

Ethnic Identity in Ancient Egypt

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This unreferenced article has been presented at the Egyptian Cultural Bureau and forms part of the research for my PhD thesis. The research is incomplete and I am still working on it but thought it may be interesting for some people to be able to read about the theoretical aspects of Egyptology.

Introduction

The subject of ethnicity and personal identity is often overlooked in favour of the 'juicier' topics like religion, art and battles. However the ethnic identity of the ancient Egyptian people is in fact a fundamental aspect of understanding who the Egyptians were and how their minds worked. This study investigates how the Egyptians viewed themselves and asks questions such as;

1. What it was to be Egyptian?
2. How the Egyptians classified themselves and others?

Personal identity is something that we all take for granted and rarely if ever truly examine in any depth. Most individuals feel they fall into a single category of classification – such as being British, being Egyptian, being French and so on – but what is it that classifies us into one of these categories?

Using myself as an example, what makes me British?

1. *Is it because I was born in Britain?* Straight away you would think yes – but this is Nationality and it is possible for someone to be British and yet born abroad.
2. *Is it because I speak English?* Yes again – but then again English is also the first language of the USA, Australia and New Zealand.
3. *Is it because I have an English name?* Yes but then again, the name Charlotte derives from the French although I have no French relatives, and Britons of other ethnic backgrounds maintain their cultural names but are as British as I am.
4. *Is it because of my appearance with fair hair and blue eyes?* This may identify me as British but there are many Britons of different colours and appearances so this can never be a good indication.
5. *Is it because of my culture – my religious, social, and behavioural traits that make me British?* Again yes but what of those who settle in Britain who adopt the language, culture and beliefs – yet maintain their foreign nationality?

Perhaps being British is a combination of all of these or none. Self identity is not such an easy question to answer as it appears even when trying to apply it to ourselves – now imagine the difficulty when trying to apply this to individuals from ancient Egypt. In modern times we have different methods of identifying such things as nationality, like passports and birth certificates, whereas in ancient Egypt there was nothing of the kind. In Egypt they knew the ethnic groups of each other enabling them to identify people as Egyptian, Nubian or Asiatic for example. But what criteria were they using and is it possible for us to identify this criteria and apply it for ourselves to their society?

All of the evidence we have regarding ethnicity in ancient Egypt comes from the Hellenistic period when it was essential to identify the Greeks from the Egyptians for taxation purposes. However in pharaonic Egypt this evidence is not common, perhaps because identification of ethnicity was not considered as important during this period. It is rare to find a pharaonic text that refers to the narrator as being Egyptian. Normally it is taken as read that the narrator or scribe is an Egyptian and therefore it is only necessary to identify non-Egyptians.

Even in art the Egyptians are presented in an autonomous fashion and the non-Egyptians in such a way as to really stand out from the crowd. The Egyptians represented themselves in art in the same way from the Old Kingdom through to the end of the pharaonic period. Men were presented with red-brown skin, and black hair. Egyptian women are shown with paler skin, often yellow, also with black hair. Both Egyptian men and women are primarily shown wearing pure white linen, with the only colour added with the use of sashes, large coloured collars, and headdresses.

Non-Egyptians on the other hand are shown in brighter costumes, making them stand out from the crowds of Egyptians in the artwork. Nubians were generally portrayed in art with darker skin than the Egyptians, ranging from reddish-brown to black. They have short black curly hair, which later developed into the 'Nubian' wig favoured in the New Kingdom especially in the court at Amarna. Their clothes consist of elaborate kilts made of exotic animal skins, such as panther or giraffe. They often have ostrich plumes in their hair and wear large gold ear-rings. These costumes as well as identifying them as non Egyptian also reflect the produce of the Nubian region of which the Egyptians were particularly fond.

Asiatics was a term the Egyptians used to refer to people from a wide area including the Levant, Syria and Mesopotamia. From the twenty-fifth dynasty this term may also have included Jews although they were not known in Egypt until the Persian period (after 525BC) when there was a garrison of Jewish troops residing and worshipping at Elephantine. An archive has survived from this site giving a very detailed outline of the life of the people here.

As the term covers such a wide area each specific group is identified differently in the artwork. Generic Asiatics were shown with pale skin, often yellow, with either red or black hair, often in a mushroom hair style. They are often depicted wearing brightly coloured clothes and cloaks, and the women are often shown wearing little booties – something unknown in Egyptian fashion.

One such group are the Syrians who were shown with fair skin (white or yellow), large beaky noses, long black hair, which brushed the shoulders, often adorned with coloured head bands and full black beards. Their clothes are either made of colourful, patterned wool with fringes, and full cloaks, or a three quarter length kilt with a red trim. One of these kilts was actually found in Tutankhamun's tomb.

Another group classified under the 'Asiatic' umbrella were the **Libyans** who were further sub-divided into three tribes (the Tjehenu, Meshwesh and Libu). Libya was not actually a country at the time but rather a name which covered the Bedouin tribes of the Western Desert. Each of these main tribes were displayed with distinguishing characteristics. All of the tribes are shown with fair (yellow) skin and pointed beards, and in some instances are shown with fair hair (blonde or red) and blue eyes. They generally have aquiline noses and sloping foreheads.

The Libu however are the most easily distinguished group of the Libyan tribes. They have short hair only reaching the nape of the neck, with a long side-lock and fringe. These side locks are sometimes elaborately plaited and decorated. They also have geometric tattoos on their forearms and wear long open decorated cloaks and kilts.

Even those nationalities that were not commonly seen in Egypt were presented in a very distinctive fashion in the artwork. One such group were those from Punt. Punt was referred to in the Egyptian language as 'the Gods Land' in reference to the produce that was available there. It was possible to get anything of value from the Puntites including, wood, animals, incense, gum, and ivory. People from Punt are shown with reddish brown skin and dark hair in the manner of Egyptians, although they are shown wearing unusual kilts with a central tassel and a red trim.

Another group of people who the Egyptians traded with were the Cretans, and although not common in art are shown from time to time. They are often shown carrying the produce from their country in the form of jewellery, gold, silver and lapis vessels, and jars of oil. They are presented as having similar colouring to the Egyptians again with red-brown skin and dark hair, although their hair is waist length and hangs in long curled tendrils. Their kilts are the same shape as the Puntites but highly decorated in coloured patterns. They are also shown wearing calf-length sandals, rather like the Asiatic women, something not worn in Egypt.

Although there are numerous characteristics used to present non-Egyptians in art so that they are easily distinguishable from each other there are normally only about three scenarios which are used in which they are participating. The most common, especially in the New Kingdom were the tribute scenes. On a regular basis perhaps more than annually, foreign dignitaries were expected to bring tribute to the Egyptian king in the form of produce local to their country.

Foreigners were essential to the Egyptian economy, and two important economical terms have been discovered that describe these tributary offerings. These were *inw* and *b3kw(t)*. *Inw* were gifts or tribute that went directly into the king's privy purse and *b3kw(t)* was tribute that went directly to the temple and was then redistributed to pay for military campaigns or wages.

Inw was paid on an annual basis by rulers of various places (conquered and non-conquered foreigners, and Egyptians), directly to the king. Although it did not reflect Egyptian domination, the king did not view it as a transaction between equals. There were rules as to what counted as *inw* and who qualified to give it, and had no connection with trade relationships.

The economic income known as *b3kw(t)*, was different and was delivered directly to the temple, rather than through the king's privy purse. *B3kw(t)* could be donated to a particular temple, temple department, deity, or for a particular purpose. Once it reached the temple it was redistributed to pay the military and other rations for the common people. The temples could also use this income for temple repairs, or for raw-material for statues.

Although *b3kw(t)* tribute does not require that the Egyptians have conquered the area, the redistributive system required an Egyptian temple to organise local distribution. This kind of structure appears to have been present throughout Nubia,

Byblos, and in Southern Sinai in the eighteenth dynasty. In the Ramesseid period this system extended to Palestine. This therefore suggests that there was a constant Egyptian presence in these regions both religious or military. Many tombs in the Theban necropolis depict such scenes where there are rows of foreign leaders parading before the king or tomb owner their arms laden with goods.

Another common representation is that of the king smiting his enemies to show his domination over the barbaric countries outside of the boundaries of Egypt. There are two types of smiting scenes – the most traditional being the king gripping the enemy by the hair as he prepares to club him with his mace raised over his head. The other is the king suppressing the enemy in battle, by running over them with his chariot, or physically capturing them in battle.

The bound captive motive is another common representation again showing the king's domination over foreigners, symbolic of domination over chaos. The bound captive has many forms – either as a parade of prisoners captured in battle, with their arms tethered in imaginative ways, as bound individuals beneath the feet of the king on footstools, and sandals, or as a bound oval - with the oval representative of the enclosure wall of a town, with the name of the town within it. A bound individual forms the top of the oval showing that the town has been captured and is under the control of the Egyptian king.

This domination by the Egyptian king of non-Egyptians is also reflected in the language used to describe them in the official texts. The most telling linguistic terms are those used to describe the Egyptians. They were described as *rmt* simply translated as 'people' whereas there were distinctive terms for those of non-Egyptian origins.

This inferiority is made clear in the New Kingdom Instruction of Ani who compares foreigners to animals;

“One teaches the Nubian to speak Egyptian,
The Syrian and other strangers too.
Say ‘I shall do like all beasts’
Listen and learn what they do”

This indicates that foreigners were not considered to be 'human' or Egyptian but something less.

In addition to such a blanket description of non-Egyptians there were also more specific descriptions of the individual ethnic groups. In the Middle Kingdom king Senusret describes the Nubians as “Craven Wretches” and in most traditional texts from that date onwards they were presented as cowards and “wretched” helping to define the Egyptian's good qualities of bravery and superiority.

In traditional texts Asiatics are presented as strange 'creatures' who roam the land; a land hostile and barbaric to the Egyptian mind. The Middle Kingdom Instruction of King Merikare laments their wandering Bedouin nature;

*“Lo the miserable Asiatic,
He is wretched because of the place he's in
Short of water, bare of wood
Its paths are many and painful because of mountains
He does not dwell in one place
Food propels his legs*

*He fights since the time of Horus
Not conquering, not being conquered
He does not announce the day of combat
Like a thief who darts about a group".*

Whereas Merikare here seems to have a certain amount of sympathy for the Asiatic lifestyle in comparison to the civilised lifestyle of the Egyptians the First Intermediate Period Prophecy of Neferti accuses the wandering Asiatic tribes of being opportunists who take advantage of the least weakness;

*"A strange bird will breed in the Delta Marsh
having made it's nest beside the people
The people letting it approach by default
Then perish those delightful things
The fishponds full of fish eaters
Teeming with fish and fowl
All happiness has vanished
The land is bowed down in distress
Owing to those feeders
Asiatics who roam the land
Foes have risen in the East
Asiatics have come down into Egypt"*

The Libyans were viewed in a very different manner to the Asiatics. They were greatly feared by the Egyptians and records show that if they were even spotted in the Western Desert those living in the village of Deir el Medina went on strike as they did not want to leave the safety of the village. Although they were feared, the Libyans were still presented in texts as being cowards who were in fact afraid of the Egyptians;

"We have heard it said of Egypt from the time of our father's father: 'She is one who breaks our back'. We have begged our own death by our own choice. Our very own legs have carried us to the fire"

This image however is totally belied by the bloody battles of Merenptah and Ramses III, and the Libyans later control over Egypt; showing they were not the cowards of the texts but rather commendable adversaries.

Although there were numerous other races encountered by the Egyptians (including Cretans, Puntites, Persian, Carians and even Indians in the Ptolemaic period), the races discussed so far were considered the main 'threats' to the Egyptian borders and from an early period the king was depicted overpowering them. Others were either viewed as too far away to cause a threat or were just associated with trade and tribute.

Although contact was sometimes limited between the Egyptians and other states they still referred to them in a derogatory fashion. The Egyptians, for example, believe the people of Punt '*know nothing of mankind*' (mankind being the Egyptians) showing their ignorance of civilisation.

Countries outside of the Egyptian borders were presented in texts and official images as being chaotic and inhabited by barbarians whereas Egypt was governed by the rule of Maat, and therefore was considered righteous to subjugate foreign countries as a way of maintaining order over chaos.

What it is to be Egyptian

From these images, both literary and artistically, it is clear to see what the official opinion of non-Egyptians was but it is also possible to identify what it was to be Egyptian. As we heard in reference to Punt – being ‘ignorant of Mankind’, or Egyptians and their way of life instantly made you a barbarian – living outside of the civilised world so from an Egyptian viewpoint to be Egyptian was to be superior. Therefore we need to look at the descriptions of what is “wrong” with non-Egyptians to discover what is “right” with the Egyptians.

In the Middle Kingdom story of Sinuhe, we can see by his actions when he returns to Egypt what aspect of the culture set the Asiatics apart from the Egyptians; *“Years were removed from my body. I was shaved, my hair was combed. Thus was my squalor returned to the foreign land, my dress to the sand-farers. I was clothed in fine linen; I was anointed with fine oil. I slept on a bed”*

The first half of this paragraph indicates that whilst he lived amongst the Asiatics, even though he was a tribal chief and married into a wealthy family he lived in squalor. The second half of the narrative describes the luxuries considered ‘normal’ for an Egyptian showing a distinct difference between the two cultures; consisting of washing, and being clean shaven and being adorned in clean linen.

As in the paragraph from the Instruction of king Merikara the Bedouin lifestyle of the Asiatics is commented on in Sinuhe by his joy at the prospect of sleeping in a bed, indicating that the Bedouins did not.

Examining more of the Instruction of Merikara we can learn a little more of the culture of the Egyptians and how it differs from that of the Asiatics. He states the Asiatic is *“wretched because;*

Short of water, bare of wood – whereas the Egyptians had water and wood in abundance due to the Nile and the subsidiary canals and any wood they needed not available in Egypt would be imported.

Its paths are many and painful because of mountains – the landscape of the Nile Valley on the other hand is relatively flat, and just surrounded by mountains separating the desert from the fertile land.

The Asiatic - does not dwell in one place - Food propels his legs – whereas the Egyptian is settled within a community and there is food abundant.

He fights since the time of Horus, Not conquering, not being conquered – although of an aggressive nature, the Asiatics are neither the victors or the victims but just fighting to maintain their lifestyle – fighting simply to survive whereas when the Egyptians fight there is purpose to it – either to defend or to conquer.

Another main point of difference between Egyptians and non-Egyptians is religion. The Hyksos rulers of Egypt in the second intermediate period were described by Hatshepsut in the Speos Artemdios inscription as ‘ignorant of Re’ indicating their barbaric status. If they had knowledge of Re this would be seen as a saving grace but to live without the Egyptian gods was to live without order in their lives.

These images (textual and artistic) are based on the official representations of foreigners and Egyptians which are primarily used as pro-Egyptian propaganda presenting the Egyptians as superior to the rest of the known world and is in fact no reflection on the real population dynamics of Egypt. Evidence shows that there were a number of foreigners actually living in Egypt – regardless of the official opinion on non-Egyptians.

A group of non-Egyptians living in Egypt from the Old Kingdom onwards, were the Medjay Nubians. By the beginning of XVIII dynasty they were mercenaries in the army and by the reign of Thutmosis III and Amenhotep II the Medjay Nubians policed the Theban Western Desert. In the New Kingdom their main job was to patrol the Valley of the Kings and prevent tomb robberies from occurring. Out of 35 “Chiefs of the Medjay of the tomb” that we have records of only a few have non-Egyptian names but it is believed that most of the Medjay Nubians changed their names to Egyptian ones as they became more acculturated into society. By the end of the New Kingdom the term Medjay no longer meant Nubian but changed to simply mean police force, as there were so many Nubians in the occupation for there to be a shift in language interpretation.

Another common role for foreigners within the Egyptian population was that of soldier and there is a splendid scene in the eighteenth dynasty tomb of Tjanuny (TT74) which shows a group of five Nubian mercenaries from the Egyptian army. Tjanuny was the ‘Royal Scribe’, and ‘Commander of Soldiers’ during the reign of Thutmosis IV. They are shown in the process of marching and four of them are brandishing sticks in their right hands. The fifth mercenary is holding a standard of their regiment which depicts two men wrestling. The mercenaries are all depicted in a reddish brown colour typical of representations of Egyptians. To differentiate between the mercenaries they are shown in alternate shades of darker reddish brown and a lighter shade, so there are no limbs of the same colour next to each other. They are not differentiated however, from the surrounding Egyptian military by colour, only by their distinguishing characteristics.

Their protruding stomachs could be an indication of their status showing they were leading a settled and comfortable life. They are all wearing short white linen kilts with a net over-skirt with a leather patch over the posterior which acts as limited protection. They also have the curious cat’s tails attached to their knees and also to the waistband of their kilts. They all have long, hair characteristic of their status as soldiers.

Another Nubian military group were the *Aaw* “foreign speakers”, of which the name indicates language is a clear marker of a non-Egyptian. This group were settled southern mercenaries employed in the army. A Nubian cemetery has been discovered at Gebelein. This First Intermediate Period community of Nubian mercenaries lived and were buried alongside the Egyptian population, and regardless of their Nubian origins they chose to be buried in completely Egyptian fashion. In these stelae the Nubian mercenaries are shown as Nubian with darker skin, bushy hair, white kilts with elaborate sashes, distinctive to this group of Nubian soldiers. Their wives, also represented on the stelae are generally all shown as Egyptian, with yellow skin and long linen dresses and suggests that they married local women.

Due to the close proximity of Gebelein to Nubia the Nubians were probably not so inclined to present themselves as Egyptians as the Nubian groups living further north did.

Another Nubian who is evident in the archaeological record who also adopted the Egyptian religion and burial practices was the royal fan-bearer Maiherperi.

Although only a fan-bearer he was actually in a high position and was greatly revered by the king he worked for, as he was given a burial in the Valley of the Kings in the eighteenth dynasty during the reign of either Amenhotep II or Thutmose IV. The fan bearer was in the close company of the king at all times and he accompanied him in public. It is thought that he may have acted as a personal body guard as fan-bearers were sometimes armed with axes for these public appearances.

There is no doubt that Maiherperi was a military trained man as his tomb contained two quivers with 50 arrows each made of leather embossed with Asiatic designs as well as wrist guards and in fact his name translates as "lion of the battlefield." He was also one of the earliest holders of the title "fanbearer to the king" and it was a title often held by the Viceroy of Kush himself. Maiherperi was called the "child of the nursery," normally used to designate a foreign prince who had been raised from an early age in Egypt. It could be suggested that Maiherperi was an example of a child of a Nubian vassal ruler being brought to Egypt to be raised at court and then returned to their country remaining loyal to Egypt. Maiherperi had therefore been raised in the royal court with the royal princes, and would have been a childhood friend of the king whom he served under. He was also buried with a copy of the Book of the Dead where he is represented as a Nubian wearing Egyptian clothes.

Not all of the foreigners living in Egypt were Nubian although they were more common in the south than the north. In the north, specifically in the Delta region there were large pockets of Asiatics. Although more prominent in the north they were also living at Deir el Medina in the south.

Although the Egyptians greatly feared the Libyans and there are a number of texts reporting "inactivity" of the workmen, due to the Meshwesh arriving or being seen in the area, there is no surviving record of any aggressive activity by the Meshwesh that instigated this fear. Despite this there were a number of people living in Deir el Medina with Libyan names, from different periods of the New Kingdom. One of the Libyan names was *knr*/l which was common throughout Egypt and there were thirteen people in the village with the name. One of the Libyans from Deir el Medina rose to the position of 'Chief Workman'. He was named Didi, and he was married to Taweret, who was probably Egyptian and they had two sons Amennakht and Penduau which are both Egyptian names. Penduau however had a son called *Knr*, and indicates his Libyan origins. Tomb and funerary goods of Didi identify him as a Libyan.

Intermarriages between Egyptians and Libyans seem to have been common. And even Herihor, the 'Viceroy of Nubia' under Ramses XI although of Egyptian origin may have been married to a Libyan woman. His wife Nedjmet, although having an Egyptian name, was probably Libyan as five of their sons have Libyan names.

There were also a number of Canaanites living in Egypt, especially in the Delta region, although there is even evidence of them at Deir el Medina. Here they tended to hold menial positions but in the wider context of Thebes they seemed to hold more powerful positions. For example a Canaanite, Zabku, originally was a chapel scribe who rose to Scribe of the vizier. From the 22 masculine and 10 feminine names of Canaanite origin at Deir el Medina 9 of the women were

housewives married to Egyptian workmen and the 10th was a servant for one of the gangs. 1 man was a necropolis guard, 2 men were gardeners, and the rest were workmen; so all were low level jobs.

One Asiatic however rising to a position of power and status was Kerem. He was a new-comer to Egypt as he was given the Egyptian name "Geregwaset" which means "settled in Thebes". He held the position of 'doorkeeper' at the chapel of Hathor in the Temple of Thutmosis III at Thebes. This title demonstrated loyalty to a religious cult, as well as a well paid position. Kerem also held the title of 'scribe' and is shown holding a scribal palette indicating he was literate in the Egyptian language as well as his native Asiatic tongue. This also suggests he received formal teaching of his scribal skills indicating it was not limited to Egyptians.

There were also a number of Syrians living within Egypt both as merchants and in the army. In fact there were so many Syrian merchants in Egypt that the word for 'haggle' in the Egyptian language was "to do business in the Syrian tongue" and there were in fact a large number of Asiatic words adopted into the Egyptian language.

In the army there were a number of regiments comprising of thw a term which referred to Sea Peoples, Syrians and Hittites. Artistic representations also indicate there were mixed troops of Egyptians and foreigners, meaning they lived and trained together which aided the foreigners integration into society. Syrians are recorded as being in both mixed troops and those made entirely of foreigners.

One stela belonging to a Syrian mercenary shows him with a spear upright behind him and indicates that he was in the infantry, but also that he was able to amass enough wealth to produce a stela, to own a metal straw, and a servant. He also married an Egyptian woman. Although most of the inscription is missing, his wife's name *irbw'3* could be Egyptian, and she is also shown using Egyptian artistic characteristics. The mercenary on the other hand represents himself as a Syrian and calls himself the "Syrian warrior".

Syrians at Deir el Medina however all belonged to the lower levels of society. The Syrian women were all housewives, or were married to workmen. It could be suggested that those of Syrian origin or ancestry were not given the same opportunities as the Egyptian inhabitants of Deir el Medina, or it could simply be that as most positions were passed down from father to son, and therefore any new families in the village, had to start with the lower positions until they either were promoted or married into a family with a higher position.

It is also recorded that certain household positions were filled with Syrians. For example young men from Kerke (near Kadesh in Syria) were highly favoured as butlers and Egyptian kings preferred foreign butlers as they had no connections of their own within Egypt, and therefore were dependent on the king and was a way of ensuring loyalty.

In the rest of the Theban area, Syrians held various powerful positions including scribes of the vizier, priests, and palace officials. Syrian scribes were common in the New Kingdom treasury, and a Syrian called Ben-'anath became the Chief Physician and worked in the *per ankh*. This indicates that Syrians *did* have the same opportunities as the Egyptians, and were able to gain positions of power and wealth if their abilities enabled them to do the job, and firmly suggests that opportunities were based on ability not nationality.

Although there are numerous foreigners present and identifiable in the archaeological record as living in Egypt there are probably a larger number which are no longer identifiable as they were acculturated into the Egyptian community. There was a certain process of acculturation for those entering Egypt, regardless of whether they came as Prisoners of War or voluntarily. The first part of the process was to adopt the Egyptian language, then the religion and burial practices and the final part of the process was to change their name to an Egyptian one.

The official process of acculturation has not survived and we can only make inferences about its existence. There are however indications that can help us put this process together. Inscriptions of Ramses III at Medinet Habu explain the first part of the process in regards to Prisoners of War;

“They were placed in strongholds of the mighty king, that they might hear the talk of the people following the king. He suppressed their language, so they did not go back to it”.

This indicates that one of the main concerns when Egyptianising a foreigner was the language. In order for them to be useful to and belong in the society; whether as a servant or soldier they need to understand Egyptian. This clearly involved an intensive course where they were not permitted to use their own language. The Egyptian texts often refer to foreign tongues as *iaAw* “babbling” or “braying” in the same manner as donkeys.

Some of the foreigners entering Egypt, like Kerem would have also learn to read Egyptian too enabling them a scribal career. Whilst they were learning the language the immigrants would also be learning the culture of the Egyptians, primarily from living within the community, either in the military barracks or villages. This integration within the community enabled them to inter marry with native Egyptians and this was perfectly acceptable within the community.

The way to tell an acculturated foreigner is through investigating the material culture involved in their lifestyle, and the first things to disappear were their native pottery, jewellery and funerary assemblages. Therefore a semi-acculturated foreigner may wear Egyptian clothes, and fashionable wigs but may still be adorned with their native jewellery and be using native cooking pots in the home.

The change in language, cultural practices and religious beliefs may take a little longer but are unidentifiable from the archaeological record. This means that the archaeological record may show a number of foreign artefacts such as jewellery and pottery but will not reflect the language, or beliefs of the individual. This provides a biased view of the number of foreigners in Egypt. There are however a few examples of hybrid foreigners; those who are in the process of acculturation but have not quite reached total Egyptianisation. This group of individuals are in essence in their own little ethnic group, which could be given the epithet of post-Nubian or ex-Nubian for example. An example comes from the tomb of Huy, the Viceroy of Nubia under Tutankhamun, which shows Egyptianised Nubian royalty wearing Egyptian tunics and wigs but lots of Nubian gold jewellery and cats tails hanging from their arms.

Once a foreigner has become totally Egyptianised it is impossible to tell them apart from the true Egyptians. Therefore if it impossible to tell the non-Egyptians from the Egyptians then surely they are Egyptian. The final part of the acculturation process was to adopt an Egyptian name and once this has been done they are totally unidentifiable from other Egyptians. It is often only when texts identify nationality,

(e.g. Asiatic born in Egypt, or the Nubian N), that it is possible to classify these foreign individuals.

When these titles are not used and the names are Egyptian then the foreign origins are lost. It has also been suggested that these epithets themselves do not necessarily mean anything in reference to the cultural practices, beliefs, or behaviour of the individual and may be simply a mark of familial connections as we saw with the Viceroy of Nubia Herihor, whose children had Libyan names but were raised in Egypt as Egyptians.

During the early Ramesside period at Deir el Medina, a number of foreign individuals are identified through foreign names, but the families slowly become more Egyptianised and by the twentieth dynasty the families stop using their native names and adopt Egyptian ones meaning the trail of their family tree and origins are masked.

So it is clear from this abbreviated study on ethnic identity in ancient Egypt that it is a complicated subject. Therefore to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the talk we need to look at the definition of an Egyptian. The Egyptians referred to themselves as 'people' and classified other nations as barbarians according to their differences – therefore if someone 'babbled' rather than spoke the Egyptian language, lived 'in ignorance of Ra' or did not follow the Egyptian religion, and were identifiable by their unusual costumes they were considered to be non-Egyptians and were categorised as such.

However if you spoke Egyptian, followed Egyptian fashions and culture and adopted the religious beliefs and burial practices of the Egyptians then you would be classified as 'ꜣꜣꜣ' – a person, or an Egyptian. As a number of foreigners, who changed their names to native Egyptian names are totally indistinguishable from the rest of the Egyptian population then they must also have been considered Egyptian by the Egyptian community – entitling them to the same opportunities, and status as an Egyptian born individual.

Therefore this indicates that rather than being xenophobic as the propaganda texts would suggest the Egyptians were in fact very accepting to any foreign immigrants providing they were prepared to become "Egyptian". Assimilation was not instantaneous, and the "programme" of integration would have been encouraged. Problems between native Egyptians and foreign cultures within the community only occurred when a group maintained their ethnic identity and separateness from Egyptian society. So for example the Jewish community on Elephantine sacrificed lambs which offended the Egyptian Khnum worshippers there and in 410 BC Egyptian priests demanded that the temple of Yahweh be destroyed. Despite this incident, Persian conquerors, Greeks and other Jews all showed signs of Egyptianisation, mainly due to wide-spread intermarriage by this time.

The willingness of the Egyptians to accept anyone into their society is reflected by the adoption of foreign terminology into the Egyptian language. For example the Medjay Nubians were so common in the military that the term soon came to mean "police force" with no ethnic connotations and the word for haggling was 'to do business in the Syrian tongue' as the Syrians in Egypt were often in the roles of merchants. This easy acceptance into society of anyone willing to accept Egypt as their home and to adopt their customs as their own is something that sets Egypt apart from other nations and makes ancient Egypt one of the earliest truly multi-cultural societies.