

First, I say a few words about what characterises the circumstances in which the Syriacs came into contact with and began to appropriate Greek learning and how these circumstances compare with those of other groups represented at this symposium. After that I shall give a brief description of the kinds of materials that were translated from Greek into Syriac, together with some comments on the state of research on each of these areas, which will then be followed by some remarks on a number of features of interest relating to the reception of Greek learning among the Syriacs.

The Slav Reception of Classical Greek Culture from the Late Ninth to the Early Eighteenth Century

Francis J. Thomson

Prior to their conversion none of the Slav peoples had any written culture and hence no knowledge of Greek culture. The West Slavs, Poles, Czechs and Slovaks were converted to Latin Christianity between the ninth and eleventh centuries and used Latin as their liturgical and literary language and hence their knowledge of Greek culture can be compared to that of the Germans.

The Greek influence on *Slavia orthodoxa* was enormous but was restricted to the spheres of Christianity without dogmatic theology and ecclesiastical art and architecture. Hellenism in the sense of philosophy and science was notable by its absence. When, in the eighteenth century as a result of the efforts of Peter the Great (1682 [1689]–1725), Russia turned to the West, Western intellectual thought and ideas did not replace Hellenism since it had never been assimilated. As Sir Dmitri Obolensky aptly put it: *Old Church Slavonic was responsible for restricting the range of Greek culture accessible to the Slavs* (The Byzantine Commonwealth. London 1971, p. 324).

ALIEN WISDOM?

ARNALDO MOMIGLIANO ON THE HELLENISTIC PERCEPTION OF BARBARIAN CULTURE¹

György Geréby

First of all let me thank the conveners for their trust that I can live up to the expectations of this honourable company of scholars, classicists, orientalist, and historians. It is with due trepidation that your humble lecturer, a philosopher so deeply ignorant of the respectable trade of the historians and philologists, is allowed to offer you reflections on the views of the great Arnaldo Momigliano about the problem of Hellenisation in the antique world.

In trying to find a vantage point for my approach I finally settled on the very first sentence in the book of Arnaldo Momigliano, which inspired our conference.² He began his book devoted to *Alien*, that is, non-Greek, or barbaric *wisdom* with the remark that “the philosophic historian will never stop meditating on the nose of Cleopatra.” Momigliano detects in the nose of Cleopatra the problem of “an intellectual event of the first order,” namely, “the confrontation of the Greeks with four other civilizations,” and he is going on to analyse the nature of these confrontations. The four cultures on his list were the Roman, the Celtic, the Jewish, and the Persian or Iranian. An obvious case, the Egyptian, which is mentioned only in this witty note, Momigliano either left out because of a lack of expertise, or because he might have thought that Egypt had been in contact with Greeks well before the Hellenistic period he was interested in.

“What I want to ascertain—Momigliano says—is how the Greeks came to know and evaluate these groups of non-Greeks in relation to their own civilization.” The analysis then turns to the relationship of “the Greeks and their neighbours” (as the title of his first chapter says), one by one with great erudition and wonderful rhetoric. His assessment of these relationships is summarized by the subtitle of his book, the “limits of Hellenisation,” since in the end he arrives at a rather pessimistic conclusion.

¹ A rewritten version of the lecture held at the ESF Exploratory Workshop “Hellenism. Alien or Germane Wisdom?” on 23 November 2007. I thank István Péczel, Judith Rasson, Niels Gaul and Katalin Szende for their suggestions and corrections. If not indicated otherwise, translations are by the author.

² A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom. The Limits of Hellenisation* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

In Momigliano's eyes the ideal of universal Hellenic culture had severe inherent limitations. The limitations are best exemplified in the last chapter of his book, when, at the end of the case by case studies, Momigliano finally analyzes with great lucidity Hellenistic accounts of Persian culture. In his assessment, the Greek intellectuals facing "a state with its own political organization, its moral code and, vaguely in the background, its religion" stopped short of a veritable confrontation. Among the Greeks, says Momigliano, "nobody really cared to know what Zoroaster had been or what he had written or truly inspired." Whatever the Greeks (whom I am more inclined to call Hellenists for a reason I will soon try to justify) attributed to Persian spiritual masters, was to a large extent the result of Greek imagination, put forward in pseudonymous treatises, or, if you wish, in blatant forgeries. And while the Greeks, in Momigliano's view thrived in these forgeries, and "admired their own forgeries as manifestations of a foreign civilisation," there was "the living and powerful reality of genuine Zoroastrianism, of which the forgeries were only pale shadows."³

Ultimately, Momigliano finds fault with Hellenisation precisely on this score. The forgeries feigning to be documents of other, foreign, civilizations meant for him a loss of faith in the very principles of Hellenism, a "subordination of Greek thought to Oriental wisdom"⁴ and Momigliano attributes the cause for that to the reluctance of the Greeks to learn foreign languages. While

as early as the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. the Greek philosophers and historians had shown keen interest in foreign doctrines and customs and had been inclined to recognize some value in them, ... The intellectual influence of the barbarians was ... felt in the Hellenistic world only to the extent to which they were capable of expressing themselves in Greek.⁵

What Momigliano was concerned about was "real understanding" of a different culture, and this the Greeks and their Hellenised allies never managed to achieve.⁶ The "assimilation of many techniques and notions does not necessarily imply a real understanding."⁷

In Momigliano's assessment the Greeks possessed all the instruments for knowing other civilizations—except the command of languages. In addition, as mentioned above, the attribution of the invention of so many ideas to various

barbarian nations shows, Momigliano thinks, that the Greeks also lost faith in their own wisdom.

The subject of my musings will be these judgments. Was Hellenisation indeed such a failure? Was it really inherently inhibited by these characteristics? Was there indeed arrogance or some other reason why the Greeks showed no inclination to appreciate foreign languages? Does a loss of confidence explain the attribution of the invention of every important cultural element to barbarians? Is this the only way to read the story of Greek encounters with barbarians? Or is there something more to it, embedded in the accounts, an unusually successful program not at all that naïf?

I will try to suggest that another reading is possible, and that this shows a program clearly characteristic of a deliberate and well thought-out cultural policy appropriate to a culture with a universalistic tendency. My main point is that Hellenic culture did find acceptance in the *οἰκουμένη*⁸ precisely because of its non-particularist character, of which the symptoms seemingly indicating a "loss of self-confidence" are a consistent manifestation.

In developing an alternative to Momigliano's thesis I will first address the question of perspective. It is true that the interpretation of the exchange between the Hellenistic and the barbarian world is restricted in the sense that the documents for the latter point of view have survived only in a very fragmentary way (and largely as archeological data). Therefore, we inevitably remain restricted to the Hellenic perspective, to which, and in this I agree with Momigliano, we are ultimately all confined in some way or another. While this is true, it has to be noted that the Hellenistic perspective is in no way restricted only to representatives of Greek extraction. By everything that we know, a symbolic figure of Hellenistic culture such as Plotinus was an Egyptian from Lycopolis. His most famous disciple, Porphyry, was a Syrian originally called Malchus in his native Phoenicia, and his former classmate in Alexandria was Origen, who was, in fact, Horigenes, as some scholars (like Reinhold Merkelbach) pointedly call him. Neither did their teacher, the mysterious founder of Neo-Platonism, Ammonius, receive his name from a native Greek deity. Iamblichus in the next generation was born in Chalcis, in Coele-Syria. Favorinus was "a Gaul but led the life a Hellene."⁹ Before them, Alexander of Aphrodisias was probably of Cappadocian extraction, where his

³ Ibid., 147–8.

⁴ Ibid., 147.

⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁶ Ibid., 147.

⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁸ There is an equivocation hidden in the concept of the *οἰκουμένη*, to be sure. It can mean: 1. the *οἰκουμένη* as identical to the Roman Empire, 2. the realm of a shared culture of ordered life and reasoned ideas. In what follows I shall use the second meaning.

⁹ Philostratus, *VS* I.8. Olearius 489. *Philostratus and Eunapius. Lives of the Sophists*, tr. W. C. Wright, Loeb Classical Library 134 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 25.

mother-tongue was spoken in his days (at least we have rumours that translations were made into that tongue even as late as the Christian period), and Lucian, the greatest Atticist of the second century, was Syrian. And we could expand the list indefinitely, like with Anacharsis the Scythian, or Zeno of Citium, who was known to be a Phoenician. The Hellenistic perspective, therefore, has to be taken to include the voice of the Hellenised “barbarians” as well. These Hellenes were not subservient “colonial” cronies of an empire. They were not forced, but attracted. Philostratus, speaking about various sophists, mentions the most varied people of this stock, like a certain “ruler of the [Kimmerian – GG] Bosphorus, a man who had been trained in all the education of the Hellenes”¹⁰ or Timocrates “who came from Pontus, and his birthplace was Heraclea, whose citizens admired Hellenic culture.”¹¹

A second point leads us to the cultures missing from Momigliano’s list. With due respect, we have to mention that the Hellenic—for the reason above I would rather say Hellenic rather than Greek—view was not directed only towards the cultures investigated by Momigliano, but to everywhere it could possibly reach. Indeed, to his list we should certainly add not only the already mentioned Egypt, but also Numidia and Aethiopia, let alone the Scythians, or even the legendary Pygmies and Troglodytes. The extension of the list does not serve some petty pedantry. The Hellenic mind relates not just to neighbouring nations. I think it was important for a culture thinking in terms of a universal *οἰκουμένη* that it knew about *all* nations that dwell in the habitable part of the world. The ethnography might be fantastic, but the preconception hidden in the idea of the *οἰκουμένη* is the unity of mankind, despite the wild variety of the peoples. “We are of one descent,” says the apostle Paul on the Areopagus,¹² in a Stoic vein appropriate to his Stoic (and Epicurean) audience. We are citizens, *συμπολίται* inhabiting the same world-city, the *κοσμοπόλις*, a term so suggestive for the Hellenistic view of the world.

In developing a rival theory of antique Hellenisation we do well to begin with Homer. Hellenic culture commenced with Homeric poetry since it was not only considered as its founding document historically, but also in the practical sense. The educational curriculum relied on the epics as the primary means to “Hellenise the tongue” well into the Byzantine period. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were acutely aware of the existence of barbarians, that is—to cast it in modern phraseology—of the “Other.” If we look at the meaning of the term “barbarian,”

we should probably translate it as that. It is not just *ἀλλογένης, ξένος*, or *alienigena*, but those who are essentially “different in their ways,” that is, different in their culture. What kind of picture can be gleaned from the epics?

I think it is a curious fact that in Homer the term “barbarian” does not occur, except on a single occasion, when it is mentioned that the Carians speak a foreign tongue.¹³ This is all the more interesting since the Trojans are not Greeks, and their allies come from the most varied and faraway parts of the world one can imagine, like the Amazons. As if the epic wants to intimate that it is aware of the term, but does not want to make extensive use of it. A wider use of the term would look very strange indeed in a world where Glaucón and Diomedes, Priam and Achilles, all the allies and confederates, could talk to each other without ever mentioning an interpreter. What is more, they apparently not only share a common language, but a world of common values, too. The manners, the values, even the gods, are just the same for the opponents. Both sides are under the rule of the same Zeus and the same inexorable Moira.

In this Homeric context I just can’t see that the Greeks would not have been ready to learn. Just the opposite. I suggest that we read the famous line in the beginning of the *Odyssey* as a program of travelling for gaining knowledge about the “Others”: “Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose mind he learned.”¹⁴ This line is not just an isolated admonition, but an idea, the importance of which is well shown by Horace’s popularisation of it in Latin.¹⁵ True, Odysseus is not said to have learned the language of the Laistrygons or of the Lotus Eaters, but he learned what is really important: the minds, that is, the different characters of the “cities and peoples.”

The Hellenic mind knows that the world abounds in peoples and cities, and looks at them with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. The Hellenic mind is ready to learn about them and, by becoming acquainted with them, to familiarise their “otherness.” Momigliano himself observed that the Asians were said to be sisters by the Greeks. In the tragedy of Aeschylus about the Persians practically no Greek name occurs, but Darius’ shadow speaks like the ideal Persian ruler (as imagined in the idealizing picture of the Greeks), reproaching his son for his unbridled *hybris*. Why would Aeschylus try to raise compassion among his victorious Greek compatriots for a distant and beaten enemy? Why would Xenophon, in a later instance, project his vision of the ideal ruler to a not-so-

¹⁰ Philostratus, *VS* I.25. Olearius 535. Loeb 117.

¹¹ Philostratus, *ibid.*

¹² *Acts* 17: 26

¹³ *Iliad* 2, 868 *Νάσσης αὖ Καρῶν ἠγγήσατο βαρβαροφώνων.*

¹⁴ *Odyssey*, I, 3.

¹⁵ Horace, *Ep.* 1, 2, 19–20. ... *qui domitor Troiae multorum providus urbes // et mores hominum inspexit latumque per aequor ...*

distant and openly hostile power? Why would Philostratus describe the travels of Apollonius as a series of meetings with the Persian king, the Brahmins of India, far beyond the narrower *οἰκουμένη*, “in a country which Alexander never assailed,”¹⁶ or with the Ethiopians at the cataracts of the Nile—all conducted in Greek and about Homeric or Platonic questions, like about the show trial against Palamedes?¹⁷

To the modern reader it sounds pretty unlikely that Indian wise men would have discussed such *Quaestiones Homericae* with Apollonius. Once again, it is not the historical truth which matters, but what the story tells us about the mind of Philostratus, the author of Apollonius’ *Life*. He apparently thinks in terms of a universal culture. Common culture creates familiarity. In order to achieve this familiarity, Philostratus seems to know that he has to presuppose not just a common language (the Brahmins are made to speak wonderful Greek in his account), but a common cultural frame of reference. Homer played an important role in that. A beautiful example of this role of a common cultural language founded in the Hellenic *paideia* can be read in the meeting of the Christian Justin Martyr, and Trypho the Jew in the second century. If I may remind you, Justin is waiting for his ship when he is addressed by a stranger as: “Hail philosopher!” Justin, who was identifiable since he wore the robe of the philosophers, turns to the stranger with the following words: “Who of the mortals art thou, mightiest one?”¹⁸ It takes some time for the modern reader to realize that this line is a pun, a slightly twisted Homeric quotation, replacing “of the gods” in the original with “of the mortals,” but retaining the meter. Why the joke? Since, I suppose, it was meant to be a test, whether the stranger addressing Justin belonged to the club of educated persons or not. And the stranger proved himself to be a member of the club, since—as when Homeric heroes met—he related to Justin his “name and extraction.” The formulation, Justin leaves no doubt about this, was done in a mockingly Homeric fashion. And then they sat down in the neighbouring gymnasium to discuss the characteristically Hellenic questions of “*πῶς βιωτέον*,” that is, which is the true philosophy by which one has to live, with rational arguments.

It is against this backdrop of a shared culture that it becomes less implausible when Cassius Dio relates the story of a letter which Emperor Nerva sent to Trajan, the Hispanic, who was then stationed in Germania, a letter written by

his own hand: “May the Danaans by thy shafts requite my tears,”¹⁹ meaning, of course, the vanquishing of the valiant Germans. Or how else would the story of the other Dio, Dio of Prusa, be plausible for Philostratus’ audience, when the sophist, doing menial work in his exile, jumps on an altar during a mutiny, throws off his rags, acting out the returning Odysseus, and quotes aloud the appropriate line from Homer, first, to attract the attention of the soldiers, and then to win them over with an appropriately fiery speech, to act in accordance to the will of Rome?²⁰

The ubiquitous use of Homer as a rhetorical mould, in which communicative situations can be cast, brings us to the issue of the common language. The Hellenistic world, the *οἰκουμένη*, was characterised by several common languages, primarily Greek, but also Latin and later Aramaic/Syriac (nicely symbolised by the inscription in these three languages on the cross of Christ). No realm remotely reminiscent of an *οἰκουμένη* can do without a common language. A vehicle for mutual understanding is required for transmitting ideas, but this is not the only task the common language can do. We should not imagine cultural exchange in an old-fashioned or naive way. Cultural exchange does not mean that people take things over ready-made and appropriate them in their original native sense. Influences work in a much more complex way. *Quidquid recipitur, recipitur per modum recipientis*, as the adage says. Whatever is received is received according to the capacity of the recipient. Again, when we speak about transmitting ideas, we tend to forget that reception implies not only a cohabitation of ideas; but, by allowing them to show up side by side, allows for their competition, too. The fellow citizens, the *συμπολίται* of the cosmic city, meet in the abundantly available public spaces, the *fora*, the *ἀγοραί*, the halls, porticos, covered walkways, baths, and *gymnasia* of the ancient city, where those who want to tell something to others can do so. These are the places to stir up, to argue with, or to convince others. All sorts of people can speak up there in a language in which they can be understood. The ubiquitous theatres of every city in the Hellenistic world, peppered around the *οἰκουμένη*, secured precisely such opportunities. Allowing the public presentation of the ideas created the context of the competition, the *ἀγών*.

It is against this background that the famous speech of St. Paul on the Areopagus becomes so fascinating. It is probably not without benefit to quote at length the preamble of the speech to make the Hellenistic character of the event conspicuous:

¹⁶ Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* II. 33, 13. Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, tr. F. C. Conybeare, Loeb Classical Library 16 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), 205.

¹⁷ Philostratus, *Vita*, III, 22, 14 sq. Loeb, 277.

¹⁸ Justin, *Dial* 1, 3. *Τίς δὲ σὺ ἐσσι, φέριστε βροτῶν*; cf. *Iliad* 15, 247. *Τίς δὲ σὺ ἐσσι, φέριστε θεῶν*;

¹⁹ *Iliad* 1, 42

²⁰ Philostratus, *VS* I.7. Olearius 488, Loeb Classical Library 134 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 20.

Therefore Paul disputed in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seems to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speak, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.) (Acts 17, 17–21)

From the account it is clear that Paul first disputes with Jews, who are his most natural audience. But then the Hellenes get wind of this new speaker. What are they doing then? They make Paul speak out in public. Their attitude fits the principles underlying the abundant urban public spaces. Here it was the theatre of the Council of Athens. The audience takes seat, places Paul in the middle of the stage and, then, says: “Let’s listen to you! Convince us! At least we’ll have some good fun in listening to something yet unheard of.” Paul clearly failed although he delivered a discourse being a patchwork of Classical quotations (he would convince only a handful of his listeners), but the situation described by the text seems to be entirely realistic.

The *Acts of the Apostles* clearly implies that Paul spoke in Greek, the *lingua franca* of the period, which both helped him to explain his message, and enabled his audience to understand it. We can see, what is more, that the common language also allowed the Hellenic philosophers to compare Paul’s new ideas and to judge them.

That Paul had to speak Greek to his audience was not considered by him as submission to Greek cultural imperialism. I suggest that the role assigned to a common language by the Hellenistic realm did not result from a colonizing attitude, but rather from the ideal of a common realm of human culture, where every idea would have a chance to present itself and where values can be judged in open competition. Along these lines Momigliano seems to reproach the “Greek” attitude unjustly. His regret expresses, for the Hellenes, not so much a loss of the genuine perspective of other cultures, but in fact implies a preference for the anti-Hellenistic, the anti-*oecumenic* voice, or, to put it bluntly, the national, or particularist voice.

Let us reflect here for a moment on language, which, as I said above, is the indispensable requirement for understanding between different cultures. In recent discussions, language has often been considered as a vehicle of colonisation. However, let us look at the Hellenistic situation with unbiased eyes. Who were those who colonised in the name of Hellenisation, without promoting their own language? The Romans. The Romans, however, did not impose their own language on the larger part of the empire (except in the realm of law, but that was a different business). Again, considering the social complexity of the (later) Roman army, we can not talk here about a single colonising *nation*, like many times over the course of history. It is rather a political system which can be called the actor. Therefore it should not be surprising that the use of Greek intensified in Egypt after the Roman conquest. Another interesting fact can be gleaned from Tschirikover’s *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, which shows that the inter-Jewish correspondence was conducted in Greek well into the 3rd century A.D.²¹ And which Greek language are we speaking of? The educational program of the Hellenistic schools was based on more-or-less fictitious Greek dialects, namely, Attic for prose and the artificial archaic Homeric dialect for heroic verse (not to mention the Doric and the Aeolic, not being identified with Greek tribes, let alone with a nation, but with literary genres). The artificiality of the educated language meant that it had to be mastered not just by foreigners, but even by native *koine* speakers.

If the above reflections are acceptable, we might also find an explanation for that curious tendency of Hellenistic authors to impute the discovery of every important cultural invention to barbarians. To remain with Momigliano’s own example, the “multicultural” preface of Diogenes Laertius, the second-century doxographer, is a telling paradigm case. Diogenes reports that it is often said, especially by Aristotle and Sotion, that philosophy began with the barbarians. He lists the Magi of the Persians, the Babylonians, the Chaldeans among the Assyrians, the naked philosophers of the Indians, the Druids and the God-fearing among the Celts, the Galatians, the Phoenicians, the Thracians, and the Libyans. So far it is true that Diogenes gives preference to the barbarians. He says very little, however, about their native wisdom. This is understandable: the barbarians had not put forward their wisdom in a comprehensible language. This is a situation hard to acknowledge—but experienced by many a Romanian, Georgian, Armenian, Hungarian, etc. scholar—who, at a certain stage of his or her career,

²¹ Victor A. Tschirikover and A. Fuks, ed., *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

was forced to realize that whatever they published in their mother tongue could be considered as virtually lost to the universal culture of their times.

So why does Plato make Timaeus relate the story, put into the mouth of the Egyptian priest addressing Timaeus' grandfather, according to which "you, Greeks, are just children," meaning: you learnt all your wisdom from your elder brother, that is, from us, Egyptians? We have seen that Momigliano attributes this phenomenon to the Greeks having lost confidence in their own Greek culture. However, was this really due to a dissatisfaction of the Greeks with their own achievements? Let me begin my answer by trying to establish what such an imputation really means. An emphasis on indigenous developments, the attribution of invention to natives in a particular foundation myth, is parsimonious. Emphasis on the indigenous, the national, would create the Other. If I am the originator, the inventor, then the Other can only be a disciple, an inferior. (Some may remark that this is precisely the ideology that present neo-Weberian ideologists and politicians are promoting concerning the achievements of so-called "Western civilisation." We also see the results thereof—a growing anti-Western sentiment all over the world.) By attributing familiar ideas, however, to our opponents, we establish a familiarity with that group. If the origins of my own art are attributed to Others, the Other not only becomes familiar, by definition, since we are pursuing the same art, but this attitude also allows for a balanced relationship, since the story of an adapted wisdom not only allows, but even requires to elevate the Other to my own rank. If the role of the *πρῶτος εὐρέτης* is attributed to an alien, a barbarian, then the alien is drawn into the club on the ticket of something mutually important, a shared heritage. I am inclined to say, therefore, that this Hellenic tendency of attribution to others was, rather than a sign of a loss of self-confidence, a technique of inclusion, that is, a sign of deliberate openness by which the *Other*, the *Alien* could be turned familiar, both in terms of a magnanimous gesture and as objective grounds for acquaintance.

Now let me quote just two examples for the "technique of inclusion." Numenius, the second-century philosopher, is attributed with the famous saying, "What else is Plato, than an Atticising Moses?" This can be taken as an example of "syncretism," but at a closer look it expresses nothing else than the non-imperialistic relation of the Hellenistic philosopher to barbarian wisdom. If Hellenism would have been imperialistic, he would have said: "What else is Moses, than a barbarian Plato?" But he said the opposite.

Another instance of this approach, albeit from the opposite direction is the *Oracula Sibyllana*. I think it is not by chance that this marvellous many-layered theological forgery of the Hellenistic period formulates a Jewish missionary

message and Christian accounts about the baptism of Christ in Homeric style under the name of the mythical soothsayer of Rome. Here, I suspect, we can observe a converse application; the Jewish, and later the Christian, propagandists apply the same strategy of "acclimatisation" by putting prophecies about the Jewish God (or the Christ) in the mouth of the gentile divine, and thereby achieve a *per definitionem* familiarity of the gentile nation with the Jewish and Christian doctrines. If this interpretation is correct, we can detect here a popular technique which might have played a role in the development of the "Oriental religions" in the Roman Empire, too.

Therefore, as to the putative dissatisfaction of the Hellenistic thinkers, with their own culture I just do not think this was the case. The Hellenes were perfectly ready to allow for the first inventor having been a barbarian but, from Plato onwards, they would add an important qualification, namely that perfection belongs to the Hellenes. As Celsus, the second-century philosopher, remarked: "The Barbarians are great in inventing doctrines, but the Hellenes are those who can judge and confirm and apply these doctrines to the practice of virtue."²² In this statement, however, Celsus did nothing other than voice a view that was prevalent among the Graeco-Roman intellectuals. Plato said that, "whatever the Greeks take from the Barbarians, they turn it to something better,"²³ and this was repeated by Pliny: "To invent splendid things, and announce them wonderfully, the Barbarians can, too, but to arrange them properly and design them in various ways belongs to the educated only."²⁴ This general principle also applies to theology. Celsus says repeatedly that whatever the Christians say "has been said far better by the Hellenes,"²⁵ that is, without the uselessly unreasonable doctrines. This attitude is hardly that of someone with an inferiority complex.

I have stressed that we are probably wrong when we assume that Hellenisation was an imperialistic encroachment on native cultures. First of all, the *οἰκουμένη* can be considered, in a general sense, derived from the Roman polity, as a welcome development for the public commensuration of ideas. It helped not only the then-proselitising Jews, or later the Christians and the Manichees, but allowed all nations of the *οἰκουμένη* to develop their skills in the public of others. The cultural attraction can be seen well in the example of the sixth-century historian, the Christianised Goth, Jordanes. His *History of the Goths* described this nation

²² Celsus, *Alethes logos* 1.3. τὰ ὑπὸ βαρβάρων εὐρεθέντα ἀμείνονες εἰσὶν Ἕλληνες

²³ Plato, *Epim.* 987e

²⁴ Plinius, *Ep.* 3, 13, 3: Nam invenire praeclare, enuntiare magnifice interdum etiam barbari solent, disponere apte, figurare varie nisi eruditus negatum est.

²⁵ Celsus, 6, 1: φάσκων βέλτιον αὐτὰ παρ' Ἑλλήσιν εἰρησθαι ...

with the words apparently adopted by all major Hellenistic historians: “Nor did they—the Goths—lack teachers of wisdom. Wherefore they have ever been wiser than other barbarians and were nearly like the Greeks, as Dio relates, who wrote their history and annals with a Greek pen.”²⁶ How does the proud history of this people end, though? Jordanes finishes his account with the victory of Justinian and Belisarius over his own nation, and the story ends with the “union of the race of the Anicii with the stock of the Amalii.”²⁷ With this marriage, the history of the valiant Goths ended, and little regret can be detected in Jordanes’ words. He seems to have favoured the view that at last the Goths achieved their destiny, becoming full members of the universal civilised realm.

Why should we regret that this Hellenic cultural realm proved so attractive for the various peoples? There is no sign that anyone forced Greek on the peoples of the realm. Rather I would suggest that for many this culture (propagated by educationally defined citizenships, that is, political rights) secured entry to the great *cosmopolis*, the citizenship of which carried so many serious advantages (amusingly summarised in the discussion of the Jewish revolutionaries about the cultural impact of Rome in the *Life of Brian* by Monty Python). To the advantages of the universal realm in commerce and urban civilisation one could add, for example, the rule of law. This legal thought appealed by developing concepts like *bona fides* (acting in good faith and assuming the others to act similarly) or *aequitas* (fairness). Of course, these concepts were often more ideals than reality, but the ideals a society develops do characterise a peculiar society. Or consider just one little example, less well known, but a characteristic feature of the Hellenic world nonetheless. It is the phenomenon termed *parrhesia*, freedom of speech, which is contrasted to servile submission. The lives of the sophists are full of accounts of arguments with emperors (even at the risk of life), that is, cases of speaking freely in the company of the sovereigns. The significance of this political term can be seen from the fact that it made its way into theology as well. Origen, for example, in his treatise on prayer, speaks about the novelty of the Christian prayer *Our Father*. He identifies this novelty in the opening address—the free and open frankness of speech—which is “meet and right” for human beings empowered and privileged to become not just children, but “friends” of God.

In addition to all benefits, the Empire was primarily associated with peace. The Jewish Philo “celebrated Augustus in no equivocal words for extending the territory of Hellenism,” as Momigliano himself mentions, in a way the Christians also did later.

²⁶ Jordanes, *Getica* V. 39.

²⁷ Jordanes, *Getica* LX, 315.

This is he [Augustus – GG] who reclaimed every city to liberty, who led disorder into order and brought gentle manners and harmony to all unsociable and brutish nations, who enlarged Hellas by many a new Hellas, and Hellenized the outside world in its most important regions, the guardian of peace who dispensed their dues to each and all ...²⁸

Were these ideas unrealistic? Of course. The dire reality of noble imputations to the non-Hellenes was encountered by the Hellenistic philosophers after the so-called closure of the Academy in Athens in A.D. 529, when they went over to Persia to the court of Chosroes II. Here followed utter disappointment, as can be gathered from Agathias’ remark about their homesickness. This case indicates, perhaps, that when Hellenistic thinkers said that the citizen of the *cosmopolis* feels himself at home in the whole *οἰκουμένη*, what they said was not a statement that could have been established empirically, but a normative requirement. A citizen of world, someone raised in Hellenistic culture, should approach the whole world with a readiness to feel himself or herself at home. This idea, was beautifully formulated in the famous passage of the *Letter to Diognetus*, about the Hellenistic Christians who “live in their home city as foreigners. They participate in the life as citizens everywhere, but they remain in every a place as if foreigners. Every foreign city is native to them, and every native city a stranger.”²⁹

This is why I suggest that the “forgeries” or “imputations” criticised by Momigliano are expressions of, or rather, logical consequences of, an intended worldview. These fictitious tracts, and their imaginative content were not meant to be faithful and factual descriptions, but they formulated—as said above—a normative view. Intentions nonetheless are objective, even if they are not about the real. The facts of life may speak against the imaginative, but it is more important how people face an admittedly hostile world. Take it, as it were, as a benign application of the program of third book of the *Republic*, where Plato proposes the employment of “useful lies” in the education of the citizens.

We can now conclude this sketchy reflection on Momigliano’s important problem. Is barbaric wisdom alien or germane? What seems to emerge of Hellenistic imagination is a gesture both magnanimous and shrewd at the same time, a generous attribution of the role of originator to others, allowing at the same time for the self-assured claim of Plato, Pliny, and Celsus quoted above, that the barbarians might be good at inventing things, but securing them remains for

²⁸ Philo, *Leg ad Gaium* 147. tr. F. H. Colson, J. W. Earp (slightly modified), Loeb Classical Library 379 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 75.

²⁹ *Ep. ad Diognetum* 5, 5, 1–3.

the Hellenes, since it is they who can deal with the issues confidently trusting their superb education and promoted by an environment geared to competition.

This is why, I think, that the well-meaning program of the 1970s about promoting cultural diversity—we should not forget that Momigliano delivered his lectures in 1973—was not necessarily conducive to its own best conceived aims. I think Momigliano forgot about the implications of the Hellenic ideal of agonistic curiosity. The true Hellene is characterised by intellectual interest and inquisitiveness, be it respectful or irreverent. So it has to be—from where else would the Hellene develop the characteristic interest in anything alien and distant? The Hellene wants to understand and to investigate, but one can not conduct a good discussion with inferiors. So allow the barbarians to stand on an equal footing, since they can be credited with inventing all the major cultural achievements, after all.

If the barbarian remains enclosed in his own world, in his own national tradition, which *qua* national tradition has great difficulties in communicating with other national traditions, the barbarian will remain a barbarian. Along these lines the barbarian can be defined as culturally solipsistic. It should be wisdom which matters, after all, not being a Greek, a barbarian or a gentile. Where could the nations form a community and where could the competitive testing grounds for their best ideas for solving the problems of humanity be found if peoples were doomed to silence in the proud isolation of self-centred national traditions?

EASTERN WISDOMS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Guy G. Stroumsa

Some time ago, I realized that there was no Late Antique sequel to what Arnaldo Momigliano had done for the Hellenistic period in his *Alien Wisdom*. If I wanted to read such a book, the next chapter in the history of the cultural relationship between East and West, I soon realized, with some anguish, that I might have to write it myself, with my obvious limitations, and from my own viewpoint. In such a book, I hope to investigate the seduction exerted by traditions of wisdom coming from the old *Kulturvölker* of Iran, India, Israel and Egypt, “among the oldest and the wisest peoples,” as Origen calls them, on late antique intellectuals (both pagans and Christians) in the Eastern Roman Empire.¹ I refer here to the perception of wisdom traditions expressed in both religion and “philosophy,” i.e., in myths and their interpretation. Such traditions, which had circulated since Classical antiquity and through the Hellenistic period, retained their potency in late antiquity. Their powerful attraction is related to, but not identical with, that of the “Oriental religions,” a label forged by Franz Cumont a hundred years ago which oddly ignored both Judaism and Christianity. It was expressed, over the centuries, in a diversity of ways. This attraction is of major importance for a number of Greek- and Syriac-writing authors and for the formation of their own cultural and religious identity. Moreover, these traditions of Eastern wisdom seem to have had a major impact upon the Arabization of Greek philosophy in early Islam. Despite a great number of monographs, this topic has never elicited, it seems, a synthetic and sustained study.

Since at least Herodotus and Plato, Greek culture has shown a sustained curiosity for, and powerful attraction to, the wisdom traditions of Eastern peoples. Around 300 B.C., Megasthenes thought that essential concepts of Greek philosophy had been anticipated by the Indian Brahmins and the Syrian Jews. This curiosity and attraction eventually passed to European culture, of which they became a constant component, until it was picked up and transformed by modern Orientalist philology. A study of the powerful interest in Eastern wisdom in late antiquity might shed some light on the dynamics of this passage. Both before and after the religious revolution of the fourth century initiated by Constantine, several intellectuals, particularly in the Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, expressed a lively interest in traditions of wisdom coming from

¹ *Contra Celsum*, 1.14.16.