρις [unpatriotic] an enemy of the people's Greek language and religion. These are the foundations and the unwavering bases of our society. It is not possible for (any) Filis to detonate them. The people will dethrone him, using their vote to give his party and himself an exemplary punishment.

Our Language and Religion helped the Greeks to exist and play the leading role in the world during the last 4000 years. This Language and this Religion are what Tsipras, his young followers and his American trolls want to destroy [να βγάλουν από τη μέση]. They are atheists, ανθέλληνες (anti-Greeks), traitors! Shoo!⁸⁸

This discourse clearly presents the controversy as a Manichaeism conflict between good and evil. To the first category belong both religion and language, seen as sacred symbols and proof of the superiority of the diachronic Greek civilization. To the second category belong the leftist and atheist SYRIZA politicians, who betray national-religious ideals, assisted by dark forces that serve American interests. Their actions are destructive, for they threaten the very existence of the Greek nation. It is not accidental that right-wing nationalist ideology, and specifically Greek orthodox fundamentalism, has been marked by such features as ethno-religious nationalism, Manichaeism, and conspiracy theories, as I have demonstrated elsewhere.⁸⁹ As regards the framing of the dispute by unnamed proponents of reform, the following comments are characteristic:

At a time when the developed world has visited space and gone beyond our solar system [!], we force our children to waste countless hours of their lives (because they learn NOTHING) studying Ancient Greek, just because some ethno- and antiquity-maniacs (εθνοβαρεμένοι αρχαιοπληκτοι) imposed it due to the supposed continuity of the unitary language and race, and in order for some thousands of teachers of Ancient Greek to have jobs... [Pupils] are growing up in a globalized economic environment and [yet] they are being taught NOTHING about it... My proposal is that the teaching of religion should be abolished in primary education and replaced by sex education; the teaching of history in primary education should be abolished and replaced by financial management; Ancient Greek should be abolished as a compulsory subject in the *gymnasio* and the *lykeio* (let it remain optional) and replaced by the teaching of investments and stock exchange transactions. Instead of becoming

88 Comments, 24–25 September 2016, available at <https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/613633/sia-anagnostopoulou-na-stamatisei-i-diamahi-gia-ta-thrskoutika/> [accessed 5 May 2019].

89 E. Kessareas, 'The Greek debt crisis as theodicy: Religious fundamentalism and socio-political conservatism', *The Sociological Review* 66.1 (2018) 122–37.

stupid with online games and porn, let them learn how to earn money from the computer.

The problem is the unnecessary and time-consuming effort to learn something worthless, something that is based on ideological constructions and not on reason.

What do we really lose from ancient literature, if we read the translation in the modern language? Why do our pupils need to waste so many hours learning syntax and the like, but not the ουσία (essence)?⁹⁰

Here reform supporters construct and promote a distinction in much the same way as their opponents, but in reverse. Now the teaching of subjects such as AG, history, and divinity, which are perceived to be more past-oriented – and, in a sense, the past itself – are placed on the modern scale of usefulness and weighed against the ultimate goal of making money. While the features that belong to the first part of the distinction are disdained as being purely ideological constructions, those of the second part are extolled as manifesting logic and progress itself. In such a framework, the traditional ontological category of ‘essence’ acquires an exclusively this-worldly value: it is equated with economic development and pragmatism.

Overall, a fundamental ideological polarity was constructed between ‘useful/utilitarian progress’ and ‘worthless tradition’; but when they are viewed from the contrasting standpoint of the anti-reformists, they are transformed into an antithesis between ‘sacred tradition’ and ‘profane progress’. The reformists were attacked by their opponents as ‘fighters against antiquity’, as ‘traitors’ and ‘atheists’, with the accusation that they aimed to destroy the Greek collective identity, the sense of its historical continuity and its established values, which have been cultivated and promoted through the traditional humanities including the study of AG. Conversely, advocates of the teaching of AG in school were dismissed by reformists as ‘worshippers of antiquity’ who hindered the desired progress of the era of *homo digitalis* in economic and social development.

Reinforcing the left–right divide in times of austerity

This ideological polarization found fertile ground for development during a period marked by continued austerity measures, deep recession and rising public disappointment with the failure of the political system to implement an alternative financial policy. It is crucial to recall that the self-proclaimed radical party SYRIZA came to power by promising to end austerity. Yet it signed a third Memorandum in July 2015, despite the fact that 61.31% of the Greek population had voted against the

90 Comments, 3 June 2016, available at <https://sarantakos.wordpress.com/2016/06/03/arxaia-2/> [accessed 5 May 2019].

austerity policies in the polarizing referendum that took place earlier that year.⁹¹ This change of policy challenged SYRIZA's leftist profile, engendering a sense of resignation and of distrust in political parties – especially among the middle and working classes most affected by the financial crisis. The National Dialogue in Education that began a few months later (December 2015) offered the opportunity to the government, through a process of polarization, to seek 'victory' in the realm of ideology, as it had lost the battle in the realm of the economy. Put differently, the government attempted to heal its traumatized leftist profile so as to appeal once again to its electoral constituency. The ideological polarization was also promoted by the main opposition party, ND, which likewise viewed it as an opportunity to stress its politico-ideological identity as distinct from that of SYRIZA. To achieve that aim, the polarity between 'worshippers of antiquity' and 'fighters against antiquity' had to manifest a clearer political content. This is why both sides framed the reform proposals in a manner that highlighted the traditional left-right divide, with each party evaluating the two terms differently.

For instance, in the public discussion in which Minister Filis made the controversial 'against nature' statement, he presented the government proposals as a continuation of the democratic reforms of the past in sharp contrast to the ones of his politico-ideological opponents:

... the issue of whether pupils should be taught Ancient Greek in the *gymnasio* through the original or in translation, so as to deepen their understanding of the meaning, is... one of the basic stakes of democratic educational reform. It is not Rallis; it is Papanoutsos, it is Glinos, it is the Left, it is the democratic camp, which argued that we will learn the meanings of ancient Greek philosophy and thought in the language of the people. Otherwise it is a story where we learn words, infinitives, but not the essence.⁹²

Filis mentions here a number of politicians, educators and intellectuals of a leftist or liberal political orientation, who played a crucial role in the demoticist reforms of the past.⁹³ At the same time, he downgrades the contribution of the conservative ND party, although it was its education minister, Georgios Rallis, who introduced the 1976–7 language and educational reforms, on lines that owed much to the left-liberal Papanoutsos.⁹⁴ Filis implies that the conservatives implemented a reform that was

91 For a description of the anti-austerity activism of that period, see E. Kessareas, 'The Orthodox Church of Greece and civic activism in the context of the financial crisis', in R. G. Strachwitz (ed.), *Religious Communities and Civil Society in Europe: Analyses and Perspectives on a Complex Interplay*, I (Berlin 2019) 61–118.

92 'Ο Υπουργός Παιδείας για τα Αρχαία Ελληνικά' [video].

93 Space limitations do not permit me to provide information about the life and works of these historical personalities. For such information, see Mackridge, *Language and National Identity*, 306.

94 According to Alexis Dimaras, this reform was actually a revival of the one introduced in 1964 by the Centre Union government of Georgios Papandreou. For Dimaras the fact that ND implemented the reform

historically initiated and pursued by the ‘Left, the democratic camp’, something that serves his aim to highlight the left/right divide. Likewise, Liakos stated: ‘How can we recover the thread that connects us with the attempts of the Educational Association, of Delmouzos, Glinos and Roza Imvrioti, of Kakridis, Papanoutsos and Dimaras, and with the ideals of our democratic Μεταπολίτευση?’⁹⁵ In the same period, Filis fiercely attacked those who opposed the educational reform, accusing them of serving not only professional vested interests but also ‘reactionary forces’, who opposed the ‘great democratic reform...[and] rebirth of our educational system’.⁹⁶

In this way, a politico-ideological polarity was constructed and promoted that divides the social and political space into two parts. At one pole are the government and its supporters, who are identified with democracy itself. Their reform is presented as a response to the need for a revitalization of the spirit of the Μεταπολίτευση, which has lost its shine due to both the financial crisis and the post-dictatorship conservative policies that prioritized hierarchy instead of equality, thus betraying the emancipatory demands of ‘Ψωμί–Παιδεία–Ελευθερία’ (‘Bread–Education–Freedom’).⁹⁷ This slogan of the 1973 students’ anti-junta uprising was recycled for the democratic legitimation of the educational proposals and at the same time for the implicit linkage of the anti-reformists to the stigmatized adherents of the dictatorship regime. At the opposite pole one finds the ‘reactionary forces’, which are motivated by their antipathy towards the values and practices of democracy. To further highlight the gap between the two camps, Filis emphasized the government’s aim to produce ‘ένα σχέδιο φιλολαϊκό’ (‘a plan that will benefit ordinary people’).⁹⁸ The reference to the people has a special ideological charge in Greek political culture, as it is associated with the populist discourse of PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement). This party had enjoyed power for much of the period since 1981 but collapsed in the elections held during the crisis period, being blamed for the outbreak of the financial crisis and for the implementation of the austerity measures. The result was that SYRIZA penetrated PASOK’S political space by presenting itself as the new opposite pole against the conservative camp.

The same strategy to reinforce the left/right distinction was followed by politicians of ND. On a television programme *Ελλήνων Έγερσις* (Rising of the Greeks), Georgiadis

in 1976–7, despite it had opposed it in 1964, can be explained by a ‘need for the conservative camp to disconnect itself as clearly as possible from the dictatorial regime and take advantage of the “progressive” current of the time’; see A. Dimaras, ‘Ζητήματα παιδείας’, *Καθημερινή*, 5 December 1999, available at <http://www.komvos.edu.gr/endoglwssiki/historiko/episkopisi/endogloss/barmMet76.htm> [accessed 10 March 2020].

95 Liakos, ‘Ο Εθνικός και Κοινωνικός Διάλογος για την Παιδεία’.

96 ‘ΔΕΛΤΙΟ ΤΥΠΟΥ: Δήλωση Νίκου Φίλη για τη ματαίωση της σημερινής συζήτησης για την Παιδεία’, 19 January 2016, available at <https://dialogos.minedu.gov.gr> [accessed 2 February 2020].

97 Liakos, ‘Ο Εθνικός και Κοινωνικός Διάλογος για την Παιδεία’.

98 ‘Μήνυμα του Υπουργού Παιδείας, Έρευνας και Θρησκευμάτων, Νίκου Φίλη’, available at <https://dialogos.minedu.gov.gr/μήνυμα-υπουργού-παιδείας-έρευνας-και/> [accessed 2 February 2020].

attacked SYRIZA not only for implementing catastrophic policies in the area of ‘economy and national sovereignty’ but also for making moves to ‘destroy the language, the history, and everything’, while his brother Leonidas emphatically added: ‘people need to understand that the Left is a deception (απάτη)’.⁹⁹ An even more illustrative example is Adonis Georgiadis’ statement that the educational reforms of SYRIZA, such as fewer teaching periods for AG, changes in the teaching of divinity, and the replacement of Latin with sociology aimed at ‘making the children leftist’, thus ‘perpetuating the ideological dominance of the Left in schools and later in the universities’.¹⁰⁰ This statement is in line with his anti-leftist, and particularly, anti-communist mentality. For Georgiadis ‘the leftists are not democrats’ since ‘nowhere in the world has the Left – we are talking about the communist Left, not about social democracy – proved compatible with democracy. The communist left..., wherever it ruled, ruled with totalitarianism’.¹⁰¹ Here, the evaluation of the political terms ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ is reversed: at one pole is the nationally dangerous and atheist communism of SYRIZA, since this party ‘originates from a split with the KKE [the Communist Party of Greece], and these people are communists’. At the opposite pole is the patriotic and responsible ND, which defends democracy, ‘normality’, and traditional values. The crucial task for ND is to overthrow the ‘ideological hegemony’ of the left in Greece so as to make ‘our country a proper European state’.¹⁰² Georgiadis presented himself as an agent of ‘resistance’ against this ideological hegemony and against the educational reform, defending the ‘single and indivisible in time’ Greek language.¹⁰³

Conclusion

Ancient Greek is one of the most ideologically charged school subjects in Greece: classical antiquity constitutes the cornerstone of the ideology of the unbroken continuity of the Greek nation. Therefore the function of AG as a school subject is by no means limited to its ostensible purpose of teaching ancient Greek language and literature. It also aims at enhancing national self-esteem through the connection of modern Greeks with the glorified past of ancient Greece. This ideology served the needs and aims of the Greek

99 ‘Ο Αδωνίς Γεωργιάδης επιστρέφει δριμύτατος’.

100 See A. Georgiadis, ‘Περί καταργήσεως των Λατινικών και αντικαταστάσεώς τους από την Κοινωνιολογία’, 5 September 2018, available at <https://www.facebook.com/553120004728223/posts/2384401771600028/> [accessed 24 May 2020]; ‘Ο Γεωργιάδης πιστεύει πως μέσω της κοινωνιολογίας θα γίνουν τα παιδιά μας αριστερά’ [video], 4 September 2018, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68lcZsBIW8s&feature=emb_title [accessed 24 May 2020].

101 ‘Politischios.gr: Ομιλία Άδωνι Γεωργιάδη στη Χίο’ [video], 23 October 2016, available at <https://www.cnn.gr/news/politiki/story/51684/2016-10-24-17-40-07> [accessed 24 May 2020]. For a short extract of this speech, see ‘Άδωνις: ‘Οι αριστεροί δεν είναι δημοκράτες’. Οργή από ΣΥΡΙΖΑ και ΚΚΕ’, 24 October 2016, available at <https://www.cnn.gr/news/politiki/story/51684/2016-10-24-17-40-07> [accessed 24 May 2020].

102 ‘Politischios.gr: Ομιλία Άδωνι Γεωργιάδη στη Χίο’.

103 See ‘Ο Αδωνίς Γεωργιάδης επιστρέφει δριμύτατος’.

nation-state particularly during the period of its formation and early development. However, in the modern era new structural and ideological changes (globalization, immigration, multiculturalism) have challenged the traditional beliefs and values (notably about national homogeneity and an idealized past), triggering fierce public debates about the content and goals of this subject in schools curriculums. The controversy that re-emerged in 2016 acquired the character of an ideological battle between ‘traditionalists’, who portrayed themselves as guardians of the sacred past, and ‘modernizers’, who presented themselves as representatives of development and progress. Each side attempted to stigmatize its adversaries; for the ‘modernizers’, the traditionalists were the ‘worshippers of antiquity’, i.e., adherents of an outdated and useless tradition, while, conversely, the ‘modernizers’ were seen by their adversaries as ‘fighters against antiquity’, i.e., as advocates of ethno-nihilism and atheism.

However, this polarity was just the tip of the iceberg of a far greater politico-ideological polarization. The adoption of austerity measures by both the leftist SYRIZA and the conservative ND parties as a response to the severe financial crisis has challenged the traditional distinction between Left and Right. The dispute over AG offered the possibility for the reconstruction of this politico-ideological boundary as it became a battlefield and instrument for these parties, which sought to mobilize their supporters and, more importantly, to regain the trust of those who had abandoned them. To that end, they constructed and promoted a Manichaeian distinction between left progressives and right reactionaries, or, conversely, between nationally dangerous communists and pro-European democrats. Therefore, it was not the economy (where the two parties followed the same austerity policies) but ideology that became the ideal arena for political confrontation, precisely because it offered the possibility of differentiation.

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