

# Rome and Greece as Proto-Nations? Simultaneity and Collective Identity in European Antiquity

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*This paper builds upon Benedict Anderson’s conceptualization of chronological simultaneity as a necessary condition for collective national identity. I provide an expanded definition of temporal simultaneity and connect it with the sociological concept of the spatio-temporal order, arguing that the formation of national identity requires a dualistic sense of chronological time (history) and non-chronological time (myth). I apply this new model to the historical examples of Greece and Rome in antiquity and provide evidence for their status as “proto-nations.” I conclude by offering reasoning for the theoretical usefulness of this new classification within the context of political science research.*

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson put forth the concept of *simultaneity*, specifically along two theoretical axes. First, as it applies geographically: the notion that individuals or groups can feel connected to a physically dispersed body of others they might never see, meet, or interact with.<sup>1</sup> And second, as it applies to the temporal realm: the idea that people can feel a similar sort of connection to those that came before and to those that will come after. Anderson makes the claim that at some point in Europe there occurred a collective transition from “messianic time” or “simultaneity-along-time” (non-chronological time) to

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London New York: Verso, 2016), 19–22, 114–15, 171–79, 188–189. It should be noted that “geographic simultaneity” is never directly referenced the way temporal simultaneity is in the book itself, but it is reasonable to infer it as a theoretical category in parallel to temporal simultaneity due to the discussion given to the concept by Anderson throughout.

“homogenous, empty time” (chronological time as we think of it today).<sup>2</sup> Fundamentally, Anderson establishes his thesis for nationalism upon the principles of simultaneity, claiming that modern forms of national identity require both a sense of geographic simultaneity as well as a chronological sense of temporal simultaneity. I argue, however, that a synthesis of non-chronological and chronological temporal simultaneity existed in pre-medieval Europe, and that this synthesis combined with geographic simultaneity to form real, imagined community in Rome and Greece of antiquity.

As such, an expanded conceptualization of simultaneity and its history is necessary to appropriately consider both the way that humans perceive of themselves collectively as well as the ostensible shift that occurred along these lines in Europe after antiquity. This paper has two main aims: first, to more fully analyze the theoretical usefulness of simultaneity and to explain how it might be reconceptualized in a broader sense, Second, I will look at the Roman and Greek history, keeping simultaneity in mind as a way to consider their candidacy as proto-nations with the aim of determining the types of imagined communities that may have preceded those better recognized as being nations more fully.

### **Theorizing simultaneity conceptually**

Anderson himself would probably have agreed that the concept of *simultaneity* was of critical importance to his definition of nationalism given his comment that “so deep-lying is this new idea [of simultaneity] that one could argue that every essential modern conception is based on a conception of ‘meanwhile’.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, at the same time he argued that it would be “short-

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson, 23–25.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, 24n34.

sighted, however, to think of the imagined communities of nations as simply growing out of and replacing religious communities and dynastic realms.”<sup>4</sup> Although I agree that the connection as presented here is not so simple, I disagree with his under-emphasizing of the connective role that simultaneity may have played in the conceptualization of community in pre-modern Europe.

Anderson goes on to make the claim that the pre-modern mind “had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separations between past and present.”<sup>5</sup> Instead, he argues they held what Walter Benjamin referred to as “messianic time,” or a “simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present.”<sup>6</sup> In the quoted essay, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin originally builds this concept in contrast to “homogenous, empty time” (our idea of chronological time) as a way to think about the connection people have with history and the role that this connection plays when considering the idea of progress and revolution more generally.<sup>7</sup> A secular version of messianic time, he explains, is brought about in revolutionary moments where a causal sense of a “continuum of history” begins to unravel and a more interconnected, simultaneous history begins to emerge – connecting all of the present and the past as one. To Robespierre and the French Revolution, Benjamin explains: “ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now.”<sup>8</sup> Going further, he posits that this belief was not unique to just the French Revolutionaries, but more universally “characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their action.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense, Benjamin evokes an inherently mystical notion of time as it exists within moments of great change, deliberately

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, 24; Walter Benjamin, Harry Zohn, and Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (Boston ; New York: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), 208.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, Zohn, and Arendt, *Illuminations*, 198–99, 204–5.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin, Zohn, and Arendt, 205.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin, Zohn, and Arendt, 205–7.

contrasting this idea to the more causal sense of historicism that otherwise strips the interpretation of human history in its totality as being meaningfully interconnected.<sup>10</sup>

This argument about the role that messianic time played in pre-modern Europe was not derived wholly from Benjamin. According to Marc Bloch's *Feudal Society* (a book written contemporaneously to Benjamin's), this radically non-causal perception of reality had theological origins in the belief that human society had been placed in the end times of history.<sup>11</sup> Apocalyptic thinking, he argued, was fundamental to pre-Reformation society's perceived reality. Bloch goes on even more forcefully to say that this mentality inhibited the average individual from properly understanding the political changes that were occurring around them, noting that "men thought of past and present as being so closely bound together that they were unable to perceive the contrasts between them" – to the extreme point, he contends, that they "believed that the Roman Empire was still in existence."<sup>12</sup> Alongside this argument based on ideology and theology, Bloch also presents a materialist-based conclusion that parallels Anderson's own assertions about print capitalism and the importance that time-keeping played in this period: to put it plainly, the people of pre-modern Europe lacked an easy way to measure the passing of time. As a result, it wasn't until systems of measurement more advanced than water-clocks and sundials were invented that all people, from peasants to the nobility, began to think about time in a straightforward, chronological sense.<sup>13</sup>

Overlapped against Bloch's arguments, however, Benjamin's ideas about the revolutionary's messianic time and the historicist's homogenous, empty time seem counter to

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin, Zohn, and Arendt, 207–9.

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 23; Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society. Vol. 1: The Growth of Ties of Dependence*, trans. L. A. Manyon, vol. 1, A Phoenix Book 156 (Chicago [Ill.]: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997), 84–87.

<sup>12</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society. Vol. 1*, 1:91.

<sup>13</sup> Bloch, 1:73–75.

Anderson's claims about the sociopolitical evolution that temporal simultaneity ostensibly went through in Europe. Read directly, Benjamin makes an inverted argument here: the great explosions of collective national identity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries must have been predicated on a messianic understanding of time, not a homogenous, empty one.<sup>14</sup> Correspondingly, this raises the question of whether the messianic simultaneity held in pre-modern Europe could have produced certain collective identities that have been unintentionally overlooked. Moreover, this implies that if messianic time was integral to Europe's conceptualization of temporal simultaneity, then the eventual, secularized understanding of collective identity arising after the Protestant Reformation must have been based not on an evolutionary shift towards homogenous, empty time, but rather on a fundamental reinterpretation of messianic time as it represented the now non-theological orientation of revolutionary beliefs in a modernizing, secular Europe.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For a much more expansive discussion of Benjamin's potential beliefs about this specific subject, see Michael G. Levine, *A Weak Messianic Power: Figures of a Time to Come in Benjamin, Derrida, and Celan*, First edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014) esp. 24-28.

<sup>15</sup> For an example of other work that reaches similar conclusions, see Kathryn A. Woolard, "Is the Past a Foreign Country?: Time, Language Origins, and the Nation in Early Modern Spain," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 14, no. 1 (2004): 57-80, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.2004.14.1.57> as well as that entire special edition of the journal for a broad set of research focusing on the connection between history and temporality. I maintain that Anderson's recognition of simultaneity still has a substantively useful purpose for understanding collective identity more fully. In general, little work has focused on this part of his definition of nationalism. For one example of work that is decidedly more critical, see John Kelly, "Time and the Global: Against the Homogeneous, Empty Communities in Contemporary Social Theory," *Development and Change* 29, no. 4 (1998): 839-71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00101>; for a modern interpretation of this issue, specifically as it relates to contemporary populism, see Henrik Bødker and Chris Anderson, "Populist Time: Mediating Immediacy and Delay in Liberal Democracy," *International Journal of Communication* 13, no. 0 (November 24, 2019): 5948-66; for further discussion about the sociopolitical role that temporal contemplation plays in modernity more generally, see Timothy Mitchell, ed., *Questions of Modernity, Contradictions of Modernity*, v. 11 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) esp. chap. 1 (and for a short discussion of homogenous, empty time see, specifically 14-18); the transnationalism and migration literature has at times focused on the issue of simultaneity for their concerns about social networks and identity, see Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society1," *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 1002-39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00227.x>; Takeyuki Tsuda, "Whatever Happened to Simultaneity? Transnational Migration Theory and Dual Engagement in Sending and Receiving Countries," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 4 (April 1, 2012): 631-49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.659126>.

Erich Auerbach's description of Christianity's interpretation of consciousness, which provided Anderson with the other major philosophical foundation for his conclusion (and the term *simultaneity* itself), helps us disentangle the problem here.<sup>16</sup> Rather than describing solely a process of singular transition, Auerbach instead outlines something closer to a societal dialectic between the two types of simultaneity, one that became heavily weighted towards messianism during the rise of Christianity. On this push and pull process, he explains:

This [messianic] conception of history is magnificent in its homogeneity, but it was completely alien to the mentality of classical antiquity, it annihilated that mentality down to the very structure of its language... Wherever the two conceptions met, there was of necessity a conflict and an attempt to compromise – between, on the one hand, a presentation which carefully interrelated the elements of history, which respected temporal and casual sequence, remained within the domain of the earthly ground, and, on the other hand, a fragmentary, discrete presentation, constantly seeking an interpretation from above.<sup>17</sup>

This portrays messianic and homogeneous, empty time as co-existing in an occasionally heated conflict with each other. Auerbach certainly makes it clear that the rise of Christianity in Europe was such a period, but in considering Benjamin's interpretation of revolutionary-messianic time, the era of secular revolutionary change beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century might similarly be seen as such a period as well.

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<sup>16</sup> Erich Auerbach and Willard R. Trask, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 1st Princeton Classics ed., 50th anniversary ed, Princeton Classics (Princeton ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 72-75 (Anderson's quoted passage occurs on 74); Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 23–24.

<sup>17</sup> Auerbach and Trask, *Mimesis*, 74 (beginning right after Anderson's quoted passage).

This perspective seems especially relevant when considering the world events that surrounded Benjamin, Auerbach, and Bloch. All three were writing during the second World War – specifically in its early period during which the ideologically revisionist Axis powers appeared to be at the apogee of their strength.<sup>18</sup> In the final paragraphs of *Theses*, Benjamin gives perhaps his most illustrative explanation of the philosophical contradictions inherent in a society undergoing a massive, contemporary crisis:

The present, which, as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgment, coincides exactly with the stature which the history of mankind has in the universe... A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with chips of Messianic time. The soothsayers who found out from time what it had in store certainly did not experience time as either homogeneous or empty. Anyone who keeps this in mind will perhaps get an idea of how past times were experienced in remembrance – namely, in just the same way. We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future

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<sup>18</sup> Bloch's *Feudal Society* was first published in late 1939, Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* in 1942, and Auerbach's *Mimesis* in 1946, though he began writing it in May of 1942. For a fuller understanding of the context at least for Auerbach, see Edward Said's introduction to the fiftieth anniversary edition, Auerbach and Trask, *Mimesis*.

turned into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.<sup>19</sup>

At least for Benjamin, it seems that holding on to both messianic and homogenous, empty time was a demanding exercise during these periods of conflict, but one that benefited the individual willing to recognize the advantages (spiritual, philosophical, or otherwise) that came with pairing a messianic sense of yesterday and tomorrow with a chronological pathway to today.

All this to say that it may not be best practice to view the two types of temporal simultaneity as fundamentally antithetical (like Anderson did). Rather, it is through their synthesis that a mutual sense of self-actuation and collective identity can be formed in the first place. The chronological interpretation allows for groups to consider the causal pathways of their cumulative history as well as the potential possibilities for their collective future.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, the non-chronological interpretation allows for that same group to think about themselves as a singular body of people whose aggregate historical experiences were preordained by some greater philosophical force and whose future remains compellingly inevitable. This recognition of the required role played by messianic time in the construction of national identity helps explain why nationalism always seems to contain elements of primordial thinking about a people's history and the role of myths as a critically important connecting element.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Benjamin, Zohn, and Arendt, *Illuminations*, 208–9.

<sup>20</sup> This process is functionally a socially aggregated version of the one famously described by Mead about the present as the “seat of reality” from which the past and the future are interpreted. See, George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present*, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> The interplay between messianic time, myths, and identity was important to Sorel's thesis about society. See, Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings, 6th ed., Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 115–19; For a recent work dealing with the resilience of primordialism, see John Coakley, “‘Primordialism’ in Nationalism Studies: Theory or Ideology?,” *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no. 2 (2018): 327–47, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12349>; See, also Ronald Grigor Suny, “Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations,” *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 4 (December 2001): 862–96, <https://doi.org/10.1086/340148>.



## Simultaneity in a sociological context

It goes without saying that this interpretation of a dualistic simultaneity is heavily contingent upon a set of abstract conclusions regarding the collective interpretation of history and time. But it does seem to have an intuitively useful heuristic value. Anderson may have only gotten half of the story right. It wasn't that pre-Reformation Europe failed to form strong collective nationalities because it had no concept of homogenous, empty time. Rather, national identity failed to emerge because there was no environment where a dualistic sense of chronological and mythical history could combine with stable geographic identity.<sup>22</sup>

This understanding about the dualistic nature of temporality creates a theoretical model for a societal sense of self-consciousness. This self-consciousness, consequently, may be a prerequisite for a more solidified but bounded sense of national consciousness. The dialectic as described by Auerbach can be broken down into a more specific set of circumstances wherein homogenous, empty time allows for a connection with others in a direct sense while messianic time allows for a connection with others in a symbolic sense. This can be expressed by the recognition that a United States citizen understands both that George Washington held the same citizenship, but that his actions produced a radically different United States as it exists today. A society cultivating both is a necessary condition for the creation of a solidified national mindset.

In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckman directly discuss this matter as it relates to their more general focus on the connection between perception of reality and the formation of social organization. They argue that although the standard time of everyday life can

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<sup>22</sup> Niklas Luhmann described the role that this type of temporal complexity has for the theory of social systems more generally. See, Niklas Luhmann, "Temporalization of Complexity," in *Sociocybernetics: An Actor-Oriented Social Systems Approach Vol. 2*, ed. R. Felix Geyer and Johannes van der Zouwen (Boston, MA: Springer US, 1978), 95–111, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-4097-3\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-4097-3_7).

be understood as “the intersection between cosmic time and its socially established calendar,” there nonetheless can never be a “full simultaneity between these various levels of temporality.”<sup>23</sup> This contrast in temporality creates what they later describe as a “symbolic universe,” that acts as a collective memory shared between people as they exist in the past, present, and future.<sup>24</sup> This universal sense of collective self anticipates Anderson’s notion of symbolic immortality as it relates to the nation.<sup>25</sup> The latent symbolic sense of continuity provided to the individual by social orientation is created by a “comprehensive integration” of these two types of temporal connectivity.<sup>26</sup> Subsequently, a process of legitimation occurs wherein the individual becomes aware of in-group members and out-group others as defined by their relationship to this sense of connection and the difference in others’ socialized practices relative to one’s own group identification.<sup>27</sup>

This legitimation process feeds into the idea of ontological security – the realized perception of self within a broader sense of continuity that helps provide meaning and reason to one’s existence as it develops alongside other people’s lives and experiences. Anthony Giddens describes the instrumental purpose that collective memory may serve for the individual and the role that this plays in the aggregated way that society is constructed. Namely, he argues that the individual subconsciously uses this collective memory within the context of regular life to preserve their own ontological security; by positioning oneself in a long-term temporal reckoning

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<sup>23</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 27.

<sup>24</sup> Berger and Luckmann, 103.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 9–12.

<sup>26</sup> Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 102–4.

<sup>27</sup> Berger and Luckmann, 87–88, 103, 134–35; For a broader discussion about time and its place in sociological inquiry, see Harry H. Bash, “A Sense of Time: Temporality and Historicity in Sociological Inquiry,” *Time & Society* 9, no. 2–3 (June 1, 2000): 187–204, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X00009002003> as well as other articles in the journal, which focuses on the subject directly. For a more thorough discussion about the way perception of time affects organization, see Patrick Dawson, “Reflections: On Time, Temporality and Change in Organizations,” *Journal of Change Management*, September 2, 2014.

of an identified group of people, the individual can routinize their behavior and justify the habits and preferences they see around them. Aggregated together, this mitigates a peoples' recurrent anxieties about remaining in-group differences, in effect allowing for the formation of stronger collectives established by the implicit recognition of out-group "others".<sup>28</sup>

Combining this with geographic simultaneity creates what is sometimes referred to as a "spatio-temporal order," an organized collection of people who share an identifiable, institutionally bounded geographic and temporal connectivity.<sup>29</sup> The nation-state is the most obvious example of this in the modern day. Applied to the concept of nationhood in a broad sense, however, this simultaneity-founded understanding remains applicable across all human history.<sup>30</sup>

The idea of spatio-temporal ordering connects the conflict occurring during the rise of Christianity as described by Auerbach with the conflict occurring during certain revolutionary periods as described by Benjamin. Characterizing these types of conflictual processes as inherent to the human experience, Saskia Sassen argues that "the past is unsettled, not in the sense of imperfect data or knowledge about it, but in the sense that it lives."<sup>31</sup> The past, conceived

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<sup>28</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, First paperback edition (Berkeley Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 49–51, 74–78; Durkheim also occasionally discussed directly the "binding" effect born out of the connection between time and space. For one example, see Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, Free Press trade paperback edition (New York: Free Press, 2014), 229–33; For an interesting discussion of the potential reversal of this process today, see Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 741–67, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00396.x>.

<sup>29</sup> Saskia Sassen, "Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global: Elements for a Theorization," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 215–32; Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Updated ed., 4. print., 1. paperback print (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), chap. 8; Mead also frequently discussed the concept of spatio-temporal ordering in society, see Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present* esp. chap. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Max Jammer provides the most explicit discussion about the change in perception of simultaneity across history. Though he focuses primarily on the understanding of the term within the scope of the history of science, his book is one of the few that attempts to place simultaneity along the scope of human history. See, Max Jammer, *Concepts of Simultaneity: From Antiquity to Einstein and Beyond* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) esp. chaps. 2-4.

<sup>31</sup> Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights*, 396.

collectively around something like the nation, can be seen neither as having a definitive linear sequence nor as existing wholly in the present.<sup>32</sup> Instead, there is a fundamental unsettledness that occurs when thinking about history – a never-ending legacy of the past that is constantly being reshaped and reconstructed by the newcomer. This creates a dynamic wherein the history of any group, but especially of nations, should be thought of not as a set of chronological experiences chained together to form a presumed empirical narrative, but as an ever evolving “constructed discourse.”<sup>33</sup>

Engaging the concept of dual simultaneity as defined above with the sociological approaches to temporality leads to a point where it feels like we’ve ended up back where we started. Anderson’s description of the nation already seems to contain the idea of a constructed discourse rather than an empirical narrative. If there is to be a presumed heuristic value of dual simultaneity in the first place, then it should be demonstrated that it allows for a better understanding of nationalism. Taken alongside the broadly applicable spatio-temporal model of collective identity, I argue that this concept of dual simultaneity allows us to identify pre-modern nations that existed outside of the modernist context, but without the baggage of the primordialist position on nationalism. Moreover, viewing social history through this lens allows for the analysis of a more granular evolutionary history of change as people shifted their own sense of collective self across the ages – this is especially relevant when considering the role that

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<sup>32</sup> On the concept of simultaneity as it applies to perceptions of history and social entities, see Hanns-Georg Brose, “An Introduction towards a Culture of Non-Simultaneity?,” *Time & Society* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 5–26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X04040740> esp. 14–21.

<sup>33</sup> Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights*, 395–98; See also Michel-Rolph Trouillot and Hazel V. Carby, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2015), from which the idea of history as a constructed discourse arises. For the role that narratives have about perceptions of the future in this context, see Emma Uprichard, “Narratives of the Future : Complexity, Time and Temporality,” in *Sage Handbook of Innovation in Social Research Methods*, ed. W. Paul Vogt and Malcolm Williams (London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd., 2011); For a critical view about this issue from a historian’s perspective, see Robert F. Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse*, 3. print (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

hierarchy plays in people's identities and the problem of competing allegiances across political orders.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, nationalism should not be thought of as a concept unique to modernity and born out a specific set of European circumstances, but rather as one branch of the evolutionary tree of collective identity as it transformed alongside the changing nature of spatio-temporal orders in Europe.

### **Simultaneity and the nation in European Antiquity**

In considering this theoretical background, I aim to address the obvious follow-up question: could collective identities of the past have been closer to a nationalism than is usually understood? For this my scope will be limited to arguably the two most politically influential antecedents in antiquity Europe: Greece and Rome. As I will show, although both held idiosyncratic attitudes towards collective identity, their experiences look quite close to modern definitions of nationalism. Similarly, their impressions of time and space evince strong resemblance to the dualist notion of simultaneity theorized above. Moreover, their understanding of identity would go on to inform the underlying philosophical positions about the subject across all European contexts.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, their beliefs about collective identity and simultaneity may be the most proximately important from a retrospective standpoint.

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<sup>34</sup> This specifically seems relevant when thinking about the broader discussion about hierarchy in international relations theory and the idea of the modern world as evolving into something akin to neo-Medievalism.

<sup>35</sup> For examples of work detailing the role that Hellenic concepts of identity played, see Parts II and III of Katerina Zacharia, *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity* (Ashgate Publishing, 2008) ; for examples of work detailing the role that Roman concepts of identity played, see Catharine Edwards, *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945* (Cambridge (GB) New York (N.Y.): Cambridge University Press, 1999).

## Greece

The history of Greece was never limited to the boundaries of one nation state or one congruent, unified polity. Indeed, up until approximately the rise of the Ottoman Empire, it is probably fair to say that more Greeks lived beyond the modern boundaries of Greece than did within them.<sup>36</sup> Although these Greeks almost certainly did not have a singularly reified sense of titular homeland, a collective sense of “Greekness” did still seem to exist at least by the invasion of the Persian king Xerxes in the fifth century.<sup>37</sup> In his *Histories*, Herodotus remarked that there were four unique markers that overtly separated Greeks from non-Greeks: blood, language, religion, and customs.<sup>38</sup> Critically, this perspective on Greek identity was built out of a negation of the alternative in a moment of crisis: the in-group Greek only existed in contrast to the out-group non-Greek, the barbarian invader who could be identified as a fundamentally differentiable “other.”<sup>39</sup> Thucydides’ famous account of the war between the victorious city-states of Athens and Sparta directly built upon this identity, using the Greeks’ collective defense

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<sup>36</sup> Walter Scheidel, “The Greek Demographic Expansion: Models and Comparisons\*,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 123 (November 2003): 120–40, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3246263>.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Cartledge, “‘We Are All Greeks’? Ancient (Especially Herodotean) and Modern Contestations of Hellenism\*,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 40, no. 1 (1995): 75–82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-5370.1995.tb00465.x>; for a more directly ethnographic discussion of Herodotus and the concept of Greek ethnicity, see Rosaria Vignolo Munson, “Herodotus and Ethnicity,” in *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2014), 341–55, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118834312.ch23>.

<sup>38</sup> Katerina Zacharia, “Herodotus’ Four Markers of Greek Identity,” in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, by Katerina Zacharia (Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 15; Although Herodotus’ four markers have commonly been regarded as the first notion of Greek identity, more recently some scholars have argued that the concept of a collective Greekness goes back even further. See Joseph Skinner, *The Invention of Greek Ethnography: From Homer to Herodotus*, Greeks Overseas (Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 1.

<sup>39</sup> This is admittedly a complicated subject that has been written on by a variety of authors. For a longer discussion about the identity formation that occurred through the differentiation of Greeks and Persians, see M. I. Finley, “The Ancient Greeks and Their Nation: The Sociological Problem,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 5, no. 3 (1954): 253–64, <https://doi.org/10.2307/587071>; for a critical analysis of Herodotus’s representation of the Persians and its implications more broadly, see Rosaria Vignolo Munson, “Who Are Herodotus’ Persians?,” *The Classical World* 102, no. 4 (2009): 457–70; for a discussion about the way that Herodotus conceptualize the “other” in relation to himself and to Greece more generally, see François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* (University of California Press, 1988); Vernon L. Provencal, *Sophist Kings: Persians as Other in Herodotus*, Paperback edition, Bloomsbury Classical Studies Monographs (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); See also, Mary G. Dietz, “Between Polis and Empire: Aristotle’s Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (May 2012): 275–93, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000184>.

against the Persians as a moral lens through which the subsequent war between the Athenians and Spartans might be seen.<sup>40</sup> His history, famous as a landmark for its causal-focused historiographical methodology, serves as an early indication that the Greeks of this period had a definitive conceptualization not only of their semi-mythologized past, but of their chronological historical experiences as well.<sup>41</sup>

After the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, the Greeks' connected identity was revived by Philip and Alexander of Macedon, both of whom used the city-states' common memory as a justification for a military campaign of shared revenge against the Persians.<sup>42</sup> Just as the collective feeling of Greek solidarity had previously materialized in a critical moment of beleaguered defense against imperial ambition, so too was it now being used offensively as a cudgel for essentially inverted aims.<sup>43</sup> Later, following the conquest of the now-traditional Greek lands by the Romans, collective Greek identity once again bore out as a reaction to the political ramifications of imperial politics. In contrast to the processes occurring further to the Roman west, Greece successfully resisted romanization in part by appealing to the Roman belief that the Greeks should be seen as their primordial ancestors centrally positioned in a Hellenistic world rapidly becoming dominated by the Romans themselves.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, the Greeks concatenated

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<sup>40</sup> Many, especially in international relations, have written about Thucydides' conceptualization of identity and morality in his work. For an example dealing with identity, see Per Jansson, "Identity-Defining Practices in Thucydides': History of the Peloponnesian War," *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 2 (June 1, 1997): 147–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066197003002001>; for an example dealing with morality, see S. Sara Monoson and Michael Loriaux, "The Illusion of Power and the Disruption of Moral Norms: Thucydides' Critique of Periclean Policy," *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 2 (June 1998): 285–97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2585664>.

<sup>41</sup> For a more extensive look at the role of kinship, identity, and the idea of history and myth as collective memory in Thucydides specifically, see Maria Fragoulaki, *Kinship in Thucydides: Intercommunal Ties and Historical Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. chaps. 1, 2, and the conclusion.

<sup>42</sup> Maria Brosius, "Alexander and the Persians," in *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*, by Joseph Roisman (Leiden: Brill, 2003) esp. 116-117, 184-185.

<sup>43</sup> For a more specific account of this process, see Christos Kremmydas, "Alexander the Great, Athens, and the Rhetoric of the Persian Wars," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement*, no. 124 (2013): 199–211.

<sup>44</sup> Ilaria Romeo, "The Panhellenion and Ethnic Identity in Hadrianic Greece," *Classical Philology* 97, no. 1 (January 2002): 21–40, <https://doi.org/10.1086/449565>; Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The*

the outside-in historical understanding of Greek identity with their own internal one, effectively solidifying a more fully realized version of Greekness that could stand on its own conceptually.<sup>45</sup>

When the Roman Empire eventually split, the perception of its Eastern successor as a “Byzantine” Empire was wholly due to the reconceptualization of Greekness once again, this time within a distinctly self-constructed imperial context.<sup>46</sup> Roman political practice was synthesized with Greek culture and Christian faith to create a new pattern of identity that constituted a continually evolving understanding of Greekness.<sup>47</sup> This process took place rather quickly relative to Greek and Roman history writ large, and the nature of the transformation can be expressed by that fact that while Justinian chose to speak Latin in the early sixth century, the imperial administration by the end of the seventh had become entirely linguistically Hellenized.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, during the later periods of the Empire when the system itself began to collapse, imperial historians placed Byzantine identity within the larger continuum of Greek, not Roman history.<sup>49</sup>

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*Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Maud W. Gleason, “Greek Cities Under Roman Rule,” in *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, ed. David S. Potter (Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 228–49, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996942.ch13>; For a general discussion about the power transition that occurred during this period, see Arthur M. Eckstein, *Rome Enters the Greek East: From Anarchy to Hierarchy in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, 230-170 BC* (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2008) esp. chap. 1, 7-9; Guy Rogers challenges the popular understanding of this subject as presented here. He provides a slightly more cynical view, arguing that the Roman elite exploited Greek identity as a way to solidify their power in the region. See, Guy Maclean Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesos (Routledge Revivals): Foundation Myths of a Roman City* (Routledge, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Greg Woolf, “Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East\*,” *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 40 (ed 1994): 116–43, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068673500001875>; See also the edited volume, Simon Goldhill, ed., *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (Cambridge, UK ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2001) esp. the introduction and chaps. 3, 7.

<sup>46</sup> For a general overview of the evolution of Greek identity and its connection to the history of Byzantium, see David Ricks and Paul Magdalino, eds., *Byzantium and the Modern Greek Identity*, Publications 4 (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain ; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Ashgate, 1998).

<sup>47</sup> Ioannis Stouraitis, “Byzantine Romanness: From Geopolitical to Ethnic Conceptions,” *Transformations of Romanness in the Early Middle Ages: Regions and Identities*, July 2018, 123–40, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110598384>.

<sup>48</sup> Claudia Rapp, “Hellenic Identity, Romanitas, and Christianity in Byzantium,” in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, by Katerina Zacharia (Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 138–42.

<sup>49</sup> Rapp, 142; For a distinctly critical approach to the idea of Roman identity in Byzantium, see Ioannis Stouraitis, “Roman identity in Byzantium: a critical approach,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 107, no. 1 (July 1, 2014): 175–220,



This seems an inevitable conclusion; the geographically bounded identity born from the Persian invasion had not only persisted for millennia, but intertwined itself with Greek chronological history and mythology so effectively as to have sustained a continuous collective identity.

Through the lens of simultaneity, it feels fair to say that the Greeks of antiquity showed a generalized sense of collective temporal and geographic connection to one another and to their place in the Mediterranean world.<sup>50</sup> This multitude of city-states and peoples who routinely waged war on each other still allowed themselves to be subsumed under the guise of a greater Greek whole.<sup>51</sup> Although said subsumption occurred along ethnic lines, it clearly created recognition of a collectiveness that cut across space and time as well as through any sub-ethnic differences.<sup>52</sup> A hierarchic notion like “those Dorians in Sparta may not be friendly to us Ionians in Athens, but they are Greeks like us” could exist alongside a collective belief that “the Persians are our enemies now just as their ancestors were the enemies of our ancestors ages ago.”<sup>53</sup> Considering the idea of nationalism more broadly, this type of collective consciousness feels conspicuously modern.<sup>54</sup>

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<https://doi.org/10.1515/bz-2014-0009>; See also, Anthony Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019) esp. chaps. 1-3.

<sup>50</sup> For an overview about the nature of Greek identity and its connection to Greek history (especially under the Roman Empire), see the edited volume, David Konstan and Suzanne Saïd, eds., *Greeks on Greekness: Viewing the Greek Past under the Roman Empire*, Supplementary Volume (Cambridge Philological Society), vol. 29 (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> For a larger work describing this process in detail, see Emily Maureen Mackil, *Creating a Common Polity: Religion, Economy, and Politics in the Making of the Greek Koinon*, Hellenistic Culture and Society 55 (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan M. Hall, “Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 8, no. 2 (October 1998): 265–83, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959774300001864>; Irad Malkin, “Networks and the Emergence of Greek Identity,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 18, no. 2 (December 1, 2003): 56–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951896032000230480>.

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion about Greek identity and sub-ethnicities, see Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) esp. chaps. 2-3.

<sup>54</sup> Indeed, many of these concepts of Greek identity feel particularly related to Anthony Smith’s argument that national identity is built as much upon exclusion as it is on inclusion. See, Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, Penguin Politics and Current Affairs (London: Penguin Books, 1991); See also, Anna Triandafyllidou, “National Identity and the ‘Other,’” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 4 (January 1, 1998): 593–612, <https://doi.org/10.1080/014198798329784>.

## Rome

In part because of its long-term imperial practices, Roman identity evolved alongside Rome's political experiences and the changes its institutions underwent.<sup>55</sup> From the beginning of the republic, Rome maintained a militaristic disposition predicated upon an inexhaustible push for outward expansion.<sup>56</sup> It provided an extensive scope of collective identity that remained principally founded upon a sense of militarily bounded citizenship patterned alongside a mythical and geographic connection to the city itself.<sup>57</sup> Unlike the Greeks, this did not involve identification along ethnic lines using markers based on exclusionary premises; instead, the process of sociopolitical integration and eventual romanization primarily involved a civic sense of duty born out of years of exposure to military service.<sup>58</sup> The early efficacy of the Roman politico-military system hinged upon this decentralized model of political co-optation that had been institutionalized over the course of their conquests.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For a broad overview of Roman identity in the republican period, see Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology ; The Townsend Lectures, v. 52 (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1992); For an overview of the variety of identities in the Roman Empire, see the edited volume, Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry, *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire* (Routledge, 2001); as well as Janet Huskinson, ed., *Experiencing Rome: Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire* (London ; New York: Routledge in association with Open University Press, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> Walter Scheidel, *Escape from Rome: The Failure of Empire and the Road to Prosperity*, The Princeton Economic History of the Western World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 57–58; Roman expansion in this period wasn't an identical experience everywhere. For a discussion regarding the problems of applying a singular model of Roman political character across the entire republic, see Fergus Millar, "The Political Character of the Classical Roman Republic, 200–151 B.C.," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 74 (November 1984): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.2307/299003>.

<sup>57</sup> Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, 65–70; For a more in-depth discussion about identity in the Roman military, see Simon James, "The Community of Soldiers: A Major Identity and Centre of Power in the Roman Empire," *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal*, no. 1998 (April 16, 1999), [https://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC1998\\_14\\_25](https://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC1998_14_25).

<sup>58</sup> Henrik Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 99–104; For a more conceptual discussion about the process of romanization in the early period of expansion, see Thomas Blagg, Martin Millett, and Tom F. C. Blagg, eds., *The Early Roman Empire in the West*, Reprint (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), sec. I; Additionally, the process of becoming a Roman soldier frequently involved at least one trip to Rome, which for many would be the first and possibly only trip to the city they would experience. The effect this process of pilgrimage to the capital has on collective identity formation is similar to the one described by Anderson. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, chap. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, 59–65; See also, Pat Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History* (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2007) esp. chap. 2.

Unlike the top-heavy model of agrarian societies illustrated by Gellner in *Nations and Nationalism*, Rome's centralizing institutions built a core apparatus around which citizen elites and citizen commoners could find mutual collective identity (figure 1).<sup>60</sup> Operating along what Charles Tilly calls a "coercion-intensive" model, the Romans continually admitted newly conquered peoples into an accessible spoils system wherein contribution was expected to be given as provision of soldiers rather than of taxes.<sup>61</sup> These soldiers participated in new conquests, took part in new spoils, and settled in new lands – a process that would regularly repeat itself as expansion continued.<sup>62</sup> This worked so well in part because the Romans profited from (and contributed to) a highly militaristic peninsular culture that glorified warfare. The conquered could maintain their sense of collective honor because they were never subjected to an imposed system of extractive taxation; instead, they were brought into the fold of a growing process of inclusive conquest.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell Univ Pr, 2009), 10; Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, 87.

<sup>61</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*, Rev. pbk. ed, Studies in Social Discontinuity (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 17–20, 30; Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, 63–67.

<sup>62</sup> Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, 68–74; John Patterson, "Military Organization and Social Change in the Later Roman Republic," in *War and Society in the Roman World*, by John Rich and Graham Shipley (Routledge, 2020), 92–112, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003071341-5>.

<sup>63</sup> On the general history of the Roman military and sociopolitical experience described in this section, see Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, chap. 2, esp. 59–69; and Jeremy Armstrong, *War and Society in Early Rome: From Warlords to Generals*, First paperback edition (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2021) esp. chaps. 4-6; see also: Henrik Mouritsen, *Plebs and Politics in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*; Paul Erdkamp, "War and State Formation in the Roman Republic," in *A Companion to the Roman Army* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2007), 96–113, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996577.ch7>; For an overview of the Roman aspects of social power as related above, see Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chap. 9.

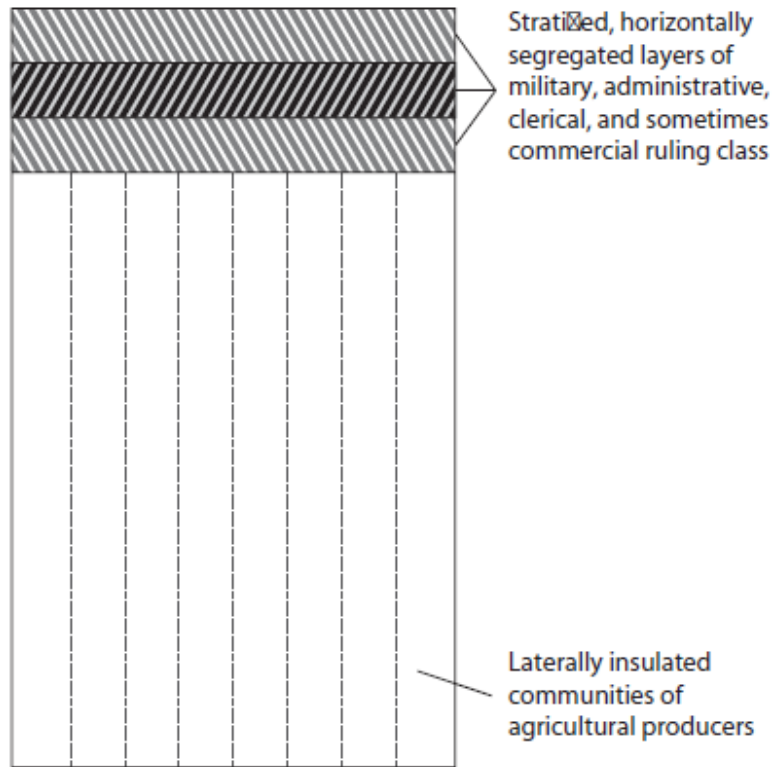


FIGURE 2.6 (A) General form of the social structure of agrarian societies according to Ernest Gellner.

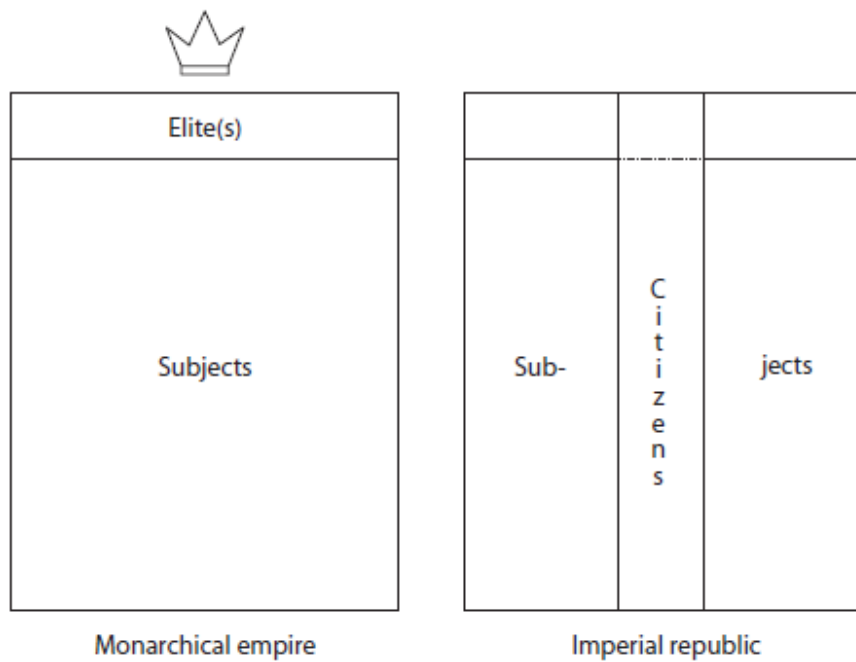


FIGURE 2.6 (B) Adaptations of the Gellner model.

Figure 1. Scheidel's adaptation of the Gellner model

The Roman appetite for expansion eventually exceeded its ability to concurrently integrate newly conquered people into its political sense of self, a concept understood as the *Res Publica*, a contemporarily subjective term whose meaning changed across Roman history.<sup>64</sup> Early in the republic, *Res Publica* likely invoked a sense of collective ownership and a tangible connection between all adult male Roman citizens who participated in public life and performed military duties – in effect forming a composite political body that constituted “the commonwealth” of the Roman Republic.<sup>65</sup> As this commonwealth voraciously expanded and as its most ambitious citizens began appealing to a greater body of potential political constituents, however, the collective idea of *Res Publica* gradually became less literal and more metaphorical – eventually developing into a mythical embodiment of the Roman people and Roman history.<sup>66</sup>

Correspondingly, the republican version of Roman collective identity that had previously predominated for centuries was eventually forced to include the entirety of the peninsula after the revolt of the near-Roman Italian allies in the Social War of 91-87 BCE.<sup>67</sup> This resulted in their enfranchisement as citizens and, eventually, their integration into a greater conceptualization of

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<sup>64</sup> T. W. Hillard, “‘Res Publica’ in Theory and Practice,” in *Roman Crossings*, ed. T. W. Hillard and Kathryn Welch (Swansea, Wales: Classical Press of Wales, 2005), 1–11.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Asmis, “The State as a Partnership: Cicero’s Definition of Res Publica in His Work on the State,” *History of Political Thought* 25, no. 4 (January 1, 2004): 569–98; Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 13–21; Louise Hodgson, *Res Publica and the Roman Republic: “Without Body or Form,”* First edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017), 267–75; For a focused look at who really participated in these assemblies, see Martin Jehne, “Who attended roman assemblies? Some remarks on political participation in the Roman Republic,” in *Repúblicas y ciudadanos: modelos de participación cívica en el mundo antiguo* (Repúblicas y ciudadanos: modelos de participación cívica en el mundo antiguo, Universitat de Barcelona, 2006), 221–34, <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2566158>.

<sup>66</sup> Hodgson, *Res Publica and the Roman Republic*, chaps. 1, 7; Catherine Steel, “The Roman Senate and the Post-Sullan ‘Res Publica,’” *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 63, no. 3 (2014): 323–39.

<sup>67</sup> See, generally Arthur Keaveney, *Rome and the Unification of Italy*, 2nd ed, Ignibus Paperbacks (Exeter, Devon, UK: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2005); For a look at the specifics of Roman identity just prior to the Social War, see John R. Patterson, “Contact, Co-Operation, and Conflict in Pre-Social War Italy,” in *Processes of Integration and Identity Formation in the Roman Republic*, by Saskia T. Roselaar (Brill, 2012), 215–26, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004229600\\_014](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004229600_014); The edited volume as a whole is replete with interesting discussions about the relationships between Romans and Italians more generally. See, Saskia T. Roselaar, ed., *Processes of Integration and Identity Formation in the Roman Republic*, Mnemosyne Supplements--History and Archaeology of Classical Antiquity, v. 342 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012).

what it meant to be “Roman,” a now broader collective identity that combined the history and mythology of Rome the city with the geographical extent of Italy the peninsula.<sup>68</sup> But the process was not gradual like it had been before; it involved the rapid integration of an “exceptionally large, disparate and culturally heterogenous population... [many of whom] probably felt little or no loyalty towards the *res publica Romana*, of which they had become part.”<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, after the integration of the Italian peninsula the *Res Publica* began to bear less similarity to its previous understanding.<sup>70</sup> What in the words of Ernest Renan might have once been a very literal “daily plebiscite,” now instead became an aggrandized slogan increasingly being employed as a populist agitprop by a power-accumulating Roman elite who would in short order form the nucleus of the soon-to-be autocratic Roman Empire.<sup>71</sup> No doubt the *Res Publica* was still a daily plebiscite well into the imperial period, but it had by then become a plebiscite removed from its once directly tangible customs all the while maintaining a claim to their historical legacy and metropolitan centrality.<sup>72</sup>

Because of the expansion of this collective identity, Rome began to become increasingly fascinated by its own history. Writing in the chronological style of Thucydides, Sallust’s

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<sup>68</sup> Keaveney, *Rome and the Unification of Italy*, 189–92; Emma Dench, *Romulus’ Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 217–21.

<sup>69</sup> Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 171–72.

<sup>70</sup> R. E. Witcher, “Globalisation and Roman Imperialism : Perspectives on Identities in Roman Italy.,” in Herring, E. & Lomas, K. (Eds.). (2000). *The Emergence of State Identities in Italy in the First Millennium BC*. London: Accordia Research Institute, University of London, Pp. 213-225, ed. E. Herring and K. Lomas (London: Accordia Research Institute, University of London, 2000), 213–25, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/accordia/italypub-details.htm#italy8>; Roselaar, *Processes of Integration and Identity Formation in the Roman Republic*.

<sup>71</sup> Ernst Renan, *What Is a Nation?*, trans. Ethan Rundell (Paris, 1882); Keaveney, *Rome and the Unification of Italy*, 190–92; Hodgson, *Res Publica and the Roman Republic*, 2–5, 10–16; For a discussion about this type of control in a religious context, see Veit Rosenberger, “Republican Nobiles: Controlling the Res Publica,” in *A Companion to Roman Religion* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2007), 292–303, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470690970.ch21>.

<sup>72</sup> Sam Wilkinson provides an illuminating overview of the role that ideological republicanism played even into the imperial period. Roman political culture had to create a system wherein the philosophical appeals to republican history could be squared against the realities of an autocratic institutionalization of power. See, Sam Wilkinson, *Republicanism during the Early Roman Empire* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2012); For a discussion about the way Roman culture connected to these historical claims, see the edited volume Huskinson, *Experiencing Rome*.

surviving works from around 50 BCE attempted to explain the historical causes that led to the crises he was experiencing in the late Republican era.<sup>73</sup> Later in the 20s BCE, Virgil would write the *Aeneid*, an epic poem representing the mythologized illustration of the Romans as collective descendants of the Homeric hero Aeneas.<sup>74</sup> Soon after, Livy would write *Ab urbe condita* (*From the Founding of the City*), an attempt at synthesis between the Aeneas myth and a real, historical account beginning at Rome's founding.<sup>75</sup>

From a retrospective standpoint, these works stand as evidence that, like the Greeks of the preceding centuries, the Romans had an aspirational desire not only for a solidified mythology that could help connect their sense of self to the past, but also for a coherent chronology that could properly explain the causal context of their historical experience.<sup>76</sup> This mass of Roman identifying people now ruling over the Mediterranean seemed to expect an explanation for their newly found position of authority. If Greek identity had been constructed in the face of an imperial force compelling collective defense, then conversely Roman identity had been required for the justification of being such an imperial force themselves. The Republic's outward expansionism into and governance over a subjugated periphery demanded a comprehensive understanding of in-group and out-group identification if it was to maintain an effective process of continual integration, socialization, and norm diffusion.

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<sup>73</sup> Daniel J. Kapust, *Republicanism, Rhetoric, and Roman Political Thought: Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), chap. 2,3; See also Thomas Francis Scanlon, *The Influence of Thucydides on Sallust* (Winter, 1980).

<sup>74</sup> Yasmin Syed, *Vergil's Aeneid and the Roman Self: Subject and Nation in Literary Discourse* (University of Michigan Press, 2022), chaps. 1, 2.

<sup>75</sup> Kapust, *Republicanism, Rhetoric, and Roman Political Thought*, chap. 4.

<sup>76</sup> For a broader explanation of Roman historians and especially of Sallust and Livy, see Ronald Mellor, *The Roman Historians* (Routledge, 2002), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203047262>. Mellor's general arguments fall within the camp that even the most methodologically rigorous of Roman histories should be seen as literary in character. This is an important concern when considering Roman written history, but in a sense strengthens my argument that Rome was interested in finding a semi-mythologized narrative for itself.

Throughout the early Empire, enfranchisement became an instrument of imperial will, serving as a tool used by Emperors who needed to artificially enlarge the potential pool of military recruits required for an ever-expanding set of conquests to wage and borders to defend.<sup>77</sup> This was born in part out of Rome's continuous battle against low fertility rates in its core areas, which resulted in an increasing need to settle and integrate migrating non-Romans into the Empire's borders as a means of maintaining a sustainable military-age population.<sup>78</sup> The practice culminated in 212 CE, when the Roman Emperor Caracalla issued an edict granting full Roman citizenship to all free men in the Empire.<sup>79</sup> By this point, however, citizenship's strong sense of exclusivity had begun to weaken, and its connection to a more distinctly localized notion of Roman identity had begun to devolve.<sup>80</sup>

By the third century, the Roman Empire had stopped attempting to inculcate a shared, explicitly socialized sense of collective values; local identities all the way up to the supra-regional level thrived under an imperial structure that had little interest in maintaining (much less the capacity to enforce) the policies of romanization that had been integral to its now-past

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<sup>77</sup> Myles Lavan, "The Foundation of Empire? The Spread of Roman Citizenship from the Fourth Century BCE to the Third Century CE," in *In the Crucible of Empire: The Impact of Roman Citizenship upon Greeks, Jews and Christians*, ed. Katell Berthelot and Jonathan Price (Peeters Publishers, 2019), 31–38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1q26t99>.

<sup>78</sup> This is, to put it lightly, a continuously debated issue in Roman historiography, especially as it relates to the larger narrative of the Western Empire's collapse in the fifth century. I present a general argument for this paper, but a litany of work has been done on the subject in great detail. As an example, see Walter Scheidel, *Debating Roman Demography* (Brill, 2001); Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>79</sup> Lavan, "The Foundation of Empire? The Spread of Roman Citizenship from the Fourth Century BCE to the Third Century CE," 39–41.

<sup>80</sup> Although the figurative exclusivity of Roman citizenship by the time of Caracalla had been lost, the actual number of Roman citizens may still have been no more than 1/3 of the Empire. See, Myles Lavan, "The Spread of Roman Citizenship, 14–212 CE: Quantification in the Face of High Uncertainty," *Past & Present* 230, no. 1 (February 1, 2016): 3–46, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtv043>; For a more general overview of Roman citizenship and its numerous inconsistencies, see Jane Gardner, *Being a Roman Citizen* (Routledge, 1993), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203032121>.



periods of growth.<sup>81</sup> In its place stood a more universal sense of collective political citizenship understood under the term “Roman.”<sup>82</sup> Indeed, by this point the Italian peninsula itself had developed into a complicated relationship of artificial, territorially-bounded Italian sub-identities that co-existed within a now broader sense of “Roman-ness” as it was understood in the Empire.<sup>83</sup> The history of the Romans had become provenance for so extensive a group of people that few bore any particularly strong resemblance to their now-mythologized founders.<sup>84</sup> This sense of broad cultural and legalistic universalism would only grow more prominent as the Empire aged and, more importantly, as it adopted Christianity’s monotheism – a theological position that coordinately helped propagate and strengthen a more powerfully messianic sense of symbolic universalism.<sup>85</sup>

Simultaneity in the Roman experience seems at times both more salient and identifiable but also more difficult to define than it does in the Greek experience.<sup>86</sup> In part because the Greek concept of citizenship and identity seems to align more closely with the ethnically bounded form

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<sup>81</sup> David Braund, “Cohors - The Governor and His Entourage in the Self-Image of the Roman Republic,” in *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, by Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry (Routledge, 2001), 10–24.

<sup>82</sup> Ralph W. Mathisen, “Peregrini, Barbari, and Cives Romani: Concepts of Citizenship and the Legal Identity of Barbarians in the Later Roman Empire,” *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 4 (October 1, 2006): 1011–40, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.111.4.1011>; Caroline Humfress, “Laws’ Empire: Roman Universalism and Legal Practice,” in *New Frontiers: Law and Society in the Roman World*, ed. P. J. du Plessis (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 73–101, [http://www.eupublishing.com/book/9780748668175](http://www.euppublishing.com/book/9780748668175).

<sup>83</sup> Ray Laurence, “Territory, Ethnonym, and Geography - The Construction of Identity in Roman Italy,” in *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, by Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry (Routledge, 2001), 95–110.

<sup>84</sup> For a more explicit discussion about the creation of founding myths in the imperial period, especially as it relates to Constantine and the establishment of Christianity as an imperial institution, see Dilia Angelova, *Sacred Founders: Women, Men, and Gods in the Discourse of Imperial Founding, Rome through Early Byzantium* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015) esp. chaps. 1–3.

<sup>85</sup> Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. chap. 2; Henry Chadwick, “Christian and Roman Universalism in the Fourth Century,” *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity* 19 (January 1, 1993): 26–42, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004312852\\_003](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004312852_003); Humfress, “Laws’ Empire,” 90–94.

<sup>86</sup> I don’t go into detail about the Roman understanding of geographic simultaneity, but there is good reason to believe that the Romans had a solidified understanding of their geographic expansion as well as of the political meaning of their geographic empire. See, Claude Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire*, 1. Paperback ed, Jerome Lectures 19 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2015).

of modern nationalism, that the Greeks of antiquity constituted something like a nation seems less controversial a position to defend. On the other hand, Roman history resembles a style of civic nationalism that continually evolved and broadened, eventually reaching a point where it appeared to have almost no real connection to its own original form. But so too, the later concept of Roman identity may give us a hint as to what civic universalism might look like in practice. The Romans of the post-Caracallan Empire could still identify in-groups and out-groups as defined by the separation of citizenship and the borders of imperial geography.<sup>87</sup> So too, although these same Romans no longer directly personified their predecessors from the early republican period, the material and symbolic history of the republic was still theirs nonetheless.<sup>88</sup> The land, the cities, and the political system that they inherited was owed to past generations, all of whom similarly thought themselves as Romans descendant from a singular line of people who shared a singular line of history.<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusion

The Romans and Greeks of antiquity both present compelling arguments that temporal and geographic simultaneity existed in very real and identifiable senses long before the medieval period in Europe. Both maintained strong conceptualizations of simultaneity along messianic and

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<sup>87</sup> Mark W. Graham, *News and Frontier Consciousness in the Late Roman Empire* (University of Michigan Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.66756> esp. chaps. 1-3; For a discussion about the integration of migrating non-Romans into the empire itself and the effects it had on the perception of citizenship, see Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer, eds., *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World: Cultural Interaction and the Creation of Identity in Late Antiquity* (London New York: Routledge, 2016) esp. chaps. 3-4; Peter Heather, "The Barbarian in Late Antiquity: Image, Reality, and Transformation," in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. Richard Miles (Routledge, 1999), 25.

<sup>88</sup> Richard Hingley, "Cultural Diversity and Unity : Empire and Rome.," in *Hales, Shelly & Hodos, Tamar (Eds.). (2009). Material Culture and Social Identities in the Ancient World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Pp. 54-75*, ed. Shelly Hales and Tamar Hodos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 54–75, <http://www.cambridge.org/gb/knowledge/isbn/item2428102>.

<sup>89</sup> For a discussion about the glorification of the past that occurred during the late stages of the Roman Empire, see Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, Past and Present Publications (Cambridge University Press, 1990) esp. chaps. 2-3.

homogenous, empty temporalities. The Greeks understood their place as part of a greater chronological history of the Mediterranean but also repeatedly invoked their past to augment their future. Similarly, while the Romans created an empire so expansive and universalizing that their identity became stretched to the point where it evolved into something civic and universal, the core notion of their citizenship still connected a consistent narrative of their past to their beliefs about the future. Although neither fully incorporated the trappings connected to the modern understandings of ethnic and civic nationalism as we think of it today, it feels hard to not call them clear examples of imagined communities in some form or another.

The breakdown of the western Roman Empire in the fifth century would indeed lead to cataclysmic shifts in the way that spatio-temporal political orders existed in the post-Roman geographic area. Alongside this long-spanning politically devolutionary period was the continued rise of Christianity, its strong appeal to messianic temporal thinking, and the belief in an increasingly religious-based universality. The established sense of simultaneity persisted in post-Roman Europe, but whereas it had once been founded upon a legal philosophy of universal Roman citizenship, it was now rapidly moving towards a theology of universal Christian salvation. If, as described by Auerbach, the rise of Christianity did indeed shift the emphasis of temporal thinking towards messianism, then it would take generations before Europe would see a correction back towards the dualistic sense that had been more prominent in the preceding periods.<sup>90</sup> More directly, however, because no distinct polity was able to fill the gap left by the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church remained the only institution capable of harnessing the legacy of Roman universalism.<sup>91</sup> As such, it was only after the Church's eventual solidification

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<sup>90</sup> Auerbach and Trask, *Mimesis*, 73–75.

<sup>91</sup> Derek Benjamin Heater, *World Citizenship and Government: Cosmopolitan Ideas in the History of Western Political Thought* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan [u.a.], 1996), chap. 2.

as an independent political institution around the first millennium that a new form of European particularism could occur alongside the rise of a more modern sense of geopolitically bounded nationality.<sup>92</sup>

Early medieval Europe's continual shifting of political borders and weakly centralized sense of intellectual history ensured that collective identity would not bear out in a way that could be directly compared to the Greek and Roman experiences.<sup>93</sup> From this perspective, Greek and Roman collective identities seem to be unique in their overlapping onto the modern sense of national community rather than to the more lineal and hierarchical type of collective identity experienced by their immediate successors. Accordingly, their political experiences may consequently be more closely connected with that of modern nation-states.

Is it fair, then, to consider Rome and Greece as “proto-nations?” Given a now more expanded evolutionary and sociological context for Anderson's conceptualization of simultaneity, I argue that there is good reason to believe this to be the case. Moreover, I believe that there is likely valuable theoretical insight to be gained by viewing Roman and Greek history within the context of more modern idiomatic expectations of nation. The insurmountable separation of history means that the Romans and Greeks of antiquity clearly had different lived experiences, to be sure, but relegating them to an improperly differentiated category of ancient “other” circumscribes any potential attempt at incorporating their political history into the contemporary political scientist's toolbox. I hope here to pre-empt critical attempts at rejecting Roman or Greek history as being fundamentally incompatible for comparison to modern political

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<sup>92</sup> For a recent work in political science considering this hypothesis, see Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *The Invention of Power: Popes, Kings, and the Birth of the West* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2022).

<sup>93</sup> Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*, ed. David Cannadine, *The Penguin History of Europe* / General Editor: David Cannadine 2 (London: Penguin Books, 2010), esp. chaps. 17, 22.

analysis on the basis of their not having a sense of nationhood. On the contrary, the modern features exhibited by Roman and Greek collective identity are at times striking and beg the question of whether nationality within a historically European context should maintain such an overtly presentist inclusion criterion in the first place.

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