In 1983, I. F. Stone, the radical journalist, boarded the Queen Elizabeth II to sail for England on his summer holiday.* Izzy, as he was known, had friends everywhere, and his ten-day itinerary was packed. But he looked forward to one appointment in particular: his planned visit with M. I. Finley, the eminent historian of Greece, who was also a longtime friend. For years, Stone had been working on a book about the trial of Socrates, and he was eager to discuss his theories with a trusted—and sympathetic—expert.

These two figures were colossi in their respective fields. And though they are not usually associated with one another, they did share a remarkable set of experiences. Their lives roughly corresponded to what Eric Hobsbawm has called the Short Twentieth Century (Stone was born in 1907 and died in 1989; Finley lived from 1912 to 1986), meaning that the rise of Communism and Fascism, followed by the Cold War, marked the essential political milestones of their careers.1 Isidor Feinstein and Moses Israel Finkelstein each chose to Anglicize and shorten his Jewish surname for personal and professional reasons. As suspected Communists in McCarthyite America they were outcasts whose careers were threatened by witch-hunt and blacklist. Yet each outlasted his enemies and went on to achieve superlative distinction.

A final significant link was their shared fascination with the ancient world. By the 1960s, Finley was already widely regarded as the leading historian of ancient Greece. He was more than that: In fact, he was in the words of colleague Arnaldo Momigliano ‘the most influential ancient historian of our time’, whose thinking had lifted his field to the leading

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1 Hobsbawm 1994, 235, 439.
edge of theoretical discourse. His writings challenged old orthodoxies about slavery and economics, while introducing innovative sociological methods to the study of the classical Mediterranean. Prestigious posts at Cambridge University, popular books, and lecture tours had earned him global renown and a knighthood.

Stone’s Grecian odyssey had been rather more tortuous. Finding himself unemployable in the newspaper business of the early 1950s, he had spent two decades self-publishing *I. F. Stone’s Weekly*, a newsletter that became must-reading for anyone craving an independent voice in conformist America. If his exposures of official lies made him an oracle to young investigative journalists, his steadfast honesty about divisive questions—including Israeli politics, the New Left, and Soviet totalitarianism—made him a truly independent intellectual, a party of one beholden to no faction or shibboleth. Confident in his values, even at the nadir of the Red Scare, he had foreseen his eventual redemption. ‘Honey’, Izzy had promised his wife, Esther. ‘I’m going to graduate from a pariah to a character, and then if I last long enough I’ll be regarded as a national institution’.

By the early 1980s, this prophesy had been fulfilled. Yet Stone was not satisfied with accolades and tributes. During his career as a journalist he had cherished a plan for a more academic project: a history of the ‘freedom of thought’. And his research had brought him all the way back to ancient Greece—in particular, to the trial and execution of the philosopher Socrates. ‘I. F. Stone’s retreat into the cloistered precincts of classical scholarship was as unorthodox as anything he’d ever done’, his biographer D. D. Guttenplan has noted. And yet there was something apt about the elderly Stone spending his final decades immersed in the original trauma of western political life—to be a radical, after all, means to return to the roots.

To write intelligently about Ancient Athens, Stone first had to learn Greek and immerse himself in the scholarly literature—all at an enormous cost of anxiety and exertion. A combination of ‘chutzpah plus zest plus temerity’ kept him at it. As foreign as the material was, he still found ways to employ the instincts of a lifetime to interpret ancient texts. His copies of Plato grew ragged from use: he underscored relevant passages with shaky lines, and crowded the margins with notes. ‘You re-examine

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3 Guttenplan 2009, xv.
4 Guttenplan 2009, 442.