

## **Mattias Brand – Papyri and the Dynamics of Religious Identification: Introductory remarks**

Religious identification has sometimes been treated, in modern studies, as if it equaled coming out of the closet: an individual decision to reveal aspects of his or her most inner self-understanding in precarious situations. Alternatively, less tentative explanations have been given for religiously marked language, like the immersion of individuals and scribes in a shared in-group repertoire, or the impact of institutional behavioral norms. This paper aims to examine the various social situations that gave rise to religious identifications, as well as the potential of modern social scientific theory for the study of these processes in ancient papyri. Obviously there is an enormous range of social scientific studies which could potentially shed light on ancient religious identifications. By considering a few recent contributions, I will highlight some valuable approaches for understanding how multidimensional human beings drew upon religious repertoires when they needed to. In particular I would like to shift the focus away from the (linguistic) markers of religious identification to a different set of questions related to the events or situations in which they were deemed relevant.

## **Annemarie Luijendijk - The Dynamics of Religious Identification in the so-called Little Peace at Oxyrhynchus**

This paper contributes to understanding the dynamics of religious identification through an analysis of evidence for cultic activities in documentary papyri from the second half of the third century found at the ancient Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus, with an emphasis on the activities of early Christians. The large amount of papyri found at Oxyrhynchus has contributed significantly to our understanding of everyday lives and reading practices, in general and also for Christians. The earliest Christian literary texts from Oxyrhynchus date to the late second century, while Christians appear in documentary texts from Oxyrhynchus from the middle of the third century on. I am particularly interested in the second half of the third century, the so-called “Little Peace,” the period after the Decian persecution beginning with the peace of Galerius through the Diocletian persecution in the early fourth century. This proves to be a formative period in the early church. What makes the Little Peace enigmatic is the paucity of literary sources, what Graeme Clarke fittingly calls “our third century ignorance.” Between the writings of Dionysius of Alexandria and Cyprian of Carthage and those of Eusebius of Caesarea, there is a gap. It is here where a case study of Oxyrhynchus becomes interesting. Both documentary and literary papyri provide fresh evidence for this period in Oxyrhynchus. Taking my approach in the perspective of the quotidian turn, my paper presents a “street view” of cultic places and practitioners, including temples and churches, and priests of Greek, Roman and Egyptian cults and Christian bishops.

## **Arietta Papaconstantinou – Lifting the cloak of invisibility: tracking down the Jews of late antique Egypt**

During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the Jews of Egypt are very present in the historical record, and the Jewish community of Old Cairo in the medieval period is intimately known because of the documentary treasure represented by the Geniza of the Ben Ezra Synagogue, whose significance was recognised by Solomon Schechter at the very end of the 19th century. Without this collection, we would know next to nothing on Old Cairo’s Jewish community – almost as little as we know about the Egyptian Jews of late antiquity, between, say, the reforms of Diocletian and the ninth century. This absence has often been noted with puzzlement, and accompanied by comments to the effect that this absence of evidence cannot possibly mean there were no Jews in Egypt during that period. The case of the Geniza is a good example of the unreliability and lack of homogeneity of our evidential base, and

the possibility of a chance find for the late antique period that will suddenly shed light on a community or an individual is far from excluded.

As things stand, however, we are left to work with the evidence we have. In the context of a conference on religious identification in papyri, it seemed therefore appropriate to tackle this documentary 'invisibility', and to question the expectations present in the identification of religious groups in documentary evidence. To be sure, a change in presentation and self-presentation of Jews did occur, since they seemingly disappear from the record. In this contribution I will explore possible proxies for this missing evidence, and alternative ways of interrogating papyri and other sources, in an attempt to shed some light on this historical puzzle.

### **Susanna de Vries - Expressing Jewish identity through the use of the Hebrew and Aramaic language**

This paper explores the linguistic preferences of the Jews in late antique Egypt for the purposes of determining Jewish self-definition in a Diaspora setting. One of the remarkable characteristics of Jewish communal life in Egypt in late antiquity is the extensive use of Hebrew and Aramaic, as evidenced by the surviving papyri written in those languages, whereas these Jews had written in Greek up until then. This language shift raises the question of how and why Egyptian Jews began writing in a different language at this specific point in time.

Thus far, three theories have been put forward attempting to explain this phenomenon. 1) The Jews of Egypt started to use Hebrew to stress their relation to Palestine and the Jewish nation (Tcherikover: 1964). 2) The language shift was a reaction to the fact that Jews were increasingly being marginalized by the Christians (Bowman: 1996). 3) The linguistic change is as an indicator that points towards the spread of rabbinic Judaism (Cohen: 1995).

These are general theories only, not based on a thorough linguistic investigation of the evidence. Therefore, in this paper I analyze the language shift among the Jews of Egypt through an application of socio-linguistic theories on bilingualism, language shifts, code-switching and borrowing. In this way, it is possible to read the Hebrew and Aramaic papyri in a more contextualized way. Special emphasis is placed on a discussion of an intriguing Jewish marriage contract, the *ketubbah* of Cologne, Inv. 4853, - a document largely written in Aramaic but prefaced, rather oddly, by several lines in Greek.

I conclude this paper by pointing out how study of the linguistic preferences provides a new and better understanding of the dynamics of language use and self-definition by the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt, while reflecting on the larger, underlying historical patterns.

### **Benjamin Sippel - Choosing my Religion Situational Religious Self-Identification of Egyptian Priests in Late Antiquity**

In accordance with the terminology adopted by Mattias Brand in his introductory essay, I understand the concept of 'religious identification' as the effort or process of aligning social self-presentation with (a selection of) the religious narratives, categories, or groups available to ego (p. 1). My central interest is in the socio-linguistic investigation of situations in which individuals (more abstractly: 'agents') choose specific words, names and formulas in order to register their elective identification with certain communities and narratives (p. 7-8). Whereas this conference is mainly focused on the dynamics of religious identification in Christian contexts, my paper considers patterns and strategies of identification in non-Christian communities. This counter-perspective is intended to further

discussion about whether practices of (self-)identification observed in Christian contexts are specific to those contexts or are better understood as variants upon more general patterns.

To this end, I focus on priests of traditional Egyptian temples. Of course, these men were educated in the Egyptian tradition and strictly obliged to serve traditional Egyptian gods, such as Horus or Sobek. Moreover they were tightly enmeshed in an endogamous familial structure. My point of reference however is the recently-concluded project *Lived Ancient Religion*, whose starting-point is that “ancient individuals had a certain amount of freedom to appropriate elements from various great traditions in their daily lives” (p. 6). This has prompted me to assume that we might be able to find evidence of situational acts of personal or idiosyncratic self-identification even among these religious officials.

In the documentary papyri, Egyptian priests appear primarily in their role as temple-officials, so that personal utterances are rare. However, the names they chose for their children (which, at a time of increasing Greek influence on general nomenclature in Egypt, are always specifically Egyptian names) indicate that they sought against the odds to remain a distinctive group of indigenous religious professionals, even in Late Antiquity. But irrespective of names, some priests, at any rate in certain situations, used or adopted words, names and formulas from beyond the Egyptian tradition, a phenomenon that presupposes a deeper social and cultural interaction with Hellenized sections of the population. My claim is that closer examination of such situations may offer a better understanding of socio-religious interaction in Roman Egypt in general. The paper treats patterns and strategies of religious self-identification of Egyptian priests in three different situations: (1) naming practices, (2) Greek invocations in business-accounts, (3) the intermingling of various religious concepts in a private letter.

### **Sabine Huebner - Χρηστιανὸς ἔστ(ιν): Self-identification and Formal Categorization of the First Christians in Egypt**

This paper reexamines a long known papyrus letter housed in Basel of unknown date and provenance containing a nomen sacrum. On the basis of prosographical research it is now possible to establish a secure terminus antequem and origin for this letter. The resulting picture confirms previous assumptions about the spread of Christianity in the Egyptian chora and the social milieu from which the first Christian community leaders originated. The Christian author of the letter is known as well from other documents showcasing multiple identities depending on the respective situation in his everyday life as faithful Christian, estate manager, member of the political elite, son, husband and brother.

### **Jennifer Cromwell - Religious Identity and Relationships between Rulers and Ruled in the Coptic Papyri of Early Islamic Egypt**

The late 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries in Egypt, after half a century of Islamic rule, are witness to the increasing use of Arabic, the increasing presence of Arab officials throughout the country, and an increasing volume of paperwork generated by the administration of taxes, especially the non-Muslim poll tax. Literary sources that cover these decades portray a varied picture of relationships with the country's rulers. In the *Life of Isaac*, the governor ‘Abd al-Azīz (684–705) is presented eventually as a lover of the Christians, a builder of churches and monasteries for monks, but only after a period of destruction of crosses and anger towards the patriarch. The *History of the Patriarchs* expands on these points, especially his anger towards Isaac, and depicts his successors as haters of Christians, as wild beasts (‘Abd Allah), and as lovers of money (Qurra). But beyond this literary record, which deals mainly with the governors in the capital, what of the relationship between Egyptians and Arabs, between Christians and Muslims, throughout the rest of the country? The survival of a large volume of

non-literary texts from the early 8<sup>th</sup> century are invaluable for the study of many aspects of daily life, including religious identity.

Drawing primarily upon the Coptic non-literary record, this paper will examine the language of religious identity. This involves the use of epithets, titles, and descriptions in reference to individuals, overt and indirect reference to religious belief and practice, and sociolinguistic analysis of communications between Egyptians and Arab officials. Examination of these factors will illustrate how the Christian populace expressed their religious identity under Arab-Muslim rule and the dynamics of their interactions and relationships with their rulers.

### **Paula Tutty - From the sacred to the profane: evidence for multiple social identities in the letters of the Nag Hammadi Codices**

Within the cartonnage material that stiffened the covers of Nag Hammadi Codex VII the remains of approximately fifteen letters were found addressed to/and or from monks. The letters are written in Greek and Coptic and the subject matter is diverse, ranging from the care of sheep and goats to requests for prayers of intercession. Approximately half of these letters were written to a monk named as Sansnos who corresponds with fellow monks, clergy, and members of the local community.

Although the men mentioned in the Nag Hammadi cartonnage letters were clearly monks they were also economically reliant on work that was not connected to any form of religious vocation. The monks were thus required to live in a way that was highly similar to that of the aspiring authors described in Bernard Lahire's *La condition littéraire. La double vie des écrivains*; the writers make tremendous sacrifices in order to write but at the same time are dependent on earnings gained outside the literary field. In this paper I shall discuss how this collection of letters gives evidence for the multiple social identities held by this group of fourth century monks. How do monks address fellow members of the monastic community? Is there evidence for code switching? What speech patterns are apparent and do they change as the monks are identified variously as economic partners, fellow brethren and spiritual patrons? By discussing these questions I hope to throw some light onto the complex social lives of this early monastic community and demonstrate how this complexity is reflected in their written communications.

### **David Frankfurter - Christianization and the issue of identity**

However we characterize the religion of Egypt (or even the Empire) from the end of the fourth century CE, we must be very careful with the term "Christian," which has invited the retrojection of modern notions of distinct identity and adherence to orthopraxy – or even orthodoxy. To be sure, there are manifestations of Christianity – scripture fragments, onomastic changes, the remains of a new infrastructure – that suggest new ways of negotiating religion in Egypt. But the relationship of these features to lived religion, local religion, or popular religion is highly ambiguous. Based on comparable situations of Christianization (e.g., Latin America), it makes more sense to speak of Christianity as a series of potential strategies (after Swidler) or material/sensory "regimes" (after Meyer), or even as Great Tradition continually interpreted in local terms (after Redfield), than as a new and uniform belief-system adopted at baptism.

### **Eline Scheerlinck - "Like oil in their bones". Threats, Excommunication and Religious Identification beyond Late Antiquity.**

TBA

## **Przemysław Piwowarczyk & Ewa Wipszycka - Interpersonal function of the Biblical quotations in the letters of Frange**

In the dossier of letters (and epistolary exercises) written by the 8th century monk Frange there are more than twenty texts in which the author introduced scriptural quotations or allusions (an exact number could be hardly given because of the fragmentary state of preservation of some relevant texts). It is not unconceivable that some of them were given merely as more or less random examples of biblical erudition, but certainly in the most cases Frange introduced them deliberately to exert more direct effect and to bring desirable reaction of recipient.

In most cases Frange uses Scripture to exercise his authority and to strengthen the persuasive force of a reproach, a request (O.Frangé 15, 120, 162) or an excuse (O.Frangé 14). In those cases Frange identified quotations by unambiguous introductory formulas, such as “It is written in the Scriptures”, “The Lord said”, “It is written by the Apostle” and similar.

More interesting are, however, instances, in which quotation or allusion is interwoven into the body of the text, what could be interpreted as an example of an in-group language. In such a way Frange cites usually Psalms (O.Frangé 186, 456, 548; group of epistolary exercises with reference to Psalm 98,6: O.Frangé 433, 434, 440). As a main part of everyday monastic prayer they would be easily recognized by the recipients of the letters. It is probably not only as a result of the fragmentary character of some ostraca that the Psalms are never introduced by formulas explicitly identifying them as Scripture. Other passages taken from the Bible appear in such light as not so commonly recognizable by the Theban Christians (and monks among them), what sheds light on the biblical culture of the Theban Christianity and monasticism.

## **Joseph Sanzo - Marginalized Orthodoxy: Anti-Jewish Invective and ‘Pure Christianity’ on Amulets from Late Antiquity**

Sociological analysis of orthodoxy and heresy has had a considerable impact on the study of these categories in late antiquity. In this vein, Max Weber, Pierre Bourdieu, and their successors have typically understood orthodoxy and heresy according to a two-group conflict model: the elite “orthodox” that battle against the non-elite “heretics.” It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars of late antiquity often claim (or assume) that boundary demarcation and concerns for “orthodoxy” during late antiquity were primarily – or even exclusively – within the purview of ecclesiastical elites.

To be sure, Bourdieu did not claim that orthodoxy and heresy always operate solely and completely within distinct spheres of social existence. Most important, Bourdieu and his followers have emphasized that the heretical power of figures, such as “sorcerers,” must rely on the “authorizing language” of orthodoxy, even while formulating objections against their orthodox antagonists. But this model assumes that the heretical use of authorizing language will be deployed against the orthodox. What if, by contrast, the authorizing language of “sorcerers,” for instance, consists of ideas designed to marginalize other powerless or deviant groups?

In this essay, I highlight a series of amulets from late antiquity that appropriated “orthodox” traditions of anti-Jewish invective in order to draw firm boundaries between “Christians” and “Jews” for ritual efficacy. These objects reveal that the same individuals whom orthodox power marginalized as heretics on the basis of their ritual practices could, within those very practices, deploy for religious purity “orthodox” language that was aimed at other marginalized groups (e.g., the Jews). Accordingly, these artifacts of “lived religion” imply that many late antique individuals were positioned within

global hierarchies of religious and cultural power in such a way that they *simultaneously* embodied the domains of heresy and orthodoxy – albeit in relation to different discursive categories.

### **Ágnes T. Mihálykó - Markers of Religious Identity in Ritual Texts on Papyri (3–5th century): Between Fluidity and Regulation**

Communal and private addresses of the divine in the forms of rituals are situations in which the words being said are effective in constructing and reinforcing religious identity. Communal ritual gathers members of the group regularly to the common recitation of texts and the reception of texts recited by the leader of the congregation, which convey the theological ideas and self-identification of the group. Private rituals in turn reflect the activation of dispositions that have been acquired during the communal rituals. The texts of prayers and hymns that have been preserved on papyrus give a unique insight into what was being said on such occasions. What do they disclose about the construction of the religious identity of the groups that recited them? When one looks for markers of religious identity in these texts, a mixed picture emerges. There are on the one hand witnesses that show that formulas and even complete texts could be borrowed between different religious groups. Thus a prayer of Jewish or Hermetic origin could be used by Christians, or a Christian exorcism could be adapted by Manicheans. Other ritual texts faithfully reflect the emerging Christian orthodoxy and display a set of unequivocally Christian markers. In the later centuries texts with flexible religious affiliation disappear. I will argue that this trend towards uniformity in prayers and hymns is due to an episcopal effort to regulate the communal and private praying practices. The coexistence of fluidity and regulation in the 3–5<sup>th</sup> centuries has interesting implications for the role of ritual in the negotiation of group identity. It suggests that while for the people writing the papyri ritual texts apparently did not create rigid group identifications and were not treated as unique to each group, the opposite approach was promoted from the upper level of church hierarchy.

### **Petra Sijpesteijn - Blessings for the prophet Muhammad and his family**

References to the prophet Muhammad can be found in Arabic papyri from the early 8th century onwards. As most papyri from this period are of an official nature, that is also the context in which Muhammad appears. From the 9th century onwards, however, when 'private' correspondence in Arabic increases we can find blessings to Muhammad, sometimes in combination with good wishes for his family, found in the opening and closing greetings of letters. Veneration of Muhammad and his descendants was important for all Muslims, but it is of course especially associated with the Shi'a. In this paper I will examine the references to the prophet Muhammad examining whether specific contexts called for such mentions or whether certain senders or scribes were more inclined than others to use them.