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Society, Identity, and Ethnicity in the Hellenic World

Teresa Morgan

In the past thirty years, representations of ethnicity in the Greek and Roman worlds and their relationship with other ideas about identity have become a major field of research. The cultivation of the field owes much to two disciplines which arose separately but have increasingly interacted: the study of ethnic identifiers in documentary inscriptions and papyri, and the reading of Greek and Latin literature in a framework informed by theoretical writing on ethnicity in the social and physical sciences.¹ Between them, these disciplines have transformed our understanding of ancient assumptions and assignments, evaluations, and manipulations of ethnicity: of their complexity and their significance.

On the literary side, the ground was broken in the mid-to-late 1980s by a series of studies in Greek culture by Edith Hall, Catherine Morgan, Paul Cartledge, and Jonathan Hall.² Their work draws on thinking about ethnicity and race in biology and sociology, while paying close attention to the cultural specificity of ancient discourses and languages of identity. Jonathan Hall, perhaps the most influential of the group, developed a six-part definition of Greek ethnicity which has been adopted by both Greek and Roman historians (and also by scholars of ancient Judaism and early Christianity). Ethnic groups are 'self-ascribing and self-nominating' social entities which self-differentiate from other groups. Biological features may be invoked but do not ultimately define them; they are defined above all by shared myths of common descent, shared territory, and a sense of shared history. They are not static, and through time both assimilate with other groups and differentiate from them. Individuals have multiple social identities, so ethnic identity is not always the most important aspect of

¹ The literary/documentary distinction has never been watertight, of course; studies on both sides refer to sources on the other.

² Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Catherine Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

identity in a given context. Finally, ethnicity often emerges in the context of migration or conquest.³

Hall's list hints at another criterion which never becomes explicit but is often taken for granted by ancient historians: What he identifies as 'ethnics' (at least down to the level of the city⁴) tend to be terms for groups which, at some point in their history, were politically autonomous.⁵ This submerged, but significant, criterion helps to explain why historians include in studies of ethnicity groups very varied in shape and size, some of which at times identify closely with one another and share myths of descent, history, and even territory. Despite their obvious differences, for example, 'Athenian' (referring to a citizen of a city) may be counted an ethnic, and so may 'Boeotian' (typically referring to a citizen of one of a regional group of cities), 'Greek' (encompassing citizens of many cities and regions), 'Macedonian' (referring to a subject of the kingdom), 'Egyptian', 'Jewish', and 'Roman' (a highly complex concept which this essay will not attempt to map). This criterion also helps to explain why certain groups are excluded from studies of ethnicity. For example, ancient historians do not typically count 'Christian' as an ethnic. Nor do they treat it as an ethnic κοσμοπολίτης – the term coined by the Cynic Diogenes to identify himself as a 'citizen of the world' and used by Stoics to identify with an abstract and universal community of the good – though it shares most of Hall's criteria. Βακχεῖος or *Baccha*, 'follower of Dionysus', is not treated as an ethnic despite the fact that Livy, for instance, can attribute to the consuls at Rome in 186 BCE the conviction that followers of Dionysus constitute a sociopolitical entity whose existence is a political threat to the Roman state (Livy, 39.8-18).⁶

In thinking about ethnicity, are we justified in privileging groups which at some period enjoy political autonomy? Up to a point. What scholars recognize as ethnics are also terms used as identifiers in legal documents and public inscriptions, so modern scholarship often follows ancient political and social authorities. We should be aware, however, that ancient agents self-identify with a much wider range of what, on modern criteria, are identifiable as ethnicities than either ancient or modern authorities acknowledge: a point of relevance to students of early Christianity.

We will return to this issue, but most of this essay will discuss what most modern scholars treat as ethnic identifiers to see how their treatment by individuals and groups evolves in the half-millennium or so before the Common Era. First, however, it is worth noting that the Greek and Latin terms which we associate with ethnicity

³ Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 9–10. The approach of Hall et al. now informs studies of ethnicity throughout the ancient Mediterranean and Near East: notably Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Nathanael Andrade, *Syrian Identity in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Alex Mullen, *Southern Gaul and the Mediterranean: Multilingualism and Multiple Identities in the Iron Age and Roman Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Kostas Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Andrew Gardner, Edward Herring, and Kathryn Lomas, eds, *Creating Ethnicities and Identities in the Roman World* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2013).

⁴ ἔθνος is also used of various 'tribal' groups within cities.

⁵ One exception are ethnics of non-autonomous cities within kingdoms; see P. M. Fraser, *Greek Ethnic Terminology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶ Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 485–6.

refer to far more than groups which at some point held political or military power. Ἔθνος can refer to almost any kind of group, human or animal.⁷ Ἔθνος is often used of kinship groups (small or large) but can also refer, among other things, to a sex, class, or any 'type' of person or thing. *Genus* is used of everything from the human race to an individual family member via all kinds of species, political groupings, professional classes, social orders, groups, sexes, or characters of plant, animal, or person. Ἔθνος, γένος, and *genus* can refer to political groupings of many sizes and kinds, from a family network to a city-state, a collection of states, the people of a region, or a kingdom. Herodotus, for example, whose interest in identity makes him a rich, if sometimes idiosyncratic, source for the study of identity in the fifth century BCE, can use γένος to refer to a group within an ἔθνος (1.56, 1.101), ἔθνος of a group within a γένος (1.143), and the two as synonyms.⁸ Meanwhile, the Greek term which most straightforwardly means 'kinship' or a grouping based on shared descent is συγγένεια, which usually refers to relatively close family and is rarely used of groups with wider sociopolitical or cultural identities. When Greek or Latin writers refer to an ἔθνος, γένος, or *genus*, they may therefore be talking about almost any kind of group, for which any aspect of the term may be important, marginal, or irrelevant. We must accordingly always treat the language of ethnicity or identity, including early Christian identity, with caution. Its terminology is so multivalent that its meaning is likely to be highly specific to the context in which it is used.

If terms such as γένος and ἔθνος are complex and multivalent, 'Greek', 'Ionian', or 'Egyptian' are equally slippery, referring to different groups of people in different contexts or the same groups differently defined. Some scholars have responded by expanding their definition of ethnic identity to include a number of other markers which are invoked by ancient writers as identifying groups: above all shared language, customs, and/or cult.⁹ If these can also be arbiters of ethnicity, then Herodotus may have been articulating a widely shared view when he put into the mouths of the Athenians, in the midst of the Persian War of 480–79, the statement that τὸ Ἑλληνικόν is a matter of shared blood, language, temples, rituals, and ways of life (8.144). Modern historians would refine Herodotus mainly by emphasizing what Herodotus often illustrates, that not every dimension is in play in every context, and that identity is not always defined by opposition. On the contrary, as Hall argues, though identity is always differential for 'Greeks', its articulation is by no means always intended adversarially.¹⁰

In recent years, studies of ethnicity in literary texts have interacted increasingly with documentary papyrology and epigraphy to generate richer historical accounts of ethnicity and more theoretically informed studies of documentary texts. P. M. Fraser's *Greek Ethnic Terminology*, for example, brings a theoretically sophisticated approach to the study of individual and group identity in Greek inscriptions. Fraser shows how, in their native city, individuals in the classical Greek world tend to be identified by name, patronymic, and/or deme (official 'home' village or region), rather than by city.

⁷ Fraser, *Terminology*, 1–35.

⁸ 1.56.2, cf. 1.57.3, 5.91.1. Later historians follow Herodotus' example.

⁹ For example, David Konstan, 'Defining Ancient Greek Ethnicity', *Diaspora* 6 (1997): 97–110; Gardner et al., *Creating Ethnicities*, 2–3.

¹⁰ Jonathan M. Hall, 'Ancient Greek Ethnicities: Towards a Reassessment', *BICS* 58, no. 2 (2015): 15–29.

Non-locals from nearby city-states tend to be identified by the name of their city ('Plataean', 'Epidauran'), though certain groups (such as 'Boeotian' and 'Thessalian' mercenaries), for uncertain reasons, are often identified by region rather than city. In some cases, non-locals are identified by both city and a larger grouping ('from Helikē, Achaean').¹¹ Non-locals from further away are more likely to be identified by terms for larger regions ('Thracian', 'Ionian') or simply as 'foreigner' (ξένος).¹² Fraser's work illustrates vividly how Greek 'ethnic' identities are not a set of fixed or objective categories, but vary according to context and the perspective of users. Under the Roman Empire, the use of ethnics in the Greek-speaking world in general dies out: perhaps, Fraser suggests, because it ceases to be strongly correlated with citizenship of politically autonomous cities.¹³ Fraser also observes that early Christians very rarely use 'ethnics': whether because most belonged to non-citizen populations of cities or because they lived in the countryside where such things seem to have been of less interest – or, one might add, because they identified with the kingdom of God rather than with any earthly group – we cannot currently tell.¹⁴

Some of the most striking findings about identity in the Greek and Roman worlds have emerged from the study of documentary papyri from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, to which we will return.¹⁵ Relatively rich evidence, mostly epigraphic rather than papyrological, also survives from the Hellenistic Seleucid kingdom and the Roman province of Syria. Richard Fowler has explored representations of identity under the Seleucids in 'Ethnicity and Power: Studies on Royal Ideology in the Hellenistic Fertile Crescent',¹⁶ while Nathanael Andrade has treated the nature of 'Syrian-ness' in *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World*.¹⁷ Fowler and Andrade focus particularly on the area around Babylon, one of two regions from which most of our best evidence for thinking about ethnicity in the Graeco-Roman Near East derives. The other is Israel. The study of Jewish understandings of identity and conflicts over identity in the Hellenistic world is a sizeable field in its own right which lies beyond the scope of this essay. Most recent studies, however, share with studies of Greek and Roman identity a nuanced account

¹¹ Perhaps because the city belongs to a federation which self-identifies as an ethnic group.

¹² See Fraser, *Terminology*, 76 (locals in home cities), 79 (mercenaries), 112 (foreigners in Athens), and 119–20 (identifications by city and regional ethnic).

¹³ Alternatively, other markers of Greekness may become more important. Cf. R. J. van der Spek, 'Multi-ethnicity and Ethnic Segregation in Hellenistic Babylon', in *Ethnic Constructions in Antiquity: The Role of Power and Tradition*, ed. Ton Derks and Nico Roymans (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 101–16.

¹⁴ Fraser, *Terminology*, 232.

¹⁵ Fundamental studies include Dorothy J. Thompson, *Kerkeosiris: An Egyptian Village in the Ptolemaic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); *eadem*, *Memphis Under the Ptolemies*, 2nd edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Naphtali Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Koen Goudriaan, *Ethnicity in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1988); Per Bilde, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Lise Hannestad, and Jan Zahle, eds, *Ethnicity in Hellenistic Egypt* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992); Csaba Lada, *Foreign Ethnics in Hellenistic Egypt* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002); Gregor Weber, ed., *Kulturgeschichte des Hellenismus: von Alexander dem Grossen bis Kleopatra* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007); Jean Bingen, *Hellenistic Egypt: Monarchy, Society, Economy, Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Sandra Coussement, 'Because I am Greek': *Polyonymy as an Expression of Ethnicity in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016).

¹⁶ DPhil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1999.

¹⁷ See note 3.

of ethnicity informed by modern theory and close attention to ancient evidence. They recognize that while ethnicity is invoked regularly as a marker of Jewish identity and a form of differentiation, its content is variable, negotiable, and contestable.

A number of the ideas touched on here are now widely shared by scholars of ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern ethnicity. Ethnicity (like identity in general) is always a construct. Representations may invoke (among other things) stories of shared descent, shared territory and history, language, culture, and/or cult. The content and significance of claims about ethnicity are closely tied to the contexts in which they occur and the perspectives of those who invoke them and, in any one context, some aspects of the concept will be privileged above others. Ethnicity is always open to renegotiation and challenge. It is differential, but not necessarily bipolar or adversarial. The rest of this essay will seek to draw out the significance of some of these propositions in the Greek, especially the Hellenistic, world. The final section will reflect briefly on their implications for thinking about ethnicity among early Christians.

1 Early Greek views

If there was a time and a region in the Graeco-Roman world in which the idea of ethnicity based on shared descent, history, and territory had particular currency, it has been suggested that it was the archaic and classical Greek world. Between the eighth and fourth centuries BCE, groups such as Dorians and Ionians can be found tracing themselves back to a single eponymous ancestor.¹⁸ Arcadians sometimes identify as descendants of aboriginal Pelasgians, Athenians as descendants of the autochthonous Erechtheus or Erichthonius.¹⁹ In the same period, however, some of the same groups tell stories of the migration of their ancestors across the Mediterranean to conquer the lands where they now live and intermarry with earlier inhabitants.²⁰ Others trace their name back to that of a mythical king (Macedon, Cyzicus, Taras) without claiming that all their members are descended from him. Meanwhile, the most famous story of human origins composed in this period, Hesiod's 'ages of man' at the beginning of *Works and Days* (196–76), does not rely on the idea of shared descent, history, or territory at all. Identity based on these factors is at most one idea among several in play.

The context in which late archaic and classical Greek cities take the most practical interest in shared descent, history, and territory is in their citizenship laws. To count as Athenian, for instance, for political and legal purposes, in the early sixth century BCE, one had to live and work in Attica. After Cleisthenes' political reforms of 508/7, one's father had to be Athenian; under Pericles' citizenship law of 451, both parents. The citizen elite of Sparta, Spartiates, had two Spartiate parents. Even in classical Athens, however, grants of citizenship were made to individuals and groups who did

¹⁸ Heraclides Criticus fr. 3.2 in Friedrich Pfister, *Der Reisebilder des Herakleides* (Vienna: R. M. Rohrer, 1951); Conon 26, *FGH* 1.27.

¹⁹ Euripides, *Phoen*, 638–75; Pherecydes 3 *FGH* 22 (Thebans); Herodotus 2.171.3 (Arcadians); Herodotus 1.57.3; 2.51.1–2 (Athenians).

²⁰ For example, Herodotus 2.51 (Pelasgians); Herodotus 1.171.2 and Thucydides 1.4 (Carians); see Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 30–6.

not qualify by birth, while in Sparta, entry to the group of adult male Spartiates was not only by birth but also by contribution to the common mess, and those who lacked funds to contribute were excluded. Even when cities most valued endogamy, shared descent, history, and territory were never sufficient arbiters of identity.

Hall has argued that the concept of 'Greekness' emerged largely as a result of Greek colonial expansion in the early Iron Ages and, moreover, that it emerged first in the new overseas settlements. It is when people leave home, he suggests, and come into contact with unfamiliar groups, that they first begin to think about and define identity.²¹ This attractive theory may also (at least partly) explain why some of the most creative and sustained thinking about identity in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds takes place among displaced Greeks, diaspora Jews, and early Christians.

Herodotus, however, shows how labile even apparently straightforward identifiers of colonial ethnicity are in his day and shortly before. At 1.146 he comments on the weakness of the Greek γένος in general in the mid-sixth century, and in particular that of the Ionian ἔθνος (which he treats, in principle, as a descent group). Most of those, he says, whom outsiders called Ionians disliked the name and refused to use it. The exceptions were twelve cities, which built the Panionium cult centre to establish their shared identity. Inhabitants of these cities, however, were and are mostly not Ionians: They belong to other tribes which intermarried with locals. Herodotus, tellingly, invokes the idea of Ionian ethnicity here only to complicate and undermine it.²²

Occasionally Herodotus goes further and shows not just complexity but the deliberate acquisition of aspects of others' identities as, paradoxically, an indication that a group has a particularly strong, distinctive, and successful identity of its own. Equally paradoxically, the two groups that share this characteristic in his work are the two which, above all, are cast as ethnic opposites and enemies at its climax: Persians and Greeks. Persians and Greeks, says Herodotus, are both exceptionally syncretistic, constantly adopting and adapting the best features of other groups with which they come into contact (1.135). The Persians, for example, have adopted Median dress, Egyptian armour, and Greek sexual habits (7.62). The Greeks learnt about armour from the Carians (1.171), religion and geometry from the Egyptians (2.49–50, 2.109), and Athena's aegis from the Libyans (4.189). The paradox that cultural porosity and acquisitiveness may be markers of a strong and dominant identity is not widely acknowledged in studies of ethnicity, but we encounter it repeatedly in Hellenistic and Roman, and also in Jewish and Christian contexts.

The Persian wars of 480–79 (in which the forces of Xerxes were defeated by an alliance of cities whom their leader, the Spartan general Pausanias, contentiously described on the commemorative column he had inscribed at Delphi as 'the Greeks') inaugurated a period in which Greeks, especially Athenians, created some of the most ethnically and culturally adversarial texts and images that survive from the ancient

²¹ Hall, *Hellenicity*, chs 4–5, though there was no period when Mediterranean peoples did not come into contact with one another through trade.

²² Herodotus also talks of 'Ionia' as a region (5.37) or a group of cities (6.1). Lydian and Persian rulers of Asia Minor, meanwhile, used *Yauna* or similar transcriptions of 'Ionian' to refer to Greeks of all origins in their territories (Robert Rollinger, 'New Observations on "Greeks" in the Achaemenid Empire According to Cuneiform Texts from Babylonia and Persepolis', in *Organisation des pouvoirs et contacts culturels dans les pays de l'empire Achéménide*, ed. P. Briant and M. Chauveau (Paris: Éditions de Boccard, 2009), 331–51). I am grateful to Alexander Wilson for this observation.

world. These differentiate 'Greeks', especially Athenians, radically from others, especially 'barbarians' and above all 'Persians'.²³ Even in this period, though, there are signs that Greek, and especially Athenian, identity is not just complex but porous. In his funeral speech, delivered over the Athenian dead of the first year of the Peloponnesian War in 431/0, the Athenian general Pericles, according to Thucydides (2.39), claims that Athens is more hospitable to incomers than any other city. On this and other grounds, he boasts that Athens provides a *παίδευσις* – a common education or culture – for Greece (2.41). A generation later, in about 380, the Athenian orator and teacher Isocrates published a panegyric to Athens which echoes Thucydides, speaking of Athens' unique openness to strangers (41) and her gift of philosophy to the world (47):

The result is that the name of the Hellenes no longer seems to indicate an ethnic affiliation (*γένος*) but a disposition (*διάνοια*). Indeed, those who are called 'Hellenes' are those who share our culture (*παίδευσις*) rather than a common nature (*φύσις*).²⁴

We do not know how the *Panegyricus* was received by its first audience but Isocrates was not unique in the fourth century in his views: Hall traces similar themes in the work of Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle.²⁵ We should not be surprised, therefore, to find Alexander the Great, Aristotle's pupil, in the late fourth century experimenting with his own culture and identity and that of his courtiers and subjects. It is no longer fashionable to suggest that Alexander aimed to abolish ethnic distinctions and achieve the 'unity of mankind', but he certainly invoked non-Macedonian identities in his public self-representation and that of his close associates. He represented himself as the son of Graeco-Egyptian Zeus-Ammon, adopted forms of Persian dress and behaviour, intermarried with his subjects and compelled other Macedonians to do the same, mixed Macedonians, Greeks, and Asians at court, and probably demanded that his courtiers treat him in some respects as a Persian king.²⁶ Some of these behaviours were bitterly resented as un-Macedonian or un-Greek, but all attest to Alexander's conviction that identity may be at once porous, accretive, and distinctive.

Persia, Athens, and Macedon were all at different times aggressive, expansionist, successful states. For them all – and, one might argue, for the Hellenistic kingdoms and Rome²⁷ – openness to acquiring aspects of other peoples' identities and sharing their own was part of their strong sense of identity, individuality, and power. They offer food for thought not least for those who study understandings of ethnicity and identity among Jews and Christians.

²³ Other members of the Achaemenid Empire may stand for Persians, as does the bending Scythian on the Athenian 'Eurymedon vase'.

²⁴ Trans. Hall, *Hellenicity*, 209, modified. In *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates praises the Athenians as fit successors to Agamemnon, 'the general of the whole of Greece' (76).

²⁵ Hall, *Hellenicity*, 210–20.

²⁶ A. B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); *idem*, *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁷ Cf. Emma Dench, *Romulus' Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2 The Hellenistic world

The thought worlds of archaic and classical Greek cities continued powerfully to influence the imaginations of those who identified in some sense as 'Greek', as well as many whose primary identification was not Greek, long after what modern historians treat as the end of the classical Greek world. The next three centuries, however, also see developments in thought and practice which are extensions of past practice or new responses to the new contexts of the 'Hellenistic' kingdoms.

The definition of 'Hellenistic' is a moveable feast. It is widely used of a period of time (usually from the death of Alexander in 323 BCE to the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE) and/or a geographical area under Macedonian rule (roughly from northern India to the eastern Mediterranean), but both definitions are fluid (in recent years, for instance, the concept of the 'Hellenistic west' has gained currency²⁸). In the study of literature and art, 'Hellenistic' can mean 'post-classical-Greek', 'sub-classical-Greek', or 'classical-Greek-plus'. I shall take 'Hellenistic' to mean the post-Alexandrine, Greek-influenced, political, social, and cultural world which in some aspects extends into the western Mediterranean and the period of Roman rule in both west and east. Traditional definitions have always included the history of Greek-speaking Jews and Jews under Greek-speaking rulers; my definition also includes the world of early Christians.

However defined, the Hellenistic world is a fascinating one in which to study ethnicity. Like the archaic Greek world, it is a time and place of exploration: of the conquest of new territories, building of new settlements, forging of new relationships and creation of new political, social, and cultural entities. It enables and enforces new ideas and practices of identity. Those who travel to new regions, settle new cities, serve new dynasties, write new texts, or create new artefacts look simultaneously backwards and inwards to their inherited identities and forwards and outwards to new ones.

2.1 Shared descent, history, and territory

We noted above the role that shared descent, history, and territory played in ethnic identification in the archaic and classical periods. All these remain sufficiently important in the Hellenistic world to be fabricated regularly by both individuals and groups.²⁹ When, for example, new members joining the gymnasium or the ephebate in Seleucid Syria proudly advertised their Greek ancestry, onomastic evidence often suggests that they had made it up.³⁰ Aristocratic families had long traced their ancestry back to gods or heroes. In this period individuals and, especially, cities continue to claim descent from a god or hero, often for the first time, and to invoke shared descent as a basis for new relationships and alliances. In the first century BCE, for instance, the Euboean city of Carystus sought an alliance with the Carian city of Alabanda in Anatolia (long under Macedonian rule, but usually recognized as non-Greek in origin)

²⁸ J. R. W. Prag and Josephine Crawley Quinn, eds, *The Hellenistic West: Rethinking the Ancient Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁹ An ancient pastime: cf. Herodotus 5.49; Nick Fisher and Hans van Wees, eds, 'Aristocracy' in *Antiquity: Redefining Greek and Roman Elites* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2015), 3–10.

³⁰ Andrade, *Syrian Identity*, 44.

on the novel grounds that both were descended from the teacher of Achilles, Chiron the centaur.³¹

Eftychia Stavrianopoulou has recently discussed an inscription from Sidon, erected around 200 BCE, which testifies to the importance of genealogy in a Hellenistic city but also hints at its malleability and celebrates its complexity. The inscription honours Diotimos, chief magistrate of the city and winner of the four-horse chariot race in the Nemean Games:

When all drove [their swift horses] from their chariots [in the] Argive [valley], [rivals in the competition,] to you, O Diotimos, [the people] of Phoronis [gave] noble fame, and you received the eternally memorable wreath. For, first of the citizens, the glory of an equestrian (victory) from Hellas have you brought to the home of the noble sons of Agenor. Thebes, sacred city of Kadmos, also boasts, seeing her mother-city glorious with victories. As for your father Dionysios, fulfilled was [his vow concerning the] context when Hellas shouted this clear [message]: 'Not only for its ships [is Sidon] extolled [above others], but now also for prize-winning [chariot-teams].'³²

Sidon is a Phoenician city under Seleucid rule, which here links itself with Greek Argos (whose colony it claims to be) and Thebes (whose mother city it claims to be). The language and references are Greek, but there are hints that Greekness is not Diotimos' only affiliation.³³ It is as a Phoenician, not a Greek, city that Sidon is famous for its ships. Stavrianopoulou argues, moreover, that in calling Dionysios δικαστής, the author of the inscription chooses to translate the Sidonian office of *shofut* with a Greek term which describes its role, rather than with the more common but less specific term for a Greek magistrate, ἄρχων. By this means, she suggests, the Sidonians advertise not only their own and Diotimos' Greekness but also their continuing Phoenicianism.³⁴

As classical Greek cities took different approaches to maintaining citizen descent groups, so Macedonian royal dynasties took different approaches to maintaining their identity. The Ptolemies tended to marry within the family or with other Macedonian royal families. The Antigonid kings married Macedonian, Greek, and Epirote women, but not Asians. One of the wives of Lysimachus, king of Macedon and Thrace was the Persian princess Amastris, niece of Darius III. The Seleucids too married outside Macedonian or Greek families: Seleucus I (r. 305–281) and Demetrius I (r. 161–50) both seem to have married Sogdian princesses called Apama. There is no sign that any of these families regarded themselves as less Macedonian by the first century BCE than

³¹ IG XII 9.4; O. Curty, *Les parentés légendaires entre cites grecques: catalogue raisonné des inscriptions contenant le terme SUNGENEIA et analyse critique* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1995).

³² See Eftychia Stavrianopoulou, 'Hellenistic World(s) and the Elusive Concept of "Greekness"', in *Shifting Social Imaginaries in the Hellenistic Period: Narrations, Practices, and Images*, ed. Eftychia Stavrianopoulou (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 177–205.

³³ Stavrianopoulou, 'Hellenistic World(s)', 178.

³⁴ Corinne Bonnet, *Les enfants de Cadmos: le paysage religieux de la Phénicie hellénistique* (Paris: Boccard, 2015), 260–5, offers a different interpretation which also captures Diotimos' ethnic complexity.

in the third. Political advantage was undoubtedly a factor in all royal marriages, but we may also detect in them different attitudes to the transmission of ethnicity.³⁵

Outside royal families we must assume that intermarriage was common, even the norm, between Macedonians, Greeks, and other inhabitants of the Hellenistic kingdoms. The earliest Macedonian and Greek settlers were soldiers and traders, most of whom, if not all, were male. In later generations it was probably still far more common for men than women to move around the Mediterranean. Even when we have information about family groups from tax or census documents, it rarely covers more than two or three generations, so we cannot trace lines of descent far (this is true even of relatively strongly self-defining groups such as Jews³⁶). But by the late third century BCE, it is likely that most families in the Hellenistic kingdoms, however ethnically self-defined, were, to an outsider eye, mixed.

2.2 Assigned identities: Tax, legal, and professional status

Ethnic markers continued to be performed, recorded, advertised, and celebrated throughout the Hellenistic kingdoms. In many cases, however, ethnicity clearly became an assigned rather than inherited identity. It was a legal and tax status; a consequence of holding a certain type of citizenship or job. A few examples must suffice from the great wealth of data now available.

Alexander the Great and his successors established dozens of new cities in their kingdoms, some of which became primary seats of Macedonian administrations. Simultaneously, existing cities (such as Tyre, Sidon, Memphis, and Babylon) acquired Greek *polis* status and institutions. These cities were established or endowed with many of the political and social institutions of classical Greek *poleis*, including councils (which undertook much of the cities' day-to-day administration), magistracies, gymnasia, and ephebrates. New cities were settled by veterans of the invading armies, κάτοικοι, who were given an allotment of land, together with other Greek and Macedonian incomers and inhabitants of the area. Those eligible to serve in and enjoy the cities' elite sociopolitical institutions were their citizens, who were classed as Greeks. Some of these will have self-identified as Macedonian rather than Greek. Others, by background, were neither: they were Greeks by status.

Numerous inscriptions from later Hellenistic Seleucia honour individuals with Syrian names and Greek citizen rights.³⁷ The citizens of the Greek *polis* of Tyriaion include individuals with Macedonian, Greek, Phrygian, and Galatian names.³⁸ The *Diary of the Messengers of the Citizens*, a fragmentary astronomical diary from Babylon, refers (lines 3–7) to citizens in connection with the high priest of Esagila. Rolf Strootman has argued persuasively that this suggests that the Greek community

³⁵ In other contexts, for different purposes, all these families could also represent themselves as belonging to other groups: see below, pp. 33–4.

³⁶ Gideon Bohak, 'Ethnic Continuity in the Jewish Diaspora in Antiquity', in *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities*, ed. John R. Bartlett (London: Routledge, 2002), 175–92.

³⁷ See, for example, Fowler, 'Ethnicity', 179, 374; Andrade, *Syrian Identity*, 10, 42; cf. Pliny, *Nat.* 6.22.

³⁸ Andrade, *Syrian Identity*, 43.

in Babylon consisted in part of the upper echelons of earlier Babylonian society who were still worshipping their traditional gods.³⁹ It has sometimes been argued that the aim of the reforms of Antiochus IV in Jerusalem was to establish a *polis* of which Hellenizing Jews would have become (some of) the citizens. Though few now think this was the case in this instance, there is nothing implausible about the idea in principle: The practice of enrolling non-Greeks as Greek citizens of a *polis* was widespread.

It was also possible to be classed as Greek without being a citizen of a city. This seems to have been the case for Alexandrian Jews, who were classed as Greeks for tax and legal purposes and had entry, for instance, to the gymnasium, but were not Alexandrian citizens.⁴⁰ Dorothy Thompson and Willy Clarysse, in their study of Ptolemaic tax registers, have argued that the Ptolemies used tax status routinely as a means of social control and reward. Having acquired Egypt with a relatively small force of Macedonians and Greeks, they sought to enlist the support of the existing ruling classes (which included Persians, Egyptians, and probably Arabs) in government.⁴¹ These ruling classes, in cities, towns, and villages, were encouraged to learn Greek, adopt Greek customs, and serve the new administration; the reward of cooperation was to be redefined as Greek.

These 'tax Greeks', or 'new Greeks',⁴² included teachers of Greek letters, 'actors of Dionysus' who performed Greek drama, doctors, policemen, priests, soldiers, and temple workers (in both Greek and Egyptian temples). Some appear in documentary records writing in demotic, or writing Greek with a brush rather than a pen, revealing their training as Egyptian scribes. Many have non-Greek names (like the well-attested Petechonsis, scribe and an official of the tax-area of the Themistos Section between early 229 and mid-224 BCE) or belong to families of which all other members have Egyptian names. A few have double, Greek and Egyptian, tax status.

Occasionally we can trace the rise of an individual through the ethnic ranks. A famous case is that of Maron, also known as Nektsaphthis, son of Petosiris, of the Egyptian village of Kerkeosiris. Nektsaphthis first appears in the Kerkeosiris archives in a document dated to 119/8 BCE.⁴³ The following year, he appears as 'Maron son of Dionysios, formerly known as Nektsaphthis son of Petosiris'. A few years later he appears again as 'Maron son of Dionysius, Macedonian of the catoectic cavalry'. This is the elite military classification, carrying high social status, which originally belonged only to Macedonians by descent. Within about a decade, it seems, Nektsaphthis has risen from Egyptian to Macedonian status.⁴⁴ (We may note that even if Nektsaphthis' tax

³⁹ Rolf Strootman, 'Babylonian, Macedonian, King of the World: The Antiochus Cylinder from Borsippa and Seleukid Imperial Integration', in *Social Imaginaries*, ed. Stavrianopoulou, 67–98, esp. 84–5.

⁴⁰ Avi Avidov, *Not Reckoned Among the Nations: The Origins of the So-called 'Jewish Question' in Roman Antiquity* (TSAJ 128; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 172–8.

⁴¹ Willy Clarysse and Dorothy J. Thompson, *Counting the People in Hellenistic Egypt* (2 vols; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴² Clarysse and Thompson, *Counting the People*, 138.

⁴³ *P. Teb.* 1:546–7.

⁴⁴ Jane Rowlandson, 'Dissing the Egyptians: Legal, Ethnic, and Cultural Identities in Roman Egypt', in *Creating Ethnicities*, ed. Gardner et al., 213–47, at 218.

status has changed, he may not have left one identity behind when acquiring another; he may have kept them all in play in different contexts.)⁴⁵

Tax status did not always follow one's job. Those identified as 'Persian' or 'Arab' were, like Jews, classed as Greek for tax purposes, for reasons we do not know. The ethnic profile, in terms of descent, of these groups is particularly unclear. Many Persians have Egyptian names and some have both Egyptian and Greek names, suggesting that the Ptolemies may not have been the first imperialists to co-opt members of existing elites into the new ruling class.⁴⁶ Some Arabs have names attested in the Arabian peninsula; others have Greek or Egyptian names. A significant number of Arabs are attested as shepherds or policemen, but the status of Arabs as tax Greeks seems to extend beyond particular occupations.⁴⁷

It is common (though not universal) in Ptolemaic Egypt for individuals of very varied social status to have Greek names while the rest of their families have Egyptian names, or for the men of a family to have Greek names while the women have Egyptian names. In some cases this may indicate descent, but often it probably indicates that, for men engaged in public life, a Greek name was a reflection (or claim) of a certain status. Women, less engaged in public life, were less in need of acquiring such a name. It also suggests that there was no disgrace for a 'Greek' man in having an identifiably Egyptian family. The number of cases in which we know of both the Egyptian and the Greek name of an individual also indicates this, and further suggests that different names and identities were used in different contexts.

2.3 Ethnicity and code-switching

If it was appropriate for individuals to use different names and ethnic identifiers in different contexts, ethnic identity was not holistic or exclusive but could be a matter of code-switching. 'Code-switching' is a term borrowed from linguistics to refer (originally and most simply) to individuals who speak more than one language, using each as single-language speakers use it, rather than mixing the two on a linguistic or conceptual level. It has been widely applied in the study of cultures to people who are able to operate in more than one cultural context in a way appropriate to monocultural users of each. The most famous example of code-switching in the Hellenistic world is the self-representation of the Ptolemies. When they were crowned at the pre-Greek capital Memphis, in their observance of Egyptian cult, and in the temples they commissioned to Egyptian gods, the Ptolemies represented themselves in traditionally Egyptian style. At court, in Alexandrian statues and on coins, they represented themselves in Macedonian style. The Seleucid kings also practised code-switching, though apparently to a lesser degree. They participated in Babylonian cults, but they do not seem to have represented themselves iconographically as Persian or Assyrian kings. Hellenistic

⁴⁵ The scribe in whose archive Maron appears is Menches son of Petesouchos, also known as Polemon, who seems to have used his Greek name in official and his Egyptian name in private life.

⁴⁶ Coussement, *'Because I am Greek'*, 105.

⁴⁷ Clarysse and Thompson, *Counting the People*, 157–60.

kings could also code-switch by representing themselves differently at home and abroad. The first self-declared king of Cappadocia, Ariarathes III (r. 262/255–220), represented himself abroad as a Hellenistic king, to mark his status to other Hellenistic kings, but at home as a Persian, presumably to appeal to pre-Alexandrine local patriotism.⁴⁸

If individuals, in life, often switched codes according to context, a remarkable group of tombstones from Apollinopolis Magna (modern Edfu) in the later second century BCE suggests that in death they were sometimes happy to set multiple identities side by side. The family of Ptolemaios, also known as Pashou, is commemorated by a series of paired tombstones: one of each pair wholly Greek, one wholly Egyptian in appearance. Some members of the family are army officers and Ptolemaios himself bears the title συγγενής, literally 'relative' of the king, marking him as a member of the Ptolemaic court. He may have been an Egyptian who had achieved Macedonian status. Alternatively, as J. Yoyotte suggests, he may have been a Macedonian who, like his king, represented himself as Egyptian when he thought it appropriate.⁴⁹

The concept of code-switching highlights another aspect of ethnicity in this period: It is often – perhaps typically – accretive. People could acquire new ethnic designations in the course of their lives and make use of old and new identities in different, or even the same, contexts.⁵⁰ A well-preserved cylindrical document from Seleucid Mesopotamia, dated to 268 BCE, offers an example of accretive royal identity.⁵¹ It begins: 'Antiochus the Great King ... king of the world, king of Babylon, king of countries ... foremost son of Seleucus, the king, the Macedonian ... am I'. Antiochus I here articulates his kingship simultaneously in Babylonian, Persian, and Macedonian terms. The language of the inscription is Akkadian, the old Babylonian language used throughout the Achaemenid Empire for official and cult purposes. The script is an archaizing form of Babylonian cuneiform which was also used in propaganda by the pre-Achaemenid kings of the Babylonian Empire. The cylinder proclaims both Antiochus' Macedonian identity and his regime's continuity with the region's previous two empires.⁵²

That individuals owned and acknowledged, even advertised, multiple identities has a further implication: that identity was contextual. Being Jewish, or Egyptian, or Syrian might serve in one context, where being Greek or Roman was preferable, or necessary, in another. This could be true even in situations where one might expect ethnic identity to be most stable or directive, such as in law. Under the Ptolemies, individuals who claimed Greek identity, and therefore access to Ptolemaic law, might be expected to

⁴⁸ Though he also implemented a *polis* constitution in the Cappadocian city of Hanisa, with a Macedonian calendar, Greek magistracies, and Greek temples (Christoph Michels, 'The Spread of *Polis* Institutions in Hellenistic Cappadocia and their Peer Polity Interaction Model', in *Social Imaginaries*, ed. Stavrianopoulou, 283–307, at 285–94).

⁴⁹ J. Yoyotte, 'Bakhtis: religion égyptienne et culture grecque à Edfou', in *Religions en Égypte Hellénistique et Romaine* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1969), 127–41.

⁵⁰ Cf. J. Geiger, 'Language, Culture and Identity in Ancient Palestine', in *Greek Romans and Roman Greeks*, ed. E. N. Ostenfeld (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2002), 233–46.

⁵¹ Strootman, 'Babylonian, Macedonian', 67–73.

⁵² On similar practices in Gaul see Mullen, *Southern Gaul*, 266–77; Ton Derks, *Gods, Temples, and Religious Practices: The Transformation of Religious Ideas and Values in Roman Gaul* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998).

have made contracts and conducted disputes under Greek law. In practice, they often seem to have used Greek, Egyptian, or Jewish law according to convenience.⁵³

In a few cases we find individuals or groups explicitly marking, even celebrating, their multi-ethnicity and perhaps even their ethnic hybridity. In documents from Egypt and Syria it is common for individuals to give, for instance, both Greek and Egyptian, or Macedonian and Aramaic names. Double names appear especially in private contracts and religious or funerary texts, where individuals may have been particularly anxious that they should be clearly identified.⁵⁴ We have already noted the bicultural funerary stelai of Pashou and his family.⁵⁵ Michael Peppard takes this theme a stage further in an analysis of multi-ethnic nomenclature in the late antique (but still Hellenistic) Jewish cemetery at Beth She'arim.⁵⁶ On the cemetery's 188 readable tombstones, names appear in Greek, Latin, Semitic languages including Hebrew and Palmyrene, and, in eight cases, in two different languages in various combinations (e.g. Ioulianos Kapitōn, Eisak Kurinos). Some of these double names, though not all, look like loose translations of each other.⁵⁷ Peppard concludes that the individuals commemorated, and/or those who commemorated them, intended to celebrate their multiple identities and even their cultural hybridity.

In these examples, individuals and groups, over a long period of time and across a wide geographical area, appear to embrace, use, and celebrate ethnic identities that are often changeable and multiple. Over the same period, it has been suggested, paradoxically, that interest in ethnic identity is weakening. In the early Ptolemaic kingdom, for example, it is normal to find individuals with Greek names – especially if other family members also have Greek names – identifying themselves in documents as coming from a particular city, region, or island in the Greek world. In the late fourth or early third century, the time of highest immigration into Egypt, it is easy to imagine that these individuals originated in the places they name; through the third and second century it becomes more likely that the names remember (or invent) ancestral homelands.⁵⁸ Through the Ptolemaic period self-identification by city, island, or region becomes less common, until under Roman rule it is normal for individuals with Greek names to identify themselves by the Egyptian city or town from which

⁵³ For example, CPJ 1.20 (228–221 BCE), CIJ 711 (Delphi, 119 CE). On syncretism in Hellenistic legal systems themselves, see Uri Yiftach-Firanko, 'Law in Graeco-Roman Egypt: Hellenization, Fusion, Romanization', in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, ed. Roger Bagnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 541–60; Robert A. Kugler, 'Dispelling an Illusion of Otherness? Juridical Practice in the Heracleopolis Papyri', in *Negotiating Diaspora Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire*, ed. John Barclay (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 457–70; cf. also Kimberley Czajkowski, *Localized Law: The Babatha and Salome Komaise Archives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵⁴ Coussement, 'Because I am Greek', 46.

⁵⁵ Bingen, *Hellenistic Egypt*, 232, 276 and Koen Goudriaan, 'Ethnical Strategies in Graeco-Roman Egypt', in *Ethnicity in Hellenistic Egypt*, ed. Bilde et al., 74–99, at 75–9, discuss further examples.

⁵⁶ Michael Peppard, 'Personal Names and Ethnic Hybridity in Late Ancient Galilee', in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee*, ed. Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale B. Martin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 99–113; cf. Coussement, 'Because I am Greek', 89, on translated names in papyri.

⁵⁷ For example, Isthēr, a transcription of Esther, and Amthaitha, which derives from the verb 'to shine' and suggests that Esther was equated to the Greek ἀστήρ, 'star'.

⁵⁸ Individuals with Greek names whose families mostly or all have Egyptian names tend to identify themselves throughout the period simply as 'Greek'; La'da, *Foreign Ethnicity*, 80–105.

they come.⁵⁹ (Gideon Bohak notes that this is also the case among those who identify as *Ioudaios* in documents of the third to the first century BCE. Whether this implies that many Jews are ceasing to think of themselves as a distinct group, or whether documents are decreasingly seen as an appropriate place to mark their distinctiveness, is unclear.⁶⁰)

The Roman Empire recognized only two tax and legal statuses: Roman and non-Roman. In the eyes of the Roman administration in Egypt, for instance, Greeks, Jews, Persians, Arabs, and Egyptians were all 'Egyptians' unless they were 'Romans'. It has been suggested that the absence of other ethnics in documents of the Roman period is due to their new legal irrelevance, but this does not explain their earlier decline. A better explanation of the trend, in light, for instance, of Fraser's work on classical Greece, is that in late Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt the names of Egyptian towns and cities are increasingly treated as ethnics.⁶¹ As migrants come to feel increasingly at home in their new locations, current location becomes more important than ancestral identity as an identifier.⁶²

If ethnicity could be not only, or not at all, a matter of shared descent, history, or territory, nor even necessarily a matter of shared language, cult, or custom, but a tax status or the consequence of a certain job or a gift of citizenship; if it could be accretive, such that individuals and groups identified with and used multiple ethnicities; if one aspect of one's identity, such as tax status did not necessarily march in step with any other, such as background or culture; if one could switch between ethnicities as between codes, according to context, or celebrate multiple identities or hybrid identities – then the modern scholar might be forgiven for wondering whether the concept remains useful at all for thinking about Hellenistic society or identity. That, though, would be to underestimate the ability of individuals and groups in many cultures to acknowledge, celebrate, and make use of multiple languages and identities.⁶³ It would also be an injustice to the evidence, which shows that what we think of as ethnic identifiers remains sufficiently important to individuals and groups to be articulated regularly in diverse contexts. Rather, the content of 'Greek', 'Syrian', 'Egyptian', 'Jewish', and so on, however, becomes more complex and flexible through this period, and so does the relationship of the concept to individual people and groups. At times ethnicity becomes less a concept with any fixed definition at all than a claim of relative status. In his study of the gymnasium and Greek identity in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, Mario Paganini notes that the Greeks of Alexandria viewed the Greeks of the χώρα – the country beyond Egypt's three Greek cities – as no better than Egyptians or Jews, and certainly not their social or cultural equals.⁶⁴ Tessa Rajak has observed that when Josephus talks of Greeks and Syrians in Palestine, he seems to use 'Greeks' to refer to non-Jews living in towns and cities, while non-Jews living in the countryside are

⁵⁹ Bohak, 'Ethnic Continuity', 181.

⁶⁰ Bohak, 'Ethnic Continuity', 186–7. Bohak argues that assumptions of high levels of Jewish endogamy are misleadingly based on evidence from the mediaeval diaspora.

⁶¹ See note 12 and discussion above.

⁶² Fowler, 'Ethnicity', 182, argues that the Seleucids were never much concerned with ethnicity.

⁶³ Cf. Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶⁴ Mario Paganini, 'Gymnasias and Greek Identity in Ptolemaic Egypt' (DPhil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2011), 272.

‘Syrians’. Since country-dwellers are widely regarded by city-dwellers in the ancient world as lower class, poorer, less cultured, or of lesser account than themselves, what appear to be ethnic designations are probably, at times, expressions of social snobbery.⁶⁵

What modern scholars call ‘ethnic’ terms in the Hellenistic world are highly complex. At once meaningful and vacant signs, absolute and relative categories, they are as definitive as a person’s skin and as layered as their clothes. They are complex not least because they act simultaneously as outsider and insider terms: used by governments to classify and rank individuals and groups and by individuals and groups to switch identities, accrete them, perform multiple affiliations simultaneously, and in the process reinvent them. Ancient ethnicity, one might suggest, is the ‘queer’ of its day: A set of labels designed to define, differentiate, and discriminate, which are taken over by those to whom they apply, and then resisted, subverted, reworked, embraced, abandoned, and celebrated in a conversation that ranges far beyond what states or dominant social groups control.⁶⁶

2.4 Ethnicity in culture, philosophy, and religion

So far, we have focused on ethnic identity mainly as a matter of (claimed) descent or as a formal, political, legal, or social status. Since, however, a long-standing *topos* of the study of the Hellenistic world is that ‘Greekness’ becomes more a matter of culture than anything else, it is worth turning briefly to some salient features of Hellenistic culture and their relationship with ethnicity.

It is a long-standing puzzle that Hellenistic Greek literature, philosophy, science, architecture, and art, all of which, since the early archaic period, had been highly receptive of external influences, became in this period almost impervious to them. All evolved significantly by their own internal dynamics, but – despite some ingenious efforts in recent years to identify examples – little convincing evidence has been found of borrowings from outside.⁶⁷ Nor did self-identified Greeks seek to interpret their

⁶⁵ Tessa Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Social and Cultural Interaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 140. Seth Schwartz, ‘The Hellenization of Jerusalem and Shechem’, in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 37–46, argues as a corollary that the Greekness of individuals or groups was variable and often very ‘thin’.

⁶⁶ What, in this context, of the double name of Saul/Paul? The evidence above does not help us decide whether he held the names sequentially or simultaneously (though Acts 13.9 suggests the latter), but it raises the question why he chose to use a Roman name when writing to mixed communities of Jews and gentiles.

⁶⁷ Despite claims of influence, notably by Jewish writers, for example, Erich Gruen, ‘Jews and Greeks as Philosophers: A Challenge to Otherness’, in *Negotiating Diaspora*, ed. Barclay, 402–22, and attempts to identify influences, for example, by Jacco Dielman and Ian S. Moyer, ‘Egyptian Literature’, in *A Companion to Hellenistic Literature*, ed. James J. Clauss and Martin Cuypers (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 429–47; Ian Rutherford, ed., *Greco-Egyptian Interactions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); and (more successful than most) Rachel Wood, ‘After the Achaemenids: Exchange, Transmission, and Transformation in the Visual Culture of Babylonia, Iran and Bactria c. 330–c. 100 BC’ (DPhil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2012). *Contra* see, for example, Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chs 3–4; Richard Hunter, *Theocritus, Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2003), 46–53; Kathryn Gutzwiller, *A Guide to Hellenistic Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 188–202. The influence of Greek on surrounding (notably Jewish) cultures is much better established.

culture to others: No Greek equivalents survive of Josephus, Manetho (the Egyptian priest who wrote a *History of Egypt* in Greek under the patronage of Ptolemy I), or Berossus (the Babylonian astronomer who wrote a *History of Babylonia* in Greek under Antiochus I). The usual explanation for this is Greek chauvinism; a better explanation may be Macedonian admiration of the Greek. Alexander and his successors were keen consumers and patrons, especially of Homer and classical Athenian culture.

Philosophy, like other aspects of Greek culture, evolves, as far as we can see, solely by its own internal dynamics in this period. Philosophical schools, however, develop two new features which they share with ethnic groups. David Sedley has shown how they increasingly heroize their founder figures and link later practitioners, especially heads of schools, to their founders through complex genealogies.⁶⁸ Malcolm Schofield has shown how Stoics develop Diogenes the Cynic's description of himself as a κοσμοπολίτης, 'citizen of the universe', into a theory about the true identity of good men.⁶⁹ As Clement of Alexandria describes this theory:

The Stoics say that the universe is in the proper sense a city, but that those here on earth are not – they are called cities, but are not really. For a city or a people (δῆμος) is something morally good, an organization or group of men administered by law which exhibits refinement. (*Strom.* 4.26)⁷⁰

Good men (Stoics do not recognize women as philosophers), together with the divine, constitute their own polity – no less real for having no geographical location – in which they live by practising virtue under the rule of cosmic law.⁷¹ Clement describes members of the community as a 'people', and conceptually he is surely right. To be a citizen of the universe and the community of the good amounts, in the terms we have been using throughout this essay, to an alternative ethnicity: one which transcends everyday affiliations without necessarily excluding them. As we have noted, cosmopolitanism is not an ethnicity recognized by modern scholars, but on their own criteria it has some claim to be. And recognizing the possibility that one could be a member of a people with no material location may help us to understand how early Christians might think of themselves in ethnic terms.

Religion and magic are usually treated, in (what are now rather old-fashioned) anthropological terms, as aspects of Graeco-Roman culture. This is misleading: Divine-human relations are as structural to ancient societies as intra-human relations, and good relations with gods are everywhere represented as indispensable to the good working of states. Places and processes of cultivation, consultation, affirmation of continuity, and the negotiation of change are as political and social when they take place between human beings and gods in temples, at altars and festivals, as when they occur between human beings in council houses, law courts, and marketplaces. Accordingly, as in other areas of Hellenistic politics, law, and social life, representations of gods and

⁶⁸ David Sedley, 'Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World', in *Philosophia Togata*, ed. Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 97–119.

⁶⁹ Malcolm Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷⁰ Cited in Schofield, *Stoic Idea*, 61; cf. Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 489–92.

⁷¹ Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.154.

religious and magical practices interact and syncretize, while individuals and groups accrete religious identities, code-switch and parade their cultural complexity.

We have already encountered a number of examples; one or two more must suffice here from the wealth of evidence.⁷² Gymnasia often housed altars or shrines, and in Egypt they were seats of Ptolemaic dynastic cult, which took a fully Graeco-Macedonian form. Gymnasial inscriptions honouring members, however, also refer sometimes to Egyptian myths of the afterlife. Paganini connects this with the readiness of self-identified Greeks to adopt Egyptian burial customs: Both suggest that Greeks found Egyptian ideas about the afterlife attractive and integrated them into their mythology.⁷³ Alternatively, individuals with Egyptian backgrounds, having acquired Greek status, may have seen no paradox in displaying this aspect of their 'Egyptianness' in this most Hellenic context.

Egypt is the context for the most syncretistic cult of this period: that of Alexandrian Serapis. The cult of Serapis combines the mortuary aspect of the sacred Apis bull of Memphis with the cult of Osiris, and its cult building, the Serapeum at Memphis, dates back as least as far as the reign of Nectanebo II (r. 360–342). Ptolemy I (or possibly Ptolemy II or III) founded a new Serapeum in Alexandria in which the god is presented anthropomorphically in Greek style but with Egyptian trappings and surrounded by an eclectic iconography drawn from several other cults.⁷⁴ Greek writers identified Serapis variously with Dionysus, Hades, Demeter, Zeus, and Asclepius (D.S. 1.25); he became the tutelary god of Alexandria and was closely associated with the royal family. The syncretism of Serapis is unusual, but not unparalleled. Egyptian Isis was worshipped across the Greek world from at least the fourth century BCE, and Herodotus (2.42, 2.156) describes her as equivalent to Greek Demeter. During the Hellenistic period she begins to be identified with all Greek goddesses and is portrayed in Greek style.⁷⁵ She retains titles and attributes from her Egyptian form, however, and can be described simultaneously as Egyptian and universal.⁷⁶

Magic is increasingly, rightly, seen as continuous with ancient religion rather than as a separate phenomenon, and Hellenistic (including Jewish and early Christian) magic is famously culturally complex and syncretistic. The Graeco-Egyptian papyrus PGM IV 3125–71, to give just one of thousands of examples, gives instructions for casting a prosperity spell which involve making a statue out of Etruscan wax of a god with three (mainly) Egyptian heads: Horus, Hermanubis (a combination of Anubis and Greek Hermes), and Ibis. The accompanying incantation invokes a nameless angel, the Greek powers Tyche, 'Aion, ruler of hope', 'holy Agathos Daimon', and Selene.⁷⁷

It is worth noting again that while the kingdoms of the Hellenistic world treat some ethnic identities as superior to others, tolerance of others' ethnicities and cultures,

⁷² On the distinctiveness of Hellenistic religion, see Angelos Chaniotis, 'Religion und Mythos', in *Kulturgeschichte des Hellenismus*, ed. Weber, 139–57.

⁷³ Paganini, 'Gymnasia', 270–2.

⁷⁴ Plutarch, *Alex.* 76; Arrian, *Anab.* 7.26.2.

⁷⁵ For example, *P.Oxy.* 11.1380, 55.3239; Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 1.

⁷⁶ For example, Diod. 1.11.4, 1.13.4–5, cf. 1.27.3–4.

⁷⁷ H. D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); on syncretism, see xlv–xlviii.

code-switching, and even syncretism, may all be understood as signs of political and ethnic strength.⁷⁸ The Achaemenids had signalled their power by boasting of the religious diversity of their empire; the Seleucids followed suit. Athens, most hospitable of cities to foreign cults, was also the most imperialist city of the classical period. Greg Woolf has shown how Rome, similarly, allowed the pre-Roman cults of Gaul to survive into the third century CE, as long as they did not take what were perceived as non-Roman (zoomorphic or aniconic) forms.⁷⁹ Tolerance of pluralism with elements of syncretism, he argues, emphasized the strength and the magnanimity of Rome and did not challenge the hegemony of Roman identity. The same might well be said of Hellenistic Egypt. We could go further and understand syncretism as more than the combination of identities which continued to be recognized as separate. It creates a new identity in its own right: yet another new ethnicity in a world which over centuries is freely productive of new identities.

3 Conclusion

This brief survey has only begun to introduce the complexity of ideas about ethnicity and identity in the Greek and Hellenistic worlds. Much has been left out altogether: not least Jewish ideas about Jewish ethnicity and identity and that of gentiles. We have not explored the (rare, but not unknown) occasions when ethnicity is invoked by 'Jewish' or 'Egyptian' rebels as a reason to oppose oppressive 'Greek' rulers. Christians' use of the language of ethnicity and identity is for others in this volume to explore, but we may conclude with one or two observations.

On both ancient and modern definitions of ethnicity, early Christians have good claim to be discussed as a type of ethnic group, but we should also bear in mind that to find a group called an ἔθνος, γένος, or *genus* tells us little or nothing about its size or shape, the basis of its coherence or its function. Early Christians are normal in their world in taking an active interest in their identity. They may even be seen as sharing the particular interest in ethnicity which has been identified in colonial and diaspora groups. They are also normal in using ethnic terms to distinguish themselves from others (both outside what is usually understood as the group and sometimes within it). We should not be surprised to find such distinctions being used adversarially, but should not assume they are always adversarial.

Some ancient groups are more inclusive than others, and churches are typically very open to new members. This is compatible with the group's taking a high view of its potential for growth and power: It may even be symptomatic of it. Like Athenians, Macedonians, and Romans before them, and like the members of the Stoic πολιτεία of the good, Christians may mark their divinely sponsored confidence in the future by welcoming all comers into their community. (At least some) Christian groups, however, are unusual in seeking explicitly to hold all members of the group in equal respect.

We should not be surprised to find individual Christians identifying with multiple labels, accreting identities, code-switching, or even celebrating their hybridity. Nor

⁷⁸ Or claims of strength: see, for example, Douglas R. Edwards, *Religion and Power: Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greek East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Takashi Fujii, *Imperial Cult and Imperial Representations in Roman Cyprus* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2013), esp. 95–7.

⁷⁹ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 206–7, 215.

should we be surprised to find insider and outsider definitions of Christian identity in dialogue. We should be more surprised not to find evidence of any of these practices – which does not mean that we should take finding it for granted. The more nuanced our understanding of the operation of ethnicity in the world into which Christianity was born, however, the better our chance of recognizing what really is, and is not, distinctive about Christian identity.

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