

Theories of Ethnicity in the Ancient Scientific Writers

(CL = Classical Studies, Other)

This panel seeks to provide scholars working with the ancient technical writers a forum to explore the interactions between the various sciences as they emerged and developed in antiquity, focusing on how they engaged with questions of race and ethnicity. Within ancient scientific and technical literature there is a wealth of information addressing the way ancients viewed the nature of race and ethnicity in the diverse cultures of the ancient Mediterranean, especially in emerging natural and social sciences like geography, architecture, zoology and medicine. While theories on the origins and diversity of peoples permeate poetic and mythic texts and images, the technical writers sought rationalized, non-mythic explanations. The material is diverse, but the theories are fairly consistent—they posit a correlation between the environment in which a person lives (be it the weather, astrological position, architectural space, etc.) and ethnicity. Little scholarship has been done on many of these texts, but interest is increasing as scholars seek to understand better the larger contexts for the formation of identities in the ancient and modern worlds. This panel examines these theories in the various genres of ancient technical writing and how these theories impacted the way the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean talked and thought about ethnicity and identity.

The panel will be structured as follows: Introductory remarks by organizers contextualizing the papers within the study of race and ethnicity in antiquity, six papers from panelists, and a response to the papers by the organizers. The papers are ordered chronologically. The first explores theories of migration in the Classical period within the contexts of theories of autochthony and environmental determinism, while the second

looks at how the real expansion of geographic knowledge in the wake of Alexander's conquests changed the way the relationship between ethnicity and geography was understood. The third paper examines the way Hesiod's mythical theory of the metallic races was transformed in the early Hellenistic period by philosophers interested in ecology and medicine. The fourth paper looks at the way the influx of foreign animals into the Hellenistic and Roman worlds shaped their views of the barbarian inhabitants and geography of the lands in which the animals originated. Paper the fifth links environmental determinism theories to military recruitment and the role of auxiliaries in the Roman army. The final paper explores the way the physical environment was understood to impact ethnic identity and could function to unify a multi-ethnic world and erase ethnic diversity.

Time Requested: 2 hours (this includes panel introduction, 6 panelists, and discussion)

AV Requirements: none

Autochthony, Environmental Determinism and the Discourse of Displacement in Greek Geographical and Ethnic Thought

In recent scholarship on Greek ethnicity, an aspect of ethnic definition – ties to an ancestral land – has been largely taken for granted. But an overview of the evidence suggests that Greeks understood the ties between the land and its people in complex and evolving ways. Two related models of the relationship between land and people, autochthony and environmental determinism, did not play as prominent a role in Greek assertions of communal identity as one might expect, although they were prominent in rhetorical, medical and philosophical literature from the fifth century BC onwards. Instead, the Greeks deployed a much more common discourse of displacement, in which communities and ethnicities are shaped by migration and colonization. This discourse helped Greeks to make sense of the similarities and differences that united and divided them; but at the same time it weakened the role that the ancestral land played in Greek conceptions of ethnic identity.

Ethnicity as the Basis for Greek Geographical Thought

The Greek study of geography began as an awareness of ethnic groups different from one's own. Early travelers generally did not go to places: they went to peoples. Odysseus went to "the land of the Lotus Eaters" or "the land of the Kyklopes." Ephoros, in the mid-fourth century BC, who was the first to write specifically about the extent of the inhabited world, defined its extremities merely by ethnicity (Strabo 1.2.28). This had a formidable effect on Greek geographical thought, for when Alexander went east a generation later, he was conditioned to explore a world that was populated not by natural features but by diverse peoples. Yet in the long run this was seen as inadequate, and scholars such as Dikaiarchos – famous for measuring the height of mountains – turned their interest toward the land itself. Thus geographical theory evolved from an ethnically-based system to one based on places and features. In the second half of the second century BC, Eratosthenes, who created the grid system of parallels and meridians, could no longer consider ethnicity as the basis for geography and established the topographically-based system still in use today.

Ethnography and the Ecology of Health

In his *Bios Hellados*, the fourth century philosopher Dicaearchus adapts Hesiod's metallic races to his own account of early Greek history. Before they fell into pastoralism and agriculture, Dicaearchus says, the Greeks followed "the opinion of the most accomplished physicians" in avoiding meat and excess in their diet, securing for themselves a golden age "free from disease" (F 56a, Fortenbaugh and Schütrumpf, *Dicaearchus of Messana* [2001]). Dicaearchus's interest in early Greek health is mirrored in the attention historians and ethnographers pay to the medical practices of ethnic others, what Rosalind Thomas (2000) has called "the ethnography of health."

Greek writers look to their own past and to the *ethne* of other places to discover best medical practices; in Greek thinking, health is often found at the edges of time and space. This paper will argue that ethnographic texts and those that describe a distant Greek past link health to ecology, the relationship between humans and their environment, and that the ecological basis for health in other times and places critiques contemporary Greek ecological practices that undermine human well-being.

Works Cited:

Fortenbaugh, W., Schütrumpf, E., (editors) *Dicaearchus of Messana: Text, Translation, and Discussion*. Rutgers University Studies in Classical Humanities, Volume X.

Transaction Publishers, 2001.

Thomas, Rosalind. *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science, and the Art of Persuasion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Barbarous Peacocks and Hellenized Elephants: Geography and Identity in Aelian's *History of Animals*

Aelian's *History of Animals* offers in piecemeal form an overview of the material, cultural, and linguistic changes of the Hellenistic and Early Imperial periods that can easily be read alongside the wide-ranging geographical and historical accounts of Polybius, Posidonius, Diodorus, and Strabo. Using animals and their characteristics as the primary vehicle of his study, Aelian nonetheless continued the work of these earlier historians and geographers, particularly in matters relating to the interactions between Greeks, Romans, and barbarians, and the influence that a land's geography could have on the character of its inhabitants. Animals accordingly provided Aelian with additional evidence to support existing theories of geographical determinism, thanks to signs that he identified of a region's human and animal residents sharing the same characteristics. At the same time, Aelian traced the impact that foreign animals had when introduced to Greece and Italy, and the processes by which they were acculturated to their new homes. The decadent peacock therefore became the target of criticism from Aelian for the luxurious behavior that it inspired in its owners, but he also found much to praise in the ability of elephants to understand the Greek and Latin spoken by their new masters. Remarkably, Aelian used animals to study the same changes and issues that others approached with reference only to people.

Hot Climates Make Cowardly Soldiers: On Vegetius' *De Re Militaris*

In *De Re Militaris*, Vegetius records not only a précis of Roman military training, maintenance, and tactics during the late empire, he also provides valuable insight into the ethnographic outlook of the Roman military machine, whose prejudices stem from long-established climatological theories. Vegetius includes a particularly intriguing tidbit concerning where best to recruit soldiers (*dRM* 1.2): men from cold climates have an overabundance of blood, but they lack intelligence, which is not conducive to camp discipline; those from warmer climes may have more intelligence but their paucity of blood renders them afraid of being wounded and, therefore, poor soldiers (c.f., Arist. *Pol.* 1327b; Poseidonius fr.71 Theiler; Vitruvius 6.1). The best troops, Vegetius affirms, are levied from temperate climates. Vegetius here echoes Strabo 6.4.1, who famously attributes the rise of Rome to her medial and temperate, yet varied, climate.

The Greeks were aware of climatological and geographical differences, and their ensuing theories of geographical determinism affected their anthropological outlook. Climate – weather – shapes character and influences health (see also Hdt 2.35). The author of the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* (ca 400 BCE) explicated how climate accounts for character (*AWP* 12, 14): Asia is mild and fertile, being close to the east, but its people are indolent and submissive; the northern Scythians are chilled, watery, and almost barren, like their wintry land; variable climate accompanies variable terrain, and produces peoples of more changeable character, and livelier and freer minds. In turn the Romans adapted these Greek theories to their own needs. Celsus' theories that certain diseases are more prevalent at certain times of the year, or even of life, was hardly original.

This paper will delve more deeply into Roman views on the interstices between ethnography and climate, especially regarding auxiliary soldiers, and explore how Greco-Roman climatological theory influenced Roman philosophy of military medicine, nutrition and health.

Blood to the Shade: the Fabrication of Late Roman Identity through the Architecture of the Word in Procopius' *Peri Ktismaton*

This paper will focus on the cultivation of unity amidst the diversity of various ethnic groups both discussed and intentionally overlooked in Procopius' *Peri Ktismaton*. Procopius is profoundly concerned with ethnicity, which is a fascinatingly complex issue in the later Roman Empire. *Peri Ktismaton* is a celebration of Justinian's reconstruction of the "Roman" empire, though of course the work says nothing of either Rome or even Italy. What's more, Justinian, though a native speaker of Latin, was probably Illyrian. Procopius himself was from Palestine and wrote in a Greek modeled after Thucydides, though almost 1000 years later and centuries after much of his style and language had become obsolete.

In fact, *Peri Ktismaton*, although dealing with actual and extensive building projects throughout much of the eastern empire, should be classified as an encomium of Justinian's success in uniting the empire in both infra- and superstructure, since the individual projects all deal with the construction of either Christian or civic institutions, both of which had been used to create a sense of universal *Romanitas* since the time of Constantine. As propaganda par excellence, *Peri Ktismaton* therefore tends to mask over the cultural differences of the regions celebrated, from Greece through Asia Minor and Palestine across North Africa to Gibraltar, which is hailed as the gateway to the Roman empire. Again, never a mention of Rome or Italy. Why? Because Italy had been devastated at least as much by Justinian's campaigns of re-conquest as by the Gothic, Vandal and Hunnic invasions of the 5th century; and Procopius, possibly at the request of Justinian himself, writes the Buildings to underline that the building program remains

incomplete. *Romanitas* would not be restored to Rome until the “barbarians” had been not only militarily subdued but also subsumed under the multi-cultural umbrella of orthodox Christianity and "Roman" civic institutions. The irony of Illyrian-Byzantine claims to Rome did not escape either the Goths or the Franks, both of whom had been so imbued with Roman values, to say nothing of their military and administrative service, that they considered themselves the legitimate representatives of “pure” *Romanitas*, which they thought had been corrupted under the last western emperors.