

ERICH S. GRUEN: *Ethnicity in the Ancient World – Did it Matter?* De Gruyter, Berlin – Boston 2020. ISBN (hardcover) 978-3-11-068478-0; ISBN (paperback) 978-3-11-099505-3; ISBN (e-book) 978-3-11-068565-7. XI, 265 pp. EUR 79.95.

In 2013 Erich Gruen published a piece titled “Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe” (*Phoenix* 67, 1–22). The probing now completed, his earlier thoughts on the matter have largely been confirmed. In response to the explicit question in the book’s title, Gruen does not think ethnicity mattered that much – or at least not deeply or consistently. The book partly reformulates arguments made earlier in the course of an illustrious career: many of its chapters were originally contributions published in edited volumes, and together they constitute a thoughtful and articulate exploration of themes that have been prominent in Gruen’s work for many years now.

The fundamental problem in seeking an implicit ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer to a question about ethnicity in the ancient world is that this dichotomy rarely, if ever, reflects reality in a consistent manner. The conversation about ancient ‘otherness’, ethnicity and discrimination was for quite some years structured precisely around this sort of dichotomy, largely thanks to the diametrically oppositional stances taken by Benjamin Isaac and Gruen himself in their two important contributions, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton 2004) and *Rethinking the Other* (Princeton 2011), respectively. I reviewed the latter (*Arctos* 45 [2011] 235–37), and tried to point out then that the most enduring approaches in the study of ancient ethnic perceptions, prejudice and discrimination are likely to position themselves between these two goalposts. Ethnicity never matters *all* the time and in *all* social interactions, while it almost always *can* be foregrounded in *some* situations.

The volume covers a whole range of contexts and identities from the Classical era to the second and third centuries, and from a broad range of societal backgrounds, too. A threefold division can be discerned, with the first section comprising Chapters 1 to 3 focusing on a selection of Greek case studies. Chapters 4 and 5 study Roman and Italian identities and ethnically framed constructs, while the six remaining chapters (6 to 11) are devoted to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Chapter 1, “Were Barbarians Barbaric?”, serves as a general thematic and terminological exploration into the Greek use of this most fundamental concept. Throughout the chapter, Gruen searches for cases where *barbaros* might denote savagery or barbarity and declares that such use is in fact difficult to find. He observes the variety and inconsistency in the ways in which *barbaroi* as a category was deployed and offers plenty of evidence that the terminology of ‘barbarians’ was left comparatively empty of meaning as opposed to the use of individual ethnonyms.

Chapter 2, “Herodotus and Greekness”, tackles a writer who is often deemed crucial for any debate of the role of ethnically framed knowledge in the Classical Greek thinking. Unfortunately, Gruen’s lack of extensive engagement with the wealth of Herodotean scholarship makes it difficult for

the uninitiated reader to see where he stands in terms of the current trends of scholarship. Gruen's final assessment is that Herodotus "evinces implicit distrust for pronouncements on national character" (p. 216), which seems overly broad. What comes across in several sections of Herodotus is that he thought environments and customs could change people's qualities: e.g. those of Asiatic Greeks or Cyrus' Persians), but this, in itself, hardly means that ethnicity did not matter to Herodotus. As for the claim that *barbaroi* in the plural serves in Herodotus mostly as a "mere synonym" for Persians (p. 13), it would be more correct to say that by its very plurality it rather conferred the image of the infiniteness of the peoples of Asia, commanded in their multitudes by the Great King: in these contexts, *barbaroi* clearly carries the implication of a multitude – a frightful kind of diversity.

In Chapter 3, "The Racial Judgements of Polybius", Gruen points to the way Polybius' Greek speakers apply *barbaroi* to Romans and Carthaginians in some cases (p. 20), which is true. Yet when he proceeds to posit that this "specif[ies] no anticipated barbarities", the argument unfortunately slips into circularity. What would such "barbarities" even be? By this stage, Gruen has spent a lot of time showing that the principle of "barbarian is as barbarian does" did *not* apply in most ancient contexts: it was a question of what you were, not what you did. In interpreting the term 'barbarians' to mean that a stereotype of 'barbaric' behaviour is being evoked, Gruen seeks support from an argument that he has already discarded. This is repeated frequently, such as when he characterises Strabo's use of the term 'barbarian' as avoiding "the slur of savagery or primitivism" (p. 27). What is more, in seeking to prove that to speak of barbarians did not entail the condemnation of foreign groups of 'barbarities' (which is true enough), he overinvests ancient references to *barbaroi* with the expectation of broad-brush 'ethnic' content. In terms of Strabo and Diodorus, it is not a surprise that Gruen does not find much evidence for ethnically framed discrimination: both authors believed in diachronic change in different peoples' civilizational level, and were far from mere 'ethnographers' – an anachronistic term in the context of antiquity, but one which Gruen uses to label them. This goes hand in hand with his interrogation of sources containing ethnographically framed content for statements and alignments that in fact would be highly atypical of these complex texts.

Chapter 4, "Rome's Multiple Identities and Tangled Perspectives", starts off with the claim that although descent made a clear difference to the Romans, they "provided no singular mark of their identity" (p. 72). In genealogical terms no, but for instance in terms of Roman dressways, the moral high ground through an emphasis on religiosity, and the self-projected image as a martial folk, the ethnic parameters of *Romanitas* were pretty clearly foregrounded since the Later Republic. If we define 'ethnicity' in a genealogical way, the Roman discourse seems indeed to "take pride in multiple origins, mixtures and admixtures" (*loc. cit.*). But is the genealogical conception of 'ethnicity' the most relevant one in the context of antiquity? The tangled and overlapping weave of Greek origin stories for the Romans operated on one level, and it need not astonish us that Romans were, despite this,

capable of discriminatory and prejudiced speech about most other groups of people (p. 79). Gruen is clearly uncomfortable with this phenomenon and seeks to reconcile it with the Roman perception of themselves as a “compound of ethnicities” (p. 81). It is unclear, however, whether the discrepancy needs any particular explanation: such inconsistencies are intrinsic to outgroup perceptions even in multiethnic societies with diverse components – just looking at the conflicted strains of arguments in the contemporary rhetoric in the U.S. helps us see this. A contextual explanation for each individual speech act – something which Gruen very much recommends (*loc. cit.*) – also helps us detect the agendas of ancient authors. Where Gruen differs from many other scholars (whose opinions, sadly, are not very often referred to in the footnotes) is that he tends to explain the motives for discriminatory speech quite generously, and often sees them as exceptions rather than as symptomatic of a system of epistemic inequality. Gruen declares himself unable to find ‘ethnic bias’ from his chosen array of prejudiced speech.

Chapter 5, “Constructed Ethnicities in Republican Italy”, looks at the ways in which the perception of diverse Italian groups coming together to form a unity could have influenced the Roman identity. It was easier for Romans to assimilate and absorb certain identities rather than others. The diverse origins for most Italian groups, for instance, could be conceptualised through the same template of travelling Greek heroes as Rome’s own origins – interspersed with occasional gestures of autochthony, perhaps inspired by the well-advertised Athenian rhetoric. Incidentally, this link to Greek nativism alerts the reader to the fact that throughout the book, Gruen has chosen not to engage with some of the most explicitly discriminatory ethnicising material stemming from antiquity: physiognomical argumentation. If he had done so and included more imperial-era (non-Jewish) sources, he would probably not have concluded that “the ancients ... refrained from passing judgement” (p. 215). Overall, imperial-era sources are treated in this book rather haphazardly.

From Chapter 6 (“The Chosen People and Mixed Marriages”) onwards, Gruen switches to studying the Judeo-Christian tradition, in which he has had a significant research interest throughout his career. The focus in Chapter 6 is largely on the Biblical books of the Hellenistic age, just as in Chapter 7 (“Did Hellenistic Jews Consider Themselves a Race or a Religion?”). Gruen’s conclusion that very little in Hellenistic Jewish/Judaean writings points to an ethnically framed definition of their ‘nation’ is, of course, a timely one and should be taken to heart in our time and age. However, to use the evidence from these case studies to buttress his broader points about the supposed lack of ethnically framed discrimination (though he does not really look into this concept at any particular length) in the broader and only partially interlinked Greco-Roman tradition, is perhaps overly confident. His tendency is – and already was in *Rethinking the Other* (Princeton 2011) – to interpret all negative statements about ethnically framed outgroups as irony, parody or inversion, while he reads most statements of inclusion, plurality and positively valued difference as uncomplicatedly direct and unironic praise.

That authors like Philo (Chapter 8: “Philo and Jewish Ethnicity”) and Josephus (Chapter 9: “The Ethnic Vocabulary of Josephus”) intensively reorder, reformulate and sample the existing ethnic categorisations is in no way surprising: both wrote to a dual audience from a position of an identity that was hybrid, and such reordering of the rungs of the ‘ethnic ladder’ (the term is that of Phil Harland) is only to be expected. Writers in such a position would have frequently found it practical to operate with a vague or capacious definition of ‘ethnicity’ (or other group identity labels). It is, one might add, unrealistic to expect “prohibitions of mixed marriage” (p. 217) from either Philo or Josephus, considering their hybrid identities. The same applies to Christian texts from Paul until late antiquity, which are the subject of Chapters 10 (“The Racial Reflections of Paul”) and 11 (“Christians as a ‘Third Race?’”). The idea of Christians as a ‘new people’ was a rather useful argument: the complexities and knowledge-ordering operations inherent in this strain of argumentation have been explored by scholars such as Denise Kimber Buell, Todd Berzon and Maia Kotrosits. Gruen, for his part, considers the ‘racial language’ in the texts these scholars have studied as rather evanescent and ambiguous, and judges the idea of Christians as a ‘third race’ a ‘scholarly concoction’.

Gruen is able to conclude that a “definitive resolution eluded our grasp” (indicating a strange expectation about all sources over such varied contexts being able to converge upon a singularity) and that “no determinative concept of ethnicity emerges” (p. 215). But if we set out the criterion that ‘barbarians’ are supposed to emerge from our sources consistently as “an alternative breed of humankind” (*loc. cit.*) – as if this was the only case in which ‘ethnicity matters’ – we are veering very close to a straw man argument. The choice of topics, overall, directs Gruen away from a context that could have offered rich and complicated sources for discussion – the texts produced under the broad umbrella of the Second Sophistic. This is among the source groups where genuine discriminatory language would have been fairly easy to find. Yet the structure of the book shifts from Late Republican Rome to Hellenistic Jews and stays within the Judeo-Christian tradition for the rest of the investigation. Thus, Gruen need not engage nor explain such phenomena as the continued entitativity of provincial ethnic labels within the Roman imperial order of knowledge, nor the strong strain of xenophobia and ethnic essentialism that rhetoricians like Dio of Prusa and Polemo of Laodicea were parading. Hadrian’s Panhellenion – a cultural club with strongly essentialist and genealogically formulated entry requirements – goes similarly unmentioned. The fact that Gruen understands ‘ethnicity’ – in the form he is searching for it from ancient thinking – as primarily defined by perceptions of bloodlines and genealogical thinking, narrows his exploration of the available evidence. But it is precisely due to this that it is so surprising not to see him engaging with the Greek nativist arguments of the late-first and second centuries CE.

All these omissions constitute a void instead of an engagement with a topic that it would have been fascinating to see a scholar of Gruen’s calibre engage with. But after having set himself such a specific and rigid target (e.g. p. 8: “Although Roman writers indulged often in slurs and quips about the inferiority

of non-Romans, they did not set them into compartments of separate ethnicities.”), Gruen’s exploration is very harshly limited by this precondition. In terms of Roman discriminatory speech about foreign groups, it hardly matters whether they used “compartments of separate ethnicities” or not. In short, Gruen’s overall conclusions are crucially circumscribed by his selection of case studies and should not be seen to represent a balanced basis for a broader set of claims about the role of ‘ethnicity’ in ancient meaning-making.

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Inscriptiones Graecae. Consilio et auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Berolinensis et Brandenburgensis editae. Vol. X : Epiri, Macedoniae, Thraciae, Scythiae. Pars 2: Inscriptiones Macedoniae. Fasc. 1: Inscriptiones Thessalonicae et viciniae. Suppl. 2: Addenda, indices, tabulae. Ediderunt DESPOINA PAPA-KONSTANTINOY-DIAMANTOYROU – ELENA MARTÍN GONZÁLEZ – KLAUS HALLOF. De Gruyter, Berlin – Boston 2021. ISBN 978-3-11-071236-0. I–XI, 555–808 pp. EUR 350.

Inter *Inscriptiones Graecas* editas ab Academia Scientiarum Berolinensi et Brandenburgensi titulos Thessalonicensis ediderunt a. 1972 C. Edson in voluminis X partis II fasciculo I et deinde a. 2017 P. M. Nigdelis in eiusdem fasciculi supplemento I (de quo dixi *Arctos* 51 [2017] 239–241). Hoc supplementum secundum, quod rerum epigraphicarum studiosis erit utilissimum, constat ex partibus duabus, scilicet ex addendis ad titulos propositos in fasciculo I et ex indicibus copiosissimis pertinentibus ad titulos tam Edsonianos quam Nigdelianos, id est ad titulos n. 1–1673. In fine operis sunt imagines photographicae aut delineatae (vel sim.) titulorum a. 1972 editorum; editio enim Edsoniana paucis tantum imaginibus est illustrata. Ceterum v. quae de hoc supplemento in universum scripserunt iidem Martín González et Hallof, *Tekmeria* 15 (2019–20) 227–248.

Quod ad addenda in hoc volumine proposita attinet, notandum est in iis memorari non solum – praeter lectiones vel interpretationes novas – libros ad titulos singulares pertinentes novos, sed nonnumquam etiam libros quosdam ante a. 1972 editos sed in editione Edsoniana nescio qua de causa omissos (e.g. 103, 105, 147, 171, 192, 199, 200, 515, 572, 593, 679, 1018). Ad quosdam titulos addenda non proponuntur (e.g. 339–342, 344–345, 347–349) aut non refertur nisi ad imagines photographicas (e.g. 687, 689, 693). Contra ad titulos quosdam laudantur non tantum addenda sed etiam ipsa tituli verba, in iisdem addendis correctae (e.g. 22, 26, 259, 261, 589 [“Tit. denuo repertus”], 674, 779, 793, 797, 804; cf. Á. Martínez Fernández, *Minerva* 36 [2023] 260). De aetate, cui tituli singuli sint attribuendi, in addendis raro disputatur (at vide e.g. 148, 351, 430, 442, 522, 525, 545, 559, 571, 572); ita apparet auctores huius voluminis de aetate titulorum cum Edsonio plerumque consentire.