CHAPTER 1

Ethnicity

An Introduction

Jeremy McInerney

“Unfortunately for us, the last 200 years have been the most mismanaged in the history of our race.”

—Eve Mungwa D. Fesl

Large Gallic Ladies

The preceding epigraph comes from a short essay written by an Australian land rights activist addressing the sorry history of relations between the white settlers and Koori (indigenous) peoples. It may seem odd to begin a collection of chapters dealing with the question of ethnicity in the ancient Mediterranean with a reference to political conditions far removed in space and time, but Fesl’s comments provide a number of vectors into the subject of ethnicity. To begin with, in many countries, discussions of “ethnicity” are a way of talking about a deeply unpopular and discredited concept—race—while for the most part avoiding that charged term. (On changes in the use of “race” as a category, see Brunsma and Rockquemore 2004 and McCoskey 2012.) Few white academics wish to write about race, preferring to observe that the term refers to a social construct, not a biological fact (Fields and Fields 2012). This is especially true in classical scholarship, where for many years there existed a broad consensus that racism was an anachronistic idea and that race was not a useful category in the analysis of ancient Mediterranean cultures, or, more simply, that Greek and Roman society was not racist (Snowden 1970, 1983; Hannaford 1996, but, more recently against this view, Isaac 2004; McCoskey 2006, 2012). Ironically, those who have suffered the most from the abuses masked by the term “race” have become those most likely to adopt it, either as part of formal critical discourse or, as in the preceding quote, more loosely. It is also worth noting that race, in
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its hortatory sense—our race—can conceal deeper complexities. At the time of first contact, indigenous Australians were not a single people, and if the term “koori” represents the emergence of a common identity, it is a commonality born of shared experience, primarily suffering, rather than a pre-existing sense of peoplehood. In this respect, we are reminded of two key features of ethnicity: the first is that there is a fuzziness at the heart of the concept. Can we say that ethnic identity is anything more than a sense of peoplehood? It may include an attachment to a territory, a common history, including its fictive and fictional elements; it may find expression in a shared language and customs; and it may be activated in response to oppression, but almost all of these elements are malleable. The one constant seems to be that some combination of these will result in a group identifying itself as a people.

The point worth remembering is that, as the subject of academic discourse, ethnicity is a concept with its own history, subject to the changing patterns—critics will say fads—that direct the flow of academic investigation. Without the cultural turn of the 1960s and 1970s and the move away from the positivism of earlier historical studies, it is hard to imagine an entire volume dedicated to the study of ethnic identities in the ancient world. However, in pursuing ethnicity as a way into the ancient world, we find ourselves in an uncomfortable place: at the point where externally generated studies of other people and communities intersect with their own, equally complicated views of themselves. Two cases, one ancient, one modern, will make the point: the first is an example of the ethnographic gaze, reflecting what anthropologists like to call the “etic perspective.” In the fourth century AD, Ammianus Marcellinus produced this gem of cultural observation (15.12.1):

Virtually all the Gauls are tall and fair. They have ruddy complexions, and a ferocious and terrible look in their eye. They love to quarrel, and are insufferably insolent. Indeed not even a whole band of foreigners could overcome one of them in a fight, if his wife were to join in, so much stronger than the man is she and with her glaring eyes, and most of all especially when, with her neck puffed out and her huge white arms at the ready she lets loose a hail of punches mixed with kicks, like bolts discharged by the twisted cords of a catapult.

Ammianus’ description follows in a long line of Greek and Roman ethnographic treatises devoted to the strange, pale inhabitants of the north. Writers such as Posidonus, Timagenes, Strabo, and, of course, Julius Caesar, had produced works that explained the Celts to Mediterranean readers (Klotz 1910; Nash D. 1976; Malitz 1983). Certain features recur. The Gauls are afraid that the sky will fall on their heads, they are prone to drink (“vini avidum genus,” Amm. Marc. 15.12.4), and they are redoubtable warriors (“ad militandum omnis actas aptissima,” Amm. Marc. 15.12.3). The tropes of ethnographic writing, endlessly repeated, produced a satisfyingly coherent picture of these noble savages. Whether it bore much relationship to reality hardly mattered. From Herodotus to Margaret Mead, the anthropologist distils the clumsy, inchoate phenomenon of the “Other” into a satisfactory, categorically distinct singularity: a “tribe,” preferably remarkable for its exotic physique, sexual habits, or food practices. In such a discursive engagement through description, “ethnicity” is not just legitimate but necessary, since it is no less than the observer’s tool for describing to his audience what we no longer are. Thus, Herodotus describes the murderous Scythians who lived on the edges of the Black Sea, killing shipwrecked Greeks and adorning their houses with the skulls of their unlucky victims. Their savagery was thrilling to Athenian audiences, who took great satisfaction in watching Euripides’ depiction of the difference between Barbarians and Greeks in his Iphigenia in Tauris.
My second example is more simple: one of the largest Hispanic advocacy groups in the United States is called La Raza (“the Race”), despite the fact that the one thing that the Spanish-speaking communities of the United States do not have in common is a single racial background. The Hispanic community has roots in Spain, and in Central and South America. It amalgamates populations from Africa, Europe, and from indigenous people. It is anything but a race, in the sense of a neatly bounded, biologically distinct entity. In fact, in scholarly explorations of the Hispanic community (notice the easy use of the singular “community,” since academic discourse opts for simple categories), a key component of investigation has been the phenomenon of mestizaje (the mixing of races, especially through intermarriage; compare French métissage). Yet, this notion of mixing has always had to wrestle with a stronger opponent, racial absolutism, which has a more powerful hold on the Anglo-American imagination. As a result, more recognizable are the utilitarian and all-encompassing terms “Latino” and “Hispanic.” Behind this is what Gary Nash (1995) has called “the hidden history of Mestizo America,” a rich cultural heritage that was largely written into oblivion. It has taken a president with an African father and a white mother to return the issue to the fore.

Ironically, it is the confidence of the dispossessed and the oppressed that has led to the appropriation of these labels to express cultural pride; yet even more ironic is the almost inevitable attraction of biological models of race to those for whom ethnicity demands expression. This is not to deny the legitimacy of La Raza, but rather to demonstrate that even the language of ethnicity can mean many different things, depending on your point of view. These complexities are nicely summed up by Attwood (1989: 149), discussing the psychological confrontation that occurred in 1788 on the shores of Botany Bay, and the mental categories used to frame those events for later audiences:

The concept “the Aborigines” has generally been used as though such a self-consciously identified group had existed at first contact with the Europeans, but this is to prescribe, retrospectively, a definition to the aboriginal peoples at a period when they had no such sense of themselves. Before 1788 or even much later, they did not conceive of themselves as “Aborigines” any more than European invaders thought of themselves as “Australians.”

One could add that it is unlikely that many of those who arrived, either as officers, soldiers, sailors, or convicts, thought of themselves as “Europeans” either. The labels and categories of ethnic identity are neither fixed nor unchanging, precisely because the identities and relationships to which ethnic labels apply are in constant flux. They fold recursively back on themselves, by turns ascribed, resisted, rejected, misunderstood, and (mis)appropriated. Ethnicity makes no sense outside a continuous dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. It is always inflected by power.

What ethnicity is emphatically not is a fixed biological entity based on primordial ties of kinship. Rejecting this, recent scholarship has been concerned with identifying the dynamic forces that shaped the emergence of ethnic identities in Mediterranean societies. Looming large over this work has been the scholarship of Jonathan Hall, whose 1997 study, Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity, powerfully made the case for ethnic identity as a contingent phenomenon, shaped in response to current needs but relying on fairly identifiable maneuvers. Hall emphasized territoriality and genealogy as the twin supports on which ethnic identities rested, but since his work first appeared other scholars have wished to deepen and extend the debate. Demetriou (2012), for example, in a study of five important emporia, or trade ports where Greeks were present in significant numbers—Emporion, Gravisca, Naukratis, Pitsirotos, and
Piraeus—concludes that in diaspora and, we might say, cosmopolitan communities, “cultural phenomena like law, political institutions, and religion” were more significant than “mythical genealogies or claims to a common territory” (Demetriou 2012: 239). In part, this is because territorial claims expressed through genealogies were the mechanisms whereby Greeks on their mainland establish relations with each other, while in colonial and mercantile contexts abroad a different set of players determined how the game was played (on kinship, see Jones 1999.) As Adolfo Domínguez (2004: 451) puts it, “…relations with the natives are an essential part of the life of all the Greek colonies.”

**What’s Bred in the Bone**

So far, approaches to ethnicity outlined in the preceding text, and for the most part explored in this volume, have tended to emphasize the contingent quality of an ethnic identity. Fungible and protean, such identities are in continuous flux, depending on the social relations to which they give shape and expression. Jonathan Hall’s definition is useful and now widely known: ethnic identity is “the operation of socially dynamic relationships which are constructed on the basis of a putative shared ancestral heritage.” However, just as the use of “La Raza” shows that there is a persistent substratum of race in discussions of ethnicity, so too there has been an unusual development in the hard sciences, giving biological approaches to ethnicity a new lease of life. This is the tracking of mitochondrial DNA and the mapping of human migrations using DNA markers. An excellent example of this comes from the South Pacific, where the relatively small number of haplotypes in sequences among the Maori population of New Zealand has allowed researchers to estimate the number of females in the founding population (Murray-McIntosh et al. 1998). The number of women (70, which actually represents a more general figure between 50 and 100) is small enough to correlate with Maori oral history. Here, biology and oral culture serve to reinforce each other, combining to anchor ethnic identities to the firmer foundations of hard science. However, this approach is not without its dangers. The same type of analysis has been applied to castes in India, pointing toward “racial” distinctions within the population, distinctions that historically have been expressed in a system that perpetuated social inequality. The “scientific” analysis of caste fits all too comfortably into a narrative of conquest, remarkably enough, from Europe: “Our analysis of 40 autosomal markers indicates clearly that the upper castes have a higher affinity to Europeans than to Asians. The high affinity of caste Y chromosomes with those of Europeans suggests that the majority of immigrating West Eurasians may have been males” (Bamshad et al. 2001). So, even as scholars in the humanities want to treat “race” as a constructed category, scientists are reviving biological approaches that threaten to reify older, discredited categories.

The disjunction between a scientific search for ethnicity encoded in DNA, on the one hand, and a distrust of “ethnicity” as anything other than a constructed, social identity, on the other, is particularly illuminated by contrasting the work of the so-called Genographic Project, which since 2005 has been mapping historical migrations by sampling DNA from populations across the globe, with two chapters in this volume, those by Corinne Bonnet and Nancy de Grummond. In their study of modern Lebanese and
ancient Phoenician populations, Zalloua et al. (2008) express the confidence of the scientific approach:

The Phoenicians were the dominant traders in the Mediterranean Sea two thousand to three thousand years ago and expanded from their homeland in the Levant to establish colonies and trading posts throughout the Mediterranean, but then they disappeared from history. We wished to identify their male genetic traces in modern populations. Therefore, we chose Phoenician-influenced sites on the basis of well-documented historical records and collected new Y-chromosomal data from 1330 men from six such sites, as well as comparative data from the literature. We then developed an analytical strategy to distinguish between lineages specifically associated with the Phoenicians and those spread by geographically similar but historically distinct events, such as the Neolithic, Greek, and Jewish expansions. This involved comparing historically documented Phoenician sites with neighbouring non-Phoenician sites for the identification of weak but systematic signatures shared by the Phoenician sites that could not readily be explained by chance or by other expansions. From these comparisons, we found that haplogroup J2, in general, and six Y-STR haplotypes, in particular, exhibited a Phoenician signature that contributed >6% to the modern Phoenician-influenced populations examined. Our methodology can be applied to any historically documented expansion in which contact and noncontact sites can be identified.

It is salutary to juxtapose this with remarks from Bonnet’s chapter: “A consensus has emerged over the last decade or so to avoid using the term ‘Phoenico-Punic’, an expression that only serves to mask the difficulty experienced by specialists trying to establish a line of demarcation between what may be ‘Phoenician’ and what ‘Punic’, whether in purely chronological or geographic terms, or in cultural and linguistic terms.” The differences could not be more apparent. The scientist takes historical events and processes as fixed points from which to begin an analysis of measurable, hard data, resulting in a study that finds a clear genetic link between past and present groups. Other studies, building on this, have further refined the genetic profile of the Lebanese population, finding two groups, one associated with Europeans and Central Asians, the other with Africans and other Middle Eastern populations. The distinction is then equated with religious differences, giving us a genetic map according to which the arrival of Islam and the Crusades are supposed to have left an imprint on the contemporary population (Haber et al. 2013). However, as de Grummond notes, tying DNA to historical events is highly problematic. In the case of the Etruscans, the genetic correspondence between Tuscan and Turkish cattle (!) has been cited in support of ancient literary traditions that the Etruscans were descended from the Lydians, whose territory lay in what is now Turkey. Hence, the discussion of ethnicity is at a peculiar juncture: the people who deal primarily with historical processes and events, namely professional historians, are increasingly uncomfortable using the very labels the scientists take for granted. Science identifies Phoenician DNA, while historians grow uncomfortable even speaking of “Phoenicians.”

Clearly then, ethnicity remains a problematic issue, pitting observer against observed, and observers against each other. The very search for ethnicity implicates scholarship in a discourse whose categories and trajectories are bound up with the construction of power and identity in our own world as much as that of the ancient Mediterranean (Benn Michaels 1992). The recent abuse of the term in such bloody conflicts as the Rwandan and Bosnian wars, with their bouts of ethnic cleansing, is a sobering reminder that
“ethnicity” is a term to be used cautiously, and that in many settings it cannot be divorced from deep-seated political and religious antagonisms. If ethnicity is a mode of human discourse, characterized as a response to political forces that require group cohesion, it can equally serve as the vector along which social breakdown occurs. That aspect of ethnicity is explored in this volume by Nino Luraghi, who once again emphasizes boundaries and power as essential ingredients of the matrix in which ethnicity functions. Given the fraught history of ethnicity, one obvious tactic would be to dismiss the notion of ethnicity as hopelessly compromised. If it is nothing more than race repackaged, then that may not be such a bad idea. It may be possible, however, to exploit the term usefully as a way not only of gauging what ancient peoples thought about themselves but also as a way of addressing a series of related issues: the conditions under which ethnic identities were formulated, the ways in which these found expression, and the means by which such dynamic processes have been understood (and misunderstood) by writers from antiquity to the present. The chapters in this book have been written with these issues in mind, and the variety of the approaches on display here is a fair indication of the many possible ways into the matter of ethnicity. No single approach is completely definitive and no single example is wholly paradigmatic, but taken together they demonstrate that, by drawing on the rich smorgasbord of modern theories and methodologies, the study of the ancient Mediterranean is capable of generating compelling and provocative ways of understanding those complex cultures.

Theorizing Ethnicity

A number of the contributions pose big questions that situate the study of the ancient Mediterranean within a broader set of issues and avenues for investigation. Harald Haarmann, for example, adopts a phenomenological approach, locating ethnic identity on a continuum that moves from intentionality to language and which proceeds by an ever-increasing process of differentiation that distinguishes groups, such as Paleo-Europeans and Proto-Indo-Europeans, from one another. Citing a series of test cases from Greece and early Italy, he focuses on writing and language as indicators of ethnicity, not a simple phenomenon but a process he describes as “a continuum negotiated by different actors.” However, such an approach almost immediately raises questions of the material record on which many reconstructions of early societies depend, an issue central to Bernard Knapp’s contribution. Using Cyprus and the Philistines as his test cases, Knapp finds the material evidence for the large-scale migration of clearly bounded ethnic groups to be problematic at best. His chapter notes the competing and divergent approaches to ethnicity taken by historians and archaeologists. Drawing on Homi Bhabha’s notion of third space, Knapp once again emphasizes the negotiated quality of ethnic identities. A third contribution that places ethnicity within a broader conceptual framework is Thomas Hall’s chapter on World-System Analysis (WSA). Based on the theoretical work of Immanuel Wallerstein, WSA is an attempt to explain the processes that sustain the functioning of self-contained systems. Hall argues that all forms of identification “occur within a world-systemic context, and are part and parcel of the dialectic between local social groups in the complex relations of production and exchange within the overall system.” Adding to Haarmann and Knapp’s fundamental notion of negotiated identifications, Hall uses WSA to identify the key components in that negotiation as the players’ positions in relation to core, peripheral, or semi-peripheral
parts of the world-system. A chapter that rounds out the portion of the volume devoted
to broad approaches is Johannes Siapkas’ concise overview of modern interpretive
models of ethnicity. Siapkas distinguishes between essentializing models, which take
ethnicity as fixed, and dynamic models, which emphasize change. Particularly helpful are
his suggestions for further work, notably in the area of the subjective internalization of
ethnic identity and the challenges of interpreting material culture. In this respect, Siapkas
is reflecting an awareness of the criticisms that have been leveled, fairly, against those who
either exploit historical linguistics uncritically to support archaeology or cite archaeology
naively to bolster claims based on linguistics (Anthony 1995). In this respect, his work
is in line with a newer trend in archaeology toward avoiding essentializing readings of
material culture and ethnic identity (e.g., see Gómez Peña 2012).

Some chapters take up the challenge of material culture more or less explicitly. Krist-
ian Kristiansen, for example, offers an analysis of ethnicity in the European Bronze Age,
ocusing on the non-literate societies of northern Europe, and argues that cairns and
rock-art, taken in conjunction with other distinctive articles of material culture such as
swords, permit the identification of distinct ethnic groups, at least at regional if not inter-
national levels. Kristiansen sees the sea as constituting the setting for a maritime network,
a notion that has recently been applied by other Bronze Age scholars to the Aegean world
as well (Broodbank 2000; Tartaron 2013). The idea of the network has, in fact, recently
emerged as a useful way of approaching the ancient world in which wide-ranging domi-
nation from a single, centralized power was the exception and not the norm. In a recent
volume, Irad Malkin, Christy Constantakopoulou, and Katerina Panagopoulou (2009)
used this approach to show how the Greek and Roman worlds could be read as networks,
and in this volume Anna Collar both explains the methodology behind network theory
and offers three test cases to demonstrate its applicability: archaic Greece, the network of
the Jewish diaspora in the early Roman period, and the development of a German ethnic
identity in Late Antiquity. Each of these is a promising line of inquiry, and, indeed, other
chapters in this book, by Munson, Kemezis and Pohl in particular, can be read in tandem
with Collar’s.

If Collar’s examples point toward the construction of connections through networks
of similarity and common interest, Gary Reger’s chapter on hybridity demonstrates that
ethnicity was also shaped by other dynamic processes. Borderlands and boundaries are
especially fertile areas for ethnogenesis, yet even here the trajectories are not straight-
forward or predictable. Ethnic identity is rarely characterized by a simple oppositional
dynamic, and since such identities must finally be expressed by an individual as well
as a community, the phenomenon is complicated by the availability of different social
identities for individual actors. Amalgamation, layering, and multiplicity are more true
of ethnic identities than fixity.

With ethnicity displaying such polyvalence, the question of how one narrates the politi-
cal history of a region characterized by different ethnic groups becomes more pressing. In
this respect, it is worth juxtaposing a group of chapters that deal with the region loosely
defined as the eastern Mediterranean, but in different periods. Trevor Bryce presents Late
Bronze Age Anatolia as a patchwork of states and kingdoms in which different ethnic
groups vied for power, some indigenous and others exogenous. However, unlike older
treatments that would have treated each of the boundaries between these units as imper-
meable, Bryce recognizes different tools being employed to reach different audiences:
Hittites using the language of the Luwian subjects, for example, on their monuments. In
the history of Israel during the same period, recent archaeological work has shed some
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light on the Philistines but has also generated a heated debate over the very emergence of a coherent Israelite ethnic identity. Ann Killebrew synthesizes the debate on this, both recognizing the particular episodes of fragmentation that occurred and yet placing the emergence of Israel within a broader eastern Mediterranean context in which its history was not unique. Geoff Emberling treats another of the great powers of the eastern Mediterranean, the Assyrians, and employs ethnic diversity as a lens through which to see the imperial state. He finds an imperial state so willing to adopt Babylonian literary culture and Hittite architectural style that, as he notes, “the final result of Assyrian hegemony was the dissolution of Assyrian identity itself.” In studies of the Greek and Roman worlds, where acculturation has often been presented simplistically as a one-way street (“Hellenizing” or “Romanization” being the preferred terms), Emberling’s work is a reminder that ethnicity and imperial power are by no means interchangeable.

Two other chapters outside the orbit of the Greek and Roman worlds also demonstrate the wide variety of ways in which ethnicity actively functioned in the Mediterranean world. One is Stuart Tyson’s chapter on Egypt and Nubia; the other is Jennifer Gates-Foster’s treatment of the Achaemenid Empire. Both offer rich, if very different, insights into the place of ethnic discourse in imperial settings. For example, in the Persian Empire, Gates-Foster sees ethnic diversity as an ideological claim used to reinforce the power of the center. As she says, it is a “message … formulated and dispersed through textual and visual media, … closely and programmatically controlled.” However, the practice is characterized by an unusual degree of fluidity. Persian tribes are mentioned near the heartland, but farther afield ethnic terms are employed that may point to identification by language or geography. Here, ethnicity resides on a continuum in which variations occur depending on whether one self-ascribes an ethnic identity or has it ascribed by others. This complexity—my label or yours—mirrors the problems identified by Bernard Knapp in imputing ethnic characteristics or meaning to objects that may represent trade but not necessarily ethnicity: taste is not identity.

In almost a complete inverse of the claim of diversity central to Achaemenid ideology, Smith finds a fundamental assertion of self and other in the Egyptian portrayal of the Libyan as “other.” However, to complicate an otherwise overly simple dichotomy, individual players within the political realm, men such as the Nubian pharaoh Piankhi, might blend elements of traditional Egyptian dress and practice while also asserting Nubian custom. Appropriately, the term used to convey that this quality of ethnic identity is entanglement.

The Greeks and their Neighbors

The chapters dealing with the Greek world also reflect some of the diversity of approaches that characterize the study of ethnicity. Indeed, the decision to present these chapters in a section devoted to the Greeks reflects only a weak organizational principle: readers will, I hope, find many of the methods and analytical approaches employed in these chapters equally applicable to other societies and times. We have already noted Nino Luraghi’s explicit use of modern ethnic conflicts to illuminate the ways that social breakdown could exploit ethnic division, often manufactured, in both modern and ancient settings. In a similar way, one could apply many of the results of Angela Ganter’s discussion of local
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myth in Boiotia to understand the importance of storytelling in shaping not only ethnic identity but the political drama that finds expression in the stories we tell ourselves and others regarding our supposed ethnic origins. Ganter’s treatment of the role of myth and genealogy in the forging of Boiotian identities reminds us of Homi Bhabha’s understanding of the nation as an exercise in narration (Bhabha 1990). As Jim Roy shows, an integral part of that storytelling involves the claim of autochthony, the notion that we have always been in our land. Both chapters address the question of how such stories were circulated, and the rich traditions of storytelling and the recording myths by writers such as Pausanias emerge as powerful components in the fashioning and circulating of ethnic identities. An especially important venue for this exploration of shared traditions was the stage, but Efi Papadodima’s contribution goes well beyond the familiar opposition of Greek and Barbarian (see Hall 1989) and explores both intra-Hellenic rivalries as well as the intersection of ethnic identity discourse with other vectors of identity, such as sex and social class.

Two other features of the Greek experience demand our attention if we are to grasp the nuances of the discourse on ethnicity. One is that the Greeks experienced not only the development of ethnic identities in the close confines of the Greek mainland but also as part of a complex diasporic experience that included the founding of colonies, the establishment of trade emporia, and service as foreign mercenaries. The former of these conditions, which resulted in the formulation of ethnic identities within the close proximity of small, closely connected regions, is the subject of Emily Mackil’s detailed study. Mackil investigates three test cases, the Boiotians, Phokians, and Achaeans, and demonstrates how claims of a shared ethnic identity supported the establishment of political federations. At the same time, however, Mackil also shows how such claims were not enough on their own to guarantee the survival of such *koina*. In a similar test case, Alex Thein examines the well-known case of the Messenians, neighbors of the Spartans. Thein argues that the Messenians, who, as helots, asserted their independence from their Spartan masters at the time of the Great Revolt in about 460 BC, following the earthquake that rocked Sparta, asserted a Messenian identity. It was, in Thein’s words, “a rebel identity.” A better illustration of the importance of power and boundaries could not be found. The opposite of such tight, regionally bounded federations were those Greek communities located away from the mainland and usually living in close proximity to an indigenous, non-Greek population. These dispersed communities are treated in Phil Kaplan’s study, in which he finds that the ties to the land from which and to which they came were subject to broad manipulation. Just as autochthony took different shapes, so too mobility and charter myths could be adapted quite easily in the traditions the Greeks told themselves. To return to the Australian experience with which we began this overview, one generation’s convict “stain” is another generation’s badge of honor.

Mackil, Thein, and Kaplan’s chapters can be usefully read in conjunction with Gocha Tsetskhladze and Corinne Bonnet’s contributions, dealing respectively with the Black Sea and the western Mediterranean. Tsetskhladze, whose chapter synthesizes much of the archaeological research of a region only recently becoming known to a wider audience, is wary of the systems created by Greek writers in antiquity and draws attention to the limits of our knowledge and the dangers of beginning with labels and categories created by the ancient literary tradition. Pointedly, he asks the question, “How do we excavate ethnicity?” There are no easy answers, although Tsetskhladze cautiously offers
evidence to see collaboration rather than antagonism as the basic tendency of the indigenous populations’ relations with the Greeks. Bonnet’s contribution is similarly cautious. We have already noted Bonnet’s comments on the labeling of Punic–Phoenician culture. In her investigation of Greek, Phoenician, and indigenous relations in the western Mediterranean, she consistently finds evidence that each of these collectives in fact contains a myriad of different groups, and that trade, prestige, appropriation, and cultural exchange are all phenomena that percolate continuously through the relationships of different groups, while ruptures, confrontations, and violence are, if anything, the aberrations, and not the norm. A further feature that distinguishes the Greeks from other, earlier cultures of the Mediterranean is that they are the first to produce a self-conscious discourse on the question of ethnicity, not only on the stage, as Papadodima explores in her chapter, but in a rich tradition of ethnographic writing, at the head of which stands Herodotus. Treatments of Herodotean ethnography have added to our appreciation of his subtlety, notably those of Hartog (1988) and Thomas (2000), but have tended to focus on his choices as a narrator. In her chapter, Rosaria Munson goes much further and reveals a thinker skeptical of mythical traditions and ancestral claims, the very stuff of ethnic identity. Grappling with relativism, her Herodotus faces the same dilemma as we moderns: a respect for cultural difference often at odds with universal values. When Herodotus, who famously proclaimed that custom is king, reports that Babylonian women must serve once in their lives as temple prostitutes, he is not merely reporting on ethic differences between Greeks and Babylonians; he is offering a considered judgment. The practice is *aischistos* (most shameful).

Three chapters that also treat Greek material but from very different perspectives complete this section of the volume. Becky Martin’s chapter concerns representation, but does not simply treat graphic depictions of ethnicity. As with Gates-Foster and Papadodima, she finds that cultural representations of ethnicity actually convey deeply complex meanings. In fact, representation is an area of cultural production in which meaning is as fluid as in ethnicity. This she demonstrates through a series of examples, the notorious “Slipper Slapper” being perhaps the starkest. Aphrodite or Astarte? Model of assimilation or assertion of difference? Are we even capable of recovering an emic understanding of one of the most famous pieces of Hellenistic statuary? From this aporetic stance, Martin offers an eloquent comparison between representation and ethnicity that bears repeating: “In this way ethnicity, too, is not about discovery and isolation of objective models (i.e., true ethnicities). Ethnicity’s value as a fluid theory is that it deepens our understanding of the basic question of “who”—who is represented by an image, text, or built environment—with the potential to challenge monolithic, normative identities.”

If Martin moves the inquiry into a world in which Greek culture (and ethnicity) finds itself no longer dominant or unchallenged, the first centuries of the Common Era would see fresh developments attesting to the vitality of ethnic discourse as a mode for expressing cultural relations and identities. One of these occurred with the growth of Christianity, which, as Aaron Johnson demonstrates, positioned itself as a radically new *ethnos*. Concentrating on the polemic between Celsus and Origen, Johnson shows that conversion was not conceived as a movement from ethnicity to a transcendent non-ethnicity, as some have imagined, but as a movement from one ethnicity to another. Triangulating between Greeks and Jews, early Christians created a new *genos* (tribe) and *politeia* (commonwealth). Here, we find ethnicity as more than a deliberately fashioned and
self-ascribed identity. It becomes a basic mode of argument in which history and religion are polemically blended. Similarly turbulent conditions of cultural reformation took place once Greece came under the political domination of Rome. However, Greece was neither a new ethnicity, nor one seeking a way of expressing legitimacy. Instead, as Adam Kemezis, demonstrates, the literary movement labeled the “Second Sophistic” drew on the traditions of a high literary culture and afforded the elites of the Greek world an opportunity to reformulate Greek ethnicity largely in terms of a cultural inheritance. Once again, this fluid and dynamic process was driven by considerations of power and its pale twin, “status.”

**Urbis et Orbis**

The remaining contributions to this volume deal with the Roman world, although, once again, overlaps and continuities between these chapters and those that come before are to be expected. Nancy de Grummond’s chapter on the Etruscans uses a familiar set of criteria to help identify a group whose self-representation was subject to ruthless distortion and manipulation by others. Exploring language, religion, and appearance, de Grummond contrasts the self-representation of the Etruscans with the conflicting traditions surrounding them in Greek and Roman sources, neither of which was disinterested. How exactly does one distinguish between a culture of deep religious temperament and a Roman description of Etruria as the mother of superstition? Similar jibes were directed at the Jews in the Roman period, but, as Erich Gruen demonstrates, such remarks do not amount to a coherent dichotomy, with Jews and Romans standing implacably on opposite sides of the divide. As in other places and instances, entanglement complicates the picture: “Godfearers,” gentiles drawn to Jewish practices, and manumitted Jewish slaves bequeathing Roman citizenship to their children are examples of the nuance and complexity that was at the heart of the relationship between Jews and Romans.

Even closer to home, in the Italy of the late Republic, the contingent quality of ethnicity—not a fixed category but a mode of negotiation between communities—emerges very clearly in both Gary Farney and Parshia Lee-Stecum’s treatments of Italian and Roman identities. The Roman identity of the Republic involved the positioning of different elite elements constantly adjusting their positions in relation to each other and in relation to a hortatory fiction: Rome. Sometimes even double and triple identities coexisted, at one time emphasizing the place of origin and at other times emphasizing a kind of bifocality involving the Etruscans or the Sabines. Farney charts the transformation of the latter’s credentials among the Romans: “The central Apennine people, and ultimately the elite of the rest of Italy, managed to change their reputation from untrustworthy savages, to marginal figures put to Rome’s use, and finally to paragons of old-fashioned rusticity and virtue.” Lee-Stecum examines the same phenomenon from the point of view of the Italian people and finds that, even as Romans and Italians fought each other in the Social War, ethnicity provided less a line of demarcation than a shared set of assumptions and aspirations. He notes: “The Romans represented their own identity as encompassing multiple, largely Italian, genealogies and traditions. The Italian allies might aspire to full incorporation within Rome, and even to identify themselves as Romans, without compromising their ethnocultural distinctiveness.” Yet,
even these two chapters, approaching Romans and Italians but from different points of view, barely scratch the surface. (See Roselaar [2012] for other essays on the same period.) Jörg Rüpke, for example, also juxtaposes the Romans with their neighbors (Greek, Sabine, and especially Etruscan), but primarily from the point of view of the Roman understanding of what we would call religion. Ethnicity, or more accurately a Roman awareness of ethnic diversity, emerges in Rüpke’s analysis, not, as we might expect, as a reaffirmation of Roman superiority but as an unusual means toward asserting a set of universal ideas and assumptions about our relations to the gods. In the setting of empire, such a tendency helped bridge the gap between separate elite families and between widely disparate subject groups. Ethnic diversity was a useful backdrop against which to set the emergence of a universal Roman power, culminating in the figure of the emperor. Reading these three chapters in tandem reveals the range of cultural work that thinking about ethnicity made possible. It provided often unexpected ways of reconciling similarity and difference.

If the chapters on Republican Rome alert us to the fact that the valence of an ethnic association can undergo a complete reversal from denigration to proud assertion, Kathryn Lomas’ contribution, an examination of the intersection of ethnicity and gender, is a powerful reminder than regional variation undercuts many easy generalizations. Contrasting both Archaic Italy with the Empire, and northern and southern Italy, Lomas recognizes a strong correlation between ethnic distinctions, dress, and the position of women in north Italian communities, a correlation that cannot be attested in the south and which was largely effaced by the spread of Roman power. Regional variation is also a key theme in Ursula Rothe’s chapter, in which she looks at the response of four different tribal groups in the provinces to the domination of Rome. As she notes, “Empires produce complex ethnic configurations.” However, the trajectories of ethnically oriented changes stimulated by the pressure to assimilate were not predictable or uniform. Armies, cities, and trade may have made their appearance in all Roman provinces, but the responses of the Batavi, the Treveri, and the Ubii, on the one hand, and the inhabitants of Pannonia, on the other, were entirely different.

In many of these chapters, ethnicity proves to be a fluid mode of discourse between spreading Roman power and local responses (whether characterized by confrontation, hybridity, entanglement, or negotiation in the middle ground). Yet, this fluidity is often masked by a tendency in ancient literary sources to prefer broad ethnic categories, a mistake frequently repeated by modern scholars. John Wonder, for example, surveys the uses of the ethnonym “Lucanian” used of the inhabitants of southern Italy, and finds that the label was largely an ascription of Greek and Roman writers, that the people so named primarily identified with smaller local groups, and that it was only in the wake of the Second Punic War that the term was adopted by the people of southern Italy to express a collective identity. To speak, then, of the “Lucanians” as a monolithic group and ignore the complex history of the various subgroups that were eventually subsumed under the broader descriptor is to make precisely the mistake that Richard White (1978: 343) warned against a generation ago, when discussing the tribes of the American southwest: “Without an understanding of tribal and intertribal histories, and an appreciation that, like all history, they are dynamic, not static, the actions of Indians when they come into conflict with whites can be easily and fatally distorted.” This is not to say that recuperating the details of local communities and their response to change is easy. Here, as
elsewhere, we remain prey to the paucity of evidence from the ancient world, but, as Brent Shaw’s chapter demonstrates, it is occasionally possible to turn prevailing narratives of the ancient world on their head. His chapter on the inhabitants of the Maghrib in Roman times uses approaches drawn from Ibn Khaldûn and, later, Soviet ethnography to suggest that the development of ethnic identities should be interpreted as the response of small local communities to external pressures by asserting group solidarity. Shaw asks: “Was there any generally shared identity among the indigenous populations of Roman Africa?” His answer: “Probably. But it is rather difficult to unearth.” The answer may seem overly cautious, but in the process he has restored to the Afri, Masaesyli, Zegrenses, and others some, at least, of their own agency and identity.

The Afterlife of Ethnicity

To encounter a monolithic Roman identity, we must wait until we come upon the Roman-ness (romanitas) (re)activated under Mussolini, the subject of Valentina Follo’s chapter. Follo charts the stages by which Mussolini moved from an early disparaging of Roman culture to a wholehearted embracing of the Roman model. She situates this in the context of the formation of an Italian nation from the late nineteenth century on, and demonstrates how both the education system and archaeology contributed to the creation of a collective memory, especially serviceable for a nation late to join the imperial program of the European states. The role of ancient ethnicities in the (continuing) development of the modern nation-state is a subject of interesting recent investigation (see, e.g., Dietler 1994 and 1998 on the Celtic past and Tai 2001 on Nora’s work on lieux de mémoire), and Follo’s chapter points toward the possibility of fruitful collaboration between ancient and modern historians. And if the monuments of Rome provided fixed points in the creation of cultural memory and ethnic identity for modern Italians, the same process was clearly at work in the ancient world, as Emily Baragwanath (2012) has demonstrated with regard to the speeches, histories, and monuments of fifth-century Athens, which fashioned a shared identity out of the Greek victory in the Persian Wars.

The bridge between ancient ethnicities and their modern reassertions may be provided by an analytical approach to ethnicity, as discussed in Walter Pohl’s contribution on the Goths and Huns. Pohl deals with the concept of the Traditionskerne (“kernels of tradition”), a well-established principle of German scholarship according to which essential, traditional features of an ethnic group remained intact and were passed on by small elites within larger ethnic groups. In many respects, the debate about this crucial notion is at the heart of contemporary discussions of ethnicity. Is an ethnic identity chiefly characterized by continuities with the past, an essentializing view, or by the changes that occur as new situations arise, an instrumentalist approach? Even if scholarly opinion has swung toward the latter view, the hold of ethnicity in the stories that communities continue to tell themselves about themselves, their past, and their place in the world suggests that our fascination with ethnicity remains a powerful response to the emergence of globalism as the dominant feature of contemporary life. In a recent contribution on Asian ethnicities in the contemporary world, Kolig, Wong, and Angeles (2009) refer to “bricolage identities,” while a similar volume on the ancient world refers to “the role of power and tradition” (Dirks and Roymans 2009). These seem mutually exclusive tendencies, and
yet it is the ability of ethnicity to link these apparent polarities that makes it so marked a feature of both the ancient world and the modern.

REFERENCES


**FURTHER READING**