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Negotiating Identity: Group-Definition in Naukratis

Naukratis, a Greek multiethnic *emporion* in Egypt, provides an ideal context for studying the negotiations of group identity. In this paper, I examine cultural relations in Naukratis both among different Greek groups and between Greeks and Egyptians. Using literary, epigraphic and archaeological evidence, I will demonstrate how religion, language, and other cultural traits were used to assert group identity.

Egyptians set apart the Greeks living in their midst in terms of geography, language, and religion, with no regard to the latter's *polis*- or intra-Hellenic identity. For example, the Pharaoh Psammetichos I granted the Greek mercenary soldiers settlements of their own, called Stratopeda (Hdt., 2.154), and his successor Psammetichos II divided his mercenary army into two groups according to linguistic differences, one Egyptian-speaking, the other composed of the *alloglossoi*, as graffiti dating from 591 BCE shows (Meiggs and Lewis, 7a). Naukratis follows in this tradition of separation between Greeks and Egyptians: the Pharaoh Amasis gave Naukratis to the Greeks to settle and to set up their own temples (Hdt., 2.178).

One of the temples the Greeks set up in Naukratis was the Hellenion, a temple that had the important function of providing the wardens of the *emporion* of Naukratis (Hdt., 2.178). According to Herodotus, four Ionian and four Dorian *poleis* along with one Aeolian *polis* were the founding members of the temple. The joint foundation of the Hellenion and its name shows that the Greeks of Naukratis ultimately formed a cohesive Hellenic identity and collectively opposed themselves to the Egyptians.

At the same time, the Greeks also considered themselves as individuals from specific *poleis*. Several dedications of the archaic period, in which the dedicator identifies himself with a city-ethnic — Chian, Teian, Phocaeon, Mytilenaeon, and Clazomenean — attest to this. The same phenomenon can also be seen in the foundation of the temples of Samian Hera, Milesian Apollo, and Aeginetan Zeus. The ties between these temples and their respective metropolises is further underlined by the many offerings in the temple of Apollo, dedicated specifically to Apollo of Miletus, and the so-called “Hera cups” found only in the temple of Hera in Naukratis and the goddess’ temple in Samos.

The example of Naukratis points to a polyvalent mode of self-definition. While religion, culture, and language played a central role in the formation of a Hellenic identity, the emergence of which was strongly affected by the Egyptian view of the Greeks, at the same time it was also instrumental in the declaration of intra-Hellenic identity and the preservation of *polis*-identity.