

# DNA Testing Annihilates Greek Propaganda

*By Victor Bivell*

Governments are not supposed to tell you who you are. That's a job for your parents. But in Greece the government does tell you who you are, and if you disagree you are in big trouble and can be seen as an enemy of the state. As a person of Macedonian heritage whose family is from the Greek side of the 1912 modern day border between Greece and Macedonia, the Greek government gives me two choices for my identity. I can be Greek and claim direct descentance from the glorious ancient Greeks; or I can be Macedonian, but if I do that then I am not really a Macedonian as I have, according to the government, no connection to the glorious ancient Macedonians and I am really a 'Slav', a 'Slavic speaker' and a 'Slavophone' whose predecessors came from a swamp somewhere in the Ukraine or Belarus, supposedly sometime in the sixth or seventh century. These are my only choices. Just as laughable is that there are academics, some of them self-confessed philhellenes who hang out at places like Oxford and Cambridge universities, who also peddle this stuff.

To me, it never rang true. I wondered if it may be true, but I couldn't bring myself to believe it. Firstly, because I could see that it was propaganda: a convenient lie by which the Greek government tries to justify its 1912 invasion of Ottoman Macedonia and its annexation of about 34,000 square kilometres of some of the best real estate in Europe. Telling the world that "Macedonia is Greek" hides the Greek government's massive dispossession of this land from village people who were born in Macedonia and had never lived anywhere else. Telling the world that "Macedonians are Greeks" hides the Greek government's theft of these people's indigenous Macedonian identity so it can give it to Greeks, most of whom were transplanted from Turkey to Macedonia in the 1920s but somehow are now the only true descendants of the ancient Macedonians.

The second reason I couldn't believe it is that there was nothing in our family history about Slavs, Ukraine or swamps. Growing up, I never once

heard the word ‘Slav’ or its derivatives. Our family and relatives were village people. All I ever heard was “Niesme Makedonsi”, which means “We are Macedonians”. That was it. The first time I remember hearing the word “Slav” was when I was in my early 30s and had just developed an interest in Macedonian affairs. I came upon it in my reading, where suddenly almost every Greek and some western academics were so keen for me to see myself as a ‘Slav’ that I felt it was being forced upon me. As I had not come across this alternative history and identity before, I didn’t know what it was or anything about the huge amount of historical and propaganda baggage it came with. Perhaps a bit like how the body can reject a transplanted organ, my identity rejected something that was foreign and seemed alien.

I’m lucky I did, because I have now done a DNA test that shows my instinct was right.

Now in my late 50s, I recently did a DNA test to find out what it could tell me about my origins. I did a Y-DNA test and an mtDNA test. The Y-DNA test is for the Y chromosome that is passed from father to son to son and so on along the paternal line. The testing agency says that sections on the Y chromosome determine the male’s haplogroup, the origins of his ancestors and their path as they migrated around the world. The mtDNA test examines the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) that is passed down from mother to children. It traces the migration path of your maternal line, your mother’s mother’s mother and so on.

In their detail, the results were far more than I expected. Yet in their conclusions they confirmed my belief, based on common sense, that the Macedonians and other peoples of the Balkans are a mixture of the many peoples who have lived there. The results said I am 100 per cent European. I am 79 per cent from Southern Europe – 61 per cent from the Balkans, 15 per cent from the Italian Peninsula and 3 per cent from Malta; I am 12 per cent from Eastern Europe – 6 per cent Magyar (Hungary and the border regions of its neighbours) and 6 per cent West Slavic (Poland and Slovakia and the border regions of their neighbours); and 9 per cent from Scandinavia.

Being 61 per cent from the Balkans means I am a native of the Balkans. The DNA testing firm says the Balkans means the area from Slovenia, Croatia and Romania in the north to Greece in the south. It includes Macedonia.

If my forebears had been part of a Slav migration then I should have a much higher percentage of Eastern European than 12 per cent. And if the Greek government is right then I would have registered 100 per cent ancestry from Eastern Europe. But I didn't. Science says I am only 12 per cent East European. Science says I am six and a half times more Southern European than Eastern European, and that I am more Italian than Eastern European. Science also says I am 9 per cent Scandinavian. But that doesn't get a mention in Greek propaganda.

And there is more to the story. The testing firm says "Present day populations in the Southeast Europe cluster show some of the highest rates of genetic relatedness to the second wave of migration into Europe roughly 11,000 years ago."

What's that? 11,000 years ago? That right. And it looks like I could be related to them. Thanks to science, I now have a third alternative identity: not a Greek who pretends to be a direct descendant of the ancient Greeks, not a Slav from a swamp whose forbears arrived in the Balkans 1,400 years ago, but a Macedonian whose forbears arrived in the Balkans possibly 11,000 years ago.

Let's think about what that means. We don't know exactly when my father's forebear arrived but if we assume it was about 11,000 years ago, that would be around 440 generations ago if the average is 25 years per generation and 550 generations ago if the average is 20 years per generation. These generations are not unlikely given the early marriages and the lack of contraception in those times.

And these generations didn't keep still. Depending on how they moved about, 500 or so generations is enough time for my 500 times great grandfather and me to have relatives who are not just Macedonian but also Greek, Albanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Croatian and every other nationality in the Balkans and much of the rest of Europe to boot. It is so many generations that these relatives could have spread that far and wide even before the start of the classical period. It makes a mockery of the simplistic Greek position.

Even more laughable is that Greek historians say the Greeks arrived in Greece between 4,100 and 3,650 years ago. It will be interesting to see what genetics says, but meanwhile if the Greek historians are right then it is the

Greeks who are the newcomers, not me. And on their principle of ownership to the first on the scene, then Greece belongs to me and my genetic kin, not them.

Unlike the Greek propaganda, science also gives me reason to be proud of my ancestors. The Y-DNA test said my paternal haplogroup is E-M35. I did an internet search and found numerous scientific papers that discuss the relationship between E-M35 migrants and the arrival of neolithic languages, agriculture and technologies from the Middle East into the Balkans and Europe.

One paper, titled "Y Haplogroups, Archaeological Cultures and Language Families: a Review of the Possibility of Multidisciplinary Comparisons Using the Case of E-M35" by Andrew Lancaster (Journal of Genetic Genealogy, 2009) was illuminating. It says:

"As shall be shown, there are obvious reasons for considering whether Y Haplogroup E-M35 male lineages may have been present amongst peoples who spread the earliest Afroasiatic languages as well as the earliest technologies associated with farming and pastoralism in the Middle East, Africa and Europe. This has also been noted in DNA surveys of the last decade. Initially, what was noted was a seeming link to the European Neolithic.

"Semino et al. (2000) proposed that in Europe, haplogroup "Eu4" or "Ht-4", equivalent to E-M35, represented "the male contribution of a demic diffusion of farmers from the Middle East to Europe".

"King and Underhill (2002) went further and showed an association between the distribution of these E-M35 lineages and the distribution of findings of Neolithic painted pottery and figurines, again focussing on diffusion from the Middle East into South-eastern Europe."

These researchers have started to sketch out what these early men who carried the E-M35 variation were like as people. Not only were they travelers and migrants, they helped to spread language, agriculture and technology around Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans and Europe.

That sure beats the modern Greeks' story of Slav swamp dwellers stealing supposedly Greek history as if they had nothing better to do in life.

The mtDNA test said my haplogroup is H15b, which is part of the

mitochondrial haplogroup H. World Heritage Encyclopedia says “Several independent studies conclude that haplogroup H probably evolved in West Asia c. 25,000 years ago. It was carried to Europe by migrations c. 20-25,000 years ago, and spread with population of the southwest of the continent.” The company that did my DNA test says H now has a significant presence throughout Europe and accounts for between 30 and 50 per cent of the population of Western Europe. So it’s a big club.

Within the club, H15 is unlikely to be from Europe, and is an uncommon branch found at low frequencies in Europe and the Near East.

The branch H15b is not well researched at all. The haplogroup.org web site says H15b is much younger than the beginning of the last ice age. “The age of H15b and its spread from the Middle East to Europe may link it to the spread of farming in the late Neolithic. It could also have come to Europe with later migrations in the Bronze Age.” It says “The woman who founded this line lived between 2,200 and 8,800 years ago (Behar et al 2012b).” In scientific papers, people with H15b have been studied with “diverse maternal origins in Europe and the Middle East. In the Middle East, results come from Turkey, Iran, and Lebanon. In Europe, they come from Greece, Italy, and Denmark. Further, there are Americans in the United States with European origins.” So as yet there is nothing definite to report. Except we can say that all the countries mentioned above are a long way from Eastern Europe.

Each of us has four grandparents. So far I have discussed the DNA results of two of mine, my father’s father’s paternal line and my mother’s mother’s maternal line. However, obtaining mtDNA results for my father’s mother and Y-DNA results for my mother’s father is more difficult as I would need to ask the appropriate cousins to do the tests. But I do not expect the results to be much different. This is because my heritage is 100 per cent European and 79 per cent Southern European. Those numbers indicate my father’s mother’s line and my mother’s father’s line were also European. Still to be explained are the 15 per cent Italian, 9 per cent Scandinavian, 6 per cent Magyar, 6 per cent West Slavic, and 3 per cent Maltese parts of me. Since these numbers are relatively small, the likely answers are the occasional inter-ethnic marriage and or marriage to someone with a different mixed ancestry.

The results of the DNA tests put me in a difficult intellectual and moral

dilemma. Who do I believe? Should I believe modern science with its many thousands of highly trained PhDs and specialists, or should I believe a bunch of Balkan Johnnies-come-lately who act as if they are 100 per cent descended from the ancient Greeks and who have been shamelessly pumping out nationalist propaganda for over 100 years? Yes, that is a hard one.

The DNA tests have opened a lot of new questions, but they have also given me a much stronger sense of certainty about who I am and where I come from. They have given me a much stronger sense of my Macedonian identity and heritage. They have also strengthened my European identity and my world identity. They have widened my appreciation for other nationalities, especially in the Balkans and Europe where nationalism can be dangerously strong. At a deeper level I can see that we are more related and more connected than I have so far understood. I see better than ever that I have thousands of distant genetic relatives throughout the Balkans, including all of Macedonia's neighbors with whom there has been so much modern political history. And I better understand that I have an untold number of genetic relatives around the world. At any time I can log in to the testing company's database and see the names of many hundreds of these relatives. Many have provided their email addresses if I want to make contact. And yes, a good number are in Macedonia and a good number are in Greece.

What these genetic results show is the shallowness and futility of Greek government propaganda and the needless nature of Balkan nationalism.

*Postscript: In March 2021 the DNA company that did my analysis said it had improved the science and methodology it uses to calculate people's geographic origins and had updated its database to give people a more precise breakdown of their geographic percentages. This changed my percentages. The original version of this article said "I am 90 per cent European and 11 per cent Middle Eastern from Asia Minor (the extra 1 per cent is simply rounding.) My European part comprises 66 per cent Southeastern European, 15 per cent East European and 9 per cent West and Central European." My updated percentages are as stated in the amended article: "I am 100 per cent European. I am 79 per cent from Southern Europe*

*– 61 per cent from the Balkans, 15 per cent from the Italian Peninsula and 3 per cent from Malta; I am 12 per cent from Eastern Europe – 6 per cent Magyar (Hungary and the border regions of its neighbours) and 6 per cent West Slavic (Poland and Slovakia and the border regions of their neighbours); and 9 per cent from Scandinavia.”*

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