MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE ANCIENT WORLD: DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY IN THE FIRST CONTACTS BETWEEN GREEKS AND EGYPTIANS

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Introduction

When keeping to the research of new strategies aiming at a multicultural education capable to fit contemporary needs[1], it is useful to analyze examples from Mediterranean Antiquity that can be compared to current problems and offer a challenging key to interpretation and comparison[2]. A diachronic perspective is indeed helpful in better understanding the dynamics of cultural phenomena, and past civilizations assume an exemplary value which is often enriched by the chance of observing the results of dynamics that can be compared to modern trends.

This paper aims at presenting a particular case related to one of the ancient world's most multicultural countries, Egypt, and discussing it as a source of issues about education and integration between different languages and cultures. The topic of (multicultural) education in ancient Egypt, especially in the Greco-roman period, is well studied[3], but the case presented here seems to have many points of contacts with a modern situation (an educational programme managed by the United States just before the Second World War) and, therefore, it will be fascinating to compare the two events in order to stress similarities and differences, and to discuss possible scenarios for a decidedly "multicultural" education.

The Ancient Case: Psammetichus I and the Greek Mercenaries

Ancient Egypt used to have a specific vocation for multicultural encounters: its linguistic experience too arose from a concrete demand of relationships with different people[4], such as Greeks. It seems that the first Greeks came to Egypt seeking a fortune as merchants and/or mercenaries[5], in the first half of the 7th century BC, in an early stage of the reign (664-610 BC) of Psammetichus I, founder of the so-called XXVI Dynasty (664-525 BC)[6]. From the end of Assyrian domination up to that time, Egypt was divided into different reigns, but Psammetichus managed to conquer and, therefore, to unify the country again, taking advantage of the efficient military techniques of the new "immigrants"[7].

He decided to reward the Greeks for having helped him and, among various grants (such as stable settlements in the Egyptian *chōra*), according to Herodotus (II 154, 2), he decided to send some Egyptian children to the Greeks so that the former could learn the latter's language and, later on, become the interpreters between the two people:

> "To Ionians and Carians, who had helped him, Psammetichos gave plots of lands on which they could settle; the plots were separated by the Nile, and he named these properties 'The Camps'. In addition, he gave them all the other rewards he had ever promised to them. Moreover, he entrusted Egyptian children to them to be taught the Greek language, and it is from these Egyptians who thus learned the [Greek] language that the present-day interpreters in Egypt are descended." (Herodotus II 154, 1-2)[8]

Psammetichus' position is rather unusual, considering the general cultural closure of ancient Egypt (which we can still find in later time, in the clear controversy against the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of Greek language as a mean for translating Egyptian texts (Assmann 2001: 465-466). Indeed, he seems to subvert the traditional Egyptian behaviour towards strangers, whose languages were known and tolerated (and sometimes used for international diplomacy), but assimilated into the local frame[9]; in particular, it is worth noting that, during pharaonic times, foreign children (almost from Nubia) called *ḥrdw n k3p* ('the children of the [royal] nursery') were brought up at the royal palace so that they could learn Egyptian and

> "[…] as Egyptized people, they go back to the countries in which they will exercise their authority: in one word, Egyptians prepare homoglot

interlocutors within the same circle to which they officially correspond in a foreign language." (Donadoni 1980: 8)

Furthermore, stranger mercenaries (and prisoners) were forced to forget their own languages and to learn Egyptian, as it is reported on a stela of the age of Ramses III:

> "Once they were brought back to Egypt, they were put into a fortress…
> They heard the Egyptian speech (*mdw.t*) while accompanying the king; he
> let their speech be dropped; he reversed their tongues." (Borghouts 2000:
> 11-12, revised against the Italian translation by Donadoni 1980: 8)

Therefore, Psammetichus can be considered as a sort of forerunner of later times, when Egyptians – now governed by a Greek-speaking and Greek-thinking ruling class – would be forced to learn the "others' language" in order to communicate (Clarysse 1993 and, in general on Greek education, Cribiore 2001), while Greeks learning Egyptian were exceedingly rare, mostly urged by economical matters[10]; in other words, it was

> "[…] an event of great significance, since it was the starting point of
> Greek-Egyptian bilingualism, which will be one of the most interesting
> topics after Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt and the establishment
> of a ruling class of Greek language and culture, whose linguistic and
> cultural interaction with the Egyptian one is a very studied but not still
> completely solved problem of the Hellenistic and Roman ages." (Pernigotti
> 1999: 30)

What makes the episode of Psammetichus so singular, even – in a sense – a milestone in the history of multicultural education is the voluntariness of the decision?

> "The settlement of the Greeks in Egypt was clearly depending on a
> strategic plan by Psammetichus I, as it is shown by the fact that the
> Egyptian king also made sure to train a group of interpreters in order to
> make connections between the newcomers and the Egyptians easier."
> (Pernigotti 1999: 29)

The Egyptians were not urged by contingent needs; it was a deliberate choice by the Pharaoh, who (fore)saw the importance of knowing the "immigrants' language" in order to establish profitable relationships with them (this can be clearly argued from Diodorus of Sicily, who states that, from then on, Psammetichus used to rely on the Greeks for government issues and to maintain a large number of mercenary troops (Diodorus of

Sicily I 67, 1-2[11]). Of course, he could not foresee that Greeks would become the new rulers of Egypt, yet his choice is surprising, meant to *learn* the foreign language rather than *teach* his own – which was, at that time, the dominant one.

Education can mean either a form of (social / cultural) command[12] or a form of integration[13]; the latter potential would never be exploited in Greco-roman Egypt[14], while the "openness" of earlier times was clearly a means, not for integration but social, political, cultural and linguistic domination. Psammetichus' choice appears quite clear: he aimed at both (a) controlling a useful but also threatening group of powerful "immigrants" by means of the knowledge of their language (the understanding of what they said), and (b) saving the traditional closure of Egyptian language (and culture), meanwhile preserving its power and strength. In fact, while the influence of Greek would be always strong during the history of Egypt, the original Egyptian cultural tradition, constantly withstanding adaptations and contaminations, apart from apparent syncretism (Kanazawa 1989), kept itself powerful and independent (but only culture did so).

Therefore, a seeming act of intercultural integration through education (learning the "others' language") was, in fact, an act of supremacy and – in a manner of speaking – "nationalism," rapidly overthrown by succeeding events. Let us turn now to the modern side of the question, analyzing another unique example of "multicultural education" which may be studied in parallel with the ancient case.

The Modern Case: *The U.S. Army Specialised Training Program in Foreign Languages*

In order to operate in the outcoming Second World War, the United States Government decided to start a programme of intensive language training since, in that country, the period between the two wars had been characterized by cultural and linguistic isolationism. The so-called *Army Specialised Training Program* (*ASTP*) *in Foreign Languages* (or *Foreign Area and Language Program – FALP*) (Nugent 2007: 12ff.) was established in December 1942 as a part of a more general project (*Civil Affairs Training School – CATS*) aiming at ensuring technical and professional skills for men involved in the prosecution of the war:

> "[...] [d]uring W[orld]W[ar] II, the US Army did not seek knowledge about global processes that threatened to stir up potentially dangerous peoples living along the external frontiers and the internal lines of fracture

of an expanding capitalist order. Instead, the military was in need of a single, overarching conceptual framework that would facilitate direct territorial administration of diverse peoples living in scattered, war-torn areas. [...] The military sought a form of knowledge that would assist in its efforts to govern these areas – that would allow its soldier administrators to know the territories for which they would be responsible *before* they actually began governing them, and that would make it possible for these soldier-administrators to deepen their understanding as they governed. In other words, military planners sought of a form of knowledge that would equip soldiers with conceptual armature they could use to effect the day-to-day administration of occupied territories (Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific)." (Nugent 2007: 7)

The primary aim of the experimental project was "to develop in trainees 'a command of the colloquial *spoken* form of the language'" (Velleman 2008: 388):

"[...] [t]his command includes the ability to speak the language fluently, accurately, and with an acceptable approximation to a native pronunciation. It also implies that the student will have a practically perfect auditory comprehension of the language as spoken by natives." (Agard *et al.* 1944, in Velleman 2008: 388)

Such languages were mainly less-commonly taught idioms like Arabic, Bengali, Burmese, Chinese, Finnish, Greek, Hindi, Japanese, Malay, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Swedish, and Turkish, but also Italian, Spanish, French (Velleman 2008: 387ff.). The great importance given to speaking abilities led to combine, in the teaching practice, a "linguist scientist" and a "native-speaking 'guide'"[15], a method that was very criticized by academics because, while "[t]he former lacked the pedagogical knowledge of the skilled language teacher [...] the latter was not a member of the profession, frequently misunderstood his or her role, and in many cases was an 'illiterate' layperson." (*ibidem*: 393ff.)

Some Concluding Reflections

The *ASPT* lasted for only one year, and was officially closed in February 1944, chiefly because of the lack of men in field operations: "the ASTP served no need recognized as immediate by most elements in the Army." (Palmer 2003, in Velleman 2008: 402) We do not know how long Psammetichus' experiment did last but, apart from evident differences[16], we are entitled to draw attention to some interesting similarities between the two episodes.

In both cases, in a context of cultural and linguistic closure and the urge of military needs – basically for the control of stranger populations[17], they established a language educational experiment that was centred on the *learning* of the "others' language," by means of the employment of "native speakers," rather than of foreign "scouts" in field operations, as used to happen in ancient pharaonic times, when people called *i'3w.w* "interpreters" or "foreigners" are attested, probably

> "Egyptianized foreigners who were used not only as interpreters but as scouts, spies, agents, couriers and foremen or mercenaries." (Fischer 1964, in Donadoni 1980: 4)[18]

Linguistic experimentation was not new to Psammetichus[19], who was credited with having tried to discover the primordial language by isolating newborn children (Sułek 1989); his further endeavour has some points in common with the theories of Leonard Bloomfield, one of the founders of American structural linguistics and one of the inspirers of the *ASTP*:

> "'Listening and speaking go first' is the essence of [Bloomfield's] language teaching theories, which is embodied in the following two aspects: on the one hand, the first aspect of the teaching ideas is informant, on the other hand, it is overlearning. The former is also called native speaker, because Bloomfield considered that the language learners should get a great number of opportunities to listen and imitate speech from native speakers as possible as they can and then should obtain the nearly standard and native pronunciations and speech. When the language learners imitate the speech of native speakers, native people could check immediately whether the language learners' pronunciations reach the standard and native level, at least those could be accepted by natives. Native speakers must correct suddenly their pronunciations if the learners' pronunciation does not up to the standard. The latter is also called over practice; Bloomfield considered that learning a language is not only to learn language knowledge, but also to practice the language." (*A Survey on Bloomfield's Structural Linguistics in Foreign Language Instruction.* Online: http://www.p-papers.com/tag/astp)

The comparison between the ancient linguistic learning experiment and the modern one leads us to some interesting remarks. In both cases, the context is a long period in which what we can call "linguistic education" was devoted to *teaching* the "dominant" language (Egyptian and American English) to people speaking different idioms but living in the "dominant" speakers' country; this corresponds, in both cases, to a linguistic (and cultural, generally speaking) isolationism. Specific (military) needs led to

a significant shift in "educational" methods, causing the experimentation of a new model based on *learning* the "others' languages." U.S. *ASPT* was limited in time and purposes, but we can take Psammetichus' project as a litmus paper to analyze the aftermath of such a *learning* model. Greeks became the new rulers of Egypt: probably we will never know how much the creation and isolation of Greek specific settlements, not assimilated into Egyptian social tissue, affected later Greek entrance in the country, but the risk of creating isolated, non-integrated groups is clear and real[20]. On the other hand, even an educational policy aiming at *teaching* the "dominant" language is destined to create a "vertical assimilation," and by no means a true integration.

The results of this enquiry are evident: an educational model based on the *learning* of the "others' language" is methodologically and conceptually limited (so much that the *ASPT* programme had a very short life and many criticisms), but nevertheless it can help to think about the possible scenarios of integrations, since a possible combination of both moments (*teaching* and *learning*) seems to be a positive answer for the question of a truly "multicultural" education.

Notes

1. For a general introduction to multicultural education development and issues see Banks: "A major goal of multicultural education, as stated by specialists in the field, is to reform the school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality. […] Multicultural education theorists are increasingly interested in how the interaction of race, class, and gender influences education […]. However, the emphasis that different theorists give to each of these variables varies considerably." (Banks 1993: 3-4)
2. For a very general overview about antiquity as a key to interpret modern linguistic issues see Reggiani (2012).
3. Cribiore (2001: 15ff.) and Thompson (2007), with further bibliography.
4. Donadoni (1980: 3); for multilingualism in ancient Egypt see Bernini & Reggiani (2011: 50ff.), with further references. A recent volume on this subject is Papaconstantinou (2010).
5. Bettalli (1995: 54ff.), Assmann (2001: 405-406), Caporali (2012: 120-126). For this phenomenon in the more general area of Eastern Mediterranean, see Luraghi (2006); in general, for Egypt, see Laronde (1995). It is not relevant here whether the Greek mercenaries were sent to Egypt by king Gyges of Lydia with the geopolitical aim of weakening Persian domination (Braun 1982: 36-37, Bettalli 1995: 58-59, Pernigotti 1999: 26-27, Caporali 2012: 117-118) or not.
6. See Pernigotti (1999: 21-24). It was not the very first time that Egypt came in contact with Greek people since we have evidence of contacts as far as from

the Bronze Age, but from the 7th century such contacts became much less transient, marking the beginning of a long-term (and closer and closer) relationship between the two people (Braun 1982: 32-35). On Psammetichus I, see Lloyd (1982).

7. The Herodotean tale about the prophecy speaking of the "bronze men appearing from the sea" who would help the king to defeat his enemies is well-known: and when "some Ionians and Carians who had sailed out for plunder were driven off course to Egypt and forced to land there […], they put on bronze body armour, so that an Egyptian who had never seen men armed in bronze delivered a message to Psammetich[u]s […] that bronze men had come from the sea." (Herodotus II 152, 3-4; transl. by A. L. Purvis, from Strassler 2009: 189). It was thanks to their hoplitic bronze armours and tactics that the Greeks managed to help the king in such an effective way (Braun 1982: 35-36, James 1991: 708ff., Bettalli 1995: 53-73, Pernigotti 1999: 21ff., Caporali 2012: 116-120 with reference to different traditions about the arrival of the Greeks in Egypt).

8. Τοῖcι δὲ Ἴωcι καὶ τοῖcι Καρcὶ τοῖcι cυγκατεργαcαμένοιcι αὐτῷ ὁ Ψαμμήτιχοc διδοῖ χώρους ἐνοικῆcαι ἀντίους ἀλλήλων, τοῦ Νείλου τὸ μέcον ἔχοντος, τοῖcι οὐνόματα ἐτέθη cτρατόπεδα. Τούτους τε δή cφι τοὺς χώρους διδοῖ καὶ τἆλλα τὰ ὑπέcχετο πάντα ἀπέδωκε. Καὶ δὴ καὶ παῖδας παρέβαλε αὐτοῖcι Αἰγυπτίους τὴν Ἑλλάδα γλῶccαν ἐκδιδάcκεcθαι· ἀπὸ δὲ τούτων ἐκμαθόντων τὴν γλῶccαν οἱ νῦν ἑρμηνέες ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ γεγόναcι (Herodotus II 154, 1-2). The passage is cited, but not much commented, in the main reference works about Herodotus (Lloyd 1993: 137, Murray & Moreno 2007: 355, Donadoni 1980: 1, Caporali 2012: 45-46).

9. "[L]'ideale politico è quello dell'assimilazione" ["the political ideal is that of assimilation"] (Donadoni 1980: 9, and *passim* for more references).

10. A letter written on papyrus by a mother to his son in the 2nd century BC clearly shows how studying Egyptian language was, for a Greek, a purely economic matter: πυνθανομένη μανθά|νειν cε Αἰγύπτια | γράμματα cυνεχάρην cοι | καὶ ἐμαυτῆι, ὅτι | νῦν [νῦγ *pap.*] γε παραγενόμενος | εἰς τὴν πόλιν διδάξεις | παρὰ Φαλου [...] ῆτι ἰατροκλύcτηι ⸍ τὰ | παιδάρια καὶ ἕξεις | ἐφόδιον εἰς τὸ γῆραc ("on hearing that you are learning Egyptian letters I rejoiced you and myself, because now you may go [to] the city and teach the servants at the house of Phalou [...] es, the doctor who uses washes; and you will have spending money for your old age"). The text was published as *UPZ* I 148 and then republished as *Chrest. Wilck.* 136 (for papyrological abbreviations see Sosin *et al.*'s *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets* at http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html) (Rémondon 1964, Bagnall 1995: 27, Sosin & Manning 2003: 208, Bernini & Reggiani 2011: 51 n. 27 and 54-55).

11. It is worth noting that the mercenary Greeks referred to themselves as *alloglossoi* 'foreigners' as 'those of alien speech' (Caporali 2012: 129). For Greeks in Egypt after Psammetichus I see Caporali (*ibidem*: 130ff.).

12. For some modern considerations about this matter see Payne 1927, Giroux 1980, and the cases analyzed by Finch 1984, Bell & Stevenson 2006: esp. 139ff., Bonnie 2011).

13. Integration is, of course, the main purpose of multicultural education, to which the present volume is devoted. For more contemporary perspectives on this theme see Stromquist & Monkman (2000).

14. Egyptian schools and Greek schools would always be separated and independent from each other (Maehler 1983, Tassier 1992, and Thompson 1992, with further bibliography).

15. "A representative of the language relevant to the area under consideration was considered essential to the group [*i.e.* the planning group or 'area committee' established for each culture/language area to be taught]." (Nugent 2007: 20)

16. The most important difference between the two cases is that Psammetichus intended to control an "immigrant" group resident in his country, while *FALP/ASPT* was intended to handle "military government in occupied [foreign] territories" (Matthew 1947, in Nugent 2007: 22).

17. "Originally conceived of as military police, FALP personnel were to be trained in police procedure as well as in the cultural characteristics and communicative practices of subject populations [becoming] a kind of cultural police force"; moreover, "[t]he architects of military government believed that it was essential to familiarize their soldier-administrators with the linguistic conventions and the cultural patterns that characterized specific peoples and areas – in the belief that this knowledge would prove invaluable in efforts to establish sound, stable, military government" (Nugent 2007: 12-13).

18. Fischer 1964 (in Donadoni 1980: 4); for the interpretation of the word as "foreigners" (not "interpreters") see Goedicke (1960, 1966), and in general Helck & Otto (1975: 1116). It seems that the word (together with its synonym *3''*) bears the same meaning as Greek *barbaros* 'babbler' (Borghouts 2000: 10-11).

19. To his reign are dated the oldest known texts written in the new Demotic script: the establishing of his power over all Egypt favoured the spread of such new writing throughout the whole country (Depauw 1997: 22, with further references), and that "was crucial in establishing greater administrative uniformity" (Manning 2010: 22, 24), though we are not able to say whether it happened under or beyond Psammetichus' control. The idea of a precise linguistic policy can be found in Capasso & Pernigotti (1997: 80-82).

20. Relationships between Egypt and Greece became closer and closer after the reign of Psammetichus: his successors carried on his policy concerning Greek mercenaries (Braun 1982: 37ff., and part. 49-52, Bettalli 1995: 61ff., Caporali 2012: 130ff., in particular, "Amasis [...] used Greek mercenaries to protect himself against native Egyptian reaction to his dynasty's dependence on and favouritism of non-Egyptians – a vicious political circle from which there was no escape" (Young 1992: 48)), who established a strong, mixed community and no doubt contributed towards spreading Greek culture in Egypt (Caporali 2012: 153). Greek mercenaries played a certain role also during Persian conquest and domination of Egypt (*ibidem*: 162-183, Mallet 1922), and it is

likely that Alexander's arrival in Egypt was made easier thanks also to the Greek culture spread in Egypt with such contacts (Manning 2010: 22: "[...] Greek presence cannot have been without impact"), not only to Egyptians' hate towards Persians ("the native population were clearly more than happy to see the back of the Persians and acquiesced in the change of masters without opposition" (Lloyd 2011: 86)). We know of a Macedonian renegade, Amyntas, who arrived in Egypt in 333 BC with 3000 mercenaries, and succeeded in getting control of the city of Pelusium (in the Nile's Delta) and raising an Egyptian rebellion, temporarily defeating Persian troops (Diodorus of Sicily XVII 48); some other revolts "were probably the result of Greek involvement with certain elite families in Egypt, who made for good bedfellows in opposition to Persian rule" (Manning 2010: 26); and Greek garrisons were placed by Alexander in the strategic cities of Memphis, were Greek mercenaries had already been settled by Amasis, and, again, Pelusium (Lloyd 2011: 87). It is often said that the Egyptians' acceptance of Greek rule was due to Alexander's and the Ptolemy's' respectful attention for local traditions and structures (Lloyd 2011: 86ff.), but of course Egyptians could not know it at the beginning of the conquest: "the Macedonian takeover of Egypt, and the subsequent formation of the Ptolemaic dynasty, was only the culmination of past centuries of direct and sustained Greek engagement with Egypt" (Manning 2010: 27-28).

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