

Call for Papers

Identity and Identification in Antiquity

Conference organised by the Department of History
of the University of the Antilles and Guyana

Where?

Faculty of Letters and Humanities, University of the Antilles and Guyana, Schoelcher Campus, Martinique

When?

Tuesday 7 April to Thursday 9 April 2009

Deadlines?

Proposals for papers to be submitted by 24 September 2009

Further information?

<http://identity-antiquity.pagesperso-orange.fr>

Background

Identity in modern society, especially over the last few decades, has once again become an increasingly hotly debated topic, engaging social scientists and historians, politicians and religious leaders, journalists and opinion makers—but also the general public. Much of the contemporary debate is focused on three key issues: race, religion and gender. Some of the controversies stirred up in these fields have spilled over into academic ancient history, where consequently the terms of the discussion have often been defined by the issues and trends in contemporary discourse.

Ancient historians, more often than not, have adopted a reactive rather than a proactive stance, not only during the "renaissance" of identity in the late 20th century, but already during the inception of modern nationalism, when ancient history had first been pressed into service to shore up newly emerging identities. Some of the new and alien identity concepts imported into ancient history then, have proven to be surprisingly long-lived. It has taken until 2006 for instance for a major academic monograph (Walter Goffart *Barbarian Tides*) to explicitly state that there were no "Germans" in antiquity. The academic struggle to eradicate modern European national identities from the ancient world in which they were so firmly implanted by 19th and 20th century historians, responding to the imperatives of political opportunity and conviction, is far from over.

More recently ancient historians have again been "wrong-footed" by the contemporary debate on identity. The discussion of race in antiquity for instance has been rekindled by Martin Bernal's 1987 publication *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, that is, by the works of a modern Orientalist historian. Gender history in antiquity—from its invention a modern history concept—has received much of its early momentum from Sarah Pomeroy's 1975 *Goddesses, whores, wives and slaves: women in classical antiquity*. Pomeroy, no doubt, is a classicist, but her work is very self-consciously inspired by modern feminism. In the field of religion one could cite Peter Schäfer's *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World*, published in 1997, a work which explicitly sets out to find the origins of a modern religious conflict in antiquity.

The conference proposes to revisit the question of identity in antiquity from the point of view of the ancient historian. Rather than following a contemporary agenda—were Athenians sexist? – did Romans hate Jews?—we hope to organise discussions which look at identity as a concept embedded in ancient societies: which types of identity are operational in Greco-Roman antiquity, and how and by whom are they defined? As a second theme, however, we wish to advance our understanding of how and why especially ancient history has on various occasions served to supply modern identities with a distinguished past to which otherwise they could not aspire.

Guidelines

Papers should aim for a presentation time of 20 to 25 minutes, with 5 to 10 minutes of discussion. Abstracts should be submitted in English for publication on the conference web site, but papers themselves may be presented also in either French or Spanish (in which case the provision of an extended abstract in English for circulation before the conference is advised).

Propositions for papers by graduate students (or advanced undergraduate students) are welcomed by the organisers.

Abstracts should not exceed 500 words in length, stating clearly the title of the paper and outline the main arguments of the presentation. Clarity is important as the organisers will assemble thematic panels on the basis of the abstracts. Abstracts must be received by Monday 24 November 2008. Potential speakers will be notified of

the acceptance of their paper by Wednesday 17 December 2008. The submission of an abstract shall constitute a commitment to attend the conference; no paper will be communicated in the absence of its author.

Themes and chronological limits

The following is meant to be guidelines for papers and can in some instances be interpreted liberally.

Papers should deal with identity and identification of individuals, groups or communities within the confines of Mediterranean antiquity, from the archaic Greek period to late antiquity (late antiquity to be understood in its modern definition, including the early barbarian successor states). Papers dealing with the use of classical, ancient models of identity (real or imaginary) to identify modern individuals, groups or communities obviously do not fall within these restrictions on time-frame.

The organisers would suggest the following thematic fields, but are open to propositions which while not falling within these themes fit the general topic of the conference:

- Types of identity in antiquity: definition and use
- Representation of identity: literary, graphic, other
- Citizen identity versus ethnic, cultural and religious identities
- State identity versus group, class and community identities
- Class identity versus formal and group identities
- Construction of new identities in antiquity
- Individual identity versus group and community identities
- Gender and identity: individual and collective
- Religion and identity: individual and collective
- Race and identity: individual and collective
- Classical models for modern identity
- Use of "antiquity" to invent modern identities
- Application of modern models of identity to the ancient world

Submission of abstracts

Abstracts should be emailed to one of the organisers before 24 September 2009:

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