Jerusalem’s population, one based on “the rubble from a small excavation (not by him),” can and should “be challenged by the biblical scholar” (144) whose historical presuppositions necessitate that this Jerusalem was the location of substantial literary activity. If archaeological evidence supports our historical assumptions, however, as in the case of Israel and Judah being distinct polities that developed separately during the Iron Age period, then such evidence should factor into our historical reconstructions (145–46).

Finally, although I rarely comment on such matters, the sheer amount and variety of typological errors in this volume cannot escape mention. Already in the “Orientation” (xii–xiii) one finds three instances in which a word or phrase is missing; Noll’s discussion of historiography and rhetoric is not 700 pages long (28); pages 69–73 contain errors on every page; “ethnic” is italicized for emphasis though “ethnic” is meant (73); five reasons are proposed for why Judahite writers would adopt Israelite identity but four are given (92–95), and many other instances could be cited. No book, of course, is able to escape such problems, but the volume feels as if it were written in haste, forcing its audience to read and reread sentences in such a way as to undermine the clear, accessible intent of the series this publisher promotes.

In the end, it is to Davies’s lasting credit that this work will perhaps spur others, inaugurating the sorts of theoretical and methodological conversations that the history of ancient Israel deserves. Maybe such works will even move beyond the confines of biblical studies that the publisher situates the subject matter of this book and will be located within the domain of history proper.


Stewart Moore, Cresskill, New Jersey

The study of society in Hellenistic Egypt has taken a quantum leap forward since work began on the preserved papyri by scholars who could read both Greek and demotic Egyptian. Previously, recovered bilingual family archives were divided between classicists and demoticists, with little communication between the two fields. One fascinating phenomenon revealed by this new research is polyonomy, the practice of using multiple names, including that of one Greek name and one Egyptian name. Bilingual archives have more than quadrupled the number of known polyonomous individuals, according to Sandra Coussement’s careful cataloging. The question arises: Why did some people in Hellenistic Egypt use two or more names, and what were the conditions that permitted them to do so?

Chapter 1 is a methodological outline of Coussement’s quite sensible stance regarding ethnicity. In brief, ethnicity is understood as a discourse using essentialist language such as kinship and descent and marking groups off by behavioral
diacritica such as language, religion, or dress. This discourse runs between two poles: the individual, who seeks to further her or his own idiosyncratic goals by manipulating the diacritica to affect how she or he is seen ethnically; and the group, which often seeks to restrict such ethnic entrepreneurism and to maintain steady categories. In any given situation, one or the other pole may dominate, and it is the historian's task to determine who is deploying ethnic symbols and to whose advantage.

Turning to the ancient world, Coussement finds both rigidity and flexibility. In both Athenian and Egyptian official discourse, identity is "almost digital," supposedly impossible to manipulate or penetrate, but in personal documents from both cultures preceding the Ptolemaic dynasty we do see ethnic boundaries being crossed in certain elite circles. Important for this study is the fact that Egyptian-language polyonomy has a history that goes back to the Middle Kingdom, generally comprising an official name and a use name. This kind of polyonomy accounts for about a third of all known instances in Ptolemaic Egypt and is generally known from documents that give both identifiers in a "double name" with certain set formulae. Most other polyonomy is bilingual Greek and Egyptian, representing just under 50 percent of all known individuals in the period; most of these are known from bilingual archives rather than double names in a single document. They are thus only recently visible.

Chapter 2 deals with the first encountered form of polyonomy, the aforementioned double names. In pre-Hellenistic Greece, alternative names are known but do not appear together in official documents; this occurs only in the Ptolemaic period, and it appears to make use of preexisting Egyptian formulae for denoting such individuals. The phenomenon really takes root in the second century BCE, where it seems to be conditioned primarily by the type of document concerned. For example, Egyptian-Egyptian polyonomy is best known from religious documents, such as Books of the Dead or funeral stelae, where making sure an individual was properly identified was of prime theological importance. Greek-Egyptian double names appear primarily in contracts, for much the same reason. Contrariwise, not a single double name is known from tax lists: with each person went only one possible tax status.

Chapter 3 documents meticulously the dominance of Greek-Egyptian polyonomy over other forms for the entire Ptolemaic period, especially in the second and first centuries BCE. Chapter 4 provides demographic data on the known polyonomous individuals. Belonging to the elite, whether administrative, priestly, or military, seems to be a decisive factor in possessing multiple names, as few are known from commercial or agricultural spheres. However, it is possible that peasants and other lower-class individuals are simply not well enough represented in the documents to demonstrate polyonomy. Still, it is interesting that surviving Greek-Egyptian polyonomy is most common in social locations where Greek-Egyptian interaction was highest.

Chapter 5 details the zones of this interaction. Especially important among these is the military, most visibly after the battle of Raphia in 220 BCE. In the
second century many Egyptians were given kleruchic holdings, by dint of which they moved among fundamentally Greek institutions. The rigidity of these organizations, compared with the fluidity of individual negotiations of them, puzzled commentators for many years. The usual tack, when confronted with a Greek-Egyptian bilingual name, was to consider one ethnicity “real” and the other “fictive.” Coussement proposes, quite rightly, to abandon this essentialist search for “true” identities, rather recognizing that both ethnic identities were constructed through social processes. Origin is only a part of ethnicity, and not always a terribly important part.

Chapter 6 is a synthetic treatment of all the data dealt with so far, including detailed explications of individual dossiers, which had not been undertaken before. I believe Coussement’s description here of ethnicity as “paradoxical” because “it can be used to create borders and to cross these at the same time” (139) is infelicitous. The apparent paradox is a result of the fact that ethnic identities are demarcated by diacritical behaviors; making the display of a certain behavior essential to ethnicity also makes it available to manipulate socially. The degree of border crossing is dependent on one’s own improvisations and on the strictness of others in the relevant groups in policing that border. Certain borders will be policed more stringently than others. This focus on ethnic ascription by others is present but sometimes submerged in Coussement’s treatment of ethnicity, which is otherwise a very sensitive tool for discussing the phenomenon of polyonomy in particular and Ptolemaic society more generally. For instance, she rejects the blanket ascription by modern interpreters of Egyptian or Greek names as indicators of Egyptian or Greek genetic identity unless proven otherwise; they are rather indicators of Egyptian or Greek status, and the significance of this status could vary from context to context.

Such an ethnic status is not to be seen bluntly as a “racial policy”; while being a Hellene gave one certain modest tax benefits at least, groups whose members most often carry Egyptian names, preeminitely the priests and the police, were also so exempted. The single identity of people on tax lists indicates some state control over who claimed to be a Hellene, but the increase of “Macedonians” and “Persians,” both associated with the military, in the second century shows that this control was not in the name of ethnic “purity.” Many elites used Greek names and the Greek language (though not exclusively), which reflects the fact that these were still ethnic statuses, even as they ceased to refer exclusively to Greek genetic origin. Outside the military, at lower levels in the administration, Egyptian names prevail, while at higher levels Greek predominates; status, not descent, was what was being expressed, as the bilingual archives express so clearly. This means that we can no longer suppose even that the royal circles were exclusively Greek simply because no Egyptian names are deployed within them.

Chapters 1 and 5 primarily provide the status quaestionis with bibliographical references to all the most important prior works. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are fairly dry presentations of data only partially digested (indeed, the data appears at the end, in the single largest part of the book, in fully raw form as a prosopographical
catalogue). This is an unfortunate, but thoroughly necessary, effect of the hitherto unparalleled thoroughness of Coussement’s research. Prior inquiries have been haphazard delvings, and a survey of the whole available corpus was sorely needed. The dryness of these chapters is more than compensated for by the reliability of the conclusions reached, whether found piecemeal through the earlier chapters or in more cohesive form in the final chapter.

Coussement refrains from programmatic exaggerations of the fluidity of Greco-Egyptian identity. She does not conclude, except in the case of two exceptionally full dossiers, to presume to speak of how individuals felt about their ethnic identity, and even then such results are tentative and are not made the basis of unwarranted generalizations. Nonetheless, her central argument, that Greek and Egyptian identities in Ptolemaic Egypt were status identities that could imply, but did not require, genetic descent, is in this book placed on a firm footing. Ptolemaic Egypt, especially in the second and first centuries BCE, was a milieu in which a great deal of ethnic boundary crossing was not only tolerated but encouraged by official institutions, at least for elites. What had only been intuited by the initial investigators of the bilingual archives is made clear here, and Coussement is to be thanked for it.


Joshua Schwartz, Bar-Ilan University

When my oldest child was in the sixth grade in a Jerusalem suburb, she brought home a test from her Jewish history class for my signature. The mark was fine, and I briefly glanced at the questions. One caught my eye: What was the connection between the conquest of the Land of Israel by Pompey and the Great Revolt and destruction of the temple in Jerusalem? Interesting question, I thought. I was not sure that I would have pushed the beginning of the process as far back as 63 BCE, as the teacher did, but the question was legitimate and seemingly required the students to think out a long-term process. Nadav Sharon, who was probably not too far beyond the sixth grade himself at that time, would have appreciated the question, as we shall see below. Then I took a closer look and changed my mind about the teacher who had mistakenly dated Pompey to 63 CE instead of 63 BCE and apparently had taught the topic based on the incorrect date. So much for critical thinking. The original question, however, with, of course, correct dating was well worth examining, and Nadav Sharon has taken up the challenge.

Nadav Sharon focuses on the relatively neglected era of 67–37 BCE, from the death of Queen Alexandra (Shelamzion) to Herod’s conquest of the Land of Israel and ascension to the throne. These thirty years, as Sharon shows, prove to be a sig-
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