

Zeitschrift: SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature
Herausgeber: Swiss Association of University Teachers of English
Band: 15 (2002)

Artikel: Europe : from ancient marginalization to modern globalization
Autor: Waswo, Richard
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-99998>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 07.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Europe: From Ancient Marginalization to Modern Globalization

Richard Waswo

I. The ancient world

The first image we have of Europe from the ancient Greeks who named it is rather ironic, in the light of what it later became. As the image will be altered and displaced, so the geographical orientation of Europe's place on the planet has never ceased to be somewhat confused. This for the good reason that all categories, divisions, and meanings are relational: they demarcate something from something else; they depend upon contrast and difference (the terms of which are constantly being changed in the course of history). But the people who wish and need the demarcations are likely to be those positioned on some border or other, feeling themselves situated somehow between or among competing interests or attitudes. Such a borderline position could, of course, also be a central one – as it certainly was for the Greeks.

The (now fragmentary) two books of the earliest surviving geographer, Hecataeus (an older contemporary of Herodotus), were called simply "Europe" and "Asia." The central point of the island of the known world (surrounded by the ocean, which flowed into the Mediterranean from the west, and into the Caspian from the east) was Delphi, home of Apollo's oracle. Europe was the whole landmass to the north, from Celts in the west to Scythians in the east, and Asia the landmass to the south, from Libyans in the west to Indians in the east. These landmasses divide at the Dardanelles and the Caucasus, both pictured as north/south separations. It is interesting to observe that this earliest division of North from South has, of course, regained currency today – but the terms are now those of economic and political disparity, not those of circular and geographic symmetry. Hecataeus' world picture was simply further divided by Herodotus (4.42): Europe remained the denomination for everything north; but the south was divided at

the Nile, to produce Libya in the west and Asia in the east. Herodotus confesses to some puzzlement about how the “single earth” in these portions received the names of three women. Libya, according to the Greeks, was the name of someone from that part, as was Asia, wife of Prometheus. But the only candidate for Europa – the Tyrian who was abducted to Crete – is unsatisfactory by these criteria: she herself was Asian and never set foot in Europe. Herodotus shrugs, and claims merely to follow “customary usage” (4.45), in which we observe that the center is itself a borderline: Crete isn’t yet Europe, which seems to commence, according to one commentator (Sayce, on 1.2), on the Theban plains, to extend limitlessly north, east, and west – “incomparably wider” than the other two, as Herodotus put it (4.42).

The huge extent he attributed to Europe did not, of course, survive in the usage that soon became customary and lasted, more or less, until the end of the Middle Ages. The *mappae mundi* sanctioned by Christianity appear mostly to derive from that of Eratosthenes, a sage at the Alexandrian library in the late third century B.C. Here the main dividing line becomes, perhaps for the first time, east/west, along the Nile as before, but now continuing through the Dardanelles, the Black Sea, and indefinitely north along the Tanais River (the Don). The huge portion east of this line is Asia; the southwest corner is Libya and the northwest Europe. The shape of this map, simplified, and rotated so that east is at the top, is that of a T inscribed in an O, well known to medievalists as the TO diagram, in which the three continents have their definitive names (Africa replaces Libya) and are assigned to the three sons of Noah, Japheth, Ham, and Shem. In some of these diagrams, the cross of the T can be placed in the center of the circular world and labeled Jerusalem. Yet once again, the center thus becomes even more visibly a borderline, a tripartite crossroads.

One modern historian of ancient geography (Ninck) reminds us that most of these pioneer geographers – and ethnographers as well – came from Ionian or Dorian seacoast settlements around the Mediterranean: Hecataeus from Miletus, Herodotus from Halicarnassus, Eratosthenes from Cyrene. (The historian of course has a small axe to grind: he is Swiss, and argues that true scientific curiosity is the natural outgrowth of a mercantile, trading culture.) Linguistically and culturally, all the pioneers were Greek; but the places where they grew up were on the other continents, unattached, unlike the Greek mainland, to Europe. On their literal/littoral borders they faced alien threats, which, in the case of Herodotus, became the primary subject of his investigations.

He begins his *Histories* by reviewing the causes of hostility between Greeks and Persians, who are of course his most significant “others,” and whose viewpoint he often labors to share and to dramatize. The review consists of myths, euhemerized into history and political allegory. Europa, however perplexing as a toponym, plays an early role in a chain of events that will result in the cataclysmic confrontation between Asia and Europe that Herodotus will chronicle. The abduction of Europa from Tyre by Cretans (not the white bull) offended the Phoenicians, but was only revenge for their (and not Hera) having ravished Io to Egypt. The Greeks’ second offense was Jason’s rape of Medea from Colchis, revenged in its turn by Alexander’s of Helen to Troy, in the next generation. So far, tit for tat, says Herodotus, reporting the Persian view. But now, by destroying Troy on this pretext, the Greeks become guilty of making full-scale war in Asia before any Asians attacked Europe. (The Persians find the pretext of kidnapping women an inadequate cause of war, “since it is obvious that they would never be kidnapped if they themselves did not wish it.”) Hence the Persian enmity to all Greek incursions and settlements in Asia, which is their hegemonic territory, as opposed to Europe (1.2-4).

So here is the crucial geographical/cultural division (which we still employ and) which structures the subsequent campaigns and ambitions of Xerxes: the Hellespont and the Bosphorus divide Europe, the West, from Asia, the East. But we shouldn’t quite yet forget the “incomparably wider” extent that Herodotus assigns to Europe – it also includes the northern (coast of the Black Sea) realm of the Scythians, and everything west *and* east of that. The Scythians, of course, are the other significant “others” in Herodotus’ narrative (Bk. 4), and the farther north you go, the worse they get. On the immemorially ancient scale of civilized beings (it appears formulaically in the *Odyssey*), which descends from settled “grain-eating men” to barbarous meat-eating nomads, the Scythians cover the range: the southernmost grow grain to eat, their northern neighbors only to sell, and the last not at all. North of them are, of course, the *ανθωποφαγοί*, who have “the crudest customs in the world, know no justice and no law and are the only ones who eat human flesh.” Cannibalism accompanied by incest are what the ancient Mediterranean imagination attributed to the inhabitants of unknown spaces, the dark margins of the circular world. In the late fourth century B.C., Pytheas, a native of Massalia, sailed to Cornwall to acquire information about its tin mines, and reported that the people who lived in Ireland ate their own fathers and fornicated with their mothers and daughters (Ninck 219). These spaces, too, were Europe to Herodotus, and they vaguely began

around the Crimea, which in Roman times acquired the name of Cimmeria – proverbial since the *Odyssey* for dwellers in darkness.

With help from the researches of the Swiss historian, we may now make a guess at the solution of what perplexed Herodotus about the name of his enormous continent. For the Tyrian maiden captivated by the white bull was but one incarnation of her namesake: Europa was also 1) a name for Hera, 2) a daughter of Ocean, 3) a name for Demeter in Boeotia (where near Thebes Zeus once hid her in a cave, according to Pausanias). Towns in Macedonia and Syria and a river in Thessaly were named ευρωπος (Ninck 15-17). The word itself appears to come from ευρωσ – dark mold or decay, or such a color. Ευρωεισ is a Homeric word for the dark earth-depths of Hades; Pindar uses ευρωπος as an adjective for “dark,” Sophocles and Euripides as a noun both for “darkness” and the continent. In all her incarnations, Europa is darkness and depth, one of the many avatars of μεγαλη μητηρ, Demeter/Gaia, the earth goddess who mates with the sky-god to become fertile (Ninck 18-20). A Cretan coin (of the 5c) nicely fuses the images of the Boeotian cult of Demeter/Europa with those of the kidnapping story: the bull appears on one side; on the other is the lady sitting in a tree with an eagle in her lap (Zeus, naturally, much in the manner of Leda’s swan). The tree is a willow, which grows around springs, and was associated with Europa in Arcadia (Ninck 20-21). Although Herodotus seems unaware of Europa as earth-mother on the Greek mainland, his narrative preserves traces of the continent’s reputation for fertility, as when the chief Persian strategist approves Xerxes’ plans to attack Athens not merely for vengeance, but in order to possess the extensive orchards of “Europe” (7.5).

So, from the dark depths of the fertile earth that produces the agriculture that makes cities, hence civilization, possible, to the dark margins of all those vast northern spaces where no society or law exist because people eat each other – all this is “Europe” to Herodotus. And all of it remains Europe, even when confined to the northwest quadrant of the circular world that constituted its picture for the Middle Ages.

II. Europe and later “others”

This picture, we recall, was drawn by Eratosthenes and subsumed into the Roman, thence into the Christian world, apportioning the continents to the three sons of Noah. The division that made political sense to Herodotus (Greek west vs. Persian east) made very little to the administration of either

the Roman empire or the early Christian Churches. As divided by Constantine, both of these common administrations had their eastern and western portions, in which of course the Greek-speaking part became the east (rich and sophisticated, including Egypt) and the Latin-speaking the west (poor and rustic, including N. Africa west of Tripoli). The collectivity of the Mediterranean οἰκουμενή during the long transition from late antiquity to the Middle Ages remained the crossroads of the three continents, none of which had more than a notional existence on the maps of scholars. The collectivity that came to matter most, after the fall of the western Roman empire, was forming as Christendom, itself divided as the old empire had been. This division, extant for four centuries, was ratified by the formal split between the eastern and western churches at the Synod of Frankfurt in 794. This, in turn, helped to make possible the crowning of Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor in 800. So there was Rome, the Christian Latin west, and Byzantium, the Christian Greek east. The political division that mattered was between these two and the lately arisen powers of Islam, containing which had weakened Byzantium to the point of permitting the separation of the churches and being unable to object to the crowning of an “emperor” in Rome (Herrin 134, 477).

The short-lived empire of the Franks did not include the Iberian peninsula, nor Brittany, nor the British Isles, nor Scandinavia. These areas were but the periphery of Christendom in the west – regardless of the crucial role of Irish and Northumbrian monks in the reimportation of classical and Christian learning to continental Europe – as dark as they had been to the ancient Mediterranean center of the circular world. One scholar, discussing the cartography of the Anglo-Saxons, observes the anomaly of their transmitting (in the TO map) a picture of the world that marginalizes themselves (Bridges 72). The Greek mainland itself was divided between Slavonic barbarians and the Byzantine empire. Islamic Caliphates ruled from southern Spain across N. Africa to Persia. The subsequent history of feudalism and the Crusades amply demonstrates the numerous divisions within western Christendom, and a fortiori the total lack of any coherent geographical or cognitive or emotional awareness of any entity called “Europe.”

Such awareness only began to develop, as Denys Hay pointed out forty years ago, in response to two new major challenges to Christendom: one political and military, the other geographical and metaphysical. Both were inaugurated by specific and famous events: the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, and the discovery of some unknown landmass in the west by Columbus in 1492. The former was a cause of the latter: the closing

of the overland trade routes to Asia obliged the maritime powers of Lisbon, Genoa, and Venice to seek alternative routes by sea. Columbus himself apparently died in the belief that what he had discovered were the Indies and Cathay. It would take a couple of generations to ascertain that the globe contained another hemisphere. But even by the latter half of the fifteenth century, something had occurred in Italy to give new currency to a very old story that provided a way of conceiving the inhabitants of Latin Christendom as related members of a single family. The occurrence was the revival and recovery and fetishization of classical texts called the Renaissance; the story was the legend of the descent from Troy, derived from the *Aeneid*, and hooked on to the biblical geographical genealogy commencing with the sons of Noah.

The merging of the sons of Troy with the sons of Japheth had been accomplished in medieval chronicles and genealogies, compiled by generations of monks usually elaborating on the universal chronologies of Eusebius, Jerome, Isidore and others. Between the seventh and thirteenth centuries, these chronicles had produced lineages for the Franks, the Britons, and numerous Italian city-states that found them all to be descended through Dardanus and Priam from Japheth, the progenitor of all Europe (including Iceland). The medieval texts, summarized by Prof. Hay, which I have analyzed elsewhere in somewhat more detail (Waswo chs. 6-9), did not, however, make much of the continental localization of all these peoples. They are rather narratives of emigration and entitlement to a noble ancestry that lays claim to the possession of civilization and its hallmark, the city: Noah and all the Trojan heroes neatly bring together the ancient Greek criteria – Noah planted vineyards and taught his sons agriculture; Troy is the resultant and resonant symbol of the achieved *civitas*. The lack of any sense of a continental collectivity in all the versions of the medieval legend is exemplified by one episode in the emigration of the Trojan ancestors of the Franks. Their route is overland (unlike that of Brutus in the later, and more literal, takeover of the *Aeneid*'s plot by the *historia brittonum*), across Thrace and the Hungarian plain to the Rhine. At an earlier point in this journey, the Trojan remnant splits up, with one bunch continuing west under their eponymous leader, Francio or Francus, and the other remaining near the Danube (the geography is far from exact) under the likewise eponymous Torcoth or Turcoth. This fellow is of course the progenitor of the Turks – apparently for no better reason than that one of Virgil's names for the Trojans was *Teucri*. That the Turks are happily regarded as the siblings of all the present local dynasties and populations situated between Britain and Bohemia makes clear that all

these imaginative genealogies are motivated by something other than any sense of contiguous, actual, present community.

The first evocation of such a sense was a direct response to the Turkish conquest of Constantinople. Pius II (the humanist scholar Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini), who became Pope in 1458, then wrote a politico-historical treatise called, tellingly, *Europa*, in which he dismissed the etymology (teucri = turks) as silly, and adduced ancient sources that claimed the origin of the Turks to be not Trojan, but Scythian (Heath 455-7). He was also the first to use “european” as an adjective – in which form it became current in Italian, French, and English by the end of the sixteenth century (according to Hay 86, 106). For Pope Pius, Europe meant precisely Latin Christendom as threatened by the Turks, against whom he struggled long and vainly to persuade various princes to mount a Crusade. Hence the Turks had to be read out of the legend of descent from the civilized Trojans (now regarded as exclusively the ancestors of Europeans) and identified as bestial barbarians from the beginning. However appropriate this identification appeared in political and religious terms, the power of the old stories was such that it by no means created an immediate consensus among scholars, who continued arguing about it well into the next century. It remained popular to preserve the Turks as Trojans, and regard the fall of Constantinople as just revenge for the fall of Troy (Spencer). On the other hand, those persuaded by the Pope that the Turks were barbaric Scythians could regard the fall of Constantinople as savage revenge for their ancient subjection by Alexander the Great. The latter notion, of course, eventually prevailed as the power and territory of the Ottomans increased.

Meanwhile, the old stories were receiving new and popular embellishment from the fraudulent practice of the new philology, the Renaissance obsession with ancient texts. If you couldn’t find them, you could forge them. The two most famous forgers of extended Japhetic genealogies in the period were Annius of Viterbo (the papal theologian to Alexander VI) and Johannes Trithemius (Abbot of Sponheim). For very different reasons, each invented and printed around the turn of the sixteenth century collections of texts purporting to be those of ancient authorities (Chaldean for Annius, Saxon for Trithemius). Their particular purposes need not detain us, except to observe that the Turks are passed over in silence, and the focus firmly kept on the peoples of what was Europe to Pope Pius. Their texts were immediately disputed by other scholars, but Annius’s became widely diffused, abridged in vernacular translations, and provided the inspiration of a vernacular text by Jean Lemaire de Belges that enjoyed similar popularity and spawned similar

imitations. Lemaire's triumphant conclusion to his (barely decipherable) demonstration that the Trojans, the French, and the Germans are all fraternal descendants of Japheth is a plea that the latter two unite to recapture their mutual Trojan heritage from the Turks (Lemaire 473). The net effect of the Renaissance reinforcement of the legend was to have made it "possible to elaborate the Trojan origin of every European people, to account for the dispersion of the arts and sciences, and to provide an etymology of illustrious antiquity for every place name" (Hay 108). Thus to see Europeans as one big family was the way in which the medieval legends derived from Virgil's epic and the Bible were recycled to respond to a present threat.

The other present challenge was the newly revealed existence of places and peoples unknown to antiquity. One of the first recorded uses of "european" in English (early 17c) contrasts it (as "learned") simply to "american" (as "ignorant") – meaning, of course (what "american" meant until 1776), the native inhabitants of the new hemisphere. As this new world began to be explored, conquered, and settled by Spain, Portugal, France, and England in the sixteenth century, geography suddenly became the one department of knowledge in which the moderns were indisputably superior to the ancients. Proud allusions to this fact echo throughout the many collections of travel narratives, such as Hakylut's. And, equally suddenly, the "west" became this other hemisphere – seen now from a Europe progressively less self-identified with the Trojans and more with the Romans, whose empire was the model of its own ambitions. These, of course, provided occasions for the vastly increased number of wars among the would-be imperial European powers, for territory and trading rights, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The trajectory of what Europeans were now identifying as their civilization had always been from east to west, and now it simply continued on that path, making the old periphery the new center. From Troy to Rome to Troynovant (Brut's name for the London he founded in the medieval chronicles and Geoffrey of Monmouth) to the twenty Troys that would later be founded in North America. This trajectory was well foretold by Dr. John Donne, the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, in a famous sermon he preached in 1622 to the "Honorable Company of the Virginian Plantation," in which he identifies investment in this colonial enterprise with the mission of the Apostles. His text is Acts 1:8: "But yee shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and yee shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." These words, says Donne, that Christ "spoke in the East, belong to

us, who are to glorifie him in the West." The glory of converting the heathen, Donne promises, will in due course also produce immense profits for the stockholders, whom he thus addresses in his conclusion: "You shall have made this Iland, which is but as the Suburbs of the old world, a Bridge, a Gallery, to the new; to joyne all to that world that never shall grow old, the Kingdome of heaven" (Donne 266 and 280-81). The dark northwestern edges of the old map, where ancient Greeks fantasized cannibalism and incest, were to become the center of the new, and were fantasizing in their turn precisely the same enormities about the folks on the new western edge of the global world. The newly extreme western edge of this now spherical world merged, of course, with its eastern edge – the Cathay that Columbus thought he had found, the Japan and the Indies where St Francis Xavier led the first great Jesuit missionary effort. "West and East / In all flatt Maps . . . are one," as Donne (who was fascinated by the new cartography) observed in a poem. And their inhabitants were one, too, in the fantasies inherited from the ancient world. St Francis found the natives of the Moluccas to be barbarous and treacherous cannibals who were also guilty of sexual sins too abominable to describe in writing (Xavier 179-80).

III. Europe as global

So thanks to the Turks and the Indians of both west and east, Europe could now figure out pretty exactly where and what it was. It was the center, no longer of Christendom, but of "civilization." This word, for the thinkers of the Enlightenment who first made it current – Mirabeau, Montesquieu, Adam Ferguson – and theorized it as the mastery of arts, sciences, technology, and manners, came into use in the mid-eighteenth century (Starobinski 11-59), when the legend of Trojan descent had been expelled from veracious history because it was no longer needed as an entitlement to culture. Europeans had stopped identifying with the characters in the legend, the culture-bringing Trojans, and now identified with the authors of it, the Romans, whose imperial takeovers they were competing with each other to reenact (Waswo ch. 13). The very formation of the new word, "civilization," suggests the nature of the enactment and the process and clinches the Roman identification. It is derived from the transitive verb, "to civilize" (Fr. 1568, Eng. 1601): not something that merely occurs, or that you can produce for yourself, but something that is done *to* you. The older English antonym to barbarity, "civility" – attested since 1549 and preferred by Dr Johnson to the newer term –

is simply a condition or state, suggesting nothing about how it is arrived at. “Civilization,” on the contrary, is imposed, transported from someone and somewhere *else* to the here and now. The word crystallizes the significance of all the old legends about the emigration of the sons of Japheth and Troy: the *translatio imperii et studii*, the whole point of the journey. The Trojans imposed their dominion and culture on the Latins, and they became Rome; the Romans imposed theirs on Europeans, and they became in turn the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and finally, the British Empires – extending over the globe to the farthest west and east become one.

The center of the latter empire, Donne’s “bridge” between old and new worlds, was not quite also the borderline that the ancient Greek center was. For London, after the founding of the Bank of England in 1694, was the center of a new sort of power undreamed of by the ancients: the power of finance, the control of global markets. This power flowed out, and profits and commodities flowed in. The principle of this operation was purely mercantile; it was and had been just what is being protested today in Seattle and Davos as economic globalization – that is, one part of the globe is exploited as a source of wealth for another part. For the first three centuries of this global commerce, what the rest of the world furnished Europe was largely raw materials, desirable stuff that grew elsewhere: spices, tea, coffee, sugar, cotton, and later metal ores like copper and uranium. Today, of course, the exploitation has expanded to include that of cheap labor in the increasingly industrialized world. The production of everything from automobiles to sports equipment and underwear can shift, more or less rapidly, to wherever in the world the materials, labor force, infrastructure and tax breaks are most advantageous. The rapidity of electronic communication and information exchange has only, but vastly, accelerated the operation of the very old principle – and without the need for the former military occupation and imperial domination.

There is, however, something new in some of the products thus produced, an interesting consequence at the other end of the process – their marketing. This consequence was conceptualized in the 1980s by the Nestlé corporation in regard to the world’s best-selling instant coffee, Nescafé Gold. This product, it turns out, exists in about 35 separate blends, to suit the varied tastes of people on the five continents, with many differences between regions of the same countries (even within neighborhoods of the same cities), where it is sold. The marketers called this “localized globalisation” or perhaps “globalized localisation” – I forget which, but it hardly matters. The interesting

point (to which I'll briefly return) is that globalization need not mean homogenization, uniformity, the eradication of all difference.

Back when London was becoming the financial center and controller of global trade that it remained until the end of the nineteenth century, it nonetheless became a borderline in the purely geographical sense in 1765. The Astronomer Royal established the zero meridian at Greenwich, used from then on by mariners, ratified by international convention in 1884, but only capitulated to by the French in 1911 (who had all the while insisted on Paris as the zero, giving positions corrected from and to Greenwich, so they could be understood). This convenience placed practically all of Europe in the east, and made the west the exclusive domain of the Americas. Cultural and political awareness, of course, has nothing to do with navigational calculations. When eighteenth-century Europeans understood themselves as the civilized center, it was still as the "west," with respect to where that civilization ultimately came from (Periclean Athens replacing mythic Troy), and with respect to Asia, regarded as the vast and despotic "east." The only ambiguity here was the place of Russia. Prof. Hay has concisely discussed how this was dealt with, resulting in the general nineteenth-century consensus that "Europe" did indeed include Russia as far as the Ural Mountains (124-7).

North and South America at this point presented no problem at all – not even after waves of colonial rebellions had produced new countries on those continents. Their native populations were being civilized or wiped out; their culture, however rustic, was the importation of all the Europeans who had settled them. They were but an extension of the European west, the last fulfillment of the *translatio imperii et studii*. There was even some European admiration for the energetic enactment of this model as the United States expanded itself across the entire continent. The model child, at this moment, was no sort of threat to its mentors. The anxieties of cultural inferiority were on the other side, since they are typically felt by the citizens of former colonies with respect to the European metropolis, which is usually happy to oblige with attitudes of great condescension. The former colony will desperately seek ways to assert its own cultural identity; its thinkers and artists will become obsessively concerned to find something unique that can distinguish it from its historical ancestor. American thought and writing went through this phase in the last half of the nineteenth century; Australia has been undergoing it in the twentieth.

Which brings us perilously close to now. Unchallenged as the radiating, imperial center of western civilization, Europe partitioned Africa in 1884 and by the turn of the nineteenth century controlled as proprietor or protectorate

about 85% of the surface of the planet. What the imperial rivalries, which began in the sixteenth century, then produced were two global wars between coalitions of European powers, both of which required the somewhat reluctant intervention of the new western power, the United States, to bring them to an end. The center thus pretty effectively exploded itself, resulting in what may one day be regarded as the major world historical event of *longue durée* in the twentieth century: decolonization – precisely the undoing of what began with Columbus. After 1945, much of Europe was physically rubble. Politically it was, again, a borderline: the armed and disputed frontier between the newly dominant and opposing powers of the United States and Soviet Russia, which created a new east/west division within Europe itself. Culturally, it was . . . what? Exhausted? Discredited? Sort of – but not quite, despite the loss, by death or emigration, of large numbers of cultural producers – artists, scientists, professors, musicians, writers – some of whom came back. But the very names given to the newly divided world in the era of the Cold War suggest the residual cultural hegemony now guaranteed by the inheritor, the last translation of the old dominion and learning: the U.S.A. along with “western” Europe split down the middle of Germany (plus the major nations in the British Commonwealth) was the “First” World; the “Second” was the Soviet Union and the now “eastern” European nations in its control. All other nations became the “Third” World that began to organize itself (at the Bandung Conference in 1955) simply as not belonging to the first two – the “non-aligned” countries. Most recently, other peoples who do not consider that they belong to any country – the surviving indigenous populations that western civilization regarded as “savages” – have begun to organize themselves (mostly on the Internet) as the “Fourth” World. Some of these peoples, mainly in Canada, have neatly inverted the numerical hierarchy, holding assemblies that label themselves the “First Nations” (Samson). But the hierarchy is clear enough, even though the Second World has lately ceased to exist, with its older and newer nations being absorbed into the First or Third. Moreover, the place of Russia in relation to Europe is now again as ambiguous as in the days of Peter the Great. When headlines trumpet Boris Yeltsin’s defiance of the “Occident,” it’s pretty clear he’s not a part of it. Since then, though, if Vladimir Putin is willing to discuss the missile shield with George W. Bush, perhaps Russia may re-become a part of it.

Europe found itself after the Second World War in the position presciently foreseen by Alexis de Tocqueville (in the 1820s) – i.e. that borderline and battleground between the two great and contending powers of the U.S. and Russia. De Tocqueville foresaw only the political growth of their ex-

panding continental empires, not the bitter opposition of their economic ideologies. With the success of Mao's revolution in China in 1949, this opposition was generally encoded as the capitalist west vs. the communist east. It is hard to avoid seeing in this geopolitical opposition an enlarged repetition of the Eurocentric Enlightenment estimate of its own civility as opposed to "Asian" cruelty, backwardness, and despotism. There was, of course, a crucial difference: the power to preserve this civilization no longer resided in Europe, but in its offspring and nuclear protector across the Atlantic. Serving its own interest, the U.S. assumed the role of both military protector and civil reconstructor in the rebuilding of (what now counted as) western Europe. The successful financing of the latter – from Iceland to Turkey (welcome back to the Teucri under the auspices of NATO) – was achieved by the European Recovery Program (the Marshall Plan, 1947-52). The shoe of cultural anxiety was now on the other foot: more than a few Europeans, especially the French, were torn between gratitude for and resentment against these forms of dependency on their younger sibling – or child. Waves of anti-American protest and preaching broke out sporadically, and continue today – the latest being the efforts of the French to curb American "cultural imperialism" by limiting the importation of American films and TV programs (but what else can fill the untold hours of air time opened by the hundreds of cable channels distributed by satellites?).

But even at – perhaps because of – that moment of greatest dependency and disillusionment in the 1950s, Europe began to forge a more pragmatic idea of itself, "to turn the name for a region into a political programme" (Hay 127). This is the concluding sentence of the second edition of Hay's book on the emergence of the "idea" of Europe, the first edition of which appeared in 1957, along with many similar titles (like *Histoire de l'idée européenne*, *The Uniting of Europe*). What intellectuals then wished to imagine was in fact getting underway, the realization of Europe as an actual, present, contiguous community. The initial program, of course, was less political than economic, thanks to the wisdom of Messrs Monnet, Schuman, and Spaak, who began with a specific, concrete, and therefore possible form of cooperation: the European Coal and Steel Community (1952), the success of which was soon enlarged into the European Economic Community (or Common Market, 1957), and only then expanded into politics proper, with the European Parliament (1962), and thence into the European Union that today is working to incorporate all the nations on the continent that were part of the former Second World. I cannot refrain from observing how the fringes on the map of the ancient circular world remain the fringes on this new one: the northeast

place of the Scythians, Russia, is still dark and ambiguous; the northwest “suburbs,” as Donne called them, the British Isles that were bridge, then center, are now marginal again, vexed and reluctant participants in what some call the “Brussels Empire.”

The European Union was an idea whose time had come, and which was given time gradually to develop, and whose development was aided, as usual, by challenges from elsewhere. These, in the last half-century, as rightly perceived by the likes of Monnet and Spaak, continue to be economic. Organizing the economy of Europe to both cooperate and compete with those of its former benefactor, the U.S., and its new rival, Japan, was the pragmatic task that may yet produce a continent unified in unprecedented ways. Its economic success can in part be measured by the need lately felt by the United States to enlarge its hegemony over its own hemisphere by the (not uncontroversial) creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Or, more concretely, by the fact that Airbus, the European consortium, has sold passenger aircraft to the extent that has obliged Boeing, the virtual monopolist of this market since its absorption (McDonnell-Douglas) or obliteration (Lockheed) of American competitors, to reduce production and lay off 20,000 employees (*The Economist* 15 Nov. 1999). The creation of such common enterprises (like the satellite program and CERN) in the last generation has in fact made Europe more of a coherent place than ever it was before.

With the advent of de facto coherence created by economic competition, also comes, however, a new form of cultural anxiety, now focused on the maintenance of cultural “identities.” Identitarian politics, I submit, is one of the worst problems of the present moment: local or religious or gender or linguistic or racial or nationalist advocacies, all of which are terrified by the self-inflicted prospect of dissolution in some larger collectivity. The discourse that usually opposes such advocacies is no better (and certainly far less effective): that of universalist claims, principally those of “human rights.” The discourse of universalism, historically one of the major means by which the Europe of modernity asserted its claim to “civilize” the planet, is not only discredited – i.e. unable to convince all those victimized by this claim – it is sterile, unable to stimulate, within Europe, any real motivation to create or conceive of identity on a continental scale. So the fallback position, interminably reiterated by well-meaning intellectuals and journalists of all kinds, is to a discourse of “tolerance,” of “respect for diversity.” So here is Europe today – a state of mind considerably confused by the success of its own globalization. Its contradictions were admirably expressed recently by a

colleague of mine at Geneva, the then president of the *Rencontres internationales*, Prof. Georges Nivat. Asked by a reporter to name the “three major characteristics of European identity,” he replied, “Absolute diversity in a desire for unity, continual conflict, and the primacy of art” (*CommUNIcation* Oct. 1999). I shall refrain from unraveling the mysterious relations among these, but go on to cite his response to the next question, “When will Europe really be constructed?” “On the day,” he said (he is a professor of Russian), “when the obstinate mutual scorn between Catholic/Protestant and Orthodox Europe will be overcome – then Europe will finally breathe with both its lungs.” In our long historical perspective, then, when Europe will become the united Christendom that it never, ever, was. This is nostalgia as mythic, as transparent, and as touching as that for our always already destroyed cultural ancestor in all the legends of the descent from Troy. I cannot refrain from observing that the day wished for by my colleague will not be tomorrow: when in the Autumn of 1999 the Pope celebrated a mass, attended by 10,000 people, in the capital of Georgia, the Orthodox clergy of the country refused to come (*Le Temps*, 10 Nov. 1999).

What will be tomorrow I now venture to prophesy – or, less boldly, to interpret. For we know what will be tomorrow, that is, next year: the beginning of the actual circulation of the single currency of the EU, the Euro. The significance of this unprecedented enactment seems to me far greater than merely economic; it is also cultural, social, affective in the highest degree, because money itself is inextricably both material and symbolic. It is both the bottom line and the supreme fiction, the real and the imaginary at once. This is, alas, not my idea, but that of Georg Simmel (*Philosophie des Geldes*, 1907). Money can be anything, as Aristotle well knew; its nature is simply its use, and its use is established solely by social assent, the agreement so to use it, the credit and the trust that any human community may place in cows or cowries, in leather or in mulberry bark, in paper or in electronic traces on a piece of plastic or a screen. Money is therefore, as a system of exchange, precisely homologous to language: systems that depend on the establishment of totally arbitrary differences, phonetic or numerical, whose meanings or value are accepted by everyone. When Euros can be spent from Rekyavik to Istanbul, that’s what Europe will be. Grab people by their pocketbooks, their hearts and minds will follow: this isn’t cynicism, but realism, or even hope. For a single anything – currency or language – never obliterates all other diversities. What individuals may wish to spend their money on or use their language for is in no way limited by the systems that enable them so to express themselves. And the more widely shared the system, the larger the

community thus formed, the understanding audience, as it were, of those expressions. It is just because languages and money are, necessarily, the formers of community for their respective purposes, which are far from being all purposes, that I regard the terrors of losing diversity as baseless. Diversity and conflict will always be with us, as, notoriously, they are even within single families. These, indeed, have been the primal sources of hostility and violence from ancient Greek mythology to the majority of police calls – for domestic disputes – in the First World today.

So it may be logical to think that what the old fantasy of family kinship – the sons of Japheth and of Troy – could not do for Europe, money can. Like nothing else, it can produce an omnipresent and geographical unity. At the simplest level, the Euro will make it possible for individuals to travel, to sample the diversities of their neighbors, without the monetary loss to the individual that always accompanies currency exchange – or even credit-card payment. Following the wisdom of Monnet and Spaak, the EU is creating a concrete, specific, therefore possible form of unity in order that other forms may follow – the envisioned “free” movement of goods, persons, and services within the entire space thus monetarily defined. And the definition will be the more powerful and efficacious, I insist, because money is itself a form of social assent, an enabling fiction, already a part of “culture.” And it will in no way diminish all other forms of cultural difference, any more than the dollar, or the rouble, or the yuan have extinguished diversity, or eliminated conflict, within the very large nations that use those currencies. So we don’t need to wait for the highly doubtful tomorrow when the Orthodox churches will follow the Lutherans and the Catholics to the bargaining table; we don’t need to fear the loss of local identities and cultures. The real tomorrow will be here soon; it’s been painstakingly prepared; it’s on schedule; and it’s likely to produce a Europe that will be a more distinct reality than ever before. Europe will at long last be something definite – competing in the global economy so as to make possible the preserving of local variation. There are worse models for the future than Nescafé Gold.

References

Bridges, Margaret. "Of Myths and Maps: The Anglo-Saxon Cosmographer's Europe," *Writing & Culture*. SPELL 6. Ed. Balz Engler. Tübingen : Gunter Narr, 1992. 69-84.

Donne, John. *The Sermons*, vol. 4. Ed. Potter and Simpson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959.

Hay, Denys. *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*. Rev. ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968.

Heath, Michael J. "Renaissance Scholars and the Origins of the Turks," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance* 41 (1979): 453-71.

Herodotus, *Histories*, 3 vols. Ed. Sayce and Macan. London: Macmillan, 1883-1908.

_____. Tr. P. E. Legrand. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945.

Herrin, Judith. *The Formation of Christendom*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.

Lemaire de Belges, Jean. *Les Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye*. Ed. J. Stecher. Vols 1, 2. Louvain: Lefever, 1882.

Ninck, Martin. *Die Entdeckung von Europa durch die Griechen*. Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1945.

Nivat, Georges. *CommUNIcation* [Université de Genève] 9 (Oct. 1999).

Samson, Colin, James Wilson and Jonathan Mazower. *Canada's Tibet: The Killing of the Innu*. London: Survival International, 1999.

Spencer, Terence. "Turks and Trojans in the Renaissance," *MLR* 47 (1952): 330-33.

Starobinski, Jean. *Le Remède dans le mal*. Paris: Gallimard, 1989.

Xavier, St. François. *Correspondance 1535-1552*. Tr. Hugues Didier. Paris: Desdée de Brouwer, 1987.

Waswo, Richard. *The Founding Legend of Western Civilization: From Virgil to Vietnam*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1997.