

EGYT 1550

- Ethnic Identity in Graeco-Roman Egypt

Theory and Methodology:
Ethnicity and Multilingualism

Instructor: Dr. Rachel Mairs

Tu Th 9am - 10.20am

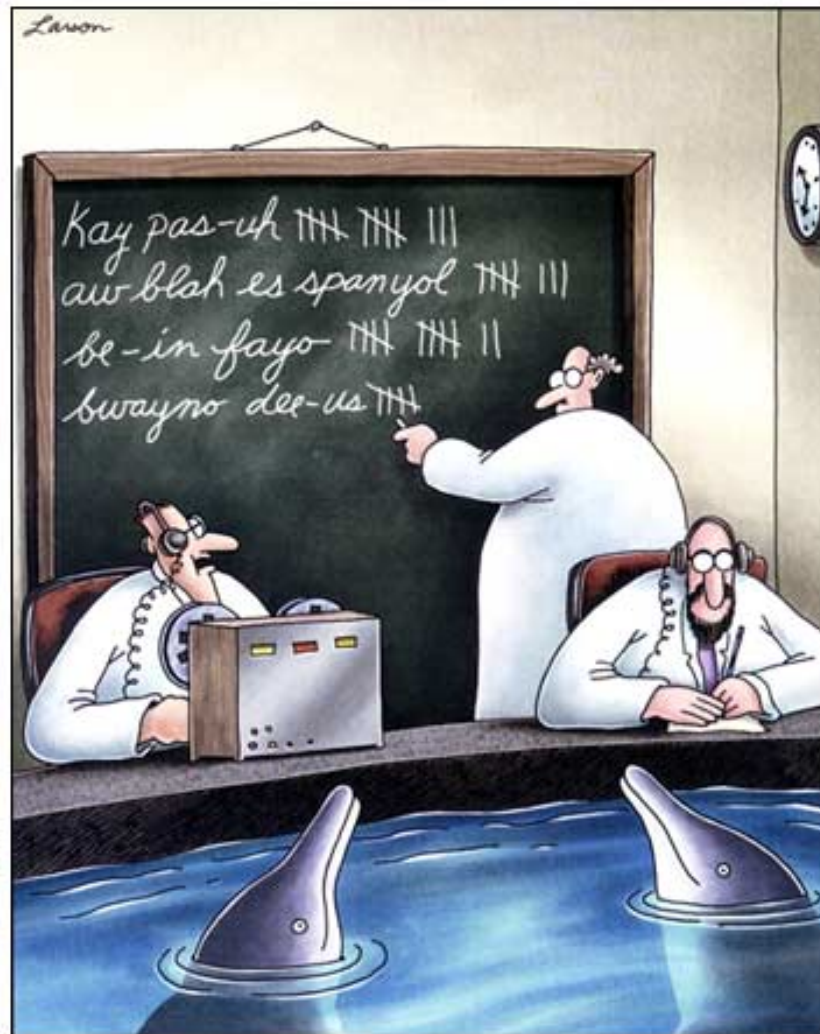
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MOTIVATING YOUR KID TO
LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE



Big Questions

- What do we mean by 'ethnic identity'?
- How do things such as language, religion, dress, food relate to a person or a community's ethnic identity?
- How does multilingualism 'work' at an individual and at a societal level?
- Where can and should we look for expressions of identity in the papyrological and archaeological record?

Ethnicity and the Ancient World:

Some key works

Barth, F. eds. (1969) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Organization of Cultural Difference*. Bergen; London: Universitetsforlaget; Allen & Unwin.

Jones, S. (1998) *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present*. London: Routledge.

Hall, J. M. (2002) *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Emberling, G. (1997) "Ethnicity in Complex Societies: Archaeological Perspectives," *Journal of Archaeological Research* 5, 195-344.

Malkin, I. eds. (2001) *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*. (Center for Hellenic Studies Colloquia 5.) Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies; Trustees for Harvard University.

Ethnicity in Egypt

Smith, S. T. (2003) *Wretched Kush: Ethnic Identities and Boundaries in Egypt's Nubian Empire*. London: Routledge.

Bilde, P., T. Engberg-Pedersen, L. Hannestad and J. Zahle eds. (1992) *Ethnicity in Hellenistic Egypt*. (Studies in Hellenistic Civilization III.) Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.

Thompson, D. J. (2001) "Hellenistic Hellenes: The Case of Ptolemaic Egypt," in Irad Malkin (eds.), *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*, 301-322. (Center for Hellenic Studies Colloquia 5.) Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies; Trustees for Harvard University.

Ground-rules

- Ethnicity is not primordial, an inherent quality of an individual or group, through descent, 'race', etc.
- Ethnicity is constructed, claimed, asserted and defended through social interaction.
- Different things – language, skin colour, religion, dress, food – may be held to be ethnically salient by different groups, and/or under different circumstances.
- What people actually do (as might be observed by outsiders) can be different from what they say or think they do.
- Ethnicity can thus be regarded as a 'fictitious identity', in the sense that it has a variable relationship to material culture and cultural behaviours. But it is *socially meaningful* and this is why it is important.

S. Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity* (1997):

“Ethnic identity: that aspect of a person’s self-conceptualization which results from identification with a broader group in opposition to others on the basis of perceived cultural differentiation and/or common descent.

Ethnic group: any group of people who set themselves apart and/or are set apart by others with whom they interact or co-exist on the basis of their perceptions of cultural differentiation and/or common descent.

Ethnicity: all those social and psychological phenomena associated with a culturally constructed group identity as defined above. The concept of ethnicity focuses on the ways in which social and cultural processes intersect with one another in the identification of, and interaction between, ethnic groups.”

...but what do we actually *do* with all this?

Ethnic Identity and the Archaeological Record

- An 'archaeological culture' is not an ethnic group. (An old point, but one worth reiterating.)
- The expression of ethnic identity is not necessarily visible in material-culture forms per se, but in the way culture is used and perceived.
- Not all forms of behaviour and material culture bear strong ethnic connotations.
- So 'ethnicity' is not necessarily a good theoretical framework in which to approach particular ancient case studies ... but the Hellenistic world happens to be one of the places where it is useful and appropriate to use the trope of 'ethnicity'.

Intermission: Some modern case studies

- *Paisanos* in John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* (1935).
- Anglo-Indians / Eurasians.
- Integration and maintenance of identity by various immigrant groups in the United States.

“What is a paisano? He is a mixture of Spanish, Indian, Mexican and assorted Caucasian bloods. His ancestors have lived in California for a hundred or two years. He speaks English with a paisano accent and Spanish with a paisano accent. When questioned concerning his race, he indignantly claims pure Spanish blood and rolls up his sleeve to show that the soft inside of his arm is nearly white. His color, like that of a well-browned meerschaum pipe, he ascribes to sunburn. He is a paisano, and he lives in that uphill district above the town of Monterey called Tortilla Flat, although it isn't a flat at all.”

Steinbeck, *Tortilla Flat*, p. 4.



Eurasians / Anglo-Indians

- Changing British official and social attitudes to intermarriage and 'mixed' relationships in colonial India.
- Changing terminology for those of British and Indian descent.
- Further redefinition of the Anglo-Indian community post-independence. Indian Constitution: "a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only."

Hawes, C. J. (1996) *Poor Relations: The Making of a Eurasian Community in British India 1773 – 1833*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon.

Carton, A. (2000) "Beyond Cotton Mary: Anglo-Indian Categories and Reclaiming the Diverse Past," *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies* 5, 1-12.

Language and Identity: Some possibilities

- The attachment of strong ethnic associations to a language, leading to its stigmatisation or deliberate suppression among a group who do not consider themselves to have that identity. (Irish among Unionists in Ireland from the time of the Gaelic Revival, and particularly after Irish independence.)
- Societies where a strong common identity is asserted, despite language variation - the existence of which may consequently be played down or even denied. (Promotion of common orthography for the various Chinese 'dialects' – which in fact constitute a language family, they're not mutually intelligible – alongside the idea of a communal Chinese ethnic and national identity.)
- The choice of a bilingual individual to identify ethnically with one of their languages over the other, whatever their actual level of competence or degree of usage.
- The choice of an ethnic group to deny membership to an individual who identifies with them, on the basis of difference in language use. (Language is one of many factors which has impeded the absorption of the Falasha/Beta Israel into Israeli society.)

Language as an Ethnic 'Indicion'

“...When you sent me again to Philadelphia to Jason, although I do everything that is ordered, for nine months now he gives me nothing of what you ordered me to have, neither oil nor grain. ... And he orders me to accept ordinary wine for salary. Well, they have treated me with scorn because I am a ‘barbarian (*barbaros*). I beg you therefore, if it seems good to you, to give them orders that I am to obtain what is owing and that in future they pay me in full, in order that I may not perish of hunger because I do not know how to speak/behave Greek (*hellenizein*)...”

P. Col. Zen. 66 (c. 265 BC).

πυνθανομένη μανθάνειν σε Αἰγύπτια / γράμματα
συνεχάρην σοι / καὶ ἑμαυτῆι, ὅτι / νῦν γε παραγενόμενος /
εἰς τὴν πόλιν διδάξεις / παρα Φαλου..ἦτι ἰατροκλύστη
τὰ / παιδάρια καὶ ἔξεις / ἐφόδιον εἰς τὸ γῆρας.

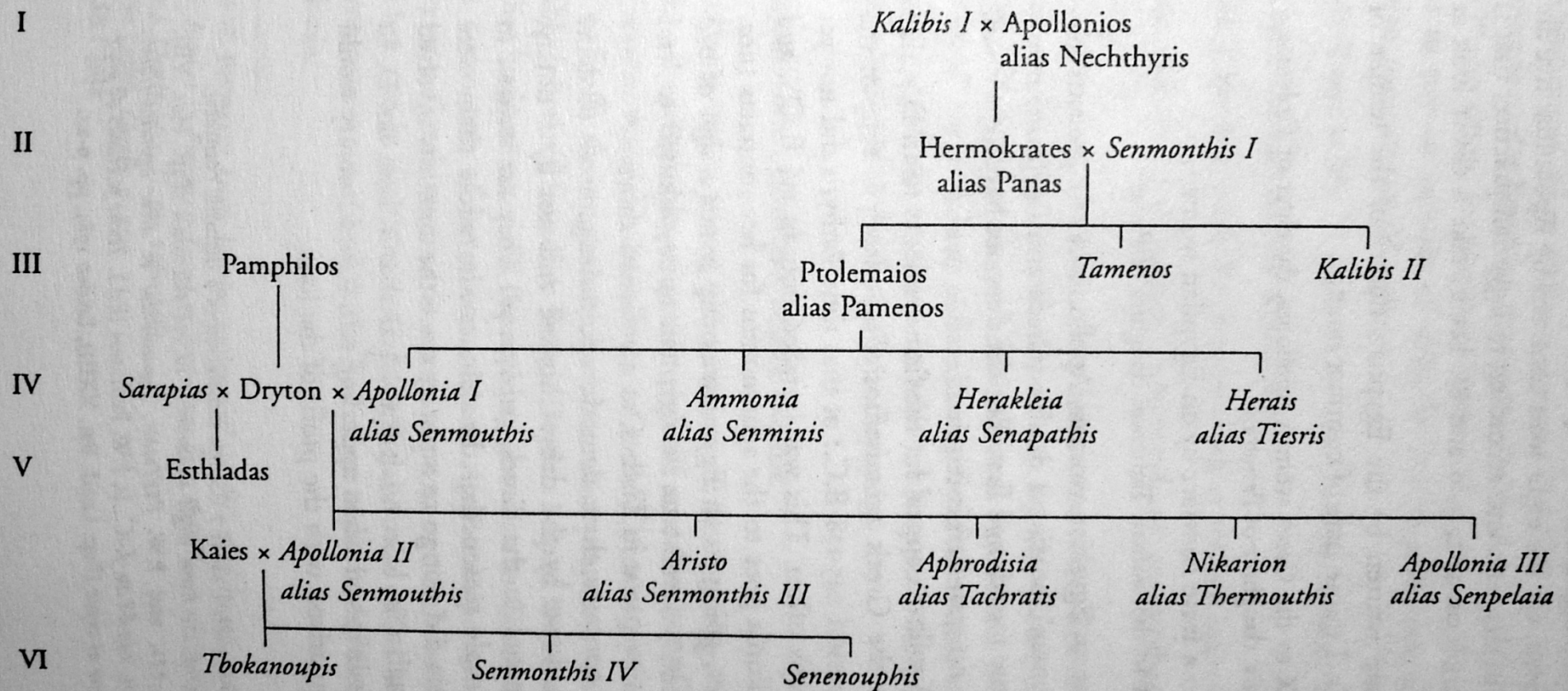
(UPZ I 148, second century BC.)

“Discovering that you are learning Egyptian letters (*Aiguptia grammata*), I was delighted for you and for myself, because now when you come to the city you will teach the slave boys in the establishment of Phalou...es the enema doctor, and you will have a means of support for old age.”

(Trans. Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt*.)

The Family of Apollonia-Senmonthis (Vandorpe, *P. Dryton*)

Fig. 1 – THE FAMILY OF APOLLONIA AND DRYTON



Legend

I, II, III, IV, V, VI: generations
 Women's names in *italics*
 × indicates marriage

How bilingualism works

- There are two complementary phenomena we can view in operation in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: societal bi-/multilingualism – use of multiple languages within a community – and individual bi-/multilingualism – an individual’s capacity to operate in more than one language.
- The notion of ‘fluency’ is not very helpful in thinking about how to define bilingualism. Bilingualism is better understood as an individual’s ability to function in more than one language in specific contexts. We call these spheres (work, school, home, market) linguistic ‘domains’.
- ‘Balanced bilingualism’ – i.e. complete native-level fluency in all domains – is and was rare.
- But the ability to use another language effectively in at least one domain is and was very common. (In this sense, bilingualism is historically and geographically far more common than monolingualism.)
- We should be hesitant to criticise the standard of the language in an ancient text. ‘Bad Greek’ may have been effective and adequate for the context, without the need for good grammar, spelling and syntax, or literary sophistication.

Ancient multilingualism and sociolinguistics

- Adams, J. N., M. Janse and S. Swain eds. (2002) *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Adams, J. N. (2003) *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dickey, E. (2003) "Review: Ancient Bilingualism," *Journal of Roman Studies* 93, 295-302.
- Papaconstantinou, A. ed. (2010) *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt, from the Ptolemies to the 'Abbāsids*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Adams, J. N. (1977) *The Vulgar Latin of the Letters of Claudius Terentianus* (P.Mich.VIII, 467-72). (University of Manchester, Faculty of Arts Publications 23.) Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bilingual people, bilingual texts

The papyri contain many examples of people who:

- use one language when addressing some officials, friends and family members, and another for others. (Week 10: Apollonia.)
- employ a scribe and/or translator to help them address someone in a (written) language they don't know.
- try to use another language when they're not very good at it.
- take great pride in their ability to use another language (sometimes even though they're not very good at it).
- manage their legal and financial business using papers written in more than one language.
- use different names (Greek or Egyptian) depending on the language of the document (whether written by themselves, or someone else).

Bilingual people, bilingual texts

Documents sometimes contain writing in more than one language, because:

- they're meant to transmit the same information to people who understand different languages (translated texts: e.g. Rosetta Stone).
- they're meant to communicate slightly different things to different ethno-linguistic audiences (complementary texts: e.g. mummy labels where the deceased and the relevant gods are described in Greek and in Egyptian).
- they're meant to excerpt some relevant information for some readers who won't need/understand the entire document ('tagged' texts: e.g. accounts with totals in Greek).
- the writer is 'code-switching' (see the e.g.s in Fewster 2002).
- the writer is changing language for reasons we really don't understand.

...we'll see examples of all of these.

Clarysse, W. (1984) "Bilingual Texts and Collaboration between Demoticists and Papyrologists," in (eds.), *Atti del XVII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia. Volume Terzo*, 1345-1353. Napoli: Centro Internazionale per lo Studio dei Papiri Ercolanesi.

Bilingual people, bilingual texts

Sometimes it all goes very badly wrong:



“Lost in translation: road sign carries email reply
”, *The Guardian*, 31 Oct 2008 <http://gu.com/p/22bfp>

A Prince From Western Libya

Aristomenis, son of Menelaos,
the Prince from Western Libya,
was generally liked in Alexandria
during the ten days he spent there.

In keeping with his name, his dress was also suitably Greek.

He received honours gladly,
but he didn't solicit them; he was unassuming.

He bought Greek books,
especially history and philosophy.

Above all he was a man of few words.

It got around that he must be a profound thinker,
and men like that naturally don't speak very much.

He wasn't a profound thinker or anything at all—
just a piddling, laughable man.

He assumed a Greek name, dressed like the Greeks,
learned to behave more or less like a Greek;

and all the time he was terrified he'd spoil

his reasonably good image

by coming out with barbaric howlers in Greek

and the Alexandrians, in their usual way,

would start to make fun of him, vile people that they are.

This was why he limited himself to a few words,

terribly careful of his syntax and pronunciation;

and he was driven almost out of his mind, having

so much talk bottled up inside him.

(Constantine P. Cavafy, 1928)

