

Towards a Contrapuntal Reading of History: Orientalism and the Ancient Near East

Fahad M. Al-Otaibi

*Assistant Professor of History, Al-Qassim University,
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*

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Greek traveller to interpreter observing an Arab tribal assembly: 'What are they doing?'

Interpreter to Greek traveller: 'They're holding a *majlis*.'

Traveller: 'What's a *majlis*?'

Interpreter: 'Its [sic] a kind of assembly.'

Traveller: 'ah, a *boule*'

Traveller to a Greek author: 'The Arabs have a *boule*.'

Modern Classicist on reading Greek author: 'The Arabs had Greek institutions.' Ball (2000: 492, No. 249).

Abstract. This article concerned with the idea of Orientalism which was introduced by Edward Said as early as 1978. However, since almost all scholars who have written about Orientalism concentrate on Islamic and modern history, this article looks at ancient history. As will be seen, the root of Orientalism discussed by Said should be sought in ancient time, not least when the West (the Greeks) came into contact with the East.

To write about Orientalism, it is necessary to start with Edward Said. This is because Said is one of the founders of the postcolonial movement in criticism which started with his seminal book, *Orientalism*, published in 1978. Said's hypothesis of Orientalism is too complex a one to be treated here. However, two aspects of his argument can be singled out. First, building on Foucault's idea that academic disciplines produce power as well as knowledge, Said attributes European imperialism to Orientalism. Since Europe had knowledge of the East (given by the Orientalists), this power (knowledge) is used to justify its invasion of the Orient. Here, Said cited Balfour's justification of the British occupation of Egypt as an example. For Balfour, since the British knew more than anyone else about Egypt, they could control it for the benefit of both the natives and the Europeans at large. Such 'authority of knowledge' claimed by the West, Said went

on, is the reason which has led the West to undertake to speak for the rest of the world, not least the East through what Said called 'Orientalism discourse.' Out of this discourse, the 'western East' has been created to meet the needs of the West for identity, authority, and so on. So generalized an argument by Said and many other scholars who were inspired by him affects the image of the Orientalists. The latter, to put it frankly, have come to be seen as the agents of imperialism. However, correct though this argument to some extent may be, a distinction should be maintained between politicians, such as Balfour, and those scholars who were interested in the East for a purely scientific reason. In other words, not all Orientalists who wrote and still write about the Orient are agents of imperial projects. We know that there are some Orientalists who contributed positively to the study of the ancient and Muslim Near East and was it not for them many things about the great civilizations of the East would have remained *unknown*.

The second of Said's arguments, since the Orient has been created to provide the West with identity and power, is that the Orientalists have looked at the Orient as an opposite which has helped them in defining their identity (here Europeaness) and asserting their superiority. Hence, to defend their self-image, unlike the West, which is seen as innovative and dynamic, the Europeans looked at the Orient as a static, eternal, and uniform entity. The clear example cited by Said here is Chateaubriand, who stated overtly as early as 1810 that the West ought to conquer the East in order to teach its peoples the meaning of liberty which they terribly lack (*la mission civilisatrice*).⁽¹⁾ Hence, Said went on, all the European literature written about the Orient does not inform us about the real Orient, if there is one, but about the Occident, or about the negative side of the Occident. Such a result of contact between different peoples seems to be a universal cultural phenomenon, as shall be seen further below. This very argument of Said has been supported by some European scholars. For example, Liauzu maintains that since the 16th century, Europe has defined itself by contrasting itself with 'les autres parties du monde'; this resulted from 'la montée en puissance du continent, d'une expansion continue depuis le xvi^e siècle'.⁽²⁾

Said's influence upon the western academic environments can be seen in the fact that many branches of knowledge such as history, art, music, and anthropology, to give but some examples, now ritually genuflect to his ideas and arguments, not the least of these being "postcolonial" discourse. However, it should be noted that Said almost used the term "Orient" to mean the modern Middle East. In the following section, the interest is more on the pre-Islamic Orient with a twofold aim. First, we shall look at the root of such modern non-political Orientalism concentrating mainly on Said's second argument mentioned above. Second, we shall try to see if some elements of the picture of the Orient given by the 19th and 20th century Orientalists are still at work as far as the ancient Near East is concerned and how they affect the study of the area. As Al-Fassi points out, in spite of the fact that ancient history suffers from the symptoms of Orientalism, the

⁽¹⁾ See Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 1978, 171-172.

⁽²⁾ Liauzu, C. *Race et civilisation: L'autre dans culture occidentale*. Paris: Syros, 1992, 41.

application of post-colonial critiques by the specialists in the field is still less than it should be.⁽³⁾

The fact that Said seemed not to have the knowledge of ancient imperialism led him to look at modern western colonialism as unique. However, as it shall be seen in a moment, these ideas of Orientalism mentioned by Said can be found in ancient times. Such ideas have 'been operating through different guises, one of which can be attributed to Hellenocentrism [...]'.⁽⁴⁾ As early as the 5th century B.C.E., perhaps earlier, the Greeks, thanks to their contact with eastern peoples, not least the Persians developed a strong sense of identity which resulted in regarding non-Greeks as 'barbarian other'. This 'other' was looked at, generally speaking, as static and timeless and lacking the criteria of 'civilized' life; a life which is nowhere better exemplified than by a Greek *polis*. It was an axiom which was accepted by almost all Greeks that the good and 'civilized' life cannot be found outside a *polis*.⁽⁵⁾ Hence, anyone who was not Greek was labelled 'barbarian' with the entire negative package which this word may denote. This without doubt helped the Greeks to foster their sense of identity to the extent that it was during this period that Herodotus introduced what can be regarded as the first notion of ethnicity⁽⁶⁾ when he emphasized that the Greeks had a common blood, religion, language, and way of life (see below). The Romans 'perceived all other societies through generalized and stereotypical categories inherited from centuries of Greek and Roman ethnographic writings'.⁽⁷⁾ This is why we tend to talk about *Greco-Roman* civilization.⁽⁸⁾ Accordingly, the Romans adopted the Greek perception of the East and its inhabitants, which was seen as a land of exotica, wealth and adventure. Hence, as early as the 3rd century B.C.E., to give only one example, we find the figures in Plautus' play going to the East only for business and returning from there opulent.⁽⁹⁾ However, it is worth noticing that the East was divided into two parts as far as the Roman familiarity with it is concerned. First, there was Egypt which was very familiar to the Romans, not least owing to its commercial power. Second, came Arabia and Persia which were seen as exotic and strange. This is indeed what we find also when we look at modern Orientalism. At the time when Britain and France were ruling some parts of the East (e.g. Britain ruled Egypt and France ruled Lebanon and Syria), some European explorers

⁽³⁾ Al-Fassi, H. "Women and Power in Ancient Northern Arabia: Nabataea." *Ph.D. Thesis, University of Manchester*, Manchester, 2000, 51.

⁽⁴⁾ Al-Fassi, H. "Women and Power in Ancient Northern Arabia: Nabataea." 20.

⁽⁵⁾ Finley, M. I. *Politics in the Ancient World*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 125.

⁽⁶⁾ The term ethnicity is a new term in social science. Older is 'ethnic'. It is derived from the Greek word $\epsilon\theta\nu\omicron\varsigma$ (*ethnos*). $\epsilon\theta\nu\omicron\varsigma$ has a variety of meanings in Greek. In Homer, for example, it is used to designate large groups of either animals or warriors. The implicit idea may be that of formless menacing groups. Another use of this term was to denote a group of people who lived outside the Greek milieu (the idea of contrast *We vis-à-vis Them* is implied). It is used in this sense for the Persians (see *Herodotus* 1.101).

⁽⁷⁾ Geary, P. J. "Barbarians and Ethnicity." In: O. Grabar (Ed.), *Interpreting Late Antiquity*. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001, 107.

⁽⁸⁾ For more information about the Greek's influence upon the Romans, see *inter alia*, Toynbee, A. "History." In: R.W. Livingstone (Ed.), *The Legacy of Greece*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928.

⁽⁹⁾ Dangel, J. "Du Nil à l'Euphrate dans l'Imaginaire des Poètes Latins de l'Epoque Républicaine." In: T. Fahd (Ed.), *L'Arabie Préislamique et son Environnement Historique et Culture*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989, 324.

were still conducting voyages to Arabia, which up to that date was a strange land to them.

Many modern western scholars claim the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome to be the basis of the values of modern Europe. In spite of the fact that such a claim has sometimes been challenged (see below), the relevant point here is that such a claim has led sometimes to a binary view of the social world (civilized, Greeks, Romans on one hand and uncivilized, easterners, etc. on the other) with an exaggerated view of the achievement of the Greeks and the Romans. Accordingly, it has been assumed, if not always stated overtly, that the ancient civilizations of the Near East only developed once they came into direct contact with Greek civilization. For those who held this view, the only interpretation of this contact is Hellenization. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Prussian historian J. G. Droysen derived this term from the term *Hellenismus* to describe the period that witnessed the spread of Greek culture to the non-Greek world after Alexander's invasion of Asia.⁽¹⁰⁾ Since then, Hellenization has been understood as the process by which the natives of the East gradually became 'Greek'. However, such an analytical framework is problematic. First, it supposes the existence of a distinctive and unified Greek culture which indeed was not the case. Greek communities in the East mixed with the native peoples such as the Phoenicians and the Egyptians. Second, the term itself implies that Hellenic culture managed to smelt the eastern people into a homogenous Hellenic identity, which again is not an accurate picture. *Bien sûr*, the East before Alexander's invasion was different from that which followed, but native peoples 'kept their original cultures for centuries [...]'⁽¹¹⁾, a point which we shall revisit further below. The third defect of the above-mentioned approach is that it sees acculturation as a one-way process from the West to the East, but not *vice versa*. That is, it tends to neglect the effect of the eastern cultures upon the Greeks which started with the latter's contact with the East as early as the 9th century B.C.E. At any rate, such a notion of acculturation as progressive and uniform has been challenged. The root of such a notion may lie in the theories of evolution and diffusion that were popular in Europe during the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Just as the European culture was seen as expanding and carrying new ideas to 'primitive' cultures, Hellenic and Roman culture introduced many new ideas and standards, so it is argued, to the barbarian others. A supporter of such a claim undoubtedly was the evolution theory of Charles Darwin. This theory of survival and natural selection is built on a binary division between 'civilized' and 'barbarian' where the latter has to succumb to the former.⁽¹²⁾

Even archaeological findings in the East have been mainly interpreted within the dominant Hellenic-Roman context. Archaeological excavations have been mainly

⁽¹⁰⁾ Shipley, G. *The Greek World After Alexander 323-30 BC*. London: Routledge, 2000, 1.

⁽¹¹⁾ Mendels, D. *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism*. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992, 17.

⁽¹²⁾ Darwin, C. *Origin of Species and the Descent of Man in Relation to Sex*. New York: Modern Library, 1936, 3ff.

concerned with finding Greek and Roman artefacts and when such things are found (e.g. inscriptions), they are explained within the context of Hellenization. But does the existence of some Greek inscriptions in the ancient Near East mean that the whole area was Hellenized or that Greek was spoken by the natives? The use of Greek in the East ‘in no way implies any Greek character or even much Greek culture in the region [...], writes Ball.⁽¹³⁾ The use of Greek in the ancient Near East must be viewed more in the context of imperialism. This point is put by Robin as follows: ‘Il était fréquent, dans le monde antique, de parler dans une langue mais d’en écrire une autre, plus prestigieuse,⁽¹⁴⁾ plus pratique *ou imposée par le pouvoir politique*’ [italics mine].⁽¹⁵⁾ However, in spite of this, as we shall see later on, before the annexation of Nabataea, to give only an example, there were no Greek inscriptions in Nabataean cities.⁽¹⁶⁾

In addition, one misconception about the study of cultural contact in the ancient world is that texts written by foreign invaders tended to be taken as a true reflection of social situations forgetting the very nature of such documents: they are *propagandistic*.⁽¹⁷⁾ Accordingly, the presence of Greek inscriptions in some areas of the former Nabataean kingdom, or broadly in the ancient Near East, does not necessarily mean the Hellenization of indigenous peoples, though it may sometimes do so. Some Palmyrenen inscriptions have been unearthed in England, some Nabataean inscriptions in Italy, and some Nafaitic inscriptions in Pompeii. Why do we not talk about the ‘Arabaization’ of these places! Hence, it is sometimes misleading to regard the presence of Greek inscriptions or documents written in Greek in the ancient Near East, a proof of the losing of Peoples identity. This is not to argue, however, that no one in the ancient Near East used the Greek script. Some individuals may have used Greek and may also have felt Greek, but this may have been in a narrow context.

All the same, such Eurocentric heritage can be seen as far as Nabataean studies are concerned. Since the beginning of Nabataean studies in the 19th century, Nabataean history has been written as it is told by the Greeks and the Romans. Those scholars who have written about the Nabataeans rarely questioned the veracity of classical sources and we know that one difficulty with these sources is their Hellenocentric views of other societies. Diodorus Siculus (first century B.C.E.) talking about the Nabataeans’ encounter with the Greeks in 312 B.C.E., wrote that the Nabataeans were ‘nomads’ and ‘pirates.’ Virtually, all modern ancient historians argue that the Nabataeans were such at that time. For example, Starcky had no difficulty in accepting Diodorus’s account.

⁽¹³⁾ Ball, W. *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*. London: Routledge, 2000, 4.

⁽¹⁴⁾ An example of a more prestigious language adopted by people who spoke another vernacular is Sabaic, which was used by the Himyarites. Though the latter spoke a language different from Sabaic, they employed it in their writing.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Robin, C. “L’épigraphie de l’Arabie avant l’Islam: intérêt et limites.” In: P.R. Baduel (Ed.), *L’Arabie antique du karib’il à Mahomet Nouvelles données sur l’histoire des Arabes grâce aux inscriptions*. Paris: Edisud, 1991, 17. We know, for example, that in Egypt any document written by a native and presented to the Roman authority in order to be accepted must be accompanied with a Greek summary.

⁽¹⁶⁾ An exception is a text found in 1897 at Bab es-Siq in Petra. However, even this inscription is not purely Greek but bilingual Nabataean-Greek.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Ball, W. *Rome in the East: Transformation of an Empire*. 446.

However, as we argue in another place,⁽¹⁸⁾ Diodorus's account of the Nabataeans is selective, with the aim of portraying them as 'uncivilized.'

At about the same time Strabo (c. 64 B.C.E. – c. 25 C.E.), claiming his friend who lived among the Nabataeans as his source, wrote that the Nabataeans drank wine, had political institutions, and held parties which were accompanied by two female singers. Here, modern scholars argue that the Nabataeans had passed through the nomadic phase and become by now a sedentary people (civilized). The big question is to what extent can classical sources be taken as reliable sources? In addition, by whose standard were the Nabataeans nomads in the first phase and civilized in the second phase? What would have been the Nabataean opinion of such an evaluation of their history, had they been given the chance to speak for themselves? Put differently, does the drinking of wine and going out with loins-cloths, slippers, worshipping the sun, etc. mean civilized life by the standard of at least some Nabataeans? The answer may be no, as shall be seen in a moment. But, these criteria of 'civilization' and 'nomadism' are those of the Greeks and the Romans which are used to judge other cultures.

Some scholars tend to demote eastern cultures as compared to the Greco-Roman one. Hence, Wilkinson writes: 'They [the Egyptians] were, *no doubt*, less lively than the Greeks' [italics mine].⁽¹⁹⁾ Therefore, the way to measure the development of eastern cultures is by comparing them with Greco-Roman culture with the idea that the more there was adaptation the more advanced these cultures became. One of the reasons behind such an idea is the Eurocentricism which resulted from the European overseas expansion during the 18th and the 19th centuries as Europe became the center of the world. This, indeed, has led to the fact that the Nabataeans, among others, have not been studied or defined in their own terms but by the, to use Mazrui and Shariff's term, 'tinted glasses of Eurocentricity'.⁽²⁰⁾ For a long time, Arabia was looked at as an exotic desert which was inhabited by nomads. This deep-rooted idea, in addition to Diodorus's account above, influenced the way that Nabataean history has been treated. As Al-Fassi shows, some scholars believe that the Nabataeans continued to be nomads throughout their history.⁽²¹⁾ This indeed suggests that Nabataean society was static and timeless. Similarly and as a result of such supposed inferiority of the eastern peoples, Quatremère argued that the Nabataeans were Armaeans since 'the Petraean ruins are unlike most of the ruins accredited to the *Semitic race*' [my emphasis].⁽²²⁾ At any rate, the fact that the Orient is seen by some European scholars as static and out of space and time can be seen in some early writings as well. The German writer Johann Georg Hamann writes in *Aesthetica in nuce* in 1762, 'How then will we revive the dead language of nature

⁽¹⁸⁾ See Al-Otaibi, F. "Rome and Nabataea: Post-colonialism and the Writing of History." *Ph.D. Thesis, University of Manchester*, 2005, Manchester, 109-114.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Wilkinson, J. G. *The Ancient Egyptians: Their Life and Customs*. London: Senate, 1994, 2.

⁽²⁰⁾ Mazrui, A. and Shariff, I. *The Swahili: Idiom and Identity of an African People*. Trenton: NJ: Africa World Press, 1994, 4.

⁽²¹⁾ Al-Fassi, H. "Women and Power in Ancient Northern Arabia: Nabataea." 57.

⁽²²⁾ Baldwin, G. D. "Nabataean Cultural Influence upon Israel Until 1106 A.D." *Ph.D. Thesis, The Faculty of the School of Theology: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*, 1982, 52.

[poetry]? Through pilgrimages to Arabia Felix, through crusades to the Orient and the restoration of its magic'.⁽²³⁾ Here, the writer thinks that the dead language and culture is there in Arabia or more generally in the Orient in the same condition as when they died (no change).

At any rate, such an approach denies the history of indigenous peoples (in this case the Nabataeans) and makes these peoples 'the passive objects of their history'.⁽²⁴⁾ However, in the cases when the history of these peoples is acknowledged, such acknowledgement tends sometimes to have a negative sense. The eastern empires and kingdoms are seen as a mere repetition of rise and fall without 'the teleological movement provided by the emergence of subjective consciences and spirit'.⁽²⁵⁾ Hence, 'Oriental history, too, is "really *unhistorical*, for it is only the repletion of the same majestic ruin," each new dynasty going through the same circle of decline and subsidence.'⁽²⁶⁾ In any event, the denial of the history and identity of the East through the exaggeration of the influence of the Greco-Roman culture is behind the depiction of the East as a *fully* Hellenized area. This overemphasis can take different forms. First, sources, whether historical or epigraphic, are interpreted outside their context. Such an interpretation is made with the predominant assumption that the East was dominated by 'western' (Greek) institutions and values. The danger of so erroneous a supposition is that natives are placed beyond time and denied even the right of owning their own native institutions, the institutions which came to be claimed as Greek. A clear example is the native eastern custom of assembly discussed by Ball.⁽²⁷⁾ This eastern institution which was held even by nomadic tribes, still till today among some Arab tribes, is usually translated into Greek as *boule*. For many modern scholars, the mere reference to this institution by Greek translation in some inscriptions is enough to articulate the deep influence of the Greek culture on the East. Accordingly, Millar concludes that 'we need not seriously doubt that Philadelphia possessed the normal constitutional structure of a Greek city'.⁽²⁸⁾

As Boardman argues, when the Greeks came to the East as early as the 9th century B.C.E., they encountered peoples with great civilizations from whom they learnt many things.⁽²⁹⁾ Though it is not within our aim to discuss this eastern influence which has been studied by scholars, some examples could be mentioned. From the Egyptians, the Greeks learnt metallurgical skills, how to use stone in buildings and how to carve capitals and bases instead of mudbrick and wood. In addition, they were inspired by the

⁽²³⁾ Spurr, D. *The Rhetoric of Empire*. London: Duke University Press, 1993, 127.

⁽²⁴⁾ Al-Fassi, H. "Women and Power in Ancient Northern Arabia: Nabataea." 51.

⁽²⁵⁾ Spurr, D. *The Rhetoric of Empire*. London: Duke University Press, 1993, 98.

⁽²⁶⁾ Spurr, D. *The Rhetoric of Empire*. London: Duke University Press, 1993, 98.

⁽²⁷⁾ Ball, W. *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*. 446.

⁽²⁸⁾ Millar, F. *The Roman Near East: 31 BC-AD 337*. London: Harvard University Press, 1993, 411.

⁽²⁹⁾ Boardman, J. *The Greeks Overseas*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1999, 35.

Egyptians in making their monumental stone sculptures. In smaller objects, Egyptian influence was apparent too. For example, the Greeks copied a nude girl swimming as a handle to a flat dish. The Greek alphabet was thought up under Phoenician influence. It is known that the Greek alphabet was derived from the Phoenicians, as Herodotus told us, perhaps at around the 8th century B.C.E. and for this reason the Ionians still called this alphabet 'the Phoenician alphabet'.⁽³⁰⁾ 'Not only the names of the letters and their order' writes Feldman, 'but also the forms of the earliest Greek letters clearly indebted to West Semitic.'⁽³¹⁾ Such an argument might be cemented by the fact that the Greek names of letters *alpha*, *beta*, and so on are Semitic words (*aleph*, *beth*) which do not make sense in Greek. *Alpha* is bull whereas *beta* is house. However, the creativity of the Greeks in such an adoption is apparent through, to give an example, their creation of the letter Y for the fifth vowel which does not exist in the Semitic model.⁽³²⁾ As far as the mechanism of Greek borrowing is concerned, there are two suggested theories among scholars. First is that there was a single act of borrowing which is thought to have taken place in Al-Mina in Turkey. Then, literacy spread along the trade routes to the rest of Greece, places such as Euboea and Athens.⁽³³⁾ The other theory is that there was not a single Greek alphabet, but several which were derived from different models. This means that different parts of the Greek world borrowed their alphabet at different times.⁽³⁴⁾

In terms of historiography, Greek historians were influenced by the Persians.⁽³⁵⁾ The Greeks also borrowed from the East in both domains of philosophy and science.⁽³⁶⁾ In the domain of Greek art, there was a strong eastern impact to the extent that some scholars⁽³⁷⁾ tend to use the term 'the orientaling period' to refer to Greek art between 750 to 650 B.C.E. Summing up his chapter about 'the orientaling period' of Greek culture, Murray writes.⁽³⁸⁾

"Naturalism in art, system in religion, the alphabet and literacy – the Greeks themselves were aware of how much they owed to the east: like the Dark Age, the orientaling period virtually disappeared from sight, to be discovered by modern research. Yet it is this brief century of creative adaptation that began many of the most distinctive aspects of Greek culture, and so of western civilization."

⁽³⁰⁾ Herodotus. 5.58.

⁽³¹⁾ Feldman, L. H. "Homer and the Near East: The Rise of the Greek Genius". *Biblical Archaeologists*, 59, No. 1 (1996), 15.

⁽³²⁾ Burkert, W. *The Orientalizing Revolution*. Translated by W. Burkert, London: Harvard University Press, 1992, 25-28.

⁽³³⁾ Cook, B. F. "Greek Inscriptions." In: J.T. Hooker (Ed.), *Reading the Past*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1990, 266.

⁽³⁴⁾ Hooker, J. T. "Introduction." In: J.T. Hooker (Ed.), *Reading the Past*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1990, 10.

⁽³⁵⁾ See Momigliano, A. D. "History and Biograph." In: M.I. Finley (Ed.), *The Legacy of Greece: A New Appraisal*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1981, 157.

⁽³⁶⁾ See James, G. M. *Stolen Legacy*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1954, 50.

⁽³⁷⁾ Burkert, W. *The Orientalizing Revolution*. 4.

⁽³⁸⁾ Murray, O. *Early Greece*. London: Fontana Press, 1993, 101.

However, this fact has always been hidden. Burkert writes:⁽³⁹⁾

“The foreign elements remain subject to a policy of containment: there is hardly a standard text book that has oriental and Greek objects depicted side by side; many of the oriental finds in the great Greek sanctuaries have long remained and some still remain unpublished. The fact that Olympia is the most significant location for finds of eastern bronzes, richer in this respect than all the Middle Eastern sites, is seldom mentioned.”

When Alexander the Great reached the East, he found an area which was highly developed socially, economically and politically. As far as religion is concerned, the Greeks themselves believed that their religion came from Egypt as expressed for example by Herodotus.

In 550 B.C.E., for instance, the Achaemenid empire came to existence. This empire united for the first time many different states and had a sophisticated system of taxes, roads and military techniques. Hence, on conquering this empire, Alexander and his successors adopted many of its institutions as they also adopted some others.⁽⁴⁰⁾

However, what is more interesting is that there is a new trend in classical studies which believes that Greek culture was Eastern (Egyptian) in origin. In his book *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (3 volumes), Bernal criticizes what he called the ‘Aryan Model’ which is held by some scholars and regards Greek culture as Aryan. Instead, he argues for what he termed the ‘Ancient Model’ which points at the Egyptian colonization of Greece as the root of Greek culture.⁽⁴¹⁾ Bernal believes that Egypt colonized Greece twice: during the 3rd millennium B.C.E. and the 17th century B.C.E. when the Hyksos after being expelled from Egypt entered the Argolid. This last model (Ancient Model), Bernal goes on, was only discredited in the early 19th century and it was only around the middle of that century that the ‘Aryan Model’ was developed. The reason behind this was the European racism in the 19th century with its belief in different races with different physical and physiological capacities. This, according to Bernal, led western scholars to ignore any eastern (African and Semitic) influence upon Greece which is regarded as the origin of modern western civilization. Indeed, Bernal’s book has exercised a very strong influence upon many scholars. Hence, John Henrik Clarke writes, ‘They have to admit that the foundations of what you call Western civilization was laid by non-Europeans’.⁽⁴²⁾

Black Athena has received wide media⁽⁴³⁾ notice and attracted scholarly attention,

⁽³⁹⁾ Burkert, W. *The Orientalizing Revolution*. 4.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Sherwin-White, S. and Kuhrt, A. *From Samarkhand to Sardis*. London: Duckworth, 1993, 1.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Bernal, M. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Vol. 1, London: Vintage, 1991, xv.

⁽⁴²⁾ Quoted Rogers, G. M. “Multiculturalism and the Foundations of Western Civilization.” In: G.M. Rogers (Ed.), *Black Athena Revisited*. London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 429.

⁽⁴³⁾ See, for example, *The Guardian*. March 1987.

both positive and negative, not least on the other side of the Atlantic. The matter has become a 'scientific war' between black Americans, or African-Americans as they prefer to be called, and white Americans, actually westerners, both of whom try to claim Greek culture. The former argue that the Ancient Egyptians were black Africans, and that they invaded Greece around the 17th century B.C.E. and introduced eastern civilization to native people who came to be known as Hellens. The latter, on the other hand, see the Greek culture as Indo-European resulting from the migration of Aryans from the north to Greece. Hence, as a counter attack to *Black Athena*, *Black Athena Revisited* (1996) appears with its 20 essays but only one aim: to refute Bernal's argument. Bernal replied to this book in his *Black Athena Writes Back* published in 2001, where he again reiterated his previous arguments.

What this shows is that Greek culture was indebted to the Orient regardless of whether there was an Egyptian colonization or not. According to Feldman,⁽⁴⁴⁾ the root of such a trend in classical studies goes back to 1936 and more precisely to E. R. Dodds in his lecture at Oxford in that year where he asked classicists to learn about the ancient Near East since it was from there that Greek culture arose and ever after that has isolated itself from its eastern background.

Hence, such a Hellenocentric or Eurocentric approach to the ancient Near East which sees the ancient Near East divided between two peoples: the civilized Greeks and Romans on one hand and the barbarian others on the other, where the latter benefited from the former, not *vice versa*, is not tenable. Those scholars who accept this division and take it as a starting point for their discussion undoubtedly operate within the general meaning of Orientalism given by Said. In this case, Orientalism 'is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"'.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Hence, Bolgar argues that the East benefited from the Greeks and their culture as did Rome. But, the difference between these two beneficiary parties according to him is that Rome was able to learn from the Greeks⁽⁴⁶⁾ — the implication is clear. Here, we can see that the attempt of the ancient Near East to preserve its identity is regarded as defection and an inability to learn from 'civilized' societies. Gibbon writes:⁽⁴⁷⁾

"Those nations [eastern nations] had submitted to the Roman power, but they seldom desired or deserved the freedom of the city: and it was remarked that more than two hundred and thirty years elapsed after the ruin of Ptolemies, before an Egyptian was admitted into the senate of Rome."

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Feldman, L.H. "Homer and the Near East: The Rise & the Greek Genius." 13.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Said, E. *Orientalism*. 2.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Bolgar, R. R. "The Greek Legacy." In: M.I. Finley (Ed.), *The Legacy of Greece: A New Appraisal*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, 429.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Gibbon, E. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. An abridgement by D.M. Low, London: Book Club Associations, 1979, 18.

In fine, the history of the ancient Near East needs a contrapuntal reading. Such a movement of re-reading history far from the relationships between power and knowledge has recently started in other places of the world. However, it is not only confined to East-West relations. Women, for example, have started to ask for a new interpretation of history from their own perspectives,⁽⁴⁸⁾ a movement which is known as feminism.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ See, as far as the ancient Near East is concerned, the brilliant Ph.D. Thesis by Al-Fassi, H. "Women and Power in Ancient Arabia: Nabataea."

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أستاذ مساعد، قسم التاريخ،
جامعة القصيم،
القصيم، المملكة العربية السعودية

(قدم للنشر في ١٤٢٧/٥/١هـ؛ وقبل للنشر في ١٤٢٧/٩/٣هـ)

ملخص البحث. منذ أن نشر الراحل إدوارد سعيد كتابه "الاستشراق" عام ١٩٧٨م وأصبح موضوع الاستشراق موضوعاً أكاديمياً رائجاً، لا سيما في الغرب، لكن أغلب الباحثين الذين كتبوا في هذا الموضوع ركزوا على التاريخ الإسلامي والحديث؛ ربما كان ذلك راجعاً إلى عدم إلمامهم بجوانب التاريخ القديم. يركز هذا البحث على الاستشراق في التاريخ القديم منذ بداية الاتصال بين الغرب والشرق، وكما سيتبين من البحث فإن جذور الاستشراق الذي درسه إدوارد سعيد توجد في التاريخ القديم.

