

Denise Demetriou. *Negotiating Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean: The Archaic and Classical Greek Multiethnic Emporia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. 292. 20 illustrations. ISBN 978-1-107-01944-7.

In this book, Denise Demetriou explores the role of Greek emporia on the perceived culture of the Mediterranean from the 7th through the 4th centuries. Unlike settlements identified as poleis, emporia were primarily commercial endeavors, exchange outposts that sought out and stimulated local and regional trade among diverse communities around the Mediterranean. Demetriou examines the identities formulated through commonalities such as language, religion, status, and/or geography at the emporion, as they are related to moderns through literature, epigraphy, and material remains and explicitly questions exclusive notions of identity based on ethnicity.¹ The book is a comparative analysis that focuses on five exemplary emporia. The five case studies include Emporion in Iberia, Gravisca in Etruria, Naukratis in Egypt, Pistiros in Thrace, and Peiraieus in Attica.

Demetriou begins with Emporion, the eponymously named emporion that serves as a formative and formidable model (but not a template) for the other settlements presented in subsequent chapters. With quasi-legendary origins, Emporion represents a successful site that survived for centuries in Iberia, a place far-removed from Greece. As the author surmises, it was the economic viability of the emporion that perpetuated its survival. Its lengthy existence, in turn, produced a dynamic community composed of native Iberians alongside Greek and Phoenician colonists. Her vision of Emporion's hybrid culture challenges the view of Greeks and Phoenicians as a civilizing force, presenting examples of native contributions at Emporion as evidence of a shared cultural exchange.²

Demetriou spends a significant amount of time redefining Emporion as an emporion that possessed many of the qualities of a polis. Beyond its role as a trade outpost, the settlement also possessed its own political autonomy, controlled the immediate hinterland, and developed the local agricultural practices, and affected native settlement patterns. The contents of lead tablets from Emporion and the epigraphic evidence of Emporion tradesmen's presence throughout the Mediterranean convincingly communicate that the Greeks' ambitious behavior were largely motivated by commercial interests.³ However, finding that Emporion is more like a polis does not redefine the emporion and does little to qualify its importance.

Despite Demetriou's conclusion that Emporion embraced its multi-cultural population to create a hybrid community, she also insists that the various groups

¹ Demetriou is especially critical of Jonathan Hall's study, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: 1997), for his exclusive constructions of Greek ethnic identities, largely based on philology.

² Her use of Greek and Phoenicians adopting Iberian decorative elements, for example, in material objects invokes the concept of creolization. However, Demetriou neither uses the term nor does she carry the visual analysis to any significant depth. See Jane Webster's improperly maligned "Creolizing the Roman Provinces," *AJA* 105.2 (2001), 209-225.

³ This is an incredibly capitalist and colonial perspective, the kind questioned by the very postcolonial scholars noted in Demetriou's bibliography.

maintained their distinctions in certain contexts. Commercial enterprises appear to promote hybridity while language, religion, and funerary practices perpetuate distinction.⁴ On the surface, such a statement reinforces the crucial importance of the emporion as a nexus of cultural exchange.

On the emporia of Gravisca in Etruria, Demetriou concentrates on the effect of religion on a community. Unlike the far-off outpost of Emporion, Gravisca was situated in the trade-laden territory of the Etruscans. According to the epigraphic evidence presented, the Greeks at Gravisca were largely from the eastern side of the Aegean Sea. Eastern script on eastern pottery bearing eastern Greek names attest to this conclusion. What is most significant about this chapter is the analysis of religious practices in the emporion over the course of several centuries. Specifically, Demetriou states that religion serves as a mediator of cultural distinction. The followers of various cults of Aphrodite, in particular, found viable means to practice their disparate versions of the deity in the sanctuary of Gravisca. Moreover, the Etruscans also found their worship of Turan (the Etruscan love goddess) a possibility in the Greek-built structure. Demetriou concludes that, in Gravisca, the evidence of religious malleability serves as proof of a larger Mediterranean identity.

Demetriou next examines the emporion of Naukratis in Egypt in Chapter 3. Unlike Emporion or Gravisca, the Greeks in Naukratis interacted with a culture that preceded their own, an ancient and deeply entrenched political institution, and peoples possessing a well-defined identity. The author makes the most of archaeological finds and material remains in this chapter, particularly the layout of the Greek settlement and the analysis of hybrid pottery. For Demetriou, religion aids greatly in facilitating the interactions among the various Greeks at Naukratis. This theory is best relayed by the construction of a structure known as the Hellenion, a kind of catchall religious area for all the Greeks residing or passing through Naukratis. The formulation of a Pan-Hellenic identity at this important emporion would predate the traditional Persian War as the catalyst for unification.

The emporion of Pistiros in Thrace is known primarily through an inscription discovered near modern-day Vetren, Bulgaria. Unfortunately, no conclusive archaeological evidence of the settlement has yet come to light. Nevertheless, the inscription provides an in-depth view of the relationship between a Greek emporion and the local Thracian rulers. It suggests that the Thracians—even in the midst of a divisive conflict—pledged an oath to their native version of Dionysus. It would seem the trade facilitated by the emporion was important enough to override political strife among three Thracian kings. Demetriou pushes the interpretation of the Vetren inscription, together with variously related literary evidence, to tenuously conclude that Thracian law

⁴ This is later problematized in the analysis of other emporia. At every locale, Demetriou cites the possibility of language, religion, politics, and ritual alternatively playing unifying and divisive roles.

perpetuated a unified treatment of multi-ethnic communities.⁵ The Thracians treated all Greeks at Pistiros as a singular group and the Greeks purportedly dealt with the divided natives in a similar fashion. Once again, religion serves as a mediating factor among such varying degrees of difference.

In Chapter 5, the emporion of Peiraius functions as a useful contrast because it is located in Greece. Peiraius has also rendered more evidence, mostly due to its proximity to and affiliation with Athens. It nevertheless shares many of the same characteristics of its foreign counterparts. The settlement possessed a multiethnic population of Greeks and non-Greeks, functioned primarily as a trading nexus, and it retained a certain degree of autonomy—an independence granted and protected by a local authority.

The examination of Peiraius allows Demetriou to posit that the mechanics of the emporion function on a Pan-Mediterranean platform. The Athenians granted foreigners in Peiraius similar freedoms to those experienced by Greeks in the other four emporia presented. Albeit limited, these rights gave the residents of Peiraius the ability to express themselves religiously and culturally, ever with the intention of facilitating trade. Demetriou sites the adoption of the Thracian goddess Bendis in Athens as the most compelling evidence of the multi-ethnic exchange that recurred in and around Greek emporia.

Ultimately, Demetriou's book is a fascinating re-assessment of Greek settlements that have, at times, been marginalized or misunderstood. The application of certain postmodern and postcolonial perspectives certainly serves in complicating the strict modern characterization and categorization of both poleis and emporia, and her suggestion that every emporion necessarily possessed variable qualities based on its individualized circumstances is very useful. It is a view that needs to be applied in many other areas of ancient studies. But while the blurring of the boundaries between the polis and the emporion helps Demetriou argue for the importance of the latter, the lack of distinction also introduces an ambiguity that can be used to question the relevance of emporia.

In addition, the notion of the emporia as a *middle ground*—a nodus of constant negotiation and re-negotiation—requires development.⁶ Demetriou emphasizes the positive effects of the emporion, downplaying the inherent (physical and metaphysical) violence in the rupture that accompanies foreign interventions. A more substantial analysis of the hybridized material objects mentioned throughout the book would aid in

⁵ The Pseudo-Aristotle and the Pseudo-Skylax are some of the more obscure sources. Although the reliability of any ancient source is always debatable, the use of such marginalia as corroborative evidence is problematic.

⁶ Demetriou cites Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (New York: 1994), but the definition and its specific application of *his* middle ground are nebulous. It seems more directly informed by Irad Malkin's networked vision of Pan-hellenism, most recently applied in *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford: 2011).

assessing the degrees of cultural exchange at a given emporion.⁷ Sadly, the paucity of hybrid texts makes the more typical linguistic analysis of cross-cultural exchange less fruitful for defining the middle ground. Ultimately, Demetriou's desire to develop a Pan-Mediterranean vision of the Archaic and Classical world suffers from the primacy of Greek sources, a ubiquitous problem among Greco-Roman scholars looking to move beyond the centrality of Greece and Rome.

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⁷ Néstor García-Canclini's *Culturas híbridas* (México: 1989) would contribute greatly to the classicist's modernist struggle to interpret postmodern phenomena. We cannot posit hybrid cultures in the ancient world without understanding our contemporary need to judge modern exclusivity harshly.