

Oriental Mirages

Stereotypes and Identity Creation
in the Ancient World

Edited by
Björn Forsén and Antti Lampinen

ORIENS ET OCCIDENS

Studien zu antiken Kulturkontakten und ihrem Nachleben | 42

Franz Steiner Verlag





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Studien zu antiken Kulturkontakten und ihrem Nachleben

Herausgegeben von

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in Zusammenarbeit mit

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Band 42

www.steiner-verlag.de/brand/Oriens-et-Occidens

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Umschlagabbildung:

Triumph of Shapur I, Sassanid rock relief, Naqsh-e Rostam, Iran.

Depicted is Shapur I on horse, receiving two submissive Romans,
probably the emperors Philip the Arab (kneeling) and Valerian (standing).

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über
dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

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www.steiner-verlag.de

Layout und Herstellung durch den Verlag

Satz: DTP + TEXT Eva Burri, Stuttgart

Druck: Beltz Grafische Betriebe, Bad Langensalza

Gedruckt auf säurefreiem, alterungsbeständigem Papier.

Printed in Germany.

ISBN 978-3-515-13672-3 (Print)

ISBN 978-3-515-13680-8 (E-Book)

DOI 10.25162/9783515136808

Preface

We live in a world full of stereotypes or generalised beliefs about categories of people. Wherever we turn we stumble on stereotypes concerning nationality, ethnicity, race, religious affiliation, gender, class, sexuality etc. Stereotypes play an important role in how we define not only other, but also ourselves. Stereotypes are as a matter of fact often constructed to create or strengthen our own identity, or to bring people together around a common cause. When studying stereotypes, we thus need to ask ourselves when, how and why they developed, and what they resulted in.

The Greek stereotypes of the East were strongly influenced by the Persian Wars, with Aeschylus' *Persians* being, as Edith Hall put it in her *Inventing the Barbarian*, 'the first unmistakable file in the archive of Orientalism, the discourse by which the European imagination has dominated Asia by conceptualising its inhabitants as defeated, luxurious, emotional, cruel and always as dangerous'. However, some parts of the stereotypical picture of the East clearly pre-date the Persian Wars. Needless to say, the Greek picture of the East developed continuously also after the days of Aeschylus, with subsequent generations during the Hellenistic and Roman periods appropriating it creatively over and over again in order to articulate distinctive, often imperial identities.

As shown by Edward Said already in his seminal book *Orientalism* in 1978, clear links can be seen between the ancient Greek and Roman stereotypes of the East and the above all during the nineteenth century prevalent prejudiced European picture of the Muslim world, which was considered exotic, backward, uncivilised, degenerate and dangerous as contrasted with the western societies that were seen as developed, rational, flexible and above all superior. What more, the Western tradition was clearly shaped by cultural attitudes of European imperialism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, just as the ancient Greek stereotypes of the East were intertwined with imperial ideals.

The Greek and Roman stereotypes of the East are well documented by the rich ancient literature and to some extent also by depictions in art. These rich sources enable us to study the ancient stereotypes of the East from numerous different points of view. However, we should not forget that our interpretations always suffer from the fact that we know much less about how the groups in the East viewed the Greeks and the

Romans, and thereby also about how this influenced the Greek and Roman thinking. Some clues can be extracted from visual depictions, such as, for instance, the Sassanid rock-cut relief in Naqsh-e Rostam, modern Iran, illustrating the triumph of Shapur I over the Romans, reproduced on the cover of this volume.

Shapur I is depicted on the Naqsh-e Rostam relief larger than life-size seated on horseback wearing royal armour and a crown. Two Romans approach him from the left, one is kneeling before the Sassanid Shahanshah, the second one is standing next to the horse being seized by his hand. There is a more elaborate version of this same relief in Bishapur, where the depiction includes a third dead Roman as well, being trampled below the hooves of Shapur's horse. The depiction has been explained by scholars in different ways, with MacDermot's suggestion from 1954, according to which the three Romans would refer to the emperors Gordian III (beneath the horse), Philip the Arab (kneeling) and Valerian (standing), still finding many supporters.

The relief depicting Shapur I's triumph is a wonderful example of how to communicate the notion of imperial power. This is not only expressed by the poses, with Shapur I rendered triumphant and superior while the Roman Emperors are defeated and subservient, but also by the way of how Shapur's crown is depicted as breaking through the upper edge of the relief to draw more attention to him and magnify his authority and importance. The message sent by the relief is clear: this is the real master of the world, in front of whom the Roman Emperors are forced to prostrate themselves. The notion of universalism was part of the imperial ideals embraced by all Middle Eastern empires going back at least to the Assyrians, if not even further. Part of the Greek and Roman stereotypes of the East clearly find their roots among these eastern imperial ideals, being taken over by the Greeks after their victory against the Persians, and then reproduced and applied in various ways.

The obvious need of a re-interpretation of the stereotypes of the East, with the focus shifting away from Said's Orientalism towards the importance of imperial identities led to the organisation of the colloquium *Creating and Strengthening Identities: Greek and Roman Stereotypes of the East* at the Finnish Institute at Athens in 2019, where we were then active as Director and Assistant Director. This volume was formed on the basis of that colloquium. Most of the speakers of the colloquium have contributed with chapters, in addition to which we afterwards invited a selection of colleagues to join us. We would like to express our gratitude to everybody taking part in one way or another to the process leading to this volume, including the two anonymous reviewers. Especially we want to thank the Finnish Institute at Athens that supported the organisation of the colloquium as well as Josef Wiesehöfer and the other editors of *Oriens et Occidens* for welcoming this volume into their publication series. The Franz Steiner Verlag has throughout been very helpful in facilitating the publication in a swift way.

Names of journals and periodicals are in this volume abbreviated according to the system of *L'Année philologique*. References to ancient authors follow the abbreviation sys-

tem of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (fourth edition), with missing authors or works abbreviated according to *A Greek-English Lexicon* (H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie, Oxford 1996). Fragments of the Greek historians are numbered according to *Brill's New Jacoby*, abbreviated *BNJ*.

Helsinki and Athens, January 2024
Björn Forsén and Antti Lampinen

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Barbarians and Empire

Greek and Roman Conceptions of the East

BJÖRN FORSÉN / ANTTI LAMPINEN

In the ancient world, art, wisdom and culture originated in the East. The Greeks were strongly influenced by the Achaemenid, Assyrian and Egyptian cultures. The way Romans looked at it, after having conquered Greece they had, in turn, brought civilisation home to the previously rustic Rome, or as Horace put it: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio* (*Ep.* 2.1.156–157). However, Empire as an institution and power also originated in the Orient, combined with wealth and abundance. What the Greeks and Romans admired and wished to emulate was therefore often to be found in the Orient. When the Greeks grew stronger and first defeated, then subdued the Persians, they began to look down on them and to emphasise the negative aspects of the ‘barbarians’: autocracy, despotism, weakness, effeminacy, decadence, corruption, greed etc. The East was frequently turned into the opposite of all virtues the Greeks and later the Romans strove for.

The gaze directed at the East has been compared to looking into a mirror, where the Greeks and Romans could see all the wonders they admired and strived after. Mirrors can on the other hand also be dangerous; getting too attached to what one sees is not good, in addition to which the mirror may distort or invert the reality.¹ The Orient has also been described in the terms of mirages, as a phantasm, a space of occlusion and illusion.² The mirage is an optical phenomenon, typically associated with the deserts

1 The first one to use the idea of a mirror in this context was Hartog 1980. Morgan 2016 approached the Greek perspectives on Persia through the twin analogies of mirrors and looking-glasses, the looking-glasses narrowing the view, picking out only some aspects of the society being observed.

2 Cf. e.g., Pinney 2018, according to whom mirages beginning from the late eighteenth century became a symbol ‘of Oriental despotism, a negative, but also enchanted emblem’. The term *le mirage Oriental* has on the other hand been used to describe both positive and negative illusions concerning the Orient. For Reinach 1893 it represented the, according to him, false belief in the Orient as the cradle of civilisation, whereas Bertrand 1910 uses it to describe the western inability to see the real development of the Orient, which instead is stereotyped as an exotic and backward region. Lepage 2000 uses the term in connection with ‘Orientalist’ paintings.

of the Middle East, through which displaced hazy images of distant objects are produced. Exactly what the images represent is determined by the interpretative skills of the viewer, thus producing both positive and negative visions.³

Identities are often constructed through the articulation of a common origin or shared characteristics (language, religion etc.). Yet the capacity to exclude or to abject people also plays an important role in the shaping of identities. Identity is to a large degree built through difference, on the relation to the opposite of how people regard themselves.⁴ Ethnic stereotypes, or culturally shared assumptions about other people, are often strongly involved in the creation and strengthening of one's own identity – either as an individual or as a group – or in bringing people together around a common cause. The effect of ethnic stereotypes can be strengthened by emic stereotypes, that is, mostly positive stereotypes about oneself or one's own in-group.⁵ Identities are never static and monolithic, but rather continuously reshaped and adapted to new circumstances. What more, identities are typically also multiple and overlapping. Most ancient Greeks thus identified themselves first of all with their *polis*, but they could simultaneously feel belonging to other groups such as a *demos*, a tribe or an *ethnos*. Greeks slowly also developed a common Hellenic identity, although this was not especially strong to begin with, and in practice was mostly foregrounded in reaction to out-groups. Similar multiple identities were also characteristic to the Roman world, where the shaping of a strong common Roman identity took centuries.⁶

The development of stereotypes about the East during antiquity is clearly connected to the need of creating stronger common Hellenic and Roman identities. However, it would be wrong to believe that there existed anything like a monolithic image of the Orient. The picture of the East developed and changed continuously, and during this process many Eastern peoples were characterised interchangeably through the same motifs. There may thus be a need to define a set of different 'repertoires' of stereotypes used in different chronological/cultural contexts, beginning from differences between Greek and Roman strains. This is complicated by the fact that part of the stereotypes tended to turn into literary *topoi* that were repeated numerous times, often even with

3 'Mirror' and 'mirage' are both developed from the Latin verb *mirari*, meaning 'to wonder at, admire'.

4 For identities, cf. e.g., Hall 1996 or Ehala 2018. Hölscher 2000 speaks about the importance of *Gegenwelten* (counterworlds/antipodes), also present in the mythical context. In a similar way Cartledge 1993 focuses on Greek self-definition through five pairings of classical thought constructed as binary oppositions (polarities): Greek-barbarian, men-women, citizen-alien, free-slave and gods-mortals.

5 For the sociopsychology of in-group/out-group cognition and identity-building, see Ehala 2018, 159–163. On the entanglement between 'autostereotypes' (the beliefs of the in-group about themselves) and 'heterostereotypes' (the beliefs about out-groups or the others), cf. Zacharasiewicz 2010, 36; Leerssen 2016, 16–17.

6 For the creation of a Hellenic identity, see e.g., Hall 1997; Hall 2002; for the development of a Roman identity, see e.g., Dench 2005; Farney 2007; Wallace-Hadrill 2008.

close to similar formulations. Pausanias, for instance, was very fond of re-using Herodotean formulations in his second-century AD *Periegesis*.⁷ The free borrowing of the 'Oriental' stereotypes in the subsequent tradition, and their application to different societies – sometimes by societies which in themselves were stereotyped as 'Oriental' by other groups – points to the inescapable conclusion that 'Orient' was and has always been a moving '(n)everwhere', and each society in the Western tradition has been prone to construct their own 'Orient' and 'Orientals'.

There is also a clear correlation between imperialist conceptions and the way groups viewed as enemies were perceived. Within an imperial discourse of power and providentiality, the empire is usually presented as triumphant and superior, whereas the defeated enemy militarily inferior and weak. This imperialistic perception of power was embraced by all Middle Eastern empires going back at least to the Assyrians.⁸ Part of the Greek and Roman stereotypes of the East find their roots among these eastern imperial ideals, being taken over by the Greeks when they began to subdue the Persians, and then being reproduced and applied in various ways in literature with the aim of marginalising the others.⁹ It has even been suggested that the Greek stereotypes of the East – including the concept of the 'barbarian' – and the Hellenic ethnic identity would go back to the Achaemenid imperial administrative system, where focus was laid on ethnic specificity and distinctions inside the empire.¹⁰

Edward Said suggested in his seminal 1978 book *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient* that there existed a link between the Greek and Roman stereotypes of the East and the mainly during the nineteenth century prevalent prejudiced and imperialist European picture of the Muslim world, which was considered exotic, stagnant, decadent and dangerous, and contrasted with the western societies that were seen as developed, rational, flexible and above all superior.¹¹ It is due to Said's influence that the words 'Orient' and 'Oriental' have struck a negative chord and warnings have been issued about projecting the use of them to antiquity, because doing so would be both anachronistic and potentially circular.¹² However, there are also several ambiguities connected with the alternative term 'Asiatic', although it clearly was used already from the Classical era onwards.¹³ In order to facilitate this, we have chosen in this volume to use 'Orient', 'Asia',

7 Cf. e.g., Lampinen, this volume.

8 For the imperial conception of power and its influence on stereotypes, cf. Isaac 2004. For the empire and imperialistic notions in a diachronic perspective, see most recently the contributions in Bang *et al.* 2021. Imperial power is usually combined with military authority and masculinity, whereas the defeated with slavery. Cf. e.g., De Souza 2011; McAvoy 2017; Merrill 2015 with further references.

9 Cf. e.g., Isaac 2004. For the Latin literature serving the interests of Roman power, see Habinek 1998.

10 Kim 2013, 32–36.

11 Said 1978.

12 Skinner 2012, 74. Cf. also Farris 2010, 268.

13 Lenfant 2017, 22–24, who argues against using 'Asiatic' as a synonym for 'Orientals'.

‘East’ or any derivation of them parallel to each other, the words ‘Orient’ and ‘Oriental’ in no way implying a diachronically unitary ‘Orientalist’ tradition.

Said’s suggestion of a link between the Greek and Roman stereotypes of the East and the Orientalist attitude of the Europeans towards the Muslim is not the main topic of this volume, although touched upon in some contributions. The aim of this collection is rather to identify and discuss sets of – frequently interconnected – stereotypes that structured ancient thinking and writing about the East and its peoples with a reference to respective repertoires of stereotypes in given chronological and cultural contexts. When and why did the different stereotypical motifs about the Orient develop? What role did the shaping of common Hellenic and Roman identities, or of an imperial identity, play in this? Which were the in-groups and out-groups connected with the stereotypical conceptions and how did they change over time? What role was played by the literary and rhetorical use of *topoi* based on established stereotypical elements? Due to the vast field, all these questions cannot be dealt with in detail, nor is it possible to provide any all-covering answers, but we hope that this volume still can rise the interest of the reader and stimulate to further work in the field.

Research trends

As already noted, the modern research on stereotypes of the East during antiquity is strongly influenced by post-colonial frameworks and especially of Edward Said. When Edith Hall wrote her *Inventing the Barbarian. Greek Self-definition through Tragedy*, a decade after the publication of Said’s *Orientalism*, she fixed the main horizon for the exacerbation of Greek images of Persia to the shock reaction of the Persian Wars. She noted that the term *barbarophonos* already had Homeric pedigree, but emphasised the way in which the tragedy as a genre shows early signs of a rise in oppositional imagery between the Hellenes on the one hand, and the barbarians on the other – and the role of the Persians as a significant group of barbarian enemies.¹⁴ Hall explicitly acknowledged the inspiration that Said’s *Orientalism* had offered for her thinking.¹⁵ The link to Said and modern Orientalism definitely helped not only to make Hall’s book a classic, but also turned the study of ancient stereotypes of the East into a popular and topical subject.

On the other hand, Said’s importance for Hall should not be overstated. The ancient perceptions of the Eastern barbarians in Greek tragedies had already before her been discussed by, for instance, Walther Kranz in *Stasimon. Untersuchungen zu Form und Gehalt der griechischen Tragödie*, or Helen H. Bacon in *Barbarians in Greek Trage-*

14 Hall 1989, esp. 56–100, 184–224; see also Bridges *et al.* 2007; Isaac 2004, 257–298; Barbantani 2014.

15 Hall 1989, 99.

dy.¹⁶ The topic in other genres of literature or in general terms had also been addressed in several studies, among which the most influential were Adrian N. Sherwin-White's *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome*, Arnaldo Momigliano's *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization*, François Hartog's *Le miroir d'Hérodote. Essai sur la représentation d'autre* and Timothy Long's *Barbarians in Greek Comedy*,¹⁷ most of which were referred to by Hall. Though some of these may have been influenced by post-colonial thinking to a degree, the earlier of these studies obviously received their inspiration from other lines of thinking. Julius Jüthner's less known *Hellenen und Barbaren. Aus der Geschichte des Nationalbewusstseins*, for instance, was influenced by the inhumanity experienced during the First World War.¹⁸

Hall's *Inventing the Barbarian* offered inspiring grounds for further explorations of the Helleno-barbarian interfaces. The subsequent range of contributions are far too numerous to be fully covered here, but a few observations and thematic highlights seem useful. James Romm in *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* studied the Greek perceptions of the furthest reaches of the *oikoumene*; Tom Harrison in *The Emptiness of Asia* continued focusing on the Eastern realities informing Aeschylus' *Persians*; while Benjamin Isaac in *Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (as well as Erich Gruen in his decidedly more optimistic response to it, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*) debated the degree to which conceptions of ethnicity and cultural identities intermingled with the dialectics of discrimination and belonging in Greek and Roman thinking.¹⁹ The representations of Persia in Herodotus and Ctesias have seen a great deal of nuanced scholarship, too.²⁰ In contrast, imagology – the study of historical characterisations of population groups – has remained a largely peripheral approach, with no significant impact on Ancient Studies.²¹

Parallel with the virtual boom of publications on the stereotypes of the East appearing during the last three decades, the scholarly world has also witnessed a burgeoning interest in questions concerning ancient identities and ethnicity. The shaping of identities and ethnicity within the Greek cultural sphere have been masterfully discussed by the likes of Jonathan Hall and Irad Malkin, also with reference to the picture of the East.²² Malkin traces the formation of a Greek ethnic identity back to the ninth century

16 Kranz 1933; Bacon 1961.

17 Sherwin-White 1967; Momigliano 1975; Hartog 1980 (see also Pelling 1997, 52–54); Long 1986.

18 Jüthner 1923. Jüthner covers the topic diachronically beginning from Homer all the way through to the Byzantine period.

19 Romm 1992; Harrison 2000; Isaac 2004; Gruen 2011.

20 Briant 2002; Miller 2006; Munson 2009; Harrison 2011 and 2015; Lenfant 2012; Lenfant 2019; Abe 2014; Provencal 2015; Morgan 2016; Llewellyn-Jones 2017.

21 On imagology, see Leerssen 2016 with a review of past research trends; a major challenge he identifies is to find non-Eurocentric working methods and a priori models (27), which also applies to the study of ancient imagery.

22 Hall 1997; Hall 2002; Malkin 1998; Malkin 2001.

BC, whereas Hall rather envisioned it formed during the Archaic period through interaction between local elites during the panhellenic games, though also emphasising the change in Greek self-definition from an aggregative to an oppositional in the wake of the Persian Wars, from an identity constructed 'cumulatively from within' to one 'being defined without'.²³

Qualitative change in the Greek self-definition in response to the Persian Wars seems likely, but it also is fairly clear that parts of the iconosphere of ethnically framed elements about the Eastern peoples certainly predated the Persian Wars. Hyun Jin Kim has for instance suggested that Ionia during the late sixth century BC might have offered the context for the development of a dichotomy between Greeks and barbarians.²⁴ It has also been noted long ago that behind some of the early Greek articulations of Eastern difference was the need to explain why the numerically fewer and in material terms seemingly disadvantaged Greeks were able to beat back two major Persian interventions.²⁵ Yet the oppositional dichotomies are not the only way to look at even this stage of the Orientalist imagery – or rather, we have to acknowledge that even as the general assemblage of ideas may have gravitated towards negative content, practical connections, interactions and entanglements would have gone on much as before, or even intensified. This is entirely in keeping with the dynamics between stereotypes and real-life interactions. As Kostas Vlassopoulos has shown in his *Greeks and Barbarians*, the mobility of goods, ideas and technologies never reflected particularly strongly the alienating currents of the Greek and Roman discourse. That said, many literary testimonies to intercultural communication are nonetheless inflected through the already-existing pool of stereotypes.²⁶

According to Benjamin Isaac the meaning of *barbaros* changed during the fifth century. He emphasises that there is no evidence that the Persians would have been considered inferior during the first half of the fifth century BC – they were rather considered worthy opponents. The appearance towards the late fifth century of the picture of the Asiatics as different and inferior, Isaac sees in correlation to the emergence of imperialist conceptions among the Greeks.²⁷ Roman authors influenced by similar conceptions adopted from the Mid- and Late Republic onwards the Greek stereotypes of the East, directing them first against the Greeks and later towards the monarchies

23 For the change from aggregative to oppositional, see Hall 1997, 47; Hall 2015, 25.

24 Kim 2013, in principle accepted by Hall 2015, 25. For supporters of the horizon of the Persian Wars, cf. e.g., Shapiro 2009; Huang 2010.

25 Jouanna 1981; Chiasson 2001.

26 Vlassopoulos 2013.

27 Isaac 2004, 261–303, 509–513. Bernhardt 2003 reaches independently of Isaac a similar interpretation, Miller 2006 again a somewhat similar result while studying the representation of Persians in Attic vase paintings, where the Persians, after first having been depicted as worthy opponents, around 460 BC began to be belittled until they finally around 400 BC totally disappeared from the iconographical palette.

of Anatolia and the Near East.²⁸ The stereotypes clearly played a role in shaping a new broader imperial Roman identity although this has not been as strongly emphasised.²⁹

Chronological stages and cultural contexts

According to Edith Hall the negative stereotypes of the Orient were created during the early fifth century BC in response to the Persian threat and with the aim of shaping a common Greek identity.³⁰ Recent research has shown that the development of the negative stereotypes clearly was a more complex and non-linear process that stretched over centuries. The type and preserved number of sources obviously restricts our possibilities to elucidate the development of the sets of stereotypes, especially for the early phases dating to the Archaic period. However, a series of consecutive chronological/cultural milieus can still be discerned, two of which pre-date Hall's suggested appearance of the stereotypes of the Orient.

During the period preceding the Persian Wars, Greeks travelling out of their homelands in pursuit of trade and mercenary contacts would have formed an important interface for the formation of early ideas about the East. The Eastern Mediterranean was dominated by a series of empires and other polities characterised by higher population density, military power, wealth and prestige. The centralised wealth produced by the Eastern empires attracted traders and pirates, but also made it possible for both the local and imperial rulers to hire mercenaries from peripheral areas like the Aegean world. Greek mercenaries fought for nearly every single Near Eastern empire at least from the mid-seventh century until the Hellenistic period, with the first cases probably dating as early as the second half of the eighth century BC.³¹ Mercenaries tend to be canny observers of the realities that they depend upon, and would typically have respected the wealth and power of those who hired them, even though at the same time they despised them for being weak and deceitful, having to hire others to fight for them and not always paying correctly. Reflections of this can already be found in the Homeric epics written during the late eighth or early seventh century BC.³²

28 Gruen 1984, 260–272; Isaac 2004, 304–323, 371–380. Cf. also Lerouge 2007 for the Roman picture of the Parthians.

29 Cf. e.g., Dench 2005 or Wallace-Hadrill 2008. Before the Romans expanded towards the East, they rather considered other Italic people barbarous (e.g., Dench 1995; Farney 2007).

30 Hall 1989.

31 Cf. Skinner, this volume, but also e.g., Luraghi 2006; Halle 2013; Iancu 2014; Iancu 2016; Rop 2021. Fantalkin and Lytle 2016 recently disputed the presence of Greek mercenaries in Neo-Babylonian service, a statement opposed by Iancu 2016.

32 Iancu 2014; Skinner, this volume. For admiration of Oriental wealth and power, cf. Hom. *Od.* 4.81–90; 4.120–135; 4.227–232; 4.613–619; for eastern wealth combined with subtle allusion to femininity, cf. Hom. *Il.* 2.867–875.

In the Greek worldview, seafaring and trade were also – despite their ubiquity and necessity – often associated with deception and luxury. Accordingly, Phoenicians could from very early times onwards be portrayed as slavers and potentially untrustworthy merchants.³³ For the inhabitants of the Syro-Palestinian, Cilician and Egyptian coasts, it may on the other hand well have been the ‘Yauna’ (Ionians) who were the tricksters, merchants and slavers – not to mention mercenaries. The Greek traders, pirates and later mercenaries brought not only ‘Egyptian and Assyrian merchandise’ home,³⁴ but also formed impressions of the eastern lands and thereby surely influenced early Greek stereotype-forming. The interactions of the Greek mercenaries formed not only ‘information’ and ‘facts’ that then began their circulation among the Greeks, but also ‘meaning’ – value assessments, symbolically and culturally important expressions of difference.³⁵ The objects they brought with them were the physical carriers of such symbolic meanings.

The Greek *poleis* along the western coast of Anatolia first came under Lydian rule during the late seventh and early sixth century, followed by Achaemenid rule from the second half of the sixth century BC. This brought along a clear change in relation to the Eastern empires, which even may have formed the very context for the development of the category of ‘barbarian’, as suggested by Hyun Jin Kim.³⁶ Part of the early Greek stereotype-formation certainly took place within the complex network of the multi-cultural Achaemenid Empire, where many population groups were conceptualised and portrayed according to their typical outfit and produce. The early focus on Eastern luxury products and wealth could thus reflect the commodity-oriented knowledge ordering of the Achaemenid Empire as much as it reflects the meaning-making about the exotic products that the Greeks encountered through trade and looting.

33 See Skinner 2012, 86–89; also Isaac 2004, 324–327.

34 Cf. e.g., Hdt 1.1–2, describing how Phoenician traders captured Io of Argos, whereas Greeks captured Europa from Tyre in Phoenicia and Medea from Aea in Colchis. Herodotus mentions the Phoenician traders bringing ‘Egyptian and Assyrian merchandise’ to Greece, but such could of course as well have been brought back by Greek traders, or as reciprocity gifts connected to mercenary service (Iancu 2014). For an overview of such Egyptian gifts ending up in Greek sanctuaries, see Agut-Labordère 2012, for similar Assyrian finds of the eighth and seventh centuries, cf. Luraghi 2006, or Dezsö and Ver 2013. The Oriental bronze reliefs found in Olympia probably represent the best example of Assyrian objects found in Greece. They seem to originate from bronze sheeting of columns or doorposts at an entrance to an important Assyrian building in northern Syria, probably stolen in connection with the collapse of the Assyrian Empire in 612 BC, whereafter acquired by an itinerant trader or bronzeworker, who brought them to Greece. Trade with scrap metal was apparently widespread and voluminous already around 600 BC. Cf. Borell and Rittig 1998; Guralnick 2004.

35 Skinner, this volume.

36 Kim 2013, 32–36. According to Kim the word ‘barbarian’ goes back to the Old Persian *barabara*, which means ‘he who carries a burden/load’. In New Persian *barabara* or *barbara* could either mean ‘carrier/bearer of a burden or tax, that is taxpayer’ or indeed tribute. The barbarians would thus be those people who paid tribute/taxes to the Achaemenid Great King.

Written sources dating to the sixth century BC are rare, but we can draw certain conclusions about this epoch on the base of a growing number of vase paintings. Using vase paintings as sources for ancient sets of stereotypes and cultural identities has to factor in several methodological problems. There is apparently no clear link between depictions of barbarians in Athenian iconography on the one hand and the picture given by literary sources on the other, not to speak of real intercultural encounters. The large number of Scythians and Thracians appearing in Attic vase paintings between c. 530 and 500 BC can, for instance, be shown to represent Greeks dressed in elements of Thracian and Scythian costume, elements that emphasise their skills as horsemen, peltasts and archers or their inclination to immoderate drinking. The artists have thus employed elements of the ethnographic record not to depict barbarians, but rather to stress certain characteristics of Greek figures. For representations of barbarians *per se* in Attic vase painting before 490 BC we are restricted to rarer mythological scenes including Busiris and Memnon. The situation changes after the Persian Wars when Persians appear in frequent battle scenes at the same time as Amazons and Trojans begin to be depicted by elements of Orientalising visual stereotypes.³⁷ Nonetheless the late sixth century BC vase paintings indicate the existence of ethnographic stereotyping of at least Thracians, Scythians, Ethiopians and Egyptians already before the battle of Marathon.

The conflict with the Persians between 490 and 480 BC clearly led to a new chapter in the Greek relation to the Eastern empires, the stage singled out by Edith Hall, during which the Greeks began to define themselves ever more in 'oppositional terms'.³⁸ The number of preserved literary sources also increase strongly during the fifth century, heavily influencing our interpretations. The Persians were first described as worthy opponents, although characterised by negative stereotypes. However, Greek military successes during the late fifth century, crowned by the march of the Ten Thousand in 401 BC, slowly changed their picture of the eastern adversaries. Military success also brought along slaves, creating another important source for ethnically framed knowledge, at the same time as fostering an imperialistic attitude.³⁹ Rainer Bernhardt and Benjamin Isaac have identified what could be described as a fourth chronological/cultural stage developing towards the late fifth century, typical for which was the fact that the Orientals increasingly were considered inferior as compared to the superior Greeks.⁴⁰ This imperialistic image of the adversary most likely also was taken over from

37 Vlassopoulos, this volume. For the depictions of Persians in Attic vase painting, cf. Miller 2006.

38 Hall 1989. For the difference between this 'oppositional' self-definition compared to the 'aggregative' one preceding it, cf. Hall 1997, 42; Hall 2015, 25.

39 See Harrison 2019.

40 Bernhardt 2003; Isaac 2004.

the eastern empires, probably by Greeks employed by the Great King: Ctesias being the best example of this.⁴¹

When analysing stereotypical images in literary works we need to put emphasis on when, why and for whom they were written. Aeschylus' *Persians* was written from a perspective of defiant resistance, not confident supremacy,⁴² whereas for instance Ctesias' *Persica* and even *Airs, Waters, Places*, a partially preserved work of the Hippocratic school, in which ethnographic stereotypes are seen as environmentally determined, are both influenced by the imperialistic attitude towards developing the late fifth century where the Eastern people were considered inferior.⁴³ Herodotus, who wrote during the third quarter of the fifth century, belongs somewhere between these stages. Thus, from the late fifth century BC onwards we see an intensifying influence of a belief according to which the spread of eastern vices led to the decline and fall of empires, which cannot be found in such a schematic form in Herodotus' work.⁴⁴

Different chronological/cultural stages of stereotypes can also be discerned when surveying how the Greeks related to the religion of the others, a topic which so far has received only little attention. The first signs of development of a common Greek religious identity, on a level above separate religious or *polis*-identities, can be found in sixth-century BC Naucratis, where the Greeks originating from different *poleis* obviously felt a need to emphasise a religious communality of their own, separated from the Egyptian one. After the Persian Wars, appeals to a common Greek religious identity appear also in the Aegean area, with the stereotype of Persian ruler-worship and impiety occurring already by Aeschylus. The emphasis is on exclusion – the things that the Greeks should not practice – rather than any distinct listing of in-group practices. However, it is not until towards the late fifth century BC and beyond that barbarian religion begins to be described as primitive, inferior and even ridiculous, in a clearly imperialistic way.⁴⁵ It is hardly surprising that especially strong mockery of the foreign can be found in comedies, as for instance revealed by a fragment of the comedy author Anaxandrides (F 40 K-A), where Egyptian customs are ridiculed: 'you bow down to a cow, but I sacrifice it to the gods'.

When using literary sources, we also need to distinguish between ethnic stereotypes and literary *topoi*. The latter rely on their communicative power on the active stereotypes among the audience, and often make use of them in order to strengthen the picture given of a people's or person's characteristics.⁴⁶ For a writer to use for instance

41 See Vickers 1990.

42 Bang *et al.* 2021, 11, correctly characterising the *Persians* as 'anti-imperial'.

43 For *Persica*, see Almagor 2012; for the Hippocratic *Airs*, see Chiasson 2001; Lenfant 2017; Kennedy 2016.

44 Bertrand 2003, 122

45 Harrison, this volume.

46 For the relationship that *topoi* bear to commonly shared stereotypes, cf. Zerjadtke 2020a and 2020b.

the cliché of ‘Punic perfidy’ or ‘Syrian greed’ without explanations requires for their audience to understand the reference – it needs, in other words, to be an active component in their pool of stereotypes about the Carthaginians. During the Hellenistic period the stereotypes of the East had already developed into a set of literary *topoi* that was re-used about a range of different, not always necessarily Oriental peoples, sometimes even tapping into other sets of stereotypes, always with the aim of emphasising in-group’s own military and cultural superiority vis-à-vis the adversary, something that was further developed by the Romans.

During the growth of the Roman Republic into an Empire, the Roman encounter with societies of the Eastern Mediterranean took many forms and was anything but one-directional. Depending on the context, many different aspects of the received Greek stereotypical pool could be triggered or brought to the foreground in literary genres. From Cato’s time onwards the denigration of Greeks at Rome had sometimes taken the form of stereotypes about ‘over-clever’, devious or emasculated foreigners – which testifies to the Hellenistic *koine* of Oriental imagery being adopted and reapplied fairly early into the Roman self-fashioning. The very fact that Greece had, indeed, been conquered, seems to have testified to the reality of these stereotypes. The ideas only gathered strength, and Cicero’s *Verrine Orations*, for instance, show that the imagery was plausible also in the intensely Hellenised Late Republican context.⁴⁷

Interactions in the East, especially after Pompey’s fully imperialist ‘reorganisation’ there, made the area more significant in his Roman contemporaries’ minds. The first shocks of Roman defeats against Parthians – especially at Carrhae (53 BC) – would also have played a role in foregrounding the role of the East in Roman worldview.⁴⁸ But once again, the picture is complex and not solely based on enemy imagery: in concrete terms, an increasing number of Syrians, Jews, Egyptians and other representatives of Levantine societies would have made lives for themselves in the city of Rome. Interaction can lead to understanding, but as is clear from the xenophobic outbursts that Juvenal echoes (or perhaps parodies), these groups would frequently face discrimination, too.⁴⁹ The pool of stereotypes was so widely spread and shared in the Imperial era in both Greek and Latin communication that they could be very easily activated in the minds of the audience. Once again, the kaleidoscopic reflections of the Orient could be put into a vast range of uses.

47 See e.g., Henrichs 1995; on Cicero’s representation of Verres’ as corrupted by exposure to Greek *mores*, see Vasaly 1993, 199–217, also cf. 109–110, 143–145.

48 Lerouge 2007; for the complex relations and images in the Augustan era, see Rose 2005, Parker 2011; on High-Imperial era, see Hartmann 2008; Landskron 2006.

49 On Juvenal’s xenophobic utterances, see Gellérfi 2019; Geue 2015.

Sets of stereotypes

The stereotypes of the East can be grouped into broader thematic categories, although it should be emphasised that these categories were in many ways interconnected and mutually associative, and in practice were often presented in different combinations.⁵⁰ Four broader thematic categories can be identified, of which the three first ones focus on autocracy, luxury and decadence/effeminacy, whereas the fourth is connected to appreciation and suspicion of Eastern wisdom traditions. The three first ones are negative stereotypes, whereas the fourth one ranges from admiration to apprehension.

The way the Athenians saw it in the later fifth century, two politically totally different societies had stood against each other during the Persian Wars; a plethora of small Greek *poleis*, in principle self-governing communities of citizens based on democratic or oligarchic political systems, were opposed by the Achaemenid Empire ruled by an omnipotent Great King. Before the Persian Wars, the image of the Eastern monarchs such as the kings of Lydia (under whom many Ionian Greeks lived, often with tyrants ruling individual *poleis*) does not seem to have focused much on the idea of autocracy. It may be that this theme only became important due to the threatening climate of the Persian Wars, with the idea of an Eastern autocrat being able to throw immeasurable resources against the Greek communities. The greater freedom enjoyed by the Greeks and later, at least during the late Republic, also by the Romans, was combined with a deep contempt of monarchs and tyrants.⁵¹ The Greeks and Romans liked to perceive themselves as courageous fighters with greater virtue because of their institutions, whereas the Persians and subjects of subsequent eastern empires were seen as weak, slave-like and incapable of organising themselves. Promiscuity, savagery, cruelty (including torture) and deception were typically combined with the Oriental autocracy or despotism.⁵² The perception of the eastern autocratic government was so strong that it retained its lure throughout antiquity, even later when the Roman emperor had become as omnipotent as the eastern autocrats supposedly were.⁵³

Abundance and wealth constitute a second category of stereotypes typically connected with the Orient. This thread can be found already during the sixth century BC and later also in Herodotus, who describes the fabulous wealth of Oriental autocrats such as Sardanapalus, Midas or Croesus. Although the Oriental wealth was comment-

50 For more examples of these, as well as for the reification of the ideas through theoretical structures, see Lampinen, this volume.

51 Cf. Isaac 2004, 264–269 (pointing out that the Greek idea of ‘freedom’ was not that of individuals, but of groups, such as the *demos*). For the contempt of monarchs and tyrants, cf. e.g., the various contributions in Luraghi 2013 or Börm 2015.

52 For the perceived ‘natural slavery’ of Eastern soldiers and the need to use trickery, cf. Isaac 2004, 375–376; Danzig 2007. For the discourse of despotism and deceit, cf. the contributions in Turner *et al.* 2010.

53 Cf. e.g., Drijvers 2011.

ed upon and rejected, its associations were not strongly delegitimizing – the reason for Croesus' fall was, for instance, not his wealth, but rather his *hybris*, which caused divine anger.⁵⁴ Towards the late fifth century BC there appeared a new way of relating to the fabulous abundance and wealth of the East, which began to be connected with deceit, corruption, debauchery, greed and effeminacy, becoming part of a general contempt for all Oriental people.⁵⁵ By the later fifth century, Sardanapalus had emerged as an early representative of the negative figure of an Eastern autocrat, as attested by Aristophanes' *Birds* and Ctesias' *Persica*.⁵⁶ The same contemptuous attitude towards the combination of wealth and autocracy can also be found in iconography as, e.g., shown by the 'Darius vase' dating to c. 340–320 BC. In its lowermost tier of imagery, a tax collector is depicted calculating the tributes of the different subject peoples, whereas in the uppermost register a torch-bearing personification with the name ΑΠΙΑ(TH) 'Deceit' stands next to the anthropomorphic personification of Asia.⁵⁷

The March of the Ten Thousand in 401 BC may, as suggested by Rainer Bernhardt, have played an important role in the Greek change of attitude. The perception arose among the Greeks that the Persians had become weakened and perhaps even inferior due to a combination of extravagant luxury, abundance and autocracy. These vices were from now on regarded as the typical cause leading to the decline and fall of empires.⁵⁸ This is the stance later transferred to Polybius and Roman authors, for whom Eastern *luxuria* and *avaritia* were not only to blame for the fall of Greece to Rome, but even were threatening the future of Rome. Roman authors' fascination for this trope depends of course on the enormous expansion of luxury concentrated in Rome and Italy beginning from the second century BC.⁵⁹

The abundance and wealth of the East were typically connected to decadence and effeminacy, two vices that throughout antiquity were characterised as strongly opposed to Greek and Roman manliness.⁶⁰ The Lydians of Herodotus are among the earliest examples of Eastern peoples whose riches proved to be their undoing, although Herodotus does not insert this critical stance until after Lydia had been conquered by the Persians. Decadence and effeminacy were typically also linked to non-normative sexuality in various guises. A good example of the intertwining of stereotypical elements

54 Hdt. 1.87.

55 For a thorough description of the general development, see Bernhardt 2003, 121–136, 190–198, 239–246. Interestingly, neither does the more negative word *tryphe* make its entry in Greek literature until towards the late fifth century.

56 Aristoph. *Av.* 1021; Ctesias (688 BNJ) F 1n, 1p. For Sardanapalus, see Frahm 2003; Fink 2014.

57 Naples Nat. Mus. inv. no. 81947. See Allen 2005, 54–55; Llewellyn-Jones 2017.

58 Bernhardt 2003, 129–131, 193–195.

59 Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 329–345 deals in detail with the Roman luxury caused by the fast conquests of the Eastern Mediterranean, which led not only to a contempt of extravagant wealth but also to a series of sumptuary laws.

60 For the effeminate East, see McAvoy 2017; for Greek *andreia*, cf. the contributions in Rosen and Sluiter 2003; for Roman *virtus*, McDonnell 2006.

is the often-encountered theme of Eastern female despots – typically intermixed with the idea of decadence. The literary depictions of different Hellenistic queens resemble each other so much that they often appear only as versions of the archetype for Oriental queens; the legendary Assyrian queen Semiramis, to whose characteristics belong masculine ambition, decisiveness, violence, treachery, boundless greed and fatal seductiveness.⁶¹

The negative picture of Semiramis was probably created by Ctesias of Cnidus in his *Assyriaca* during the early fourth century (of which only little is preserved in Diodorus of Sicily and Pompeius Trogus/Justin).⁶² Semiramis is described by Ctesias as an anti-pole to the later (and, according to Ctesias, the last) Assyrian ruler Sardanapalus, and the representations of the two are clearly meant as oppositional.⁶³ This largely fictitious bracketing for the whole of Assyrian history offered the Greek readers a degree of narratological ‘just-so’ satisfaction.⁶⁴ For Ctesias (as also for Diodorus and Trogus/Justin), the Assyrian empire was merely an early version of the Achaemenid Empire, the first in a series of world-empires,⁶⁵ and thus the apparent origin of all Eastern vices.

The last group of stereotypes we would like to highlight is the one that ranged from the appreciation and suspicion of Eastern wisdom traditions to notions of secrecy, hiddenness, deviousness and subterfuge.⁶⁶ Again, these ideas were not only associative among themselves, but could also be linked to the previously examined themes of autocracy, decadence and effeminacy.⁶⁷ Much later, the ‘inscrutability’ of Easterners surfaced as part of the Western anti-Asian, and especially anti-Chinese, stereotypes.⁶⁸ The origins of this complex of ideas are probably visible already in Herodotus’ *Aigyp-tikos logos*. The generally more positive theme of ‘Eastern wisdom’ certainly formed a literary *topos* from the Hellenistic era onwards, with the Stoic idea of the ‘seeds of wis-

61 On Semiramis, see Lampinen, last chapter of this volume, also Droß-Krüge 2020; cf. this with Cleopatra and Hellenistic queens, for which see Pyy, this volume.

62 The world history of Pompeius Trogus, who wrote during Augustus’ reign, stretched from the Assyrians until his own days. His version of Assyrian history has been preserved only in an abbreviated form by the late imperial epitomator Justin: Borgna 2018; cf. Eck 2014.

63 See also Gambato 2000.

64 Sardanapalus is probably a corruption of Ashurbanipal and Semiramis of Sammu-ramat, both mentioned in Assyrian sources, although with no negative connection (cf. e.g., Frahm 2003; Frahm 2020). Sardanapalus and Semiramis were apparently invented as none of the Achaemenid rulers fitted as prototypes (Bernhardt 2003, 195). Semiramis was also remembered in the later Zoroastrian, Sassanid and Mandaean traditions, as testified by a reference to ‘Khumāy Scheherazade, whom they call King Semiramis [*šamidai*]’ in the *Mandaean Book of Kings* (Häberl 2023, 69, 106, 124, noting her role in the mythmaking and genealogies of Assyrians, Iranians and Mandaeans alike) as well as the Zoroastrian *Bundahišn* 33.18, 36.9 (Agostini and Thrope 2020).

65 On the Assyrian Empire as a forerunner of the Achaemenids, see Heller 2015, 34–341; on Assyria generally in Greek sources, Rollinger 2017.

66 The ‘alien wisdom’ of Momigliano 1975 is still significant here; see also Vlassopoulos 2013, 206–214.

67 See Lampinen, last chapter of this volume.

68 See e.g., Schweiger 2007, 128–131 with bibliography; Chow 2002, 64–66, 89.

dom' interspersed among all the peoples probably being quite influential. Kostas Vlassopoulos has debated whether these perceived connections track actual borrowings of ideas.⁶⁹ It is yet another question whether these ideas corresponded to an equally positive stereotypical set of imagery in the broader Graeco-Roman cultural context and *imaginaire*. Its prevalence in philosophical, doxographical and technical literature might point to it being largely a feature of learned writing.⁷⁰ Behind the theme stands no doubt the Greek impression of Near-Eastern polities representing the earlier stages of human societies' development, which empowered the recurring ancient theme of projecting some of the earliest monumental works, inventions, or more vague 'ancient wisdom' to the Eastern societies.

The common idea of *presbyteron kreitton* made it natural to assume that the oldest peoples had once held the 'purest' traditions of wisdom, even if they were sometimes imagined as having become corrupted in the course of time.⁷¹ From Herodotus onwards, Egypt was a common area for these projections, but other Near-Eastern societies were also thought to host ancient wisdom traditions of their own: the Persian Magi and the 'Chaldaeans' – hovering somewhere between an ethnic and doctrinal lineage – are the two most commonly cited ones.⁷² Further east, from the Hellenistic era onwards the Brahmins or Gymnosophists similarly came to be conceived of as a γένος either in the sense of an ethnic group or a doxographical lineage.⁷³ This selection of 'wise men' in the East reinforced the collective power of the *topos*. Including or denying any single group of 'barbarian wise men' of the East their membership in the collectivity, on the other hand, allowed authors to play complex games of identity-building, knowledge-ordering and doctrinal polemic.⁷⁴ From hidden knowledge, the association with unreadability and deception follows fairly easily: as Donald Lateiner has pointed out, 'religious con-men and deceivers hold a venerable position of distrust in Greek literature'.⁷⁵

69 Vlassopoulos 2013, 209–214.

70 For a study of lists of 'wise peoples' in these registers, in particular, see Broze *et al.* 2006.

71 Pilhofer 1990; Lamberton 1992, 122; Broze *et al.* 2006, 139; Haubold 2020; cf. Haubold 2013, 35 on how Greeks tended to view the Eastern barbarian wise men as experts in history.

72 Magi: Hdt. 1.101, 107, 140, 7.19, 37; Xen. *Cyr.* 4.5.14, 8.3.11–12; Cic. *De div.* 1.46; Plin. *HN* 30.3–11; Numen. *Ap. F* 1 (Des Places); Dio *Or.* 12.9; Diog. Laert. 1 *prae*f. (including many other 'barbarian sages'). On the term *magos*, see now Nagy 2020. Chaldaeans: e.g., Diod. *Sic.* 2.29; Val. Max. 1.3.3; Gell. *NA* 14.1; while Cic. *De div.* 1.2, 91 attributes Chaldaeans to 'Assyria' and 'Syria', indicating the flexibility of such attributions of religious experts; on Chaldaeans, see Haubold 2013; Haubold 2020. Occasionally, the two groups are merged, such as in Hsch. *s.v.* Χαλδαῖοι, γένος Μάγων πάντα γνωσκόντων (possibly influenced by the Biblical use in Dan 2:2).

73 The confusion between doctrinal and ethnic groups is also noted by Broze *et al.* 2006, 135. See also Lampinen, this volume.

74 See Broze *et al.* 2006, 140–143.

75 Lateiner 1990, 237; cf. Favorinus' accusations against 'Chaldaeans' on their frivolity, mendacity and greed, Haubold 2020, 314–315; cf. also Keulen 2013.

In-groups and out-groups

The difference between in-group (oneself/the own people) and out-group (the others) plays, as we have seen, an important role for stereotyping, with the out-groups typically perceived as possessing less desirable traits than the in-group. Because of the multiple and situational nature of identities, the Greek and Roman societies would at any given time consisted of a kaleidoscope of overlapping in-groups, and the same consequently also goes for the out-groups. The traditional Greek antithetical division between Hellenes and barbarians in principle grouped all non-Greek speakers into a homogenous out-group that was excluded from Hellenicity. In practice, however, the barbarians were described in different ways, and the stereotypes of the East, in the beginning explicitly the Persians, did not constitute the only set of stereotypes about others. The Northern peoples, for instance, were covered by a totally different, though less studied, pool of stereotypes.⁷⁶ Isaac in his *The Invention of Racism* again considered the Egyptians and the Jews special cases of the Oriental people.⁷⁷

The salience or relevance of out-groups is often proportional to their physical distance from the in-group, but symbolically potent, pleasingly astonishing or otherwise impressive details can still be repeated about them in the course of in-group communication. India, located at the eastern fringes of the Graeco-Roman world, is an interesting example of these dynamics.⁷⁸ Although clearly a barbarian people (the Indians being non-Greek speakers) living in the East, the image of the Indians differed from the typical stereotypes of the East. India was considered a utopian or paradoxical country, the Indians mainly described by positive stereotypes concerning justice, physical endurance, wealth and wisdom. Although the Romans considered the Indians as inferior to themselves, they still did not attribute to them the same stereotypes as to the Orient in general. India was simply too remote and to a certain degree too unknown, in addition to which of course never conquered by the Romans despite some poets' overblown anticipation of future imperial triumphs there. Some overlapping can nonetheless be identified, like the stereotype of wisdom which except for the Indians also occurs in connection with many other peoples of the East. The Indians were also occasionally connected with some of the component parts of the typically Oriental 'luxury', such as sexual promiscuity and heavy drinking.⁷⁹

Another informative case concerning the fluidity of in-groups and out-groups, as well as the mixing of stereotypes, is offered to us by the Anatolian Galatae, who by

76 E.g., Käppel 2001; Rausch 2013; Krebs 2011; and the contributions in Hormuth and Schmidt 2010. See also the contributions in Lampinen forthcoming.

77 Isaac 2004, ch. 7 and 13.

78 Karttunen 1997; Karttunen 2002; for a comprehensive account, see now Stoneman 2019.

79 Coloru, this volume. The idea of India being a country where everything was reflected finds in some ways parallels to the image of Egypt and Ethiopia. Parallels between the way India and Parthia were conceived by the Romans can also be found (Parker 2011).

ancient authors were seen as barbarians and compared with the Persians in the Hellenistic era. Several powers used this in their propaganda, displaying themselves as the courageous and victorious in-group. In Aetolian propaganda the defence of Delphi was described as a Panhellenic act akin to the victories over the Persians, whereas the Romans emphasised themselves as the true protectors of the Greek world.⁸⁰ Hardly surprisingly, the Ptolemies and Seleucids also saw themselves as vanquishers of the Galatians, the Ptolemies even comparing the Galatae with the 'Medes' of their time, that is, the Seleucids.⁸¹ What makes the whole thing more complicated is the fact that the Romans during the Hellenistic period not only applied Eastern stereotypes to the Galatae, but also to the Ptolemies and Seleucids.⁸²

The Galatae offer us a rather rare example of how stereotypes of northern barbarians are mixed with those of the East. The Galatae originated in the north before moving towards the southeast, finally settling in Anatolia. They are therefore described as wild, strong and possessing a heedless sort of bravery, typical stereotypes connected with northern barbarians, but also combined with tyranny, luxury, untrustworthiness, callousness towards human suffering and religious exaggeration, characteristics typically applied to the East. The three last of these stereotypical ideas were occasionally also used in connection with the European Celts or Gauls, whereas tyranny and luxury could be described as representing the Eastern flavour given to the Galatae.⁸³

Many foreign adversaries of the Greeks and later Romans could be represented as a reincarnation of the Persians, sometimes described as possessing all the Eastern vices even though located in a totally different part of the world. The Etruscans were, for instance, in Latin literature described as the opposite of the ideal Roman order and thereby combined with wealth and prodigality, lack of restraint, excessive love for their wives, ambiguous sexual behaviour, love of luxury, pleasures and indolence, impiety, effeminacy and lack of military ability, in addition to which they were seen as ambitious and potential tyrants.⁸⁴ The Roman image of the Carthaginians is somewhat more complex – here we find respect and admiration mixed with contempt and denigration, the antagonist being seen as arrogant, cruel and treacherous.⁸⁵

The marvels displayed by the Oriental mirages may also encourage 'the discovery of the self in the other and the other in the self', thus inverting in-groups and out-groups, whereby barbarian traits occasionally even could be attached to Sparta and

80 Lampinen, this volume.

81 Barbantani 2014.

82 E.g., Gruen 2003; Nicholson 2020. Cf. Barbantani 2014.

83 Lampinen, this volume.

84 Cf. most recently Bittarello 2009. More generally, see also Farney 2007, 125–140. The negative picture of the Etruscans goes back to Greek sources and may be connected to the belief of the Etruscans originating from Lydia.

85 E.g., Dubuisson 1992; Waldherr 2000; Hoyos 2015.

Athens.⁸⁶ The same goes for persons, classical literature including several cases of barbaric Greeks/Romans and noble barbarians.⁸⁷ Depending on the narrative intent one and the same person can even be described in totally opposite ways by two authors. This is well exemplified by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV, who is depicted by Polybius as the stereotypical licentious Oriental king, whereas Livy's view of him is more positive, emphasising how Antiochus had been influenced by Roman culture during his sojourn as hostage in Rome while a young prince. Livy's ultimate intent was to stress the importance of foreign royal hostages as an instrument of peaceful cultural conquest, resulting in a depiction of Antiochus IV as a figure who is hard to place within the easy bipolar Greek-barbarian discourse.⁸⁸

The Saidian legacy

If there was no Herodotus before Herodotus, as Arnaldo Momigliano put it a long time ago,⁸⁹ was there Orientalism before Orientalism? In other words, can we speak of 'ancient Orientalism' or 'proto-Orientalism' – something sufficiently close to Edward Said's concept for the ideological and literary picture of the East and Easterners prevalent between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries?⁹⁰ If that is the case, would any traces of Orientalism then also survive from the time between antiquity and the late eighteenth century? These questions have been raised by many scholars, who also have reassessed, critiqued, and moved beyond the Saidian articulation of Orientalism.⁹¹ There has, for example, been a very welcome recognition of the various interstices of cultural regions between the 'West' and the 'East', as well as the ways in which many non-European societies have themselves adopted (and sometimes adapted) the ideological products of Western Orientalism; non-European cultures have also been noted to have their own modes of Orientalism.⁹²

86 Pelling 1997, on p. 64 quoting S. Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions. The Wonder of the New World*, Oxford 1991. For further examples of this phenomenon, cf. Vlassopoulos 2013, 193–194. Cf. also Harrison, this volume, emphasising how the clichés of barbarism could be inverted, occasionally allowing Greek religious practices to be considered barbarian.

87 This was noted already by Hall 1989, 201–223. Cf. also Starks Jr. 1999 discussing Aeneas and Dido.

88 Lukkari, this volume. Livy thus places Antiochus somewhere in-between the Greek/Roman ideal and the Oriental Other, a bit like Herodotus' Croesus (Pelling 1997, 56).

89 Momigliano 1958, 3.

90 Said 1978, with Orientalism defined on p. 3.

91 See for instance Gimelli Martin 1990 (juxtaposing the applicability of Said 1978 and Hartog 1980 to ancient contexts); Lockman 2004, 182–214; Thum 2007; Farris 2010; also App 2010; Colburn 2011, especially 94–98; Kalmar 2011, 18–29; Phillips 2014, 16.

92 On the negotiation of identities between Occident and Orient, see e.g., Reed 2009; Leezenberg 2012; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2014; on the adoption of 'Orientalist' categories in non-European discourse, Farris 2010, 282 n. 22; Szurek 2015; Allès 2015; Vatin 2015; on Muslim 'Orientalism', see Foltz 2008.

Yet already the Medieval European imagery of the peoples of Asia is difficult to square with Saidian dynamics.⁹³ In the Byzantine Roman sphere, many elements that had been inherited from the previous Greek and Roman tradition about the Eastern peoples' and societies' characteristics were still repeated, but also occasionally reapplied to new, more relevant population groups. Some elements known from the previous Greek and Roman tradition about the Eastern peoples' and societies' characteristics can be found in the Crusader world, sometimes re-used from ancient literature,⁹⁴ although often probably rather independently developed. It has been suggested that peoples from the east/south in general were described as cowardly but cunning, whereas peoples of the west/north were rather seen as brave in battle but lacking intelligence: the basis of this template is on the climatological aspects of humoral theory.⁹⁵ However, the picture is far from clear-cut, the characteristics often being re-used in different combinations and applied to changing population groups in different historical contexts. Anna Comnena, for instance, attributes similar stereotypes to both the Franks and the Cuman nomads. She saw them as courageous fighters, but she disapproved of their habit of combining religion with violence and considered them treacherous, fickle and greedy. For her the barbarian was not strictly defined in terms of which geographical quarter they originated from, but rather in comparison to the cultural superiority of the civilised Byzantine Empire.⁹⁶

The fourteenth-century Arab historian Ibn Khaldun offers another example of how Medieval authors re-used elements connected with the Greek and Roman conception of the East in new constellations – and once again in connection with the idea of imperial power. He was clearly influenced by the ancient theory of deterministic influence of climate on human characters, as well as of the idea that desiring and gaining luxuries breed dishonesty and other immoral behaviours, finally leading to the decline and fall of great powers. According to Ibn Khaldun the nomads preserve the masculine virtues of warfare, honour, endurance and solidarity, with the help of which they conquer sedentary civilisations, thereby turning sedentary themselves. However, the vices of urban life and increasing wealth and pleasure after a while turn the conquerors weak, thereby making them prey to the next wave of barbarian nomads.⁹⁷ Ibn Khaldun thus

93 Phillips 2014, 16–27.

94 On Byzantine representations of Eastern groups, see Petrides 2009; Kaldellis 2013, 116, 144, 158; Shukurov 2024. Many elements from the ancient literature's ways of describing Easterners were also applied to the Byzantines themselves by the so-called Latins or Franks: Phillips 2019.

95 E.g., Wilschman 2021, 20 with further references, seeing an influence from the ancient belief of climatological influence on human characters. For environmental determinism in antiquity see Kennedy 2016; see also Irby 2016.

96 For Anna Comnena's point of view in comparison to other Byzantine writers during the early Crusades, see most recently Roche 2018 with references to previous publications.

97 For Ibn Khaldun, see e.g., Baali 1988; Pomian 2006; Cheddadi 2006; Dale 2006; Demircioglu 2014; Irwin 2018; Verza 2021.

positioned the barbarian against the flourishing cultural and intellectual superiority of the Arab civilisation, in a way not much unlike Anna Comnena.

Anna Comnena and Ibn Khaldun use literary *topoi* originally shaped by ancient stereotypes in order to describe the adversaries of the imperial societies that they represent as barbarians. The use of such stereotypes could also be analysed in relation to mercenary service. A less known example for this can be offered by the mercenaries from Northern Europe, the so called *oltramontani*, that were hired by Venice to fight the Ottomans during the Morean War (1684–1699). They described the Ottomans as courageous and respected fighters, whose fine steeds and general wealth were cause of admiration. The Slavic and Greek indigenous populations were seen as inferior, cruel and bloodthirsty, whereas the Venetians were considered effeminate, weak, greedy and deceitful.⁹⁸ The stereotypes that were prevalent among these *oltramontani* probably developed independently without close connection to ancient literature. Their conceptions are however of interest – they respected and admired the empire they fought against, disliked and mistrusted the power they fought for and detested the local poor population. No connection to Said's Orientalism can be found, although we gain insights into what kind of picture mercenaries could develop of the Other.

One challenge in applying a modern definition of Orientalism to the ancient perceptions of the East and the Easterners is that the issues of power imbalance that characterised the different varieties of colonial relations in the past few centuries do not match the ancient realities: the 'West' was far from dominant, and many disparaging elements affixed on Eastern groups cannot straightforwardly represent the type of disdain of the 'Saidian' dominated – and often, colonised – 'Other'.⁹⁹ Of course, we can certainly speak about ancient Greek and Roman perceptions of the East – and their identity-constructing speech acts using Eastern populations as an out-group – without having to fixate on whether the term 'Orientalism' can be applied to these cases. The dynamics in the varied ancient contexts were specific to themselves, and while they bequeathed a set of influential literary and ideological elements to the later tradition, even this does not necessarily require us to call the ancient discourse 'proto-Orientalist', either.¹⁰⁰ In the past few decades, scholars have developed a good understanding of the Graeco-Roman tradition of looking at and writing about barbarian out-groups, and even if the study of ethnic stereotypes and *topoi* in this sense has not been very active,

98 Forsén 2017.

99 As pointed out by some reactions to Said: Vasunia 2003 (who is particularly eloquent on the implicit Eurocentrism on seeking the roots of Orientalism in Hellenic antiquity); Huang 2007; also Colburn 2011, esp. 95–99.

100 Though Colburn 2011, for instance, uses 'proto-orientalism' as a useful heuristic tool in a review-discussion; cf. Kalmar 2011, 30–39.

the modes of identity-building and communication of ethnically framed knowledge in antiquity are well-developed as fields of enquiry.¹⁰¹

The idea of the picture of the East remaining inert and unchangeable through centuries and even millennia, being passed on from generation to generation since at least the Persian Wars, is close to absurd. Stereotypes and identities continuously develop and change dependent on a vast range of different military, political, social and cultural reasons. Due to the longevity and popularity of Classical literature, some of the stereotypes of the Orient lived on as literary *topoi*, being re-used in new ways throughout the centuries, typically in relation to imperial power, wealth and mercenary service. However, such stereotypes do not have to originate from ancient conceptions but could clearly as well emerge on their own. Only contemporary relevance of any given stereotype could make a *topos* connected with it understandable and worthwhile as a communicative tool. Historical contexts dominated by strong empires or wealthy political entities obviously have offered a natural breeding ground for stereotypical thoughts like that. We thus need to try to shake off the Saidian legacy and begin to analyse each historical context separately.

Even though we try to free ourselves from the Saidian legacy, there still looms the danger that it indirectly influences the way we look at the Eastern Mediterranean during antiquity due to the fact that Saidian Orientalist stereotypes have underlined many previous studies of the eastern empires.¹⁰² Scholars have, for instance, claimed that a Persian seraglio/harem would occur in Chariton's novel *Callirhoe*, dating to the first or early second century AD, although the author clearly speaks of only one royal wife spending her time in the *gynaikônitis*, that is, the female chambers or the woman's or women's apartment in the royal palace.¹⁰³ In this specific case Saidian stereotypes of the Ottoman East including decadent seraglios/harems have thus been added to an imperial-era novel describing the Achaemenid court during the fifth or fourth century BC.

Concluding remarks

The Graeco-Roman image of the Orient was throughout history dominated by the empires of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East – admired and feared in equal measure. The Eastern empires must have seemed like mirages for the early Greek merchants and mercenaries. The encounters with these power structures, exchange networks and their middlemen gave impetus to the birth of stereotypes and the need for creating

101 See especially Munson 2001; Lightfoot 2002; Harrison 2002; Isaac 2004; Dench 2007; Gruen 2011; Skinner 2012; McCoskey 2012; Kahlos 2012; Almagor and Skinner 2013; Kaldellis 2013; McInerney 2014; Kennedy and Jones-Lewis 2016; Harrison 2019.

102 Cf. e.g., Colburn 2011.

103 Lenfant, this volume.

a common Hellenic identity. The empires in their turn had a need to fuse their different subject peoples together, something which was done by creating a negative picture of their adversaries that were considered inferior and weak. From the point of view of the Empire, the others – be it their enemies or subject peoples – were always the barbarians. The Greek conception of the East was in this sense unique – the early stereotypes of the East were rather anti-imperialist and the Achaemenids were described as barbarians. However, towards the end of the fifth century BC we can observe a change, the stereotypes turning ever more imperialist to their character, a development foreboding Alexander the Great's conquest of the Achaemenid Empire. From then onwards the barbarians were always the opponents to the Hellenistic and Roman empires.

We cannot in this volume give either a full diachronic treatment nor a comprehensive thematically arranged catalogue of the stereotypes used about the Eastern peoples in the Greek and Roman cultures. What we can offer is rather a constellation of interlinked contributions into the many reflections of the Orient and into the roles their stereotypical components played in constructing the Self and the Other from before the Persian Wars until the Imperial Era. Individual chapters range from the Late Geometric period to the Late Antiquity, and a very wide range of source groups are brought into the discussion. The twin strains of stereotype formation as a complex field of meaning-making, and of the use of stereotypes as tools for creating and maintaining identities – yet also with a range of other important communicative and rhetorical functions – run through the volume. Interpreting and understanding the Oriental mirages is clearly much more multifaceted and complex than either Saidian Orientalism or Edith Hall's early views for the 'invention of the barbarian' allow.

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