

The Fear of Social Interaction: A Historiographical Essay on Ethnocentrism and Racism in Ancient Greece

*A recusa da interação: um ensaio historiográfico sobre
etnocentrismo e racismo na Grécia Antiga¹*

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RESUMO

O artigo discute estudiosos recentes que têm advogado a favor da utilização dos conceitos de raça e racismo para explicar preconceitos culturais em Grécia e Roma antigas. Mais particularmente, este estudo debate os argumentos para o caso de uma Grécia antiga racista ou protorracista elaborados por Benjamin Isaac (2004) em *The Invention of Racism in Antiquity* e Susan Lape (2010) em *Race and Citizen Identity in the Classical Athenian Democracy*. Segundo essa perspectiva historiográfica, existiria muito mais continuidade entre o racismo antigo e o moderno do que pensávamos. O presente artigo aponta dificuldades com os argumentos dessa abordagem, bem como sustenta que as relações étnicas na Grécia antiga são mais bem compreendidas como formas não hereditárias de preconceito cultural e não como racismo, que tem uma história específica ligada à colonização europeia e ao tráfico negreiro da época moderna. Palavras-chave: Grécia antiga; racismo; etnicidade; preconceito cultural; autocracia.

ABSTRACT

This article discusses scholars who have been advocating the concepts of race and racism to explain cultural prejudices in ancient Greece and Rome. More precisely, this study debates the arguments for the case of an ancient racist or proto-racist Greece elaborated on by Benjamin Isaac (2004) in *The Invention of Racism in Antiquity* and Susan Lape (2010) in *Race and Citizen Identity in the Classical Athenian Democracy*. Thus, for this historiographical perspective, there is much more continuity between ancient and modern racism than we had assumed. This article highlights certain conceptual and argumentative flaws in this approach, maintaining that ethnic relations in ancient Greece are better explained as non-hereditary forms of cultural prejudice rather than as racism, which has a specific history related to European colonization and slave trade.

Keywords: Ancient Greece; racism; ethnicity; cultural prejudice; autochthony.

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Most authors who trace the history of racism emphasise the modernity of this notion. According to this view, racism is the result of a particular historical context characterised by the European experience of colonisation between the 17th and 19th centuries, as well as by the formulation of Darwin's theory of evolution, and the "science of human races" that would explain the development of the supposed human races.² Thus, the logic of deriving cultural and moral characteristics from phenotypic and biological marks is typical of the racist thought that emerged in European modernity.

In this perspective, racism would be an unknown experience in Antiquity. Hannaford (1996), for example, dedicates three chapters to the ancient world in his history of racism and concludes that "there was a remarkable *absence* of race as an organising idea during the Greco-Roman period" (Hannaford, 1996, p. 8). In the history of racism written by Bethencourt (2013), we read that, in the Roman world, "there is no evidence of systematic discrimination against distinct ethnical people" (Bethencourt, 2013, p. 14). According to Michel (2020), "it is necessary to conclude, therefore, that the idea of race does not precede European slavery or justifies it" (Michel, 2020, p. 19).³

In addition to the argument of racism as a particular historical experience linked to the development of European society and modern slave trade, as emphasised by Michel (2020), another essential reason for the hegemonic conclusion that race and racism are notions alien to the classical world lies in the influence of the research project carried out by Snowden (1970; 1983) and Thompson (1989), both experts in Ancient History. Snowden, an African-American who studied literary and artistic sources from Antiquity⁴ concerning sub-Saharan black peoples, concluded that skin colour was not viewed as a fundamental element of inferiority that would condemn dark-skinned individuals to possess an innate set of negative moral and social characteristics. Thompson (1989), who taught at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, conceded that Romans made derogatory remarks towards dark-skinned people, but emphasised that those expressions are not related with the modern phenomenon of race and distinct from those described by social scientists as racism (see Thompson, 1989, p. 157).

However, recent historiography has challenged this negative conclusion of racism in classical Antiquity, and one of its leading challengers argues that the almost consensus on the non-applicability of the concept of racism to Antiquity has led readers to believe that no sort of racial structure would have existed in Greece and Rome, hampering the understanding of these societies (see McCoskey, 2012, p. 9). Denise McCoskey believes that using the concepts

of ethnicity and ethnic relations to explain the connections and cultural conflicts between human groups in Antiquity – as historians have been doing for 25 years – is insufficient.⁵ She advocates “a return to the concept of race. My recommendation [is] that we revive [the] use of the specific term race to connote the organizing and essentializing operations of identity” (McCoskey, 2002, pp. 30-31).

McCoskey is not alone in this historiographical revision. Her work dialogues with Isaac (2004) and Lape (2010). These studies challenge the orthodoxy of cultural studies in Antiquity that have long assumed that race and racism are inappropriate terms to describe the ancient attitudes to foreign people. Moreover, the thesis of these critics may have significant relevance to the problem of the origins and history of racist thought, given that they state that there is a considerable line of continuity between ancient and modern racism. Therefore, this question has contemporary urgency. We must assess the merits and weaknesses of this historiographical defence of using the lexicon of racism to describe the cultural interactions between different peoples in classical Antiquity.

Lape focuses mainly on the classical Greek period (5th-4th centuries BC),⁶ whereas Isaac and McCoskey also analyse the Roman world. However, this article will focus on classical Greek society to delimit the scope, discussing how Isaac and Lape read this period, namely, why they decide to apply the terminology related to race and racism instead of the usual notions of ethnicity. Moreover, we will analyse how they interpret the historical sources used to base their arguments.

This paper will mainly discuss the argumentative core of these experts concerning ancient Greece: the relationship between the myth of the Athenians as an indigenous and autochthonous people and the citizenship law approved by the Athenians based on a proposal made by Pericles in 451/450 BC. We will see that Lape (2010) explores those related topics in depth, arguing that the autochthony myth was the ideological aspect of Athenian racism, whereas the citizenship law was its legal and practical manifestation.

BENJAMIN ISAAC'S PROTO-RACISM AND SUSAN LAPE'S "ATHENIAN RACISM"

In addition to direct and explicit discrimination against Black people, Western societies present a varied range of bigotry, often subtle, disguised and

indirect, extending further than black groups.⁷ In the new multicultural framework of racism, scholars displace the concept of racism from skin colour by emphasising, for example, the discrimination suffered by white immigrants from Eastern Europe or white Syrian refugees in central European countries. In this sense, Sivanandan (2008, p. 167-168) characterises the type of racism that occurs in Europe in the time of globalisation as xeno-racism, that is, a combination of racism and xenophobia, in which racist discrimination appears under the form of a purely xenophobic discourse; an aversion to foreigners that would be independent of physical characteristics.

The dispensability of skin colour as a criterion for the definition of racism logically expands the possibilities for scholars to apply the concept of racism to Antiquity. Thus, Isaac (2004), Lape (2010, p. 39-40), and McCoskey (2012, p. 10) neglect skin colour as a criterion for defining racism. However, the choice of these authors for dismissing skin colour goes against their intent to show the continuity between ancient and modern racism, as the categories of white and black were a determining factor for the European colonial experience (see Michel, 2020).

In my understanding, Isaac and Lape were not clear enough about the meaning of their books for the academic community. Everything happens as if they want to legitimise the use of the term “racism” for Antiquity without being responsible for this enormous historiographical revision (a criticism also made against Lape by Blok, 2014, p. 869). Firstly, the title of Isaac’s book, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, leads to misunderstandings because it does not match much of the book’s content. Overall, Isaac’s thesis is that classical Antiquity experienced a form of proto-racism, a more diffuse and less biological determinist type of racism. In the author’s words: “I certainly do not claim that we are dealing here with the specific form of scientific racism which was a product of the nineteenth century” (Isaac, 2004, p. 1). Furthermore, according to Isaac, his work aims to “offer a systematic study of the forms of proto-racism, ethnic prejudice, and xenophobia that are encountered in the ancient literature in Greece and Rome from the fifth century BC till late antiquity” (Isaac, 2004, p. 2).

Although Isaac is aware that racism (or proto-racism) is not synonymous with xenophobia (see Isaac, 2004, pages 23-34), he is not rigorous in the use of these concepts, often treating them as interchangeable. Thus, his book deals “with ambivalence and hostility towards foreigners, strangers, and immigrant minorities” (p. 4). Therefore, Isaac’s book is not about the invention of racism in Antiquity. A more accurate title could be “Ethnic relations, proto-racism and

xenophobia in classical Antiquity”. Hence, Isaac (2004) is mainly arguing in favour of the strong presence of ethnic and xenophobic tensions in Greece and Rome. In short, Isaac’s detailed work is convincing only when we rearrange his conceptual framework.

The title of Susan Lape’s book, *Race and Citizen Identity in Classical Athenian Democracy*, is also problematic. The unusual word in the title is, of course, “race”. In the contents of the book, other atypical expressions appear to explain ancient Greek Democracy: “The Sociopolitical Context of Athenian Racism”, “From Autochthony to Race”; “Renewing Racism and Refusing Civil War”. Despite the explicit use of terms such as race and racism – including the unambiguous expression “Athenian racism” –, Lape clarifies: “What must be stressed is that nothing in this project hangs on the use of the term ‘racial’ per se. One might read this entire study substituting ‘ethnic’ or some other less controversial term for ‘racial’” (Lape, 2010, p. ix). This is a surprising statement because if the book’s argument does not depend on terms such as “race” and “racial”, why insert them in its title, topics, and arguments in the first place? If “ethnic” can be a synonym for “racial”, why does Lape argue that “the concepts of racial citizenship and racism offer a better fit than ethnic citizenship” (Lape, 2010, p. 37)? Thus, as pointed out by other scholars (Tuplin, 2007; Blok, 2014), the projects of Isaac and Lape are compromised by problems of terminology.

AUTOCHTHONY, PURITY OF THE ATHENIAN “RACE” AND THE CITIZENSHIP LAW OF 451/450 BC

Isaac and Lape assume that the myth of the Athenians as indigenous people and the citizenship law passed by the Athenians in 451/450 were, respectively, the ideological construct and the practical materiality of racial (for Lape) or proto-racist (for Isaac) ideology of 5th and 4th-century Athens. Let us take a closer look at this interpretation, as it reveals how these scholars read the sources and why they conclude that the attitude of Greeks regarding foreigners can be better explained using the semantic field of racism.

Similar to other societies – both ancient and contemporary – Athenians built their ethnic identity based on the notion that they formed a “large family” in which all citizens could claim a common ancestry (see Davies, 1977-1978). Athenians of the classical period believed they had always lived in the same region (Attica), unlike other Greeks, especially Spartans, who were linked by tradition of the Greeks themselves to migratory waves. In the last decades of

the 5th century, as Rosivach (1987) argues, the myth of autochthony would have acquired its complete shape connected to the ambiguity of the Greek term *autochthon*, formed by *auto-* (“same”; “equal”) and *-chthon* (“earth”). Thus, Athenians assumed that they had always lived in the same territory, and were born from the Attic land, similar to their mythical king Erechtheus.⁸

The way in which the Athenians regarded their origins and their particularities, obviously had practical effects on the political and religious life of the city. If all Athenian citizens were born from the Attic land, they would all have had a noble birth. The autochthonous myth, as some scholars have rightly said (see Loraux, 2000; Lape, 2010, p. 26-28), is the democratic response to the emphasis on *eugeneia* (“noble birth”) typical of the Greek aristocratic idea, in which an individual’s value was ranked according to the nobility of their family. In this regard, autochthony democratizes noble birth, since all citizens would be distinguished because they were considered children of Athens, regardless of their family or economic resources. Thus, Aristotle remarked in the *Rhetoric*, “Good birth, in the case of a nation or city, is to be autochthonous or ancient and for its first inhabitants to have been leaders and have had numerous descendants distinguished in estimable qualities” (Aristotle, 2007, 1360b, 31-34).

If the myth of autochthony helped to create and sustain a collective identity among citizens, it also promoted, by the same logic, the exclusion of those who did not fit the indigenous criterion that defined the body of citizens. The proponents of the use of racism in classical Antiquity insist, precisely, on this exclusionary character of the autochthonous ideology, which, according to them, is aggravated by Pericles’ reform of citizenship in 451/450.

From 451/450, to participate fully in the polis, one had to be the offspring of both mother and father citizens, replacing the previous condition in which the father being a citizen was enough. At first glance, it seems clear that this new law discouraged mixed marriages between Athenians and foreigners. In doing so, this logic favoured marriage between Athenians exclusively, in addition to promoting restriction of the civic body. The ancient sources are almost silent on why Athenians changed citizenship at this precise historical moment. The only reason advanced by ancients is the line written by the author of the *Constitution of the Athenians*: the law was enacted “on account of the large number of citizens” (Aristotle, 2002, 26.4).

The Aristotelian explanation for reforming the transmission of civil rights, as several scholars have noted, cannot be read literally. After several years of war against the Persians in the previous decades, there is no suggestion that Attica was experiencing any overpopulation. After dismissing this

explanation, experts differ significantly though.⁹ Some think that we should partially retain the Aristotelian phrase, slightly altering the meaning: citizens are numerous, not in absolute terms, but in relative ones, that is, many citizens were participating in specific aspects of the polis, which could be preserved by reducing the body civic. Thus, the idea of the law could be to limit the growing benefits of the nascent Athenian empire to a more restricted group of citizens, in the face of a possible scenario in which citizenship would be more valuable and coveted by foreigners due to cultural and material wealth enjoyed by Athens' citizens in the middle of the 5th century (see Davies, 1977-1978; Leão, 2011, p. 107). However, other scholars argue that the Aristotelian sentence reflects the concern of Athenians with the expanding number of citizens originated from mixed marriages, mainly arising from the possible practice of wealthier Athenian men looking for foreign wives to strengthen their bonds with other cities' elites. Thus, the citizenship law would have been imbued with the democratic spirit of undermining disproportionate forms of power and status stemming from the Athenian elite (see Humphreys, 1974, p. 93-94).

Finally, a third way in which the law of citizenship has been interpreted direct us toward the recent historiography on race relations in Antiquity. Certain scholars interpret the changes in the citizenship law as a practical manifestation of the autochthonous ideology promoted by the "state". In this line of thought, the law would have put into action and materialised the desire to purify the "race" of the Athenian people by combating mixed marriages. Thus, allowing citizenship only to those born from an Athenian father and mother, Athenians would preserve their pure blood and would sustain, in practice, their pride in the exceptionality and superiority of their people and their exclusive relationship with the Attica land.

One of the first authors to approach this topic in these terms was Hignett (1952), in a book written shortly after the Second World War, when the theme of racial purity was still very present in European culture due to the Nazi period. For Hignett, the main aspect of the law of 451/450 was "to preserve the racial purity of the citizen-body" (Hignett, 1952, p. 345).

The interpretation of the 451/450 citizenship law as a manifestation of the Athenians' desire to avoid any mixing of their "race" with foreigners had other supporters in the decades following Hignett's book (for example, Kagan, 1969, p. 104), but it has fallen into disuse since the 1980s.¹⁰ One of the reasons for this loss of credibility lies in the considerable criticism against this interpretation in the historiography of this period. Certain points of these criticisms will be embraced at the end of this article. However, now we shall see the contours

of the revival of this racial purity thesis through the work of 21st-century historiography, especially Isaac (2004) and Lape (2010).

Lape (2010) states that sources from classical Greek period (5th-4th centuries BC) present the development of a “racial citizenship” promoted by Athens. For Lape, the ideological aspect of Athenian racism was the myth of autochthony, whereas the practical aspect was a set of legal measures taken by Athens to avoid mixing Athenian “race” with foreign blood. Moreover, the systemic character of Athenian racism, for Lape, was the very role of the Athenian polis in legalizing and promoting the strengthening of Athenian identity at the expense of foreign residents in Attica. We will see how this author builds her overall view of Athenian “racial citizenship” by articulating those elements that define racism.

Lape’s work is part of a vast historiographical field that has been dedicated, at least since the 1970s, to analyse Athens’ civic ideology. This approach values how arts, theatre, discourses in honour of soldiers killed in battle (the ceremony of funeral oration) and speeches presented before the Assembly or the Courts of democratic Athens tended to present an idealised image of Athens, as a single civic entity, without diversity and conflicts. This research program was central, for instance, for the “School of Paris”, primarily with Jean-Pierre Vernant and Nicole Loraux.

In effect, Loraux raised the myth of autochthony to the key piece of Athenian civic ideology. For Loraux: “The reminder of autochthony is, of course, a linchpin of Athenian external propaganda: according to the needs of the moment, the purity of an unalloyed birth provides the basis for hegemony or the city’s hatred of barbarians” (Loraux, [1981]2006a, p. 210-211).

For this reason, Loraux ([1981]2006a, p. 210) holds that autochthony is the “patriotic and civic myth embodying the unity of the Athenian community”. Lape follows the same line of valuing autochthony as a fundamental part of Athenian civic imagination. According to Lape, autochthony means the promotion of Athenian racial purity and the law of citizenship of 451/450 was the adaptation of this ideology to legal reality: “the law seems to translate the ethnic-national foundation of citizen identity encapsulated in the myth into a new legal and political reality” (Lape, 2010, p. 24). Therefore, it would be the practical realization of racial Athenian citizenship, that is, the articulation between ideology, action and structure.

Analysing every Greek text discussed by Lape is beyond the scope of this article.¹¹ Now, it is necessary to shed light on two weaknesses in Lape’s thesis: the chronological link she establishes between autochthony and citizenship law, and

her interpretation of autochthony as a myth of racial purity. Regarding the first argument, Lape complicates the matter further when she writes, “the passage of the law undoubtedly expresses a pre-existing ideology” (Lape, 2010, p. 24). Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Rosivach (1987), there is no evidence that the full version of the myth of autochthony predates the reform of citizenship.

As Rosivach (1987) maintains, the first meaning of *autochthon* (“one always having the same land”) is probably chronologically older than the second meaning (“born from the earth”).¹² However, Lape’s case depends on those two meanings already being operative in the first half of the 5th century. Note that the historical sources that Lape discusses, such as Euripides’ *Ion*, Demosthenes’ speeches or Plato’s *Menexenus*, are all chronologically subsequent to the law of citizenship. Although Lape is aware of Rosivach’s article, she does not engage with him to discuss the chronological challenge that weakens her thesis.

Isaac also suggests a tight connection between the myth of autochthony and the law of citizenship. Based on his reading of Euripides’ *Ion*, he affirms that, “the idea of being indigenous was used as justification for keeping immigrants in an inferior status. The notion that the foreigners are an alien threat recurs frequently in the play” (Isaac, 2004, p. 118). For Isaac “the Athenian insistence on the purity of their lineage must be taken into account” (Isaac, 2004, p.116, n. 226) in the interpretation of the citizenship law. Similar to Lape, Isaac mentions Rosivach (1987), but also fails to properly deal with the chronological issue related to the two meanings of the myth of autochthony.¹³

Without the supposed Athenian racial pride as the underlying reason for the citizenship reform, it could be difficult for Lape to find the active participation of the city in creating laws specifically to promote the racialisation¹⁴ of social groups. Racism without the vital role of the polis would lose its structural dimension, being just a set of ideas associated with how Athenians conceived their ancestry in a mythical way. This is an issue for Lape that, unlike Isaac, intends to emphasise not only the remote origins of modern racism in the ancient Greek political *thought*, but also aims to demonstrate that racial ideas acquired *practical* and *legal* expression in classical Athens.¹⁵

FROM PLATO’S *MENEXENUS* TO NON-HEREDITARY FORMS OF CULTURAL PREJUDICE

While it is true that Greek literature contains extracts presenting particular ideas of blood purity, this fact does not necessarily indicate that these

passages are representative of the average Athenian citizen's belief in an alleged racial superiority. However, these excerpts are precious to the proponents of the terminology of ancient racism. One of the most explicit passage is present in Plato's *Menexenus*.

In this dialogue from the 4th century, Plato represents Socrates reciting, for the young Menexenus, a funeral oration (*epitaphios logos*) which Socrates had heard from Aspasia, companion of Pericles. This text is essentially a rhetorical exercise elaborated by Plato based on *epitaphios logos*, one of the most relevant civic ceremonies of the Athenians, in which a speaker was chosen regularly to deliver a public speech in honour of the soldiers who fought for Athens and were killed in battle. The Platonic dialogue contains basic topics of this kind of speech, such as a praise of Athens and its people; history of Athens' military achievements from past to present; an exhortation to the contemporary Athenians. The interpretive problem of Plato's *Menexenus*, though, lies in the fact that the Platonic Socrates exposes this apparently serious civic argument by a framework that can be interpreted as ironic: "you're always poking fun at the orators, Socrates" (Plato, 1984, 235c), says Menexenus to Socrates. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether Socrates' eulogies in the reported funeral speech are sincere or an ironic criticism of the rhetoric of the orators similar to what can be read in Plato's *Gorgias*.¹⁶

Thus, in Plato's *Menexenus*, Socrates says that the Athenians, unlike other Greeks, did not make shameful treaties with the Persians. The reason for this noble Athenian attitude is its intrinsic disdain for barbarians and the lack of miscegenation with them:

We alone did not dare to swear and betray them, so firm and healthy is the nobility and freedom of this city, hating Barbarians by nature because we are purely Greek and unmixed with Barbarian stock. There dwells among us no stock from Pelops, nor Cadmus, nor Egyptus, nor Danaus, nor the many others who are Greek by law but Barbarian by nature. Greeks ourselves, we live unmixed with Barbarians, whence arises the pure hatred in our city of alien natures. (Plato, 1984, 245c6-d6)

This passage from Plato's *Menexenus* certainly displays a profound hatred of foreigners – barbarians and even non-Athenian Greeks – praising purity of the Athenian lineage. Thus, Athenians should be distinguished from other Greeks because they are untouched by the barbarians' nature. The myth of

autochthony is implied here, in which Athenians, as we have seen, are a people who have not been involved in miscegenation.

Isaac (2004, p. 123) is right that the Athenians are presented in this text as the only pure Greeks. Nevertheless, I cannot entirely agree with Lape's view that this type of excerpt allows us "to anticipate or prefigure the racial interpretation of history that developed in early modern Europe" (Lape, 2010, p. 143). Neither Isaac nor Lape adequately discusses the *sui generis* character of this Platonic passage, as we have seen, within Plato's *Menexenus* that many scholars have interpreted as a critique of the type of rhetoric in funeral oration.

It is possible that there is a rhetorical mechanism to exaggerate the patriotic character of the real Athenian funeral speeches and we cannot be as confident as Isaac (2004, p. 123) that the content of this passage was shared by many Athenian citizens. Another element that points to the rhetorical exaggeration of this section of the *Menexenus* concerns the vocabulary. This text is, indeed, unparalleled in Greek literature by accumulating in a few lines an extraordinary number of words linked to the idea of purity, nature and contempt.¹⁷ There are four terms in the semantic field of pureness or mixture: the adverb *eilikrinos* and the adjective *amigēs*, which mean "unmixed"; *katharos* which means "clean", "pure"; *meixobarbaros*, which means, in this context, "half barbarian, half Greek". There are also three occurrences of the Greek word for "nature" (*physis*), in addition to two occurrences for "hatred" (*misos*), including the telling word *misobarbaros*, that is, "hatred of the barbarian."

It is important to keep in mind that, on the whole, the lexical use of terms related to purity in ancient Greek has nothing to do with the modern notion of racial purity. *Eilikrinos* and the corresponding noun *eilikrinēs* only denote that someone or something is genuine or not mixed. The association of *eilikrinos* with *amigēs* "unmixed" in *Menexenus* reinforcing the idea of Athenian purity is atypical in Greek literature. The adjective *katharos* could be used to describe the pure state of water, as in Herodotus 4.53, or it could refer to purification of a person after being religiously polluted. Athenians are called *katharoi* in Thucydides 5.8, but this merely suggests that Brasidas of Sparta will face an army composed only by Athenians. In Euripides' *Ion*, the polis (city) is called *kathara* in verse 673, however this is unrelated to racial purity. Finally, the *meixobarbaros* and *misobarbaros* compounds display hatred by the Greeks of non-Greek people considered barbarians, nevertheless this feeling can be classified within the terminology of ethnicity rather than race and racism.¹⁸

The search for an operative notion of race from this text is methodologically risky for several reasons: 1) the seriousness of Plato's statement is not guaranteed; 2) the patriotic exaggeration of this excerpt is uncommon even considering other funeral orations, which do not reveal, as Cohen (2000, p. 94-103) argues, anxiety regarding miscegenation or affirmation of racial purity; 3) The classification of human groups based on notions of blood and miscegenation is not typical of Plato, who emphasises typically that the differences between human beings must be understood by the mastery of virtue, for which there are educational and philosophical means of achieving it (see Kamtekar, 2002). Also, one must consider the absence of an equivalent in ancient Greek for our word "race", let alone "racism", as admitted by McCoskey (2006, p. 248) and demonstrated by Tuplin (1999).

Greeks (or Athenians, for Lape) who are deeply concerned with racial purity and ethnic cleansing could create a highly anachronistic image. Lape, for example, seems to believe that citizenship with the principle of *ius sanguinis* – civil rights being acquired by nationality (both parents in the case of Athens after 451) – would necessarily signify a racial structure promoted by the state to protect purity against blood degradation represented by the elements foreign to the national community defined by *ius sanguinis*. If this interpretation is correct, then, as Blok (2014, p. 870) argues, all societies, ancient and modern, that define citizenship by the notion of a community of descendants linked by blood ties would be racists.

Indeed, one of the most widespread manners in which human groups constitute their identities is by the attribution of a foundational value to their territory and their ancestral bonds. This element has been fundamental in the definition of ethnic groups since Max Weber and it has been studied by several scholars of ancient Greece, such as Hall (1997; 2002). Hall (2002, pp. 9-19) distinguishes three essential characteristics of ethnic groups: shared myth of descent; relationship with a specific territory; elaboration of a common History.

In this sense, it is vital to differentiate racism from ethnicity and ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism and xenophobia are two aspects of the same phenomenon: the culture in question interprets its ethnic disparities with other societies as hierarchical relations of superiority and inferiority. The distinction lies, as Taguieff (2001, p. 59) observes, in a matter of focus: the ethnocentric society conceives itself as the superior framework by which cultural differences must be evaluated, whereas the xenophobic culture tends to denigrate and to stereotype foreigners.

Along those lines, racism, being a specific modality by which a society conceives and experiences its ethnic relations, carries hierarchical characteristics of ethnocentrism and xenophobia. However, racism is something more: it is a modality of thought and action closely linked to belonging to specific biological and/or geographical characteristics. Otherwise speaking, we can read Braude's words on this topic:

Even more essential is the claim that *all* important characteristics of the members of that race are determined by that group's physical heritage. In the racist world-view there is no human individuality. Each individual is merely an inevitable manifestation of the collective to which s/he belongs, with the nature of that collective determined by shared heredity. Racism may succinctly be defined as fixed collective hereditarian over-determinism. (Braude, 2011, p. 42)

By this comment, Braude (2011) argues that one of the main differences between racism and xenophobia or ethnocentrism stems from the former's hereditary character compared with "non-hereditary forms of cultural prejudice" (Braude, 2011, p. 42), in which Braude includes xenophobia and ethnocentrism.

Thus, the myth of autochthony can be understood as a narrative of ethnic identity that sets boundaries between who is included and who is not, by using common ancestry, territory and history as criteria. By interpreting autochthony as an ideology of human groups racialization, it would mean raising the logic of race, the heredity of collective traits, as the primary means by which Athenians would define those included and excluded from their ethnicity and citizenship.

In my view, however, although we cannot completely rule out forms of hereditary determinism in Greek thought, the "non-hereditary forms of cultural prejudice" are much more widespread in Greek texts. Hence, Greek authors value learning and education (*paideia*) in the development of both individual and peoples, since there was no thought of an individual naturally immune to *paideia* and unable to learn. As a result, in ancient Greece race was not the main criterion of ethnic identity, since Athenians and other Greeks, as has been widely demonstrated (for example, Ferreira, 1992), tended to conceive the group differences using cultural characteristics, unlike racist societies that use the phenotype (immutable; genetic) as the principal ethnic indicator (see Den Berghe, 1981, p. 240-241).

Before ending this article, I would like to indicate some limits of this study, as well as possible ways to increase our knowledge of racism in classical Antiquity. Due to the impossibility of discussing all aspects of the topic, this work focused on the relationship between autochthony and the Athenian citizenship law of 451/450. Thus, I deliberately omitted two issues that must be considered to decide whether it is legitimate to apply the lexicon of racism to ancient Greece. The first question is how the historian assesses the presence of biological and geographical determinism in the first medical and geographical treatises of Greeks and Romans, such as *On Airs, Waters, and Places* attributed to Hippocrates and probably written in the second half of the 5th century. Isaac (2004) explores these sources because he estimates that these treaties provide a clear deterministic relation between the geography of a place, and moral and social characteristics of the individuals who live there. For him, this link is (proto) racist.¹⁹

The actual status of foreign residents in Athens, the *metics*, was also not explored in this article. As we have seen, Lape (2010) argues that Athens promoted a racial citizenship at the expense of foreigners. In that case, it is worth reopening this debate to find out if the Athens' *metics* were systematic victims of racism.²⁰

Future investigations, accordingly, can reframe those themes discussing the innovative and provocative work of this recent historiographic perspective that aims to show the continuities between ancient and modern racism, changing our view of its origin, as well as how ancient societies conceived themselves as ethnic collectives.

Since we write History (the historian's text) using modern concepts – such as globalisation, gender, social class, political parties, and the idea of progress – it is always risky to use them. As Loraux ([1992]2006b) says, we need strategies to control anachronisms because a History made only from the perspective of the ancients is implausible. One of the ways to control anachronism concerning this topic, in my view, is to be very cautious with the use of the modern concept of racism to the ancient World. I am not convinced that “fear of diversity” of the ancient Greeks can be satisfactorily explained as racism and race.²¹ Nor do I think it is the best approach to broaden the definition of racism until it becomes synonymous with ethnicity.

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NOTES

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² The concept of race has sociological relevance in explaining the action of people who, consciously or not, use this idea to discriminate against people, although this notion does not have credibility from a genetic and biological point of view. Race is a cultural construct, although its definition usually has an imagined relationship with biological aspects of human groups. On this topic, see, for example, Ericksen ([1994]2010, p. 6).

³ See Fredrickson (2002, p. 17-47).

⁴ In this article, I limit the term Antiquity or Classical Antiquity to refer to ancient Greece and Rome.

⁵ Aldrovandi (2010) reviews significant studies on ethnicity in ancient Greece. Gruen (2011) highlights examples of contact with, and even admiration of, foreigners by Greeks.

⁶ The dates relating to Antiquity in this article are always before Christ.

⁷ Guimarães (2004) assesses that “the expanded reproduction of racial inequalities in Brazil coexists with the growing softening of racist attitudes and behaviours” (p. 33). It is worth investigating, however, whether the recent emergence of the Jair Bolsonaro’s government is contributing to the increase in explicitly racist speeches and attitudes in Brazil.

⁸ The myth of autochthony appears in several classes of sources during the 5th and 4th centuries: ceramic vases; Herodotus and Thucydides (although these authors do not qualify the Athenians as autochthonous); Isocrates, Lysias and Demosthenes; Plato’s *Menexenus*; speeches in honour of the Athenian soldiers killed in battle (funeral oration); dramatic poetry, especially, Euripides’s *Ion* and *Erechtheus*. For an overview of the myth of autochthony, in addition to Loraux ([1981]2006a; 2000), see Leão (2010). Similar to Lape, he develops a narrative relating autochthony and citizenship, but, unlike her, he does not think that the purpose of the citizenship law of 451-450 was protection of Athenians’ racial purity.

⁹ It is impossible to discuss, in this article, the many interpretations of the citizenship law. The reader who wants to broaden the knowledge on this controversy can read the com-

ments by Peter Rhodes in De Ste. Croix (2004, p. 251-253), as well as Blok (2009b), which served as the basis for the classifications of the interpretations proposed in my paper.

¹⁰ It is emblematic that substantial volumes on Greek citizenship between 1980 and 2000, like Manville (1990), do not even mention the word “racism”. However, Ogden (1994) is an exception, who reads autochthony as an ideology of racial purity and the citizenship law of 451/450 as the concrete manifestation of this ideology, in a similar way to Isaac (2004) and Lape (2010).

¹¹ Blok (2009a) discusses part of the same sources as Lape on autochthony, but comes to different conclusions, denying that this myth stresses racial pureness. Pelling (2009) analyses this topic in Herodotus and Thucydides, highlighting how the myth was ambiguous and elastic, being used with different meanings depending on the discursive genre. Autochthony in the Euripides’ *Ion* has a lengthy bibliography. Particularly useful are Zacharia (2003) and Leão (2012).

¹² Shapiro (1998) explores autochthony in visual arts and assesses that the full version of the myth of autochthony should be dated in the second half of the 5th century, as an ideological response from Athenians to the needs of their democracy and their hegemonic role in the Delian League. Blok (2009a, p. 261) argues that the first signs of the two meanings of the word “*autochthon*” occurred in the last two decades of the 5th century, namely with two Euripidean plays, *Ion* and *Erechtheus*.

¹³ Isaac (2004, p. 114-115, n. 220) reports Rosivach’s (1987) arguments but does not consider them in his interpretation of the relationship between autochthony and the law of citizenship. Patterson (1981) devotes much of the fourth chapter of her book opposing the “racial” reading of the law proposed by Pericles.

¹⁴ By racialization, I mean the activity of specific social agents in transforming a group of individuals into a race. In other words, racialization can be seen as the “[social] process of facing physical differences as social markers and, typically, reinforcing them through a regime of oppression” (FENTON, 1999, p. 66).

¹⁵ Isaac (2004) overemphasises the ideological dimension of what he describes as proto-racism: “This work is not concerned with the actual treatment of foreigners in Greece and Rome, but with opinions and concepts encountered in the literature” (p. 2). On these three aspects of racism (ideological, practical and structural), see Campos (2017).

¹⁶ About the divergence between serious and ironic readings of Plato’s *Menexenus*, see Trivigno (2009).

¹⁷ Unlike Kamtekar (2002, p. 3), I do not think that Plato’s *Laws* 692e-693a is comparable to *Menexenus* 245c-d in terms of emphasis on racial purity and anxiety regarding miscegenation. In Euripides’ *Erechtheus*, we read that Athenians are autochthonous in contrast to other migrant peoples (fragment 360, verses 1-13). Euripides’ *Ion* contains a similar statement: Athenians were autochthonous and therefore they did not originate from outside Attica (verses 585-594). These Euripidean excerpts do not contain, however, the collection of terms for lineage and hatred for the barbarians that exists in Plato’s *Menexenus* 245 c-d.

Moreover, it is worth noting that there is no such articulation between autochthony, blood and purity in the famous funeral oration attributed to Pericles by Thucydides (2.36-41).

¹⁸ Casevitz (1991) discusses words in ancient Greek that denote an intermediate stage between Greeks and barbarians, such as *meixobarbaros* or *mixellēnes* (“half Hellenic”). For the opposition between Greeks and Barbarians in ancient Greek culture, see Hall (1989).

¹⁹ Kennedy (2016) debates how Greek medical and ethnographical works intended to extract cultural traits from human groups based on climatic and geographical characteristics of a particular environment.

²⁰ On the dialectic between reality and representation around *metics* in Athenian democracy, see Morales (2014).

²¹ In making that point, I agree with scholars who are also not persuaded by this defence of the use of (proto) racism in Antiquity: Tuplin (2007) and Blok (2014).

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