

BENJAMIN'S OF LESBOS ECONOMIC IDEAS*

1. Introduction. In his commentary on the history of economic analysis from the 1790's to the 1870's, J. A. Schumpeter, identified a rapid professionalisation process in economics during this period. The study of economics promoted a rising tide of textbooks explaining mostly that Smithian economics were published and new economic journals appeared advancing the dialogue and the exchange of ideas among concerned citizens. Governments of the European countries backed the economic interests of the business class people and did their best to protect them¹. This statement applies for Greece too, being an economically backward country with a rich diaspora all over Europe. The ideals of the French revolution and what Schumpeter defined as political liberalism² were a moving force during the war of Independence. Economic liberalism, however, despite its appeal to the intellectual circles, up to mid 1850's had an enormous difficulty in conquering the hearts and minds of the independent Greeks³.

Economics was being taught at the University of Athens by Professor Ioannis Soutsos (2.12.1803 - 15.3.1890), who taught the subject at the Law School, ever since it was founded in 1837 until his death. He was born in Constantinople and his family belonged to the Phanariots. He studied Law in Geneva and was a student of Pelegrino Rossi (1787 - 1848) there and of Jean Baptiste Say at the College of France. He transmitted the optimistic spirit of Say on the evolution of the capitalistic system to the Greek scientists and through them to the entire Greek society. The value of I. Soutsos' work lies in the fact that he was the first to transfer from abroad the study of theoretical

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1. Joseph A. SCHUMPETER, *History of Economic Analysis*, New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1954 [repr. with a Foreword by M. Perlman, London, Routledge, 1994], p. 492.

2. IDEM, *History....*, p.394

3. Michalis PSALIDOPOULOS, Aristides Economos and the *Oikonomiki Epitheorissis*: the Rise and Fall of an Economic Journal in 19th century Greece, *History of Economic Ideas*, IV/1996/3, pp. 149 - 167, namely p. 149.

economics, and who concentrated the economic terminology in this country⁴. Soutsos' work entitled *Treatise on the production and distribution of Wealth* published in 1851⁵, is considered as the first Greek handbook of Economic Science. There are also other attempts, during the Greek Revolution and after the establishment of the Greek State (1828), for the diffusion of the ideas of economic liberalism in the Greek era⁶. In an area, where the Economic Science begins to gain its autonomy as a Science, there are attempts of Greek scholars of the Diaspora⁷, who did have economic interest or did occupy with Economics.

The purpose of this article is to bring into light the economic ideas developed by Benjamin of Lesbos (1759-1824), a Greek scholar of the Diaspora, at the beginning of the 19th century. A by - product of the analysis will be to reveal any influence, implicit and/or explicit, upon that author by the Ancient Greek Philosophers or by European thinkers such as Montesquieu, Rousseau, the Physiocrats etc.

2. The occupation of the Greek Intellectuals with Economics. It is widely known that the economic theory created a close relation to the European Enlightenment, especially since the mid -18th century. Such relation led to the fulfilment of the aims of the European Enlightenment. The interests of the Enlightenment had already drifted to Political Economy. Such drift of interests had already taken place in a wide area; in Italy with abba Ferdinando Galiani

4. Dion. ITHAKISSIOS, John A. Soutsos(1804 - 1890): The first Academic-Economist- a supporter of the economic liberalism in the new Hellenic State (in Greek), *Archives of Economic History* 1, N. 2, 1991, pp. 35 - 78; IDEM, J.A. Soutsos: Greece's first Academic Economist, *Quaderni di storia della economia politica*, 2, 1992, pp.136-148.

5. There are some works of economic interest which have been published before 1850, such as Greg. PALAIOLOGOS, *Agricultural and Household Economics* (in Greek), 2vols, Navplion and Athens 1833-35, (repr. Athens 1881), P.-A. BRAILAS - ARMENIS, *On the subject and the limits of Political Economy* (in Greek), Corfu, 1846 [=P. BRAILAS - ARMENIS, *Φιλοσοφικά Ἔργα*, ed. E. MOUTSOPOULOS *et al.*, vol. VI, Athens, 1986, pp. 79-100] [CPGRI, 6]

6. In earlier works, we tried to cover this period, 1828-1837, and to demonstrate that there have been attempts to introduce the ideas of Classical Liberalism and of Saint Simon. Cf. C. BALOGLU, The reception of the economic ideas and theories in the Greek era during the period 1828-1837 (in Greek), *Proceedings of the 1st European Conference of Neohellenic Studies* (Berlin 2-4 October 1998), vol. II, Athens, Hellenika Grammata, 1999, pp. 261 - 271; IDEM, The diffusion and reception of the ideas of economic liberalism in Greece during the period 1828 - 1837, *Spoudai*, 51, 2001, pp. 16-35; IDEM, The diffusion and reception of the ideas of economic liberalism in Greece in the first years of the new Greek State (in Greek), *Νεῦσις*, N. 10, Summer 2001, pp. 143-160. IDEM, Attempts of the diffusion of Saint-Simon's ideas and their application in the Greek territory between 1825-1837 «in Greek», *Spoudai* 53, 2003 (forth-coming).

7. Cf. the recent article by Dion. ITHAKISSIOS and A. KARAYIANNIS, Hellenic Nomarchy: A Discourse on Freedom. An Early 19th Century Greek Humanist Treatise, *Storia del pensiero economico*, n.s. 38, 1999, pp. 137-144.

(1727-1787) and Pietro Verri (1728-1797), in France with the Physiocrats, in Austria with the Cameralists, in Scotland with David Hume (1711-1776), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1747) and Adam Smith (1723-1790)⁸. On the other hand, the development of the political and economic ideas in the first half of the 18th century had as a result the transition of this interest to the Universities too. The foundation of the first Chair of Political Economy at the University of Naples (Italy) in 1754 and the election of Antonio Genovesi (1713-1769) at this chair marks change of route from the theoretical issues to the applied Science⁹. The changes noted in the European Enlightenment are closely followed by the Greek scholars of the Diaspora. The most representative of them, Adamantios Corais (1748-1833) recognizes¹⁰ the reception of the New Science, the Political Economy, by the Greek Scholars. Benjamin of Lesbos¹¹, who studied in Paris (École Polytechnique), belonged to this circle of the Greek scholars.

3. The acquisition of happiness as the ultimate target of man. Benjamin starts from the principle of *pleasure* on which he establishes his morality. He distinguishes two categories of pleasure: natural, which means physical pleasure and *moral* which means the pleasure of soul and intellect¹². With the help of the meaning of pleasure and its opposite the meaning of sorrow, the two basic principles of morality are defined - good and evil¹³. The pursue of good and the simultaneous avoidance of evil consist the natural inclination of man for the achievement of happiness. The achievement of true happiness depends on a) the satisfaction of natural needs, b) the satisfaction of mental needs and c) the communication with one's fellow-citizens¹⁴.

Benjamin accepts the Aristotelian definition of man as *social and political animal by nature*¹⁵ and from birth has accession in a rationally organised community. As of consequence he finds himself in an unevidable relationship

8. P. GAY, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co, 1977, p.347.

9. A. ANGELOU, *Traces of Political Economy in the era of Neohellenic Enlightenment* (in Greek), *Ερανιστής*, 19, 1993, pp. 66 - 101, namely pp. 69-7.

10. Cf. C. BALOGLU, *The reception of economic ideas...*, p. 265

11. Benjamin of Lesbos (1759-1824). Roxane ARGYROPOULOS offers in her dissertation, *Benjamin of Lesbos and the European Thought during the 18th century* (in Greek), Thessalonike, 1983, pp. 47-100, the best overview of the life and work of the scholar.

12. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Metaphysics* (in Greek), Vienna, 1820, §§ 288-289 [repr. A. PAPADOPOULOS, *The philosophical and sociopolitical ideas of Benjamin of Lesbos* (in Greek), Athens, Kedros, 1982, pp. 239-44].

13. BENJAMIN, *Elements of ...* § 289 [= A. PAPADOPOULOS, *op. cit.*, p. 241].

14. IDEM, *Elements of Ethics* (in Greek) § 181. The writing of the work *Elements of Ethics* has been completed in August 1817, as Benjamin writes at the end of this manuscript, which has been survived in the Roumanian Academy. The work has been edited with commentary, notes and apparatus criticum by Roxane ARGYROPOULOS, *Elements of Ethics* (in Greek), Athens, 1994.

15. ARISTOTLE, *Politics* I 3, 1253 a2

with other people. The organized and rationally structured community determines man's political and social nature, his character and behaviour. Further, Benjamin mainly accepts the Aristotelian concept¹⁶ that happiness is the ultimate cause of nature¹⁷. The Aristotelian concept of happiness was maintained by the rest of the scholars of Diaspora¹⁸ as by the French theorists of French Revolution and the Physiocrats¹⁹. In the *Hellenic Nomarchy* happiness depends on good administration²⁰. What makes Benjamin differ from the rest of the scholars is that the search for happiness leads to human rights and not merely freedom. In that way Benjamin acknowledges that natural rights are fulfilled in society.

4. The formation of society Society is the prerequisite of the fulfilment of natural rights and natural duties of man. Benjamin recognizes six natural rights in all: a) The right to self-preservation²¹, b) the right to search and obtain the means for this²², c) the right to property²³, d) the right to moral development and consequently the progress in every field such as economic, technological etc.²⁴, e) the right to freedom²⁵ and f) the right to defend one's rights from one's enemies and to resist anyone attempting to eliminate or limit them²⁶. In his analysis of the right to property Benjamin follows the Aristotelian concept²⁷, but also is very close to the political and economic thought of the 18th century. J. Locke²⁸ and the Physiocrats²⁹ take the right to property for granted. At the same time in <Hellenic Nomarchy> the security of <having> is guaranteed³⁰, while Corais³¹ also considers his right well established.

16. ARISTOTLE, *Politics* I 9, 1281 a1-3

17. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Ethics*, § 10.

18. A. CORAIS, *Διάλογος περί τῶν ἐλληνικῶν συμφερόντων* (1824), in IDEM, *Collected Works* (in Greek), vol. I., p. 609.

19. Cf. R. ARGYROPOULOS, comments on the edition of the *Elements*, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

20. ANONYM the GREEK, *Hellenic Nomarchy*, e.g. *Speech on Freedom* (in Greek) (1806). Introduction by N. TOMADAKIS, Athens, Vagionakis, 2nd edn., n. d., pp. 54-55.

21. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Ethics*, § 13.

22. IDEM, *Elements of Ethics*, § 14.

23. IDEM, *Elements of Ethics*, § 15.

24. IDEM, *Elements of Ethics*, § 16.

25, 26. IDEM, *Elements of Ethics*, § 16-17

27. ARISTOTLE, *Politics* II 5, 1263 a8-15, 39-41

28. John LOCKE, *Two Treatises of Government*, London, 1690, in: *The Works of John Locke*, vol. V, London, 1823 [Aalen, Scientia, 1963], §§ 25-51.

29. Especially Fr. Quesnay (1694-1774) does mention in his IV axiom the property as the step of the economic order of the society. P. S. Dupont de Nemours adopted the same ideas. Cf. C. ARKOUDOIYANNIS, *The Physiocrats and the Ancient Greeks. Their common ideas on agriculture*, (in Greek), Thessalonike 1967, pp. 68-69.

30. ANONYM the GREEK, *Hellenic Nomarchy*..., p. 68

31. A. CORAIS, *Notes on the preliminary notes of Greece* (in Greek) (1822), in: IDEM, *Collected Works* (in Greek), vol. I, p. 388

The existence and formation of the society results from this fulfilment of natural rights and duties of man. For the realization of this progress man has to live in a society and not in isolation³². This point in Rousseau's (1712-1778) theory about civilized life has been criticised³³. Furthermore society is the prerequisite for the existence of virtue³⁴, since virtue is the point of reference among humans and is defined according to the usage of one's own natural rights for the sake of others³⁵. It is obvious consequently that virtue cannot exist without the existence of at least two humans³⁶. For Benjamin society is defined by the social contact: ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ οὐδεμία κοινωνία δύναται νὰ ὑπάρξῃ ἄνευ συμφωνιῶν τινων καὶ φυλακῆς αὐτῶν, notes Benjamin in his *Elements of Metaphysics*, τούτου ἕνεκεν καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τῶν ἀνθρώπων προϋποτίθῃσι συμφωνίας τινάς. Τώρα ἡ ἐκπλήρωσις τούτων τῶν συμφωνιῶν εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὅποιο ὀνομάζεται πολιτεία ἢ διοίκησις³⁷. In his *Elements of Ethics* he refers to the necessity to form a society³⁸. These points of view expressed by Benjamin are similar to the ones maintained by Rousseau about the social contract. But the paternity of the theory of the social contract, as Roxane Argyropoulos correctly recognizes³⁹, does not belong exclusively to Rousseau. A number of scholars from the sophists and the supporters of natural right⁴⁰ and especially Burlamaqui had already stated similar thoughts.

Benjamin repeats fediously that man is a «social and political animal by nature»⁴¹. He proves this argument providing enough evidence. First of all man is by nature active and every action is connected to his relationship with his fellow man. That's the reason why man is made to live with others. As a consequence, in his effort to avoid evil and pursue good, man asks for the help of his fellow men. Moreover man is not able to live alone during infancy and adolescence and later, being member of a society, he cannot part with it. Obtaining happiness is impossible outside a social frame. Finally, rationalism

32. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Ethics*, § 17.

33. It is evidently that J. J. ROUSSEAU, *Discours sur l'Inégalité* (1755) seems to be as a follower of the Cynics, who denied the civilized life. Cf. A.-C. BAYONAS, *The political philosophy of the Cynics* (in Greek), Athens, Papazissis, 1970, pp. 105-106; H. NIEHUES-PROEBSTING, Diogenes in the Enlightenment, *The Cynics. The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, ed. R. BRACHT-BRANHAM and Marie-Odile GOULET-CAZE, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, Univ. of California Press, 1996, pp. 329-65, namely pp. 340-42.

34. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Ethics*, Ch. III

35. IDEM, *Elements of Ethics*, § 178.

36. Roxane ARGYROPOULOS, *Benjamin of Lesbos...*, pp. 208-209.

37. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Metaphysics*, p. δ'.

38. IDEM, *Elements of Ethics*, § 180

39. Roxane ARGYROPOULOS, *Benjamin of Lesbos and ...*, p. 209.

40. Cf. Maria A. MICHA, *The «natural right» on the Sophists and the Cynics*, Athens-Ioannina, Dodone, 1985.

41. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Ethics*, § 181

leads man to the formation of society. If man could live alone he would be irrational as animals and the seed of society «was thrown to the heart of man by the hand of nature itself»⁴². At this point the influence of the physiocratic concept about society, according to which society precedes the social contract: «Il y a une société naturelle antérieure à toute convention» writes P. S. Dupont de Nemours (1739-1817)⁴³, who will add «la société est nécessaire par la nature et l'ordre des nos besoins».

5. The theory about the stages of evolution of the human kind and the praise of agriculture. Benjamin refuses - even on a theoretical basis- to consider a human being outside society. Yet he accepts a gradual development of society. The stages represent a course from lower to higher forms of life, from the primitive to the civilized one: savagery or barbarity, pastoral life, agricultural era⁴⁴. He attributes this transition from stage to another to the sociability of man, that is his natural tendency to live in a society and also the *need*, that is the material need⁴⁵. He also claims that this need is the *best* teacher of man. And it is also worth mentioning that this analysis of Benjamin is obviously influenced by Democritus.

According to Democritus, the basic reason of sociability and consequently of historical life is the need to protect oneself from wild animals, a fight which is anyway being carried out in this primitive era without weaponry⁴⁶. As the second probable reason for the man's procedure to the historical era, the lack of food and shelter is emphasized, a situation which proved fatal for some during winter⁴⁷. So Democritus considers the *need* as the motive for the invention of economy, and *experience* as the one for the invention of work⁴⁸. Democritus not only maintains this approach but he also presents the equivalent human qualities in his analysis of the function of the *need*, as the one which directs humans to their survival⁴⁹. Consequently civilized life and the economy included in it is not simply the result of the *need* with its impact on man's existence, but mainly man's own creation. This man is considered to be an intelligent animal open to the dictates of need with the help of hands, reason and heuristic intelligence⁵⁰. In a second stage, man

42. *Ibid.*, § 181

43. P. S. DUPONT de NEMOURS, *Abrégé des principes de l'économie politique*, Geneve, Daire, 1971², p.341.

44. We find a similar procedure also in ARISTOTLE's *Politics* I 8, 1256 a40-42

45. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Ethics*, § § 180-183.

46. DK 68B 4c 1, (5)-(6)

47. DK 68B 4c 1, (7)

48. Ioannis DELLIS, Diodorus' of Sicily evidence concerning Democritus (in Greek), *ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ*, 13-14, 1983-84, pp. 109-125.

49,50. C. DESPOTOPOULOS, *Contribution to the Philosophy of Labour* (in Greek), Athens, Papazissis, 1997, pp.56-57

follows the pattern of pastoral life. The third stage is qualified by the occupation of man with agriculture and the establishment of houses.

Benjamin's ideas according the evolution of the mankind from the pre-historic life, where there is an absence of labour, to the establishment of the civilized life are obvious influenced by Plato⁵¹, but there were also known to the Scottish intellectuals⁵² and Turgot⁵³. Benjamin recognizes the contribution of agriculture⁵⁴ as the main productive sector and correlates the education to the improvement and progress in agriculture. It is obvious that the Physiocrats influenced Benjamin's ideas⁵⁵. In his speech in Bucharest he refers to Agriculture as a result of Education. Εἰμὶ δὲ πλέον βέβαιος, mentions Benjamin, ὅτι τῆς παιδείας προχωρούσης, καὶ ἡ Γεωργικὴ θέλει καλλιεργηθῇ, ὥστε νὰ ἔχητε διπλασίους καὶ τριπλασίους τὰς προσόδους⁵⁶. It is obvious that Benjamin recognizes the relation between education and economics.

6. The economics of the Oikos. Benjamin's theory on the Oikos is analytically presented in the fifth chapter of his *Elements of Ethics*, which is entitled *Peri koinonias or oikonomias (On society or economy)*⁵⁷. In the methodological process of his research of the political society, the society-forming procedures of the human race is presented as something natural, that is, not arbitrarily, but dictated by man's nature, necessary for man's maintenance and happiness in the world. This social procedure appears to have its beginning in the home, that is, the Family, then the Kome and finally the polis, the historical type of political society⁵⁸. The Oikos is the part of the whole, of the Polis. Benjamin recognizes, following Aristotle⁵⁹, the tripartite division Oikos, Kome and Polis. It is worth to

51. PLATO, *Laws* III 677A- 82B. Cf. C. BALOGLU, *The economic thought of the Ancient Greeks* (in Greek), Prize of the Academy of Athens, Foreword by Bas. A. Kyrkos, Thessalonike, 1995, pp. 205-206.

52. A. SKINNER, Economics and History- The Scottish Enlightenment, *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 12, February 1965, pp.1-22.

53. R. L. MEEK, Smith, Turgot, and the «Four Stages» Theory, *History of Political Economy*, 3, Spring 1971, pp. 9-27.

54. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Ethics*, § 154.

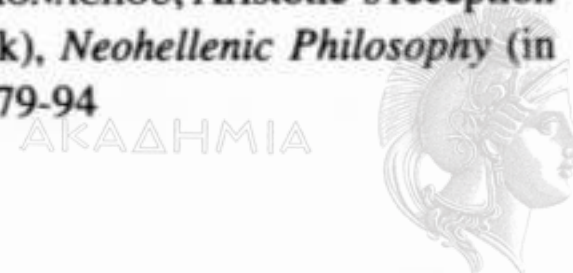
55. Cf. C. ARKOUDOIYANNIS, *op. cit.*.

56. This speech has been delivered on the 18th of January 1818 in Bucharest and has been published in the journal *Hermes ho Logios* (Vienna 1818), pp. 200-209. Reprinted in G. A. ARISTEIDES, *Benjamin of Lesbos* (in Greek), Athens, 1880, pp.43-57. Cf. K. KAVARNOS, *Benjamin's of Lesbos theories on education* (in Greek), *Proceedings of the Panhellenic Symposium Benjamin of Lesbos* (Mytilene, 28-30 May 1982), Athens, 1985, pp. 55-68.

57. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Ethics*, §§ 179-200.

58. IDEM, § 180 viz. ARISTOTLE, *Politics* I 2, 1252 b10-11,13-14,15-17,28-29.

59. Indeed Aristotle is cited and referred to sixteen times in the *Elements of Ethics*, more than other Greek writer or European intellectual. Cf. Myrto DRAGONA-MONACHOU, Aristotle's reception by Benjamin of Lesbos in his work *Elements of Ethics* (in Greek), *Neohellenic Philosophy* (in Greek), ed. K. Boudouris, Athens, Hellenika Grammata, 2000, pp. 79-94



note that G. F. W. Hegel, presents in the Third Part of his *Philosophie des Rechtes* the tripartite division: Familie, Bürgerliche Gesellschaft, Staat, in a distinct manner which, corresponding to the Aristoteleian tripartite distinction. Such division characterizes deeply the trends of the sociology of the 19th century this tripartite Hegelian theory of society. From this point of view Benjamin belongs to this tradition.

This three-stages social process according to Benjamin does not merely consist of simply three successive stages. At each time there is an overpassing of the previous stage according to the corresponding social beings: the Kome, for example, consists of many families and is appropriate for interhumane activities-, survival or other-, which exceed simple family possibilities. The polis, on the other hand, consists of many Kome and is available for interhumane activities, which cannot be done by the Kome. Benjamin analyzes the three parts of the Oikos: the man, the wife and the children. The right and virtuous management and administration of the Oikos constitutes the meaning of the term of *oikonomike*⁶⁰, a term which has been adopted by the Greek Literature.

7. Conclusions. Benjamin analyzes in his book *Elements of Ethics* several aspects of the civilized life of the human being. It is obvious that he is under the influence of the Ancient Classical Literature, especially of Aristotle. It is also worth noting that he does know the works and the ideas of the Physiocrats and the French Encyclopaedists.

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60. BENJAMIN, *Elements of Ethics*, § 184. Economics (Oikonomike) which constitutes the right administration of those things which constitute the Oikos, human-beings and objects, has been analyzed by XENOPHON, *Oeconomicus*, ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, Book I, and in some passages in *Eudemeian Ethics* (e.g. VIII 10, 1242 a22-26; 9, 1241 b 27-29), by the Peripatetic philosopher and author of *Oeconomica* (Book I), and the Stoic Philosophy, which deals with the discrimination of the terms *oikonomike* and *chrematistike* (STOB., II, 7, 26 p. 148, 5-13).

ΟΙ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΚΕΣ ΙΔΕΕΣ ΤΟΥ BENJAMIN ΛΕΣΒΙΟΥ

Περίληψη

Ο Βενιαμίν Λέσβιος (1759 - 1824) έζησε σέ μιά εποχή κατά τήν όποία τό δόγμα τής Φυσιοκρατικής Σχολής αποτελούσε έναν κοινό τόπο στήν εύρωπαϊκή διανόηση. Βαθύτατα έπηρεασμένος από τά δόγματα του Διαφωτισμοϋ, αλλά και όπλισμένος από τό όπλοστάσιο τής αρχαίας έλληνικής φιλοσοφίας διατυπώνει στό έργο του, *Στοιχεία Ηθικής*, συγκεκριμένες σκέψεις για τήν εύρυθμη διαχείριση του Οίκου. Οί απόψεις του αυτές περιγράφουν αυτό πού όνομάζεται «οίκονομική». Έμφανίζεται βαθύτατα έπηρεασμένος από τήν άριστοτέλεια αντίληψη περί Οίκου και είναι αντίθετος μέ τίς απόψεις του J.J. Rousseau. Αποτόκες τής αρχαίας έλληνικής διανοήσεως είναι και οί σκέψεις του για τήν εύδαιμονία.

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(Αθήναι)

