We are all Orthopedic, not “orthopaedic” or straight-child-ish… from “παιδίον”/paedion (=child) of Andry’s book for children!

There is a considerable difference between the spelling of the word «Orthopaedics» and «Orthopedics»; in fact, the first one, «Orthopaedics», is incorrect and inaccurate; it has been widely used and copied as the correct spelling of the term to which one commonly reverts in order to refer to the profession or specialty of «Orthopedics»; the spelling with an «ae» derives from the French term «orthopédie» used in Andry’s book (written in 1741) providing instructions for the prevention of deformities in children; «orthopédie» is formed by the ancient Greek words «orthós» (straight and correct) and «paidion» (=child), while the correct ancient Greek etymology of the term «Orthopaedics» (=Orthopedikis) in Greek derives from the ancient Greek word «orthós» (straight and standing up) and the ancient Greek verb «ped-ó» (=to prevent a distortion, commit, hold strong and steady, engage with brakes, keep something motionless, bind) or, from its derivative word «pédion», with an “e”; Orthopedics comes thus, straight from the combination of two ancient Greek terms which embody and literally express, the specialty of prevention and correction of deformities, in all age groups and not only in children.

The word « Orthopedikós » (=orthopedic doctor) is the direct adjective of the ancient Greek verb « orthopedoeo » (=standing up upright/raising someone upright on the ground or on the “pédion”) derived from the words « orthós » (=straight and standing up) and «pédion» (=ground, field or soil).

The purpose of this study is:

- To explain the error of continuing to use the actual, widely used term «Orthopaedics» with an «ae» versus the correct one «Orthopedics» with an «e».
- To present and make widely known and understood to their core, the so-far, unknown and some how, neglected ancient Greek roots of this term and in which manner they relate to it and, therefore, the writing and spelling of the term «Orthopaedics» or «Orthopedics» have been widely used correctly, for many centuries before being arbitrarily changed by Nicolas Andry, a French physician (1658-1742), to the neologism “Orthopédie” (“Orthopedia” in English) in a children’s book [5].

Unless the object of Orthopedics, as this evolved into a separate and distinct specialization throughout the last hundred years, is only related to children and has any notional connection with the original meaning of the term "Orthopédie" that the French physician created, we should all agree that Andry’s etymology is the only correct one and the writing and spelling of the term «Orthopedics» must be with an “ae” as in «Orthopaedics» [5]. Obviously, Andry composed the term, consciously or not, without taking into consideration or even, without possibly knowing the pre-existing ancient Greek verb «ped-ó» and its derivatives in the Greek language «ortho-ped(пед)-ó» «ped-ión» and «péd-i» in ancient Greek (=bind, cuff, barrier, letter) found also in Iliad’s N36 of the ancient Greek poet Homer, all written with an “e”, not an “ae” [1-4,6-10]. Under this light, I confirm that the sole and unique correct medical and scientific term is «Orthopedics» with an “e”, in Greek with an «-ed» (=επιλογή), which is the direct and self-evident objective of the ancient Greek verb «ortho-po(e) d-ó» deriving as it is mentioned from the ancient Greek words «orthós» and «pédio» from the Greek roots («-ped/-pod») [1-4,9,10]. The alternative use of “o” and “e” letters in the same word was very common in the ancient Greek language e.g. «Lógos/Légo» etc. When Paul wrote to the Galatians he said that Peter did not walk uprightly, according to the truth of the Gospel. Galatians 2:14. The Greek word here translated “walk uprightly” is the Greek word “ορθοποδω/ orthopedos”, “ortho” (right), “podo” (walk) [8].

Back in 1741, in Andry’s time, there were only few Greek academics with an excellent command of the Greek language; even the ones studying or living in France, aimed and worked towards liberating their country from the Turkish occupancy and most certainly, could not engage themselves into explaining to a French physician which should be the most suitable words to use for this term, or how to spell and write it correctly; these were the pre-existing ancient Greek words ortho-po(ед)-ó, pedo, ped-ión and péd-i, all written with an “e”, not an “ae”. The problem is that these words have the same spelling with «paedion» or «pédion» in French.
In this way, many English or American Orthopedic/Orthopaedic surgeons e.g. the members of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) who are not aware of the already cited correct and appropriate ancient Greek words, have been misled to believe that the only correct word for their specialization is, in fact, the wrong one; Andry’s used words for children, «orthós» and «paedia/paedion» (=child), are not the suitable to express the whole object of Orthopedics. Unfortunately, the term «Orthopaedics» with an «ae» has been established based on the second wrong synthetic word «paedia/paedion» (=child) indicating it has to do with children and assuming that, all adult orthopedic surgeons specialize in «children», in «childish» or «only for children»... as it was described in Andry’s book.

The Orthopedic medical specialty is not a “book for children” but a specialization mainly addressed to adult patients, which primarily assists them in standing up, walking upright and in an «orthós» (=straight position, standing on the field/soil) and «pedion» in Greek, and on a second basis, a specialization that aims at rectifying and preventing deformities, concepts related with the ancient Greek verb «ped-ο» and its derivatives, and certainly not with the word «paidion/paedion» (=child) as in Andry’s book. Ortho-ped-ic surgeons or doctors, do not “play” with “paidia/paedia” (=children) or don’t try to “become” nor «be have» like children. All are adults who try to correct or avoid deformities in every patient, not only in children.

The correct words to express the object of the ortho-ped-ic specality existed and were being used for more than twenty centuries before Andry’s book for children. The ancient Greek word ὀρθόποιος/ορθό-πο-ασ (someone with straight feet), and not «orthopai/us-orth-pae-us», has been used by the ancient Greek tragic poet Sophocles (496-406 BC); the term is composite from «orthós» (straight) and the derivative of the verb «ped-ο» «po-us» (leg/foot in English, pes/pedis in Latin) [3]. The ancient Greek word «orthopod-ούσιν» (=walking upright) found in the Holy Bible, was equally formed using the root of the same verb «ped-ό», something that expresses that «Ortho-ped-ics» refers to all age groups [8].

Why do we consider as correct the derivative "ortho-paed-ics" of Andry’s term “orthopédie” based on «paedia/paedion» (=child) and as false the self-evident derivative «ortho-ped-ics», object of the verb «ortho-ped-ο» related to the object of Orthopedics as a whole? The sole correct term must not depend upon partial data taken from a “book for children” nor upon the erroneously used words of a French physician but, should be reasonably based on the knowledge of all historical and etymological data, available on this subject [3-8]. The meaning of a term must be in agreement with its composite words. Ortho-ped-ic surgeons are not “ortho-paed-ic” nor are they, if one can say it this way, “straight-childish” (literal meaning in Greek of «orthopaedics»)...The term «ortho-ped-ic» with an «e», not an «ae», is written in French as «orthopedique», in Latin «ortopedico» and in Greek, for over a century as «ortho-pedi-kos» with an «E», only.

It came natural to French and English orthopedic surgeons to connect the term Orthopedics/Orthopaedics with the words «paedia/paidion» (=child) of Andry’s book because they assumed it’s the same and because they did not seek advice from any renowned Greek linguist or any educated orthopedic surgeon, who would have explained to them the long Greek history of the term Orthopedics. To top this confusion and make it even more complicated, an additional problem has emerged concerning this matter, this time, in Greece: in an attempt to match and to conform with the guidelines and terms used by the American AAOS Society, the Greek Orthopedic Society (EEXOT) -which up to the year 2000, was bearing its well known title, written only with an «E» and maintained that form for more than 50 years- decided, without obtaining the absolute majority of its members, to replace the term in question, with an «ae», thus, with the term «Ortho-paed-ics/Orthopaediki»! A new mistake copied by another one! In the majority of the Greek or related to Greek language dictionaries it’s written «Orthopedics» with an E, not AE or AI, philologists and linguists know it as «OrthropEdics/OrthropEdiki» as well; they all wrote it with an «E»; this new modification directly ignores the root of the ancient Greek verb «ped-ο», most probably, in an attempt for homogeneity, which, as explained, is based on false data [3,4,9-20].

The term Ortho-ped-ics is also used in the Veterinary medicine; they use the correct term to express the correction of deformities in animals; the veterinary medicine e.g. uses ortho-ped-ic splints for dogs or for cats’ fractures. Is it normal to commonly accept the use of the term «paedic» (=children’s and childishs) for both, children and animals? Is it normal that the term which always refers to our children, is being used to indicate corrections of deformities, in animals? The ancient Greek verb «ped-ο» its derivatives contain and express the practice of correcting all kinds of deformities in human beings of all ages, not just in children. We do not use children «paid-ia/paedia» (=children), instead of ortho-ped-ic splints or methods, to correct deformities.

This is really a strange linguistic and cultural phenomenon, widely discussed in the circles of intellectuals, cultivated Greeks and the medical Community; to seek authenticity and accuracy for our science and profession constitutes intent to avoid cultural and linguistic discrepancies and distortions.

Unfortunately, because of this mix-up and the everlasting and continuous use of a false term, there are currently and over these last years, two different terms used in Greece: one is the term Ορθοπαιδική/Ortho-paed-ics with an «E», used by nearly all educated Greek people who are aware of the ancient Greek etymology of the word or prefer to write it similarly to the term "orthopedic" of Andry’s book, and the other one is the «ridiculous» term, when it comes to adult surgeons, «Ορθοπαιδική/«Ortho-paed-ics» (with an «AI/AE») used by some of the members of new Greek “Ortho-paed-ics”... with «AI/AE» Society and by near only one Greek linguist and his dictionary [21).

Another argument that questions the correctness of this spelling and writing is the fact that if, in every country, one had to literally translate the “etymology” of the already mentioned ancient Greek terms, borrowed from Andry’s book, then, for example, the Italian orthopedic surgeons should also be called with the ridiculous terms "Orto-bambini", "Corretto-bambini" or "Dritto-bambini"... the English or American ortho-ped-ic surgeons should also be called with the funny terms "Ortho-childish", "Ortho-infantile", "Straight-childish" or "Straight-infantile"... and the French orthopedic surgeons "Ortho-enfantains" or "Enfant-droitique"... in their respective languages based on the incorrect second derivate παιδίον/paidion (=child).
In my opinion, the continuing perseverance to mistakenly use the wrong root of the wrong word in order to express our association with this particular science and profession, does not do count nor justice to serious and educated scientists. The correct and appropriate term is only Orthopedics, written with an «ε-ε» (epsilon) ; it’s the sole correct term that should be unanimously, commonly, worldwide used to refer to our specialty and to that effect, its spelling and writing should be reviewed by experts, adopted and adapted with an «ε» in all languages; it should become the only term in all electronic or paper dictionaries referring to our profession and finally, all related terms, composite words or deriving from this, must be written following the same linguistic principles, based on the same non-distorted etymology of the word.

As additional supportive reference there is related vocabulary to the correct etymology of the term Orthopedics from the word «orthós» and the root «ped/pod» written with e/ε (epsilon) in Greek abounds in Greek literature; In the Greek and English lexicon of Liddell HG et al. “Ορθοπεδική/Orthopedio” (=to walk upright), “ορθό-ποδ-α/ortho-pod-α” (=stretch the leg straight ahead in English), “πεδ-άορος/ped-aoros” (=with straight feet) Nic. Αλέξιος, 419, “Ορθό-ποδ-ητή/ortho-pod-ite” , “Ορθό-ποδ-ω/ortho-pod-o” (=I follow the straight path, I walk along a straight road) Παναγιώτης, Μεσοτ, σ. 494, “Ορθό-ποδ-ία(ο)/ortho-pod-i(o)” (=I follow the straight path, I walk along a straight road) Καρέ, Ι. 80-18 [3,20].


Almost all Greek dictionaries, except very few e.g. of Babiniotis, have the term «Ορθοποδέω/Orthopodeo» (=to walk upright), “Παράτο/parato pod-tos” (=with straight feet) LiddellHG edn.

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