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PEOPLE BETWEEN CULTURES IN ANTIQUITY: A FEW THOUGHTS
WHAT DID PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT CULTURES HAVE IN COMMON?

Today, we look at the past through the prism of uniform nation states, which were formed in the 19th century. For a large part of history, the reality of life in societies was much more complicated. Spain, Belgium and Italy are not homogeneous even today. Germany can be divided into the (Protestant) North and the (Catholic) South, Orin to the western and eastern parts. Countries as big as the US, Russia and China are conglomerates of cultures. If today states and their societies are so complicated, how divided was the world back when, as we can imagine, an infinite palette of polytheistic religions throve where now just a few religions, including Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity, and non-believers are to be found? How can we imagine a world in which a slightly different dialect was used in almost every town, and only few languages were known to a wide community of many peoples? This brings us to the question of what united people and what created their identity. What caused certain groups to regard themselves as a community (whether 'a tribe', 'a people' or 'a nation') and to differ from other contemporaneous groups? The Israelites are perhaps the easiest case in this respect. They shared a common history, culture, language and monotheistic religion with the Bible and had common ancestors, such as Abraham. They also endorsed common prophets. They were subjects of the same kings, such as Solomon and David (Cazelles 2001, 349-351). The religion of the Israelites involved precisely defined rules of conduct. Designs of temples, liturgical objects, texts of prayers and even small details of everyday life were normalized (Mędala 1969, 711-731). These norms were taken along when emigrating and passed on to the following generations. Whether it was Babylonian slavery, a living in Alexandria or later in Rome, the rules remained the same. The Israelites easily distinguish themselves from Egyptians and later from Assyrians, Phoenicians, Hittites and Babylonians. The Samaritan woman known to us from the Gospel of John was a pagan to the Israelites. Samaritans were known for their observance of pagan cults (Gospels 1973, 298-299). Unlike this woman, the Israelites believed in Yahweh.

The cities of ancient Mesopotamia worshipped common gods, but also had local pantheons (Roux 1998, 79-94). In this respect, researchers enumerate Semites, Hurrians and other peoples, but with the exception of short periods when one city dominated another, it seems that each local community lived a life of its own. State rulers often presented themselves as servants

of local god (Ibidem, 161), and connected temples to palace complexes, so that the prestige of divine holiness fell on them. The unifying element was provided on the one hand by the ruler (who often inspired fear rather than admiration in the subjects), and on the other by the local deity (Ibidem, 311). The preserved texts written on clay tablets are a testimony to the life of these cities. Contemporary orientalists often have to learn separate languages and different systems of cuneiform writing for each city[1].

The Persian Empire of the Achaemenid dynasty functioned differently in much later times. The rulers of a vast, multicultural country showed their graciousness and understanding of multiculturalism and multi-religiousness in art (Kaim 1996).While they themselves professed Mazdeism and worshipped only one god, they did not persecute other religions (Abadie 2001, 458). A huge country had only one thing in common: the ruler. He made sure that he was universally regarded as a tolerant person who was culturally linked to all his subjects. Reliefs sculpted in the period, e.g. the entrance to the Persepolis palace, show delegations of different peoples happily making gift offerings to him. The architecture of the palace was eclectic. It included elements related to different cultures. So that whoever entered it could see something they knew from their hometown. This made it easier for the visitors to regard the king of kings as their supreme ruler (Śliwa 1997, 403-412). As history has shown, the Greeks did not feel proud of their fellow inhabitants of the Empire, but were oppressed. For this reason, they often made desperate attempts to put an end to their Persian dependence.

Relationships similar to those in Persia continued for thousands of years in China. Specifically, until the overthrow of the Empire, the inhabitants of the multi-ethnic country mainly identified themselves as subjects of the emperor. In modern times, Chinese emigrants introduced themselves in other countries, including the US, as subjects of a particular dynasty. This even applied to the dynasty which the Native Chinese considered alien.

Groups of Phoenicians living on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea remained in contact with each other for several centuries despite the dispersion caused by colonization, and during the Punic wars they stood together under one command against Rome. Divided by the sea, they were nevertheless united by a common ruler, a common religion and shared culture (Jaczynowska 1999, 441-450).

The identity of the ancient Egyptians is an interesting issue. They lived in an area separated from other peoples by seas and deserts. After the conquest of the delta and its annexation to other territories, most of Egyptian history is associated with one statehood. Although each city had its own dominant local deity, next to, or rather above such a deity, deities common to

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[1] Oral information courtesy of Professor Andrzej Pisowicz.

the entire country were worshipped. The common ruler was also a living deity. Although he needed the help of other gods, he organized the institution of the state, conducted politics and commanded the army. He was a 'good shepherd' of his people and was responsible for their security (Schlögl 2009, 98). The Egyptians saw themselves as inhabitants of the black earth, unlike all other peoples, 'inhabitants of the red earth.' According to H.A. Schlögl, 'only the Egyptian citizen was considered a human being […] and other peoples were seen through the prism of their usefulness to the inhabitants of the Nile Valley' (Ibidem, 16). One of the worst things that could happen to an Egyptian was death in exile. Nobody could take proper care of the deceased there and perform the rituals due to him. In Egyptian art, foreigners were usually pictured as defeated enemies, prisoners of war or, at best, or persons bringing tribute to the Pharaoh. Even if they were wealthy merchants or came from Nubian gold mines, they were never presented as equal to the Egyptians. In the graves of dignitaries and pharaohs, such scenes are shown, commemorating the moments of triumph over foreigners. A good example is provided by a relief from the grave of Horemheb. It shows the bringing of a group of Syrian prisoners of war (Breadsted 1936, fig. 229). Whenever ancient Egyptian images portray local people and foreigners, there is a clear distinction between the two groups.

The situation was different in ancient Greece. Various Greek polis spoke similar dialects and worshipped the same gods, but for centuries peace was something surprising and disturbing to their inhabitants, because war was their everyday life (Murray 1993, 169-183). Even small communities waged wars against each other, yet at the same time battling cities sent their representations to the Olympic Games, as well as war gifts and spoils to common sanctuaries and the oracle, as in Delphi. Today, this may seem surprising to us, but in ancient times, total wars were fought between neighboring communities, with fields being burnt, crops destroyed, olive groves razed and wells poisoned. The long Peloponnese war between Athens and Sparta is an excellent case in point. Many smaller countries of ancient Greece were involved (Martin 1996, 164-187). The Persian Wars would bring them a sense of unity and common Hellenic roots when the sight of culturally different foreigners made the quarrelling Hellenes realize that having a common enemy they were a community (Murray 1993, 372-389). However, almost all its history, Greece was a community of independent political bodies, which were to be easily pacified by Macedonia after the murderous Peloponnese war. Later on, Alexander the Great conquered Egypt in the Persian Empire and legitimized his power over this territory, defining himself as 'the son of Amun'. The Egyptians, who were inclined to accept foreign gods, never accepted the Persian occupation. Alexander used this conflict perfectly and left Egypt as the Son of a deity, and to such one, even if he was at war on distant fronts, his followers would gladly send their crops.

Some viewed him as 'the Son of Amun', but others as a successor of Persian kings (Martin 1998, 213). The army in Iran needed supplies, and its divine ruler provided it with food through Egyptian taxation. After the conquest of Persia, Alexander, who wished to be recognized by the Babylonians as their legal ruler, made a meaningful gesture, attempting to rebuild the so-called Tower of Babel (Zikkurat in Babylon). Importantly, and married a local princess and accepted the local robes and court ceremonies. For his comrades in arms, changing customs and the waiting for grace of an audience were difficult to accept. The fact that Alexander proclaimed himself a god did not mean that his soldiers saw him in the same way (cf. Martin 1998, 215). The ruler united the army and the state only as long as he lived (Ibidem, 216). The moment Alexander died, the marriages between Greeks and Macedonians and women from the East were dissolved (Worthington 2007, 273). Instead of putting a successor on the throne, the commanders started fighting for his legacy (Bravo, Wipszycka 1992, 24). Alexander's empire lacked the only bond which his very person provided.

As far as the Etruscans, who were united by culture, religion and customs, are concerned, each of the cities of their federation lived independently. Despite having so many things in common, these small structures were in conflict with each other. Consequently, when confronted with threat from Rome, they did not create a single strong state and succumbed to the Romans (Keller 1970, 293).

Rome was a vast, multi-ethnic Empire. What did the people of Rome have in common? Latin was their official language, but in the street dozens of languages were spoke, the most important of which was Aramaic. Polytheistic religion was treated not so much as a collection of common beliefs, but rather as a set of obligatory cult practices. While not necessarily believing in Jupiter, one was expected to offered sacrifices to him. Introduced to the Senate by Caesar, the Gauls aroused smiles and derision from the 'true indigenous Romans.' For centuries, until the decree of Caracalla, only a few were citizens (Cary, Scullard, 1992, 312). For this reason, Hadrian, in order to increase the army's recruitment base, gave many cities the status of municipalities (Lat. *municypium*), and thus their inhabitants gained citizenship and were able to serve in the army. Whereas the imperial cult imposed from above was to unite the society (Jaczynowska 1999, 562), it is not quite clear who indeed considered the Emperor to be a god? What was it in fact that united the inhabitants of the Empire? On the one hand, in contemporary Switzerland, members of one family may speaks different languages, and on the other, as today in the US, no one would dare claim that only his religion is true and others his false. In Rome, the connecting factors seem to have involved lifestyle and culture. Lifestyle included drinking wine, eating fish sauces and enjoying Roman entertainment. Someone who preferred to live in a house with an atrium than in an

ordinary house, bathed in thermal baths, used the Roman latrine, what was more important, participated in the games organized in the Roman fashion — this seems romanisated. Inhabitants of over a hundred cities used water supplied by aqueducts. Additionally, flushed public toilets were built near aqueducts on a massive scale (Wypustek 2018, 37-40). Cultural differences were already observable in the toilets, where one could see the difference between one's own folk, i.e. those who took care of themselves without embarrassment in front of others, and strangers, i.e. who were confused, as for example Jews (Wypustek 2018, 87-91). The latter wanted to take care of their physiological needs in solitude, not in the sight of others. Several thousand spectators came see to gladiator performances. The auditorium of the Amphitheatre called 'the Colosseum' was adapted to accommodate over 50,000 spectators (Sadurska 1980, 128). In less comfortable conditions, a show could be admired by up to 87,000 spectators (Nosow 2009, 122). Even bigger crowds watched chariot races in circuses, including Circus Maximus in the capital of the Empire, which could host more than 100,000 people (cf. Meijer 2010, 10 et seq.). This means that in the city with the population of one million people, practically one in ten residents could go to see the show. This type of joint experience of emotions united the viewers. The enthusiastic crowd let themselves be carried away by strong emotions. The sight of blood, death and suffering must have been remembered for a long time. The bored crowd waited for strong impressions. Those coming out of the amphitheatre probably behaved similarly to today's football fans after a successful match. Here, however, there were no opposing teams supported by a divided audience, so even the death of the favorite gladiator was not a disaster for the spectators, but only an unpleasant incident. The Emperor Trajan and his successor Hadrian, who reigned in the 2nd century, were the first rulers to be born outside of Italy. It took a century to make it normal for the people of Rome that the ruler did not come from the capital, and, what is more, from a great family. In the 3rd century AD, it was clear that an important factor uniting the crowd was not any specific Emperor, because after his death, even a violent crowd easily accepted the assumption of power by the following one, not unimaginably the murderer of his predecessor. This Romanisation only informal and legal terms consisted in having citizenship, which may have been a reason why St. Paul was given a different treatment by the court.

Military service was another unifying factor. During fights, strong bonds were created among soldiers. The brotherhood of arms, however, concerned only those men who were in the army, and in addition took part in fighting. Given that for centuries, thousands of soldiers did not have to fight, but only guarded the borders, it seems that this factor gained importance mainly in the times of conquests and danger. In peacetime, it probably was not as relevant. It seems that what mattered most to the Romans, regardless of the origin of their ethnos and the language they used

at home, was the popular lifestyle. Frequenting big mass events at the amphitheatre and the circus or spending a day in the baths, Romans did not have to show a document certifying their religious faith or citizenship. Mass events, including circus games, seem to have been extremely important to them. These traditions date back to the early days of the Republic period (Rawson 1981, 1-16). Someone who dressed and combed in the Roman fashion was accepted by other Romans. He was able to enter and experience the same emotions as the other participants in the event. Atthe circus, the audience was additionally divided into factions cheering for certain stables. The coachmen wore 'club' colours: white, green, blue and red. Interestingly, certain stables and colours were accompanied by fan groups, which were united by their social background, political sympathies or city districts (Kumaniecki 1963, 469-472). It is somewhat similar to the present-day supporters of certain political parties, people from particular regions of the country or social groups. Belonging to a group of supporters could help one's career when one encountered high-ranking 'club mates' (Ibidem, 470). In this way, the spectators identified themselves with a given team as today's football fans. This was probably the strongest level of identification, because instead of being forced by obedience, it was founded on people's chosen and preferred practices and allegiances. It seems, therefore, that mass events were not only entertainment for the masses, but also a factor uniting social groups in the Roman state. It was not an intended effect, but a side effect. The sense of community and identification with it may have been no less strong than the ancient Egyptians' belief in the meaning fullness of building a pyramid.

In conclusion, for much of antiquity, societies were usually identified with small communities. Regardless of their ethnic origin or religious beliefs, the inhabitants of the Persian state and of the Chinese Empire, were subject to their respective common rulers. The Greeks, who continued to fight each other for centuries, only united in the face of a common enemy. The Egyptians of the Pharaohs were united by a narrow strip of farmland far removed from other peoples, where they created their unique state and religious structures. In the case of the Romans, it seems that although they shared an array of potentially unifying factors, such as language, ruler and legal system, they were fundamentally united by their lifestyle, including mass entertainments, such as circus and gladiatorial games.

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