The barbarian repertoire in Greek culture*

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THE STUDY of the interaction between ancient Greek and other ancient cultures has been long dominated by two diametrically opposed approaches. In the last few decades numerous scholars have tried to identify elements, motifs, stories, similes and images, which Greek authors and artists adopted and adapted from Near Eastern and other non-Greek cultures.[1] Side by side with this scholarly approach though there also exists a voluminous scholarship which examines how Greek literature and art exemplify polarity and alterity towards other cultures; from Herodotus to Athenian tragedy and Greek art, scholars have explored how non-Greeks and their cultures are depicted as despotic, luxurious and effeminate, and how they provide the polar Other which serves to define Greek identity.[2] It is rather unfortunate that these diametrically opposed approaches exist side by side without any consistent effort to combine them or explain their contradictory coexistence. Even more, while there is a grain of truth in both approaches, both have failed to capture the peculiar nature of Greek culture and its interaction with other cultures. Instead of focusing on either exchange or polarity, this article argues that we can re-orient the discussion and arrive at a better and more comprehensive understanding of intercultural interaction in antiquity, if we pose a rather different question: while there is hardly any culture which is not affected by the exchange of practices, ideas and

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1 Burkert 1992, 2004; West 1997; López-Ruiz 2010.
2 Hartog 1988; Hall 1989; Castriota 1992; Isaac 2004.

techniques, or which does not construct an image of the Other, how do different cultures reflect on this process? Do foreign objects, techniques, ideas and practices become a means of relating and referring to other cultures, or do cultures eschew such a process?

We could start by drawing a distinction between two extremes in the history of intercultural interactions. At the one extreme we can place cultures which construct and develop their literature, art and other cultural practices in explicit reference to other cultures. This reference can take a variety of forms. It can take the form of 'bilingualism', in which authors, artists, intellectuals and even a significant proportion of the population learn to operate in more than one written, spoken, visual or expressive languages.[3] Educated Babylonians learned to read and write in both Babylonian and Sumerian;[4] during the Late Bronze Age scribes and intellectuals were conversant with a variety of native scripts and literatures as well as the Babylonian cuneiform script and its literature;[5] during the first millennium[6] the Assyrians added Aramaic to the existing repertory,[7] and there is hardly a need to stress the bilingualism of Romans in both Latin and Greek.[8] Phoenician artists could employ both Egyptian and Greek styles and iconographies, and the case of Roman artists is even more impressive: they could produce free-standing sculpture in Greek style, historical and religious reliefs in Roman style, and villa paintings in Egyptian style and iconography.[9] A second means of reference was through translations. The Babylonian Gilgamesh epic is the best known example of a literary work translated and adapted in various languages and scripts in the Eastern Mediterranean,[10] while Latin literature commenced with the translation of Homer into Latin by Livius Andronicus.[11] Finally, reference can be expressed in locat-

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3 Briquel-Chatonnet 1996.
4 Hallo 1996, 154-68.
5 Carr 2005, 17-61; van de Mieroop 2007, 192-205; Ehrlich 2009.
6 All dates are BCE, unless otherwise indicated.
7 Millard 1983.
8 Adams 2003; Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 38-70.
9   Hölscher 2004; Elsner 2006.
10 Tigay 1982.
11 Gruen 1990, 79-123; 1992.

ing a culture's imaginary universe in relationship to that of another. An obvious form of this is intertextuality, in which texts from one culture presuppose and refer to texts from another; Latin texts such as those of Virgil or Statius are in a direct intertextual relationship with the Greek text of Homer. But it can also take more diverse forms; Assyrian mythology is essentially an adaptation of the Babylonian mythical universe, while Etruscan mythology is unthinkable without the Greek.[12]

At the other extreme we find cultures defined by self-reference in their literature, art and other cultural practices. It is not that these cultures are not shaped by their interactions with other cultures; it is rather that they find means of eschewing the explicit recognition of these interactions and develop a self-referential mode of expression. Perhaps the best example in the ancient Mediterranean is that of Egypt; Egyptian art and literature largely lack 'bilingualism', translations and reference to the mental universe, texts or art of other cultures. Instead they develop complex modes of self-referentiality, in which reference is almost exclusively restricted to previous periods, styles, texts and monuments of Egyptian history.[13]

At first glance, Greek culture appears close to the self-referential model of Egypt. 'Bilingualism' was largely unknown; Greek authors like Aeschylus and Euripides did not operate in any language apart from Greek, and Greek artists like Polycleitus did not operate in any style and iconography apart from the Greek ones. Translations were effectively unheard of;[14] there was no intertextuality with non-Greek texts, and one will search in vain for a Greek story putting together e.g. Heracles and Isis.

A comparison with the Hittites would clarify the above point. A series of texts translated and recorded in the Hittite language of the second millennium are known as the Kumarbi cycle and deal with the topic of divine succession. These myths describe how Anu is confronted by his cup-bearer Kumarbi and flees to heaven, but has

12 De Grummond 2006.
13 Assmann 2002.
14 Most 2003.

his genitals bitten off and swallowed by Kumarbi. Kumarbi becomes divine ruler, but has three fearful deities inside his body as a result of swallowing Anu's genitals. His attempt to prevent them from coming out fails after swallowing a rock, and the weather god Teshub emerges out of Kumarbi's body and eventually succeeds him as ruler.[15] It is obvious that a version of this myth has been transmitted through intercultural communication and further adapted in the succession myth narrated in Hesiod's *Theogony*, where Cronus castrates Uranus, swallows his children and is finally defeated by his son, the weather god Zeus.[16] But the deities in the Kumarbi cycle have Hurrian names and were Hurrian deities, while these myths also include Mesopotamian deities, like Anu and Ea. Thus, these Hittite texts make direct reference to the imaginary world of the Hurrians and the Babylonians. Motifs from the Kumarbi cycle were undoubtedly adopted in the Greek theogonic myths. But they were adopted in such a way that there is no reference to Hittite, Hurrian or Babylonian deities; the motifs have been completely assimilated and refer only to Greek deities. This shows eloquently the self-referential nature of Greek culture.

Nevertheless, Greek culture should be situated in between the two poles we have delineated above, because it developed two peculiar cultural strategies of enormous consequences. The first one is that of Greek myth. What is peculiar about Greek myth is its focus on heroes, a category that straddles the division between gods and mortals. While stories about gods are effectively universal, the development of heroic mythologies is much more circumscribed in world history. In the ancient Mediterranean and the Near East, heroic narratives are either unknown or of secondary importance in the mythologies of Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Levant, of which sufficient evidence survives to allow us to draw any conclusions.[17] It is two particular features of Greek heroic mythology which are important for our topic: its location in space and its dominance over Greek culture.

15 Hoffner 1998, 40-77.
16 Rutherford 2009; López-Ruiz 2010, 84-129.
17 Kirk 1970; 1974.

Greek myth was situated in space in a very different way from the myths of Mesopotamia or Egypt, where imaginary space was either unimportant, or restricted to the area occupied by that culture. This meant an unparalleled potential expansion of Greek imaginary space; the events of Greek myth could be situated pretty much anywhere in either real or imaginary geography. Greek myths could be located with the Achaeans in Troy, with Bellerophon in Lycia, with the Argonauts in Colchis, or in the imaginary lands of the Phaeacians and the Ethiopians. Equally important, Greek myths included as an organic element foreign heroes: Trojans like Hector and Aeneas, Lycians like Glaucus and Sarpedon, Thracians like Rhesus, as well as peoples like the Hyperboreans and the Amazons. It is important to stress that these foreign heroes existed only in Greek myth and not in the native mythic traditions of Lycia or Thrace.[18] Greek myth was a relatively closed system: it rarely incorporated foreign deities and myths in the way that the Etruscans depicted Greek deities alongside Etruscan ones, or the Romans adapted the heroes of a Greek myth in their own myth of origins. Nevertheless, the fact that Greek myth reserved an important role for foreign heroes, even if these heroes existed only in the Greek mythic tradition, is a factor of crucial importance that created a wide range of opportunities.

The other feature concerns the dominance of myth in Greek cultural life.[19] Epic, lyric and tragedy were largely dominated by plots and themes derived from Greek myth; from the seventh century onwards Greek art was to a very large extent geared towards the depiction of myth, whether in vase-painting or in sculpture.[20] What in other cultures existed as distinct and separate literary genres, in Greek culture was appropriated and incorporated within mythical narratives. One need only mention three genres: folktales, novellas and wisdom literature. All three genres were important in the cultures of the Ancient Near East; and all three genres are effectively absent from the Greek literature of the archaic and classical periods, with

18 Erskine 2005.
19 Buxton 1994.
20 Giuliani 2003.

the partial exception of Hesiod's *Works and Days*.[21] The reason these genres are effectively absent from Greek literature is that they have been incorporated within Greek mythical narratives, as is already evident in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The encounter between Odysseus and the Cyclops is a universal folktale which has been incorporated into a mythical narrative about a named hero, taking place at a specific time and a specific place.[22] Odysseus' lying tales about his exploits in Egypt are novellas comparable to that of the Egyptian *Sinuhe*;[23] but while *Sinuhe* is an independent novella, the tales of Odysseus have been incorporated into a mythic narrative.[24] This dominant role of myth in Greek literature is one of the major reasons for the lack of Greek translations and the lack of intertextuality with non-Greek texts. Translating texts would have been more likely if there had existed equivalent literary genres in Greek literature; but the incorporation of the equivalent genres within Greek genres based on mythical narrative made it less desirable and less feasible.

The second peculiar aspect of Greek culture is the way it relates to cross-cultural interactions and encounters. There should be no doubt that Persians, Thracians or Babylonians participated in intercultural communication and reflected on it as much as the Greeks.[25] This was a primarily oral universe in which countless stories, customs, information and ideas endlessly circulated. The Greek peculiarity was the textualisation of this oral universe through the development of literary genres which were based on the encounters and interactions of the four parallel worlds and the processes of intercultural communication. Sailors from all societies developed stories and a stock of information which was crucial for navigating in foreign lands and waters; what was peculiar about the Greeks was the textualisation of this information and stories into a literary genre, the *Periploi*, descriptions of foreign lands from a coastal perspective, which further developed into what we would describe as anthropology.

21 López-Ruiz 2010, 48-129.
22 Hansen 2002, 289-301.
23 Simpson 2003, 54-66.
24 Hölscher 1988.
25 Skinner 2012.

Stories about mercenary soldiers abroad must have been common among Carian and Jewish mercenaries in Egypt; Greek authors textualised such stories in a variety of literary genres. We find such stories in the historical works of Herodotus and Ctesias; Xenophon used his own experience as a mercenary for a Persian pretender in order to compose the large-scale narrative of the *Anabasis*. Stories and discussions about the great kings and their acts circulated among all Mediterranean societies; the Greeks used such stories to create new literary genres such as political theory, moral philosophy, or manuals for political and economic administration, as we shall see below.

Greek culture was therefore self-referential in that it lacked 'bilingualism', translations, or intertextuality; but the peculiar nature of Greek myth and the textualisation of intercultural encounters provided two potent means through which foreign cultures fundamentally shaped Greek culture. In combination, these two phenomena had a powerful effect: they created an extremely diverse and complex barbarian repertoire. Non-Greeks and their cultures were not just strangers, enemies or Others, even though these images accounted for a significant part of the barbarian repertoire. Non-Greeks and their cultures could also be depicted as utopian societies, whether because of their primitive simplicity (Scythia), archaic stability (Egypt), or sophisticated administration (Persia); they could provide models through which the Greeks could debate what an ideal society should be like, with a view to making practical reforms in politics, law, economics, education or warfare, as well as serve as means of debating identity and morality. Foreign cultures could be depicted as possessors of alien wisdom, the original source of Greek philosophical, religious and scientific ideas and discoveries.

Identities and moralities

One major use of the barbarian repertoire was the construction of polarised representations of non-Greeks as an incarnation of everything that was different and opposed to the values and customs that the Greeks held dear; these representations could often reach

the point of being xenophobic and jingoistic and even similar, in some ways, to modern racism.[26] But in doing this the Greeks were merely unexceptional.[27] An examination of Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature and art reveals almost identical representations of the Other in the polarity mode.[28] What is particularly interesting about Greek culture, however, is the expansion of the barbarian repertoire to encompass other modes beyond polarity.

One aspect of the Greek debate on identity is the definition of barbarism as a set of moral and cultural characteristics which are deemed opposite and/or inferior to Greek ones. These polarised constructions of identity and morality can be seen in the most diverse media. In art, a set of battle scenes between Order and Chaos, between Self and Other, became the stock themes for decorating public monuments and buildings like temples. To the archaic themes of the Amazonomachy, Centauromachy and Gigantomachy (Battle between the Giants and the Gods), the Persian Wars and their aftermath added depictions of battles between Achaeans and Trojans and battles between Greeks and Persians.[29] On the Athenian Acropolis the metopes of the Parthenon present a famous example of the first four themes,[30] while the temple of Athena Nike presents a battle against Persians in triumphalist mode;[31] Panhellenic shrines like Olympia exhibited similar visual programmes.[32]

It is also remarkable how many Greek literary genres engage with this debate using a variety of approaches. There is no doubt that upholding Greek moral superiority and condemning foreign barbarism is often at the forefront of the agenda of Greek authors. Perhaps the purest examples of the employment of the polarity mode can be seen in Athenian comedy.[33] Aristophanes presents various vignettes

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26 Isaac 2004; cf. Tuplin 1999.
27 Harrison 2000, 115.
28 Müller 1972, 15-29; Loprieno 1988; Poo 2005; Michalowski 2010; Moers 2010.
29 Hölscher 2000.
30 Castriota 1992, 134-75.
31 Palagia 2005.
32 Barringer 2008, 8-58.
33 Long 1986; Willi 2003, 198-225.

of ridiculed Barbarians, from the violent Odomantian mercenaries[34] and the sex-starved and boorish Scythian public slave[35] to the incomprehensible and uncivilised Triballian god.[36] Similar examples can be found in Athenian tragedy: the Phrygian slave depicted in Euripides' *Orestes* is a typical example of an effeminate, slavish Barbarian without honour or shame.[37]

Equally widespread is the presence of such themes in prose genres such as historiography. Herodotus' story of how after the battle of Plataea the Spartan king Pausanias refused to follow the example of the Persians at Thermopylae and mutilate the body of the Persian commander Mardonius is a well-known example.[38] So is Thucydides' description of the massacre of the inhabitants of Boeotian Mycalessus by Thracian mercenaries, and his explicit comment about the savagery of the Barbarians.[39] The discourse of alterity even penetrated scientific genres, such as medicine. A fifth-century treatise *On Airs, Waters and Places*, traditionally attributed to Hippocrates, attempts to explain in scientific terms the purported effeminacy and lack of courage of the inhabitants of Asia: it is not only the climate, whose constancy induces indolence, but also the political and social effects of the institution of monarchy, which turn Asiatics into cowards.[40] Finally, it is hardly surprising that the discourse of Panhellenism is prominent in the genre of oratory. Particularly famous is the series of texts composed by the Athenian pamphleteer Isocrates, urging Greek states to put aside their differences and unite in a Panhellenic campaign against the Persian Empire, in order to avenge past wrongs and conquer land that could alleviate Greek social ills; the exalting of Greek identity and the denigration of the barbarian enemy are a prominent feature of such works.[41]

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34 *Acharnians*, 153-72; Olson 2002, 119-25.

35 *Thesmophoriazusae*, 1001-231; Hall 2006, 225-54.

36 *Birds*, 1615-82.

37 1370-1536; see Bacon 1961; Hall 1989, 101-59.

38 9.78-9.

39 7.27-9.

40 16; Thomas 2000, 86-98.

41 Too 1995, 129-50.

Nevertheless, it is striking how Greek authors can often turn these ideas on their head in a variety of ways.[42] Some authors explore the rhetorical use of such arguments and attribute them to characters they want to discredit, as in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*. He magnificently shows how the sacrifice of Iphigenia is forced onto the Achaean leaders by a series of political machinations, and how a shameless act is cynically justified publicly as something necessary to defeat an imaginary barbarian menace.[43] Another option consisted in showing that the Greeks themselves could behave like Barbarians, or Barbarians according to Greek moral and cultural values; or to explore the extent to which barbarism and its opposite are unrelated to descent or culture, but embody a set of moral characteristics which can be exemplified by both Greeks and non-Greeks. It is particularly fascinating how again Greek myth provided Greek authors with the raw material for exploring such questions. The capture of Troy was early on represented as a bloodthirsty massacre accompanied by sacrilege and followed by the divine punishment of many Greeks for their atrocities.[44] Euripides' *Trojan Women* is the quintessential play exploring this theme: Andromache's cry 'oh Greeks, inventors of barbarian evils, why do you slay this child who never wronged anybody' is a deeply moving depiction of the Greek ability to behave as Barbarians.[45] From the opposite side, Xenophon presents the Persian prince Cyrus behaving in a way congruent with Greek values and espousing such Greek ideals as freedom,[46] while Thucydides presents an Aetolian tribe as living in unwalled villages, speaking an incomprehensible language, and even eating meat raw; the full range of polarised barbarism is used here against a Greek community.[47]

We have stressed above how Greek myth and the textualisation of the interactions between Greeks and non-Greeks constituted the two

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42 Saïd 2002.
43 Mitchell 2007, 16-9.
44 Anderson 1997.
45 *Trojan Women*, 764-5.
46 *Anabasis*, 1.7.2-4.
47 3.94.4-5.

major aspects of the peculiar form in which Greek culture related to non-Greek cultures. They both provide good examples of the complex ways in which Greek literature and art reflected on issues of identity. Myth could be used to depict alterity, as in the case of barbarised Trojans or Amazons, but it could also be used in very different ways. Even after the efflorescence of the oppositional image of the Barbarian Other in the fifth century, mythical genealogy remained a potent mode of conceptualising the relationship between Greeks and non-Greeks. Genealogical links can often be seen as part of the background of the plot. The chorus of Euripides' *Phoenician Women* consists of women from Phoenician Tyre, who were sent as offerings to serve in Apollo's shrine at Delphi;[48] they find themselves at Thebes, and describe the impending civil war between Eteocles and Polyneices as a misfortune that Phoenicia would share, as they have common blood with the Thebans.[49] The explanation of this reference to shared descent has been provided earlier by Jocasta, who narrates how Cadmus left Phoenicia in order to found the city of Thebes.[50]

Even more fascinating, though, is the way in which tragedians exploit the complexity of different modes of relating to Barbarians. This complexity becomes central in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*, which makes a significant effort to stress the alien cultural and racial background of the Egyptian Danaids.[51] When Danaus and his daughters ask the king of Argos for asylum on the basis of their descent from the Argive priestess Io, the king initially disbelieves their Greek descent given their dark skin and barbarian culture;[52] but he is convinced by their story, and so are the citizens of Argos, who grant them asylum. Furthermore, Danaus becomes ultimately king of Argos and fathers the future line of Argive kings; Aeschylus presents a strong argument for the importance of shared mythical descent in the relationship between Greeks and Barbarians.[53] While

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48 *Phoenician Women*, 203-25.
49 *Phoenician Women*, 239-49.
50 *Phoenician Women*, 1-9.
51 Vasunia 2001, 33-58.
52 *Suppliant Women*, 277-90.
53 Mitchell 2006.

polarity constituted a powerful mode of thinking about identity and morality, shared kinship remained equally important; Greek myth could be used to explore and illustrate both modes.

The Persian Wars opened the floodgates for the representation of historical events and figures in Greek art. It is true that in the history of Greek art the mythical and the generic always dominated the overwhelming proportion of artistic production; but it is telling that a significant number of the few historical artistic depictions relate to the Persians and to the other empires of the East.[54] Closely connected to the Persian Wars is the depiction of the battle of Marathon in the Stoa Poicile,[55] as well as the famous Eurymedon vase, which alludes to the crucial Athenian victory at the river Eurymedon in the 460's.[56] It depicts a nude Greek holding his penis moving towards a bending Persian: the Greek enunciates 'I am Eurymedon', while the Persian says 'I stand bend over'. As Kenneth Dover phrased it, a summary of the image could be 'we buggered the Persians'.[57]

But as with literature, polarity is not the only mode employed; the famous Xenophantus lecythos, takes us to a very different world. This is a magnificent fourth-century lecythos created by the Athenian painter Xenophantus, deposited at Panticapaion in the Black Sea, and decorated in the red-figure technique along with relief appliqués, paint, and gilding. It depicts a scene in which figures dressed in Persian clothes and labelled with Persian names, which include Dareius and Cyrus, hunt two boars, a deer and two griffins in a carefully-drawn landscape.[58] What is important about this vase is the depiction of an idyllic Persian hunt involving famous Persian kings, which portrays the Persians in a very different manner from that of the battle scenes or the Eurymedon vase.

The Xenophantus vase was part of a very significant expansion of the iconographic repertoire of depictions of Persians. Early depic-

54 Hölscher 1973.
55 Castriota 1992, 76-89.
56 Schauenburg 1975.
57 Dover 1978, 105; Gruen 2011, 42-4.
58 Miller 2003.

tions of foreigners in Greek art are largely similar to those in the Near Eastern arts; they are primarily about fighting and defeating foreign enemies, while Near Eastern arts also include depictions of foreign subjects and their exotic tribute (to which the Greeks could have little claim).[59] But in the course of the fifth century Greek artists start expanding the repertoire of scenes and situations in which foreigners can be depicted: hunting scenes, foreign symposia, barbarian courts, musicians and dancers.[60] Notable here are the 'warrior departure' scenes. While archaic vase-painters employed elements of Thracian or Scythian costume to portray secondary characters in scenes depicting the departure of the Greek warrior from his wife and family,[61] it is now the departing warriors themselves who are Persians.[62]

These scenes raise the issue of models and utopias that we shall shortly explore; but they also explore issues of identity and morality which focus on universal or shared perspectives. Depicting a departing Persian warrior invites the viewer to ponder questions about the universality of warfare, military valour, death and family loss, and the connection between war and domestic life. The countless intercultural stories that became textualised in Greek literature explored similar concerns. What duties and obligations do human beings have towards each other? Which allegiance is most important? The typical Greek way of dealing with these issues is through recourse to myth: the myth of Antigone, who has to choose between obedience to the state and loyalty to her kin and the unwritten law, is a typical example of how a Greek author like Sophocles tried to deal with the dilemma. Herodotus provides a very different way of dealing with this moral dilemma in a story drawn from the Persian imperial world. He narrates how Dareius I condemned the Persian noble Intaphernes and his male relatives to death, but gave to the noble's wife the choice to save one of the condemned; when she chose to save her brother, rather than her husband or sons, the surprised Dareius

59 Moers 2010.
60 Raeck 1981, 147-60; Sgouropoulou 2004.
61 Ivantchik 2006.
62 Raeck 1981, 138-47.

asked for an explanation; she replied that she could have another husband and other sons, but she could never have another brother, since her parents had died.[63] In such Herodotean passages stories concerning non-Greeks are narrated in order to explore questions of morality. But these are not stories that focus on polarity; they stress values which are presented as shared or universal. Textualisation could serve many different purposes within Greek culture.

Models and utopias

The barbarian repertoire was also employed in Greek culture in constructing models and utopias. One of the major results of the textualisation of intercultural encounters is the ubiquity of the casual employment of Barbarians in the most diverse genres of Greek literature; typical is Ps.-Aristotle's supporting of the statement that wine makes people insolent with the example of the Carthaginian prohibition of wine-drinking during military service.[64] A further employment of non-Greeks as models is the emergence of treatises and manuals which collected and classified information pertaining to a particular pursuit or field. These manuals made their first appearance in the later fifth century, but became ubiquitous in the course of the fourth; they covered a wide range of topics, from medicine and biology to military, financial and political affairs. Such manuals collected pertinent information from the whole Mediterranean world and from both Greek and non-Greek communities. The earliest extant military treatise is the fourth-century *How to survive under siege* by Aeneas the Tactician.[65] It is based on an extensive collection of stories used to illustrate various military stratagems and measures. While most of them relate solely to communities in mainland Greece, some stories originate from the world of *apoikiai* and their interaction with non-Greek populations, while other stories concern Greeks or foreigners in Persian service, or conflicts between Greek communities and imperial powers.

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63 Herodotus, 3.119.
64 *Oeconomica*, 1344a31-3.
65 Whitehead 1990.

But the most impressive series of manuals and treatises collecting information is associated with Aristotle and his school. *Oeconomica*, a treatise traditionally attributed to Aristotle, but apparently written in the last few decades of the fourth century, includes a collection of fiscal stratagems for the raising of money and resources by states and rulers.[66] While the majority of the stratagems relate to Greek communities, a substantial number consists of stories about Persian satraps like Mausolus and Datames, or the Thracian king Cotys, as well as Greek mercenaries in the service of foreign rulers. Aristotle and his students also initiated a massive project of collecting evidence about the history, customs and constitutions of contemporary communities; ancient scholars attributed to Aristotle works on the constitutions of 158 communities, overwhelmingly Greek, but also including some non-Greek communities like the Lycians.[67] There was also a separate collection of *Barbarian Customs*, which comprised an equally impressive register concerning non-Greek communities ranging from the Carians to the Etruscans and the Romans.[68] It is on the basis of this enormous collection of evidence that Aristotle composed his monumental *Politics*. Non-Greek communities are regularly considered in its explorations; asking the question what is the best sort of life, Aristotle examined whether the pursuit and maintenance of power should be the aim of a state's laws by providing an extensive ethnography of Greek and non-Greek states whose laws furthered this aim.[69]

But the barbarian repertoire was not restricted to providing useful examples or convenient stratagems. We have already explored how foreigners provide Greek authors with the dramatic setting in which to explore questions of identity and morality, and the same applies to political questions, as illustrated by a famous Herodotean example. The Constitutional Debate is a debate among the seven Persian notables who conspired to kill the usurper of the throne about the

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66 Zoeppfel 2006.
67 Hose 2002, 130-5.
68 F604-11; Hose 2002, 250-2, 259-61.
69 *Politics*, 1324a5-b25.

form of constitution they should adopt.[70] Otanes speaks in favour of democracy, Megabyzus praises aristocracy, while Dareius defends monarchy and carries the day, ultimately winning the competition to become king as well.[71] It is highly unlikely that Persian grandees could have been using the categories of Greek political thought or debated democracy decades before its emergence in Athens; but it is telling that Herodotus is keen to defend the historicity of the debate.[72] What is important is that Herodotus or his sources were willing to imagine how the Persians would have debated during a political crisis; the Persian crisis provided a majestic setting in which to present the claims in favour and against the various constitutional forms.

The belief that the success of a political system depends on educating existing rulers to adopt and practise the right kind of values is effectively universal.[73] What is rather unique in Greek political thought is the exploration of ways to construct a novel and ideal political community.[74] One way in which foreign communities become models is by assimilating them to the classifications of Greek constitutional theory, with its distinctions between good and bad versions of constitutions based on the rule of one (monarchies and tyrannies), the few (aristocracies and oligarchies) and the many (democracies and ochlocracies). Carthage is the most characteristic example of this assimilation; Aristotle offered an extensive discussion of the Carthaginian constitution in comparison to those of Sparta and Crete, based on the common view that they possessed the best constitutions as well as sharing many similar features.[75]

Equally important is the role of foreign communities within some key preoccupations of Greek political thought. One such preoccupation is the issue of leadership: what are the properties of a good

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70 Pelling 2002.
71 3.80-8.
72 6.43.3.
73 Gray 1998, 159-77.
74 Vlassopoulos 2010, 117-23.
75 *Politics*, 1272b24-1273b26.

leader and in what ways and conditions can he lead his comrades and subjects successfully? Leadership was one of the key topics of enquiry in the works of Xenophon, and the *Cyropaedia* opens with an explicit description of its *aporia*. Observing that among all living beings man is the one who is least willing to obey its leaders, Xenophon states that it is natural that the case of Cyrus the Great should be particularly relevant, as he was able to create an empire and rule over willing subjects who lived far away and belonged to the most diverse nations.[76] It is telling that the founder of the Persian Empire could be chosen as an illustration of the properties of the ideal ruler.

Another quest concerned administration. Greek communities had developed only elementary and rather fragile systems of public administration; accordingly, the imperial bureaucracies of Persia and Egypt exercised a strong influence on those Greek thinkers who were interested in such problems. Herodotus described Persian imperial taxation[77] and the courier system,[78] while Heracleides of Cyme offered a detailed discussion of the organisation and logic of the Persian palace system.[79] Xenophon provides excellent illustrations of how Greek authors could make theoretical points by using the Persian system as a model. His *Oeconomicus* is a work about the ideal management of an estate; the Persian king is presented by Socrates as an ideal model of administration as regards both agriculture and warfare. He describes the incentives offered by the Persian king to encourage officials to protect and advance agriculture, as well as promote the careful management of land in the royal paradises; characteristically, when Socrates' interlocutor expresses disbelief that the Persian king would ever bother about agriculture, Socrates replies with the textualisation of a story about how the Spartan commander Lysander visited Cyrus the Younger in his paradise and was told that the beautiful trees had been personally planted by Cyrus.[80]

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76 1.1.1-6.
77 3.89-97.
78 5.52-4; 8.98.
79 *FGrH* 689 F1-4; Lenfant 2009.
80 4.4-25.

Another topic explored was state intervention to create the best citizen body. With the exception of Sparta, Greek communities did not have public systems of education. Accordingly, Greek authors who recognised the importance of education in shaping the best form of citizens, could use as models non-Greek communities which did possess such systems; one example is Xenophon's presentation of the Persian system of court education as a model for emulation.[81] Equally important was state regulation of social life. Xenophon maintained that, while Athenian laws only punished wrongdoers, Persian laws were superior in their proactive concern to reward good behaviour.[82] Plato's *Laws* argued that, given the educative role of art, it is dangerous to leave it to the artists' whim to determine the form and content of art; rather the state should legislate about it. To support this thesis, Plato used the example of Egyptian art, explaining that the Egyptians long ago established and consecrated standards from which the artists were not allowed to deviate, and this explains why Egyptian artworks have followed exactly the same styles and forms for thousands of years.[83]

Finally, we can approach the issue of utopias: the depiction of ideal communities which are situated either faraway in time or faraway in space.[84] In the course of the classical period authors started to situate utopian communities in the ethnographic and historical present. Herodotus provides a memorable description of Ethiopian society in the course of his account of how the Persian king Cambyses attempted and failed to conquer it.[85] The Ethiopians live to the age of 120 by drinking milk and eating meat provided miraculously by the Table of the Sun, and they despise the trappings of civilisation, such as purple cloaks, golden jewellery and perfumes. Equally interesting is the way in which intellectuals developed the utopian image of another faraway nation, the Scythians. The fourth-century

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81 *Cyropaedia*, 1.2.1-16.
82 *Oeconomicus*, 14.6-7.
83 656d-657a; Davis 1979.
84 Romm 1992, 45-81.
85 3.17-25.

historian Ephorus of Cyme is credited with a powerful presentation of the Scythians as a utopian society.[86] He decried other historians for presenting Scythians as only cruel and barbarous, claiming that other Scythians could be used as models of good conduct due to their just lives. The Scythians are not only presented as vegetarians who abstain from killing any living creature, but, because they do not engage in money-getting they are shown as frugal and just, they are invincible to their enemies, and they have everything in common, including their wives and children.[87]

Alien wisdom

When Herodotus visited the Black Sea, there was one Scythian he knew about already: this was the famous Anacharsis, about whom various stories circulated among Herodotus' Greek contemporaries. Herodotus narrates how Anacharsis travelled around the world and became famous for his wisdom, and how on his return trip to Scythia stopped at the Greek *apoikia* of Cyzicus, became initiated into the cult of the Mother of the Gods, and vowed to introduce this cult to Scythia. When the Scythians found out, he was killed by his own brother, the king;[88] king Scyles met a similar death a few generations later for introducing the cult of Dionysus.[89]

The story of Anacharsis is instructive on many levels. We do not know whether he was a historical individual; Herodotus claims to have been given Anacharsis' Scythian genealogy by Tymnes, the chief official of king Ariapeithes.[90] But even if this were the case, the Anacharsis of Greek literature has little to do with a historical Scythian prince; rather, Anacharsis is one among many foreign characters in Greek literature which became famous for their particular kind of wisdom. Some foreign sages, like the Egyptian Amasis or the Persian Zoroaster,[91] were individuals who existed in their own national

86 *FGrH* 70 F42.
87 *FGrH* 70 F42.
88 4.76.
89 4.78-80.
90 4.76.
91 West 2010.

traditions; others, like Abaris, existed only within the Greek imaginary universe. What is important to stress is that by the fifth century the figure of the foreign sage was well-established in Greek culture: Herodotus already reports on Anacharsis, Amasis,[92] and Abaris[93] as well-known sages, while his contemporary Xanthus of Lydia was the earliest author to mention Zoroaster in Greek literature.[94]

These foreign sages became major figures of Greek literature primarily from the Hellenistic period onwards: Anacharsis became the author of *Epistles* and a central character in the dialogues of Lucian,[95] while various Greek works attributed to Zoroaster date from the Hellenistic period onwards.[96] But we can trace the beginnings of this phenomenon already during the classical period. Heracleides Ponticus, a student of Plato from Heracleia in the Black Sea, was one of the earliest Greek authors to make foreign sages major characters in philosophical dialogues with a historical setting.[97] His *Abaris* expressed beliefs on the existence of gods and the transmigration of souls;[98] another of his dialogues was apparently named after Zoroaster,[99] while a third presented a Persian magus circumnavigating Africa and visiting the court of the Syracusan tyrant Gelon.[100]

Equally interesting for our subject are the cults that led to the death of Anacharsis and Scyles; the Scythians allegedly killed them because they considered the Mother of the Gods and Dionysus as typical Greek deities, whose cults were unfit for Scythians to take part in. The Herodotean irony is that both deities and their cults were constantly described by the Greeks themselves as of non-Greek origin. Herodotus explicitly comments that Dionysiac cult differed from normal Greek cults and therefore must have been an introduc-

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92 2.173-4, 3.40-3.
93 4.36.
94 *FGrH* 765 F32; Kingsley 1995.
95 Kindstrand 1981.
96 Beck 1991.
97 Schütrumpf 2008.
98 F73-5.
99 F68.
100 F69-70.

tion from Egypt,[101] while Euripides presents Dionysus in the *Bacchae* as a foreign newcomer from Asia.[102] The orgiastic cult of the Mother is equally often depicted in Greek sources as a foreign import.[103] We are thus faced with a paradox: what is typically Greek in the eyes of Herodotus' Scythians can at the same time be described as a foreign cult by the Greeks. In the same way that the image of the foreign sage is an inherent feature of Greek culture, the image of the foreign deity and cult is equally pregnant with meaning.

At this point it is inevitable to pause to ask: to what extent do traditions about foreign sages and deities reflect a real historical process? Can we really believe that Greek intellectuals learnt their wisdom in visits to the East, or that all Greek deities came from Egypt? Scholarly views have been largely polarised between those who categorically negate any historical veracity behind the traditions of alien wisdom[104] and those who largely accept, in one form or another, the historicity of the tradition.[105] It makes little sense to deny that the Greek traditions of alien wisdom reflect in some way real historical processes. However, the peculiarly self-referential character of Greek culture means that we cannot posit a straightforward relation of imitation or adoption, as we can in the case of some of the cultures we examined at the beginning of this article.

A good illustration of this complexity is one of Herodotus' most famous claims; he argued that the Egyptian taboo against burial in woollen garments was taken over by the Pythagorean and Orphic doctrines[106] and that certain Greeks had taken over the concept of metempsychosis from the Egyptians.[107] This is an interesting example of the complexity of interactions that underlies such statements of alien wisdom. While there are obvious similarities in the wool taboo between the Egyptians and the Pythagoreans, the concept of metem-

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101 2.49.
102 1-42.
103 Roller 1999, 121-34.
104 E.g. Hopfner 1925; Lloyd 1975, 49-60.
105 E.g. Burkert 1992, 2004; Kingsley 1994, 1995; West 1971, 1997.
106 2.81.
107 2.123.

psychosis is completely alien to Egyptian religion. Nevertheless, Egyptian art often represented souls as birds, and the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* included spells to enable the deceased to take any form they liked, in order to avoid dangers and obstacles in their underworld journey. It is conceivable that there might be some connection between the Greek misunderstanding of these Egyptian depictions and spells and the Greek concept of metempsychosis.[108] But given that the concept of metempsychosis is, strictly speaking, completely alien to Egyptian culture, why did Greeks persist in portraying this idea as a loan from Egypt, instead of taking the credit for this novel idea?

This is the reason that it is essential to examine the filters and *topoi* through which the traditions of alien wisdom are utilised in Greek culture. One such *topos* is a cosmopolitan universe of civilisation, art and science. Many cultures have discourses about how civilisation, the arts and the sciences emerged, and how they reached their present state.[109] But in most cases these discourses attempt to explain how the arts and sciences emerged within one particular culture. What is peculiar about the Greek discourses is how the unit of analysis is the whole known human universe. There is also no doubt that most ancient cultures were affected by the international mobility of people, goods, ideas and technologies; the Greek peculiarity was to create a discourse which purported to investigate this very process.[110] Given that the Greeks were keenly aware of the antiquity of many of the foreign cultures with which they were in contact, it is not surprising how often they were willing to attribute discoveries and inventions to non-Greeks. Hecataeus attributed the origins of the Greek alphabet to the Egyptian Danaus,[111] while Hellanicus attributed the first construction of iron weapons to the Scythian king Saneunus;[112] Aristotle claimed that the theoretical sciences were first developed when people could afford leisure from making a living;

108 Lloyd 1975, 57-8; cf. Livingstone 2001, 157-8.
109 Zhmud 2006, 33-4.
110 Kleingünther 1934.
111 *FGrH* 1 F20.
112 *FGrH* 4 F189.

accordingly, mathematical science was invented in Egypt, where the priestly caste could devote its time to research.[113]

It should be noted that the Greek discourse of the discovery of the arts and sciences only very partially matches the processes taking place in the real world.[114] Some Greeks attributed the importation of the alphabet to Greece to the Phoenician Cadmus,[115] and this surely reflects in some way the fact that the Greek alphabet did derive from the Phoenician; but other Greeks attributed its introduction to the Egyptians, as we just saw, or even to Greek mythical heroes like Palamedes.[116] The Greek discourses are informed by the real processes, but they primarily express a Greek *topos*, which is willing to attribute priority and debts to foreign cultures. The importance of this *topos* for the history of interactions between Greeks and non-Greeks can hardly be overestimated; for it provided a means through which most foreign cultures could position themselves favourably within Greek culture, and even claim a position of superiority.

A second *topos* was predicated on the first: Greek authors could claim privileged access to alien wisdom in order to give authority to the views they expressed. The claim that Pythagoras had been educated in Egypt was an authorial strategy that aimed to give authority and credibility to a Greek view by means of appeal to alien wisdom, even if the concept of metempsychosis did not exist in Egyptian culture. The antiquity of Egyptian civilisation, the continuity of tradition established by its archives, and the apocryphal and inaccessible knowledge secreted by temples and priests, were the major tropes through which Greek authors employed the image of Egypt in their authorial projects.[117] The antiquity of Egyptian civilisation could be employed in order to scrutinise and correct Greek traditions; Herodotus used Egyptian and Phoenician traditions about Heracles in order to correct the Greek chronology of Heracles and distinguish between a divine and a heroic Heracles.[118]

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113 *Metaphysics*, 981b20-5.
114 Zhmud 2006, 40-2.
115 Herodotus, 5.58.
116 Stesichorus, F213.
117 Assmann 2001.
118 2.43-4.

Plato employed the image of Egyptian archives and their apocryphal knowledge in order to give legitimacy to his notorious tale of Atlantis.[119] The setting is Solon's visit to the Egyptian city of Sais and his conversation with the priests of Neith. As in the similar story of Hecataeus,[120] Solon's attempt to present Greek myths and genealogies is ridiculed by an old Egyptian priest, who famously claims that all Greeks are children, and goes on to narrate the story of the primeval Athenians and their struggle with Atlantis, which Solon subsequently brings back to Athens.[121] The Athenians did not know anything about primeval Athens and Atlantis because deluges and catastrophes had broken the stream of tradition; but in Egypt, the morphology of the land has prevented the catastrophic loss of memory, and old stories had been preserved by the priests. It is impressive to note what care Plato has taken to give verisimilitude to the story. The city of Sais is related to Athens, as the founder goddess Neith is the Egyptian equivalent of Athena,[122] and the presence of Greek names in an Egyptian tale is the result of Solon's translating the Egyptian names into Greek ones.[123] A different example is the Egyptian tale that Plato uses to illustrate his argument concerning the inferiority of writing to oral debate. Plato depicts the Egyptian god Thoth, the inventor of arts, presenting his inventions to Ammon, the king of the gods, and defending their utility for mankind. Ammon accepts his other arguments, but contests Thoth's defence of writing by arguing that writing can only weaken memory and cannot substitute the exchange of arguments in oral debate.[124]

Finally, let us deal with the third *topos*: the construct of the foreign deity in Greek culture. The transfer and adoption of deities and mythologies across cultural boundaries was a long-term process in the ancient Mediterranean. What is of interest here is not the actual process of adoption, but the depiction and characterisation of deities

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119 Froidefond 1971, 284-94.
120 Herodotus, 2.143.
121 *Timaeus*, 21c-25e; *Critias*.
122 *Timaeus*, 21e.
123 *Critias*, 113a.
124 *Phaedrus*, 274c-275c; Froidefond 1971, 272-84.

as explicitly foreign. Like the other *topoi* we examined above, this could take a variety of forms. Foreign deities could be adopted and assimilated, as well as depicted as foreign at the same time. During the fifth century the Athenian state adopted the cult of the Thracian deity Bendis. Since the Thracians had not yet developed an iconography of deities, the depiction of Bendis in Greek art was shaped by Greek deities perceived to be similar or equivalent to Bendis. In this case, it was Artemis that provided Bendis with the main elements of her iconography; but at the same time Bendis' Thracian dress served to identify the goddess as explicitly foreign.[125]

More complex was the case of the Mother of the Gods and her consort Attis.[126] In the case of the Mother it is probable that there was a conflation between, on the one hand, Greek deities that could play this role, such as Gaia or Rhea, the mother of the Olympian gods, and, on the other, the Phrygian deity Matar, whose epithet kubileya became Cybele, the alternative name of the Greek Mother. The Greek cult of the Mother involved ecstatic music and mysteries, while her Greek iconography came to depict her as a deity enthroned among lions and holding a *tympanum* (drum). While some elements of the Greek iconography could be traced back to the Phrygian cult, the depiction of the *tympanum* as a standard divine attribute served to characterise the deity as quintessentially exotic. Equally interesting is the case of the divine escort Attis, who is not apparently attested as a deity in Phrygia, and who is absent from the early Greek references and depictions of the Mother. It is only in the latter half of the fourth century that Attis emerges in Greek literature and art; Greek artists depicted him as a shepherd with the typical costume of Oriental characters like Paris and the Amazons.[127]

But the *topos* of the foreign deity was not restricted to deities who were indeed foreign; it could be equally applied to Greek deities in order to define and characterise particular aspects of their function. From early on the Greeks developed narratives that depicted Diony-

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125 Gočeva and Popov 1986.
126 Roller 1999; Borgeaud 2004.
127 Roller 1994.

sus as a foreign deity, even though accounts differed concerning his origins: some posited Thrace, others Asia Minor and yet others Nyssa in Ethiopia.[128] Accordingly, and given the negligible presence of Dionysus in Homer, modern scholars had long taken the Greeks at their word, and considered Dionysus as a foreign deity who had only entered Greece at some point during the archaic period. It was only the discovery of Linear B tablets that mentioned Dionysus, which proved that the god had existed in the Greek pantheon since the second millennium.[129] The depiction of Dionysus as a foreign ecstatic deity is memorably accomplished in Euripides' *Bacchae*.[130]

It is the combination of an ecstatic ritual with a secret rite that promised a better afterlife, which stands behind the use of the *topos* of the foreign deity in the case of Dionysus. Ecstatic rituals, although an essential feature of Greek culture, raised unavoidable questions of identity and morality; the Greeks could imagine such rituals as typical of effeminate Barbarians and describe the deities of those rituals as foreign. Herodotus' stories about the Scythians' unwillingness to accept the ecstatic Greek rituals of Dionysus and the Mother, which the Greeks themselves could at the same time describe as foreign, brilliantly reveals the inherent paradox. On the other side stand the Greek mystery cults: secret rites requiring initiation which promised a better afterlife. Mystery cults seem equally typically Greek, as there is hardly any evidence for such cults among non-Greek Mediterranean religions.[131] Nevertheless, the Greeks recognised the antiquity of non-Greek religions, and in particular that of Egypt, where participation in the cult was largely restricted to the priests, and where the cult of Osiris, the ruler of the Underworld, aimed to ensure a happy afterlife. It is likely that it was through Greek influence from the Osiris myth and cult that Dionysus became associated with secret rites and the afterlife.[132] The concept of the foreign sage and the

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128 *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*, 7-9.
129 Burkert 1985, 161-7.
130 1-26.
131 Burkert 1987, 2-3.
132 Burkert 2004, 71-98.

foreign deity in Greek culture were clearly informed by the processes of intercultural interaction; but they primarily reflect the expansion of the barbarian repertoire, which created a central, if peculiar, role for non-Greeks within Greek culture.

It is time to reach some conclusions. Both the image of the Barbarian and the interaction with non-Greek cultures played an immensely important role in shaping Greek culture. But the exchange approach has largely missed the peculiar self-referential way in which Greek culture interacted with other cultures; and the polarity approach has largely missed that the concept of the Barbarian included many more images than that of the polar Other. The peculiar barbarian repertoire in Greek culture allowed Greeks to use their interactions with other cultures in order to debate identities and moralities, solutions and models for practical issues or utopian reworkings, and intellectual debates concerning the world or the supernatural. This diversity of the barbarian repertoire reflects to an important extent a historical conjuncture: the diversity of the interactions between Greeks and non-Greeks during the archaic and classical periods. Greeks employed thousands of barbarian slaves, but thousands of Greeks worked for foreign kings; Greeks fought against barbarian empires, but also gave citizenship or Panhellenic honours to barbarian kings and rulers; Greeks encountered communities with primitive material cultures, as well as great ancient civilisations of enormous power and wealth; encounters in the world of *apoikiai* ranged from the creation of hybrid frontier societies to the stressing of the Greek identity of *apoikiai* through participation in the world of Panhellenic sanctuaries and games.[133] Had Greek culture developed outside this conjuncture, the diverse barbarian repertoire might have never developed. But at the same time there were inherent features of the peculiar nature of Greek culture which explain why it was in a position to turn the diversity of encounters and interactions into the diversity of a barbarian repertoire employed widely in literature and art. Future

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research into intercultural interaction in the ancient Mediterranean will need to address seriously the peculiarity, as well as the importance of the barbarian repertoire in Greek culture.

<center>⁂</center>

Αντί επιλόγου

Συνάντησα την Άννα Μίσιου για πρώτη φορά το 1999, όταν ως μεταπτυχιακός φοιτητής στην Αρχαία Ιστορία παρακολούθησα το μάθημά της για την Περσία και τις σχέσεις της με τον αρχαίο ελληνικό κόσμο. Η Άννα ήταν εξαιρετική δασκάλα. Σημαντικό ήταν το ενδιαφέρον της να μελετήσει αλλά και να διδάξει θέματα που παραμένουν στην περιφέρεια των αναζητήσεων των ιστορικών της αρχαιότητας. Κάθε βδομάδα, επέλεγε ένα βιβλίο ή άρθρο και μας ζητούσε την κριτική παρουσίασή του. Όσοι τη γνώρισαν θα θυμούνται τη σταθερή επωδό της: «ποιο είναι το ιστορικό ερώτημα εδώ;». Αυτή η προτροπή, να σκεφτόμαστε δηλαδή καθαρά τα ερωτήματα που θέτουμε ως ιστορικοί και τα μεθοδολογικά προβλήματα των πηγών και των απαντήσεών μας, δεν μπορούσε παρά να επηρεάσει έντονα όποιον είχε την τύχη να διδαχτεί από εκείνην. Οι δικές μου ερευνητικές αναζητήσεις επηρεάστηκαν σε μεγάλο βαθμό ήδη από εκείνο το πρώτο μας σεμινάριο.

Η είδηση του ξαφνικού θανάτου της Άννας με ώθησε, κάποια στιγμή, να επιστρέψω στις παρουσιάσεις μου για εκείνο το σεμινάριο πριν από μια δεκαετία. Με έκπληξη διαπίστωσα ότι ο πυρήνας του επιχειρήματος που αναπτύσσεται στο παρόν άρθρο υπήρχε ήδη στη βιβλιοκριτική που είχα γράψει για το βιβλίο *Ξένη Σοφία* του Αρνάλντο Μομιλιάνο. Μια απόδειξη του πόσα πολλά χρωστάμε στους δασκάλους μας και πόσο σπάνια εντέλει αναγνωρίζουμε το χρέος μας σε αυτούς.

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Το βαρβαρικό ρεπερτόριο στον ελληνικό πολιτισμό

Κωστας ΒΛΑΣΌΠΟΥΛΟΣ

Περίληψη

Η ΜΕΛΕΤΗ της αλληλεπίδρασης του αρχαίου ελληνικού πολιτισμού με τους άλλους πολιτισμούς της Μεσογείου και της Εγγύς Ανατολής έχει καθοριστεί από δύο εκ διαμέτρου αντίθετες προσεγγίσεις. Η πρώτη εστιάζει σε θέματα και σε μοτίβα που υιοθέτησαν οι αρχαίοι έλληνες συγγραφείς και καλλιτέχνες από άλλους πολιτισμούς· η δεύτερη επικεντρώνεται στο πώς η αρχαία ελληνική λογοτεχνία και η τέχνη κατασκευάζουν την έννοια των βαρβάρων ως αντίστιξη στους Έλληνες – και τη χρησιμοποιούν για να προσδιορίσουν πλευρές της ελληνικής ταυτότητας.

Το παρόν άρθρο προσπαθεί να υπερβεί τον σχηματικό διαχωρισμό μεταξύ των δύο προσεγγίσεων εξετάζοντας το θέμα μέσα από ένα διαφορετικό ερώτημα: με ποιους τρόπους επιλέγει ένας πολιτισμός να στοχαστεί τη σχέση του με άλλους πολιτισμούς; Παρότι η διαπολιτισμική αλληλεπίδραση επηρεάζει κάθε πολιτισμό, ο τρόπος με τον οποίο οι πολιτισμοί στοχάζονται και χρησιμοποιούν αυτή την αλληλεπίδραση διαφέρει ριζικά. Μερικοί, όπως οι Ετρούσκοι, οι Ρωμαίοι, οι Ασσύριοι, καθιστούν την αναφορά σε άλλους πολιτισμούς συστατικό στοιχείο των δικών τους πολιτισμικών πρακτικών, μέσω των μεταφράσεων, της διακειμενικότητας, και της χρήσης ξένων γλωσσών και εικονογραφικών και θρησκευτικών παραδόσεων. Άλλοι, όπως οι Αιγύπτιοι, στηρίζονται στην αυτοαναφορά, και έτσι η

λογοτεχνία και η τέχνη τους περιορίζονται σε περιόδους, τεχνοτροπίες, κείμενα και μνημεία δικά τους, αποφεύγοντας τα ξένα.

Στην περίπτωση της αρχαίας Ελλάδας, η έρευνα συχνά εκκινεί από τη διαπίστωση ότι, στη σχέση του ελληνικού με άλλους πολιτισμούς, βασικές μορφές της διαπολιτισμικής επικοινωνίας, όπως οι μεταφράσεις, η διακειμενικότητα και η χρήση ξένων γλωσσών, είναι εξαιρετικά περιορισμένες. Η εργασία αυτή επιχειρεί να στρέψει τη συζήτηση προς τρία άλλα σημαντικά πεδία, στα οποία η αναφορά σε άλλους πολιτισμούς έπαιξε θεμελιακό ρόλο στην εξέλιξη του αρχαίου ελληνικού πολιτισμού, δηλαδή τους διαφορετικούς τρόπους με τους οποίους οι ξένοι πολιτισμοί: διαμόρφωσαν τη συζήτηση περί ταυτότητας και ηθικής στο πλαίσιό του· προσέφεραν πρακτικά και ουτοπικά μοντέλα για κοινωνικά, πολιτικά και οικονομικά προβλήματά του· λειτούργησαν ως πηγή ξένης σοφίας, επηρεάζοντας τις φιλοσοφικές, επιστημονικές και θρησκευτικές αναζητήσεις του. Υποστηρίζεται ότι η απουσία των συνηθισμένων μορφών διαπολιτισμικής επικοινωνίας, σε συνδυασμό με τη σημασία των ξένων πολιτισμών στα τρία αυτά θεμελιακά πεδία του αρχαίου ελληνικού πολιτισμού, συνιστά ένα ιδιόμορφο φαινόμενο που χρήζει περαιτέρω μελέτης.

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