

Orientalism in the Ancient World: Greek and Roman Images of the Orient from Homer to Virgil*

HUANG Yang

In an illuminating study the American scholars Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen have expounded that a range of geographical divisions that we have taken for granted as scientific knowledge, from the division of the continents to the distinction of the 'East' and the 'West', are not so objective after all. They are in fact divisions that are fundamentally based on cultural perceptions of the Europeans who are responsible for establishing systematically the disciplines of human knowledge and for making it objective¹. In a more penetrating analysis Edward Said revealed that not only the 'Orient', but also the 'West' is a European 'invention', a discourse that was formed out of dealing with and conceptualizing alien cultures. He said, "Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West."² Said further stated that the Orient is Europe's "deepest and most recurring images of the Other". That is to say, the Orient is a mentally constructed 'Other' as opposed to the West (the 'Self'). As the 'Other' it plays a role in the development of European civilization in two ways. On the one hand it serves as a mirror through which the West can most clearly see itself and refine itself. It is most likely in this sense that Said saw the Orient as "an integral part of European material civilization and culture". On the other hand the discourse about the 'Other' had gradually become an instrument for redirecting and dominating the Orient. Hence Orientalism becomes "a Western style for dominating,

* An earlier version of this paper was published in *The Historical Journal* (2006, no.1) in Chinese; an earlier English version was presented at the Tokyo Summer Seminar of the Japanese Association for the Study of the Ancient World held on September 23-24, 2006, and subsequently read by Professor Lisa Raphals of University of California, Riverside. I have benefited from discussions at the Summer Seminar and especially from Mr. Yasuyuki Mitsuma, my commenter, and from Professor Raphals' criticism. The faults that remain are of course mine.

¹ Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

² Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994 (first edition, 1978), p. 5.

restructuring, and having authority over the Orient". Discourse thus becomes power.

Although Said was mainly concerned with Western representations of the Islamic world, his approach may also be inspiring for analyzing inter-cultural conceptions in the ancient world, in particular Greek and Roman conceptions of the 'East', namely Asia and the Persian Empire. Said's discussions highlighted two aspects of inter-cultural conceptions between the West and the East. Firstly, the East has always been the silent subject that has been represented, imagined and studied. Secondly, Western studies, imagination and intellectual construction of the East are largely external to the East itself. They make up a discourse that has the West as its objective, a discourse that has been a means of dominating the East and played an important role in shaping Western culture. In my opinion these two features also manifested themselves in the inter-cultural conceptions in the ancient world, and a number of scholars have already addressed various aspects of the issue by making use of Said's notions³. This paper proposes a scheme for further research into the problem and attempts at an overview of Greek and Roman conceptions of the 'East' and the implications that such conceptions may have entailed both for the 'East' and for the 'West', in this case, ancient Greece and Rome.

It must be stressed that the paper is more of a proposal for further research than of substantiated research results. Greek and Roman understanding, imagination and intellectual construction of the 'East' are a complicated, continuous process. It is impossible to do justice to this whole process in a single paper. What I propose to do therefore is to single out some key phases of this process for discussion and to make some suggestions for possible directions of research, and my discussion ends with the time of Virgil. It should be acknowledged that the author is fully aware of the dangers that such a method and such gross generalization inevitably entail. Nevertheless, it is only through synthesis and generalization that some of the fundamental features of Greek and Roman perceptions of the Orient manifest themselves most clearly. Throughout the paper I have used the terms 'East' and 'Orient'

³ See, for example, Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

in an interchangeable way, and I hope that this will not cause a great problem.

To the ancient Greeks the hostilities between them and the Asian peoples were perpetual and Homer was the first to reveal such hostilities by recounting a great war between them, the legendary Trojan War. It has seldom been emphasized that for Homer the Trojan War was not only between Troy and the league of the Achaeans. It was rather a great war between Greece and the eastern peoples headed by the Trojans. Thus apart from the Trojans themselves, the Trojan forces included a list of nations: the Dardanians, the Zeleians, the Pelasgians, the Paionians, the Paphlagonians, the Mysians, the Phrygians, the Maionians, the Carians, the Lycians, and the Thracians (*Il.* II, 811-877). It is worth noting that in this list many peoples such as the Paphlagonians, the Phrygians, the Carians and the Thracians were typical of the barbarians, famous for producing slaves, in the eyes of the later Greeks. Nevertheless it must be pointed out that Homer did not describe the Trojans and eastern peoples as culturally opposed or inferior to the Greeks, as has been noted by many scholars⁴. The behaviour of the Trojans is not seen as markedly different from those of the Greeks. Thucydides believes that Homer does not even use the word 'barbarians' because the Greeks were not yet known by one name and so make up an adversary of the other peoples (*I.*, 3). It is certain that the Homeric poems did not establish a general type of the 'barbarian' as opposed to the Greek. Nevertheless we begin to see in the Homeric poems the earliest signs of a distinction between "civilized" Greeks and "barbaric" peoples both legendary (for example, the Cyclopes) and real. For example, in the representation of the *Iliad* only the warriors from the Trojan side seem to show cowardice, as Andrew Erskine has noticed⁵. Although the word *βάρβαρος*, the typical word that was later used by the Greeks to represent the 'Other', was not used by Homer, its compound form does appear once in the *Iliad* in which the poet called the Carians *βαρβαρόφωνοι* (*Il.*, 867). Some scholars have insisted that

⁴ Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, pp. 19-47; 徐晓旭:《古代希腊民族认同的形成》(复旦大学博士后研究报告, 2003年6月), p. 71.

⁵ Andrew Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome: Local Tradition and Imperial Power*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 53.

the word does not have any derogatory meaning⁶. Its presence, however, shows that the Greeks had begun to recognize the alien character of the languages of other peoples and tried to invent particular words to describe them. It is therefore not insignificant that the word appeared in the Homeric poems⁷.

More importantly, in the eyes of the later Greeks Homer was the first to have revealed the great confrontation and conflict between them and the Eastern peoples. Therefore when Herodotus began his narrative of another great war between the 'East' and the 'West', he naturally traced the hostilities to the Homeric times. At the beginning of his *Histories* Herodotus reports in a seemingly objective way the Persian views of the hostilities between the Greeks and the barbarians, stating that the Persians believed that hostilities started with abducting each side's women, and that the Trojan War broke out because each side took the abduction of women differently. Herodotus reports,

"The Asiatics (τοὺς ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίας), according to the Persians, took the seizure of women lightly enough, but not so the Greeks: the Greeks, merely on account of a girl from Sparta, raised a big army, invaded Asia and destroyed the empire of Priam. From that root sprang their belief in the perpetual enmity of the Greek world towards them – with the Persians possessing Asia and its various barbarian peoples, and thinking that Europe and the Greeks being distinct from them (τὴν γὰρ Ἀσίην καὶ τὰ ἐνοικέοντα ἔθνεα βάρβαρα οἰκηεῦνται οἱ Πέρσαι, τὴν δὲ Εὐρώπην καὶ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἤγηνται κεχωρίσθαι)." (I., 4; Aubrey de Sélincourt's translation)

Although Herodotus claims that this is the view held by the Persians, it is not difficult to see that it rather reflected the ideas of the Greeks who polarized Europe and Asia, themselves and the various Asian peoples headed by the Persians. In 334 BC when Alexander crossed the Hellespont to start his Eastern expedition, the first thing he did was to go to Troy and make sacrifices there, and he is said to have changed his own armor for a set of

⁶ For example, Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 38.

⁷ See François Hartog, *Mémoire d'Ulysse. Récits sur la frontière en Grèce ancienne*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1996, p. 88; 徐晓旭: 《古代希腊民族认同的形成》, pp. 64-70.

armor left from the Trojan War and always brought them with him in battle⁸. By this symbolic act he also traced the enmity between the Greeks and the Eastern peoples to the Trojan War. More than two thousand years later the philosopher Hegel could still claim that the *Iliad* of Homer provides an example of an epic struggle that is “absolutely and essentially rooted in a profounder principle of necessity”. In that war “the Greeks invade an Asiatic people, and in doing so fight out as it were the preludic conflict of a tremendous opposition, the wars of which practically constitute the turning point of Greek history as we see it on the stage of universal history”⁹. Above all, the Homeric poems had already established a model in which the ‘East’ was represented and written about by the ‘West’. The Trojans had left no literary records about themselves or their adversaries. The ‘East’ had become the silent subject that was to be represented, written about and constructed.

But it was the Persian Wars that had decisively shaped Greek conceptions of the Persians and the peoples in the Persian Empire¹⁰. Faced with Persian invasions, the Greeks realized more strongly than ever that they were of one people. For Aeschylus the aggressive Persians represented the whole of Asia, the totality of the ‘East’ including Egypt, just as he says in the *Persians*, “From every realm of Asia the East in arms pours forward; the king’s dread word is spoken: A million sabers hear.” (56-58). Prolonged wars with the Persians and the presence of potential threat from the ‘East’ compelled the Greeks to study and comprehend the world of the Persian Empire and beyond its borders, to grasp it conceptually and to represent it to their compatriots in a meaningful way. It was against this historical background that a system of discourse about the ‘East’ began to emerge. In the eighth year after the Battle of Salamis (472 BC) Aeschylus staged his *Persians* in Athens. The play recounts the great sea battle not from the viewpoint of the victorious Greeks, but from the viewpoint of the defeated

⁸ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VI, 9.3.

⁹ The English translation is quoted from G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, translated, with notes, by F. P. B. Osmaston, England : Thoemmes Press, 1999, vol. iv, p.132.

¹⁰ See François Hartog, *Mémoire d’Ulysse. Récits sur la frontière en Grèce ancienne*, p. 89.

Persians. It therefore pretends to be a tragedy on the side of the Persians whose Greek expedition ended in disaster, but it is nothing like the other Greek tragedies in that the true hero is not the protagonist, but his anonymous opponent, the Greeks. The real intention of the poet was to highlight the Greek victory through reenacting the Persian loss. The contrast is made clear in many respects. At one time the Persian queen Atossa asked about the Athenians, "Who rules them? What master do their ranks obey?" And the chorus of Persian elders answered, "Master? They are no servants to any man." (241-242) Here the Athenian democratic way of life is consciously contrasted with Persian despotism¹¹. When the Persian messenger arrived at the palace and reported the Persian defeat at the Battle of Salamis, he described hearing a great shout coming from the Greek side at the beginning of the action, a battle cry which said: "Forward, you sons of Hellas! Set you country free! Set free your sons, your wives, tombs of our ancestors, and temples of your gods." (403-405) At the same time on their own side rose "the manifold clamour of Persian voices" (406-407). Such a report is most unlikely to have happened in the Persian palace because it is nothing short of an eulogy of Greek courage and their just course, whereas "the manifold clamour of Persian voices" seemed to stress the barbarian character of their tongues. The drama ends with the infamous withdrawal of the Persian king Xerxes and the desperate moaning of the Persian nobles. The whole play contrasts Greek democracy, freedom and victory with Persian despotism, servitude and failure, but speaks through the mouths of the Persians. It is not difficult to imagine how drastic the effect was on the Athenian spectators, many of whom must have taken part personally in the Battle of Salamis. Through a theme that was familiar to the spectators, Aeschylus presented the 'otherness' of the Persians to the very eyes of the Athenians. Thus Edith Hall is able to conclude after meticulously scrutinizing the Persians: "The presentation of the Persians is predicated on the antithesis of Hellene and barbarian; the barbarian character is powerfully suggested not only by the elaborate rhetorical style but by the use of a distinctive new vocabulary of words, symbols, significant actions, possible rhythm and by the emotional

¹¹ cf. Simon Goldhill, 'Battle Narrative and Politics in Aeschylus' *Persae*, *JHS* 108 [1988], 128-93.

excess, especially in the closing scene. ...The tragedy is not ornamented by oriental colouring but suffused by it, indeed it represents the first unmistakable file in the archive of Orientalism, the discourse by which the European imagination has dominated Asia ever since by conceptualizing its inhabitants as defeated, luxurious, emotional, cruel, and always as dangerous. ...The language in which the *Persae* expresses its Orientalism is a daring result of the poets' search in the years during and after the Persian wars for a new literary language in which to imply the ascendancy of Hellas and express the 'otherness' of the invader."¹² Said also noted that here "Asia speaks through and by virtue of the European imagination, which is depicted as victorious over Asia, that hostile 'other' world beyond the seas. To Asia are given the feelings of emptiness, loss, and disaster that seem thereafter to reward Oriental challenges to the West...It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries."¹³.

If, as Edith Hall has said, tragedy created a new language that was used to express the 'otherness' of the Other, then history that was born after the Persian wars was no less so¹⁴. The 'Father of History' Herodotus spends almost half of his *Histories* on describing the history, culture and customs of the peoples within the Persian Empire or around its borders. The peoples that he deals with in some detail include the Lydian, the Persians, the Lycians, the Carians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Indians, the Scythians, the Libyans, the Ethiopians and the mythical Amazons, and many more nations are mentioned. In doing so he virtually presented the entire known world to his compatriots. Yet there is something more than that. More importantly, he attempted to tell his Greek readers how to look at the world. For him the world was divided into two parts opposed to each other, namely the Greeks and the barbarians, as he makes clear at the beginning of his work that his '*historia*' is to record the "astonishing achievements of both the Greeks and the barbarians, and more particularly, to show how they came

¹² Edith Hall, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

¹³ Edward Said, op. cit., pp.56-57.

¹⁴ See Simon Hornblower ed., *Greek Historiography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 15-16 and note 24.

into war with each other"¹⁵. In his eyes the many barbarian peoples are parts of the Persian Empire, and they constitute an entity polarized with the Greeks, make up the 'Other' to the Greek world. Just as the French scholar François Hartog has argued, the *Histories* of Herodotus actually served as a mirror through which the Greeks looked at themselves. The historian created "a rhetoric of alterity" (une rhétorique de l'altérité). The alterity or otherness of the barbarians is most clearly manifested in the inversion of their *logoi* and customs. Hartog has noted in particular Herodotus' representation of the inversion of Egyptian and Amazonian behaviour and customs. It might be argued that since Herodotus gave weight to Egyptian influences on Greek culture, his attitude toward the Egyptians should not be taken as derogatory. This might be true, but the point is that the construction of "otherness" does not necessarily mean downright derogation. What matters is rather the construction of a fundamentally different type of human existence. It was precisely in this sense that Herodotus presented the Egyptians as an inversed type of human society. He says, "Not only is Egyptian climate peculiar to that country, and the Nile different in its behaviour from other rivers elsewhere, but the Egyptians themselves in their manners and customs seem to have reversed the ordinary practices of human kind." Then he lists a number of Egyptian customs that seemed to him to be the inversion of normal practices¹⁶, with the later defined largely by Greek standard. Hence the English historian Paul Cartledge comments that "polar opposition is what shapes Herodotus' Egyptian *logos* throughout and yields the *locus classicus* of 'reversed world' othering"¹⁷. The Amazonian narrative is another telling example. It is hard to believe that Herodotus took the Amazons as a real rather than a mythical people, and yet the historian decided to include them in his description of the barbarian peoples, precisely because the female-dominated society of the Amazons represented the exact opposite of the community of adult male citizens typical in the world of the Greek

¹⁵ Herodotus, *Histories*, "introduction". cf. James Redfield, 'Herodotus the Tourist', in Thomas Harrison ed., *Greeks and Barbarians*, Edinburgh University Press 2002, pp. 24-49 (originally published in *Classical Philology* 80 [1985], 97-118).

¹⁶ Herodotus, II, 35-36.

¹⁷ Paul Cartledge, op. cit., p.58.

poleis.¹⁸

The inclusion of the Amazons in Herodotus' narrative has another symbolic significance. It shows that in Herodotus' mind the 'Other' no longer denotes specifically the Persian Empire, it rather denoted a generic type of the barbarian symbolized by Persia or Asia. This generic barbarian included not only real barbarian peoples, but also mythical and imagined barbarian peoples.

Such a conception of the generic barbarian is also revealed in artistic representations of the period. Pausanias recorded a painting by Polygnotos of Thrace on the Stoa Poikile in the Athenian Agora, built around 460 BC. It painted three themes that seemed unrelated at a first glance: the Athenians under Theseus defeating the Amazons, the Greeks occupying Troy after capturing the city, and the Battle of Marathon with the Persians on the verge of fleeing (I, 15. 2-4). What bound them together is precisely this generic type of the 'Other': the Amazons, the Trojans and the Persians together made up of the enemy of the Greek world. They were the Orient that was opposed to the Occident. The Amazons were probably seen as the forerunners of the Trojans and the Persians in attacking the Greeks, as one French scholar comments, "The attack on Attica by these barbarian women was seen as a prefiguration of the expedition by Medean and Persian barbarians, in no way less historical."¹⁹ Similar scenes appeared on the Parthenon which was destroyed by the invading Persians and only began to be rebuilt in the year 447 BC. The relief on its metopes highlights the Athenian idea of binary opposition between Greeks and barbarians. The metope on the northern side depicts the Trojan War, those on the western and southern sides shows Greeks fighting the Amazons and Greeks fighting the centaurs, whereas one of the themes on the inner frieze is the Battle of Marathon. It is not difficult to conclude that the designers of the temple were propagating to their

¹⁸ François Hartog, *Le miroir d'Hérodote: Essai sur la représentation de l'autre*, Paris: Gallimard, 1991 (Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée, première édition, 1980). 'Une rhétorique de l'altérité' is the title for chapter 1 of part II; for discussions on inversion, see pp.227-29.

¹⁹ Jeannie Carlier, 'Voyage in Greek Amazonia', in Nicole Loraux, Gregory Nagy and Laura Slatkin eds., *Antiquities*, New York: the New Press, 2001, pp. 134-142 (originally published as "Voyage en Amazonie grecque," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 27 [1979], 381-405).

compatriots the general opposition and hostility of the Greeks and their eastern enemies in a subtle yet unmistakable way. Any barbarian people that came from the 'East' and fought the Greeks was now included in the Persian camp. Out of this the most note-worthy is the changing image of the Trojans, who had not been dissimilar to the Greeks in the eyes of Homer, but were now thoroughly barbarized as predecessors of the Persians. As Andrew Erskine has pointed out, "In the aftermath of the Persian invasions the Trojan War seemed to offer a mythical parallel for the struggle with Persia; here was a Greek victory over a powerful eastern kingdom. In imitation of the Persians the Trojans came to be called 'barbarians', that derogatory term for all who were not Greek."²⁰ In tragedy Trojan figures began to be created in imitation of the Persians, and they were given Persian costumes to wear. Moreover, other mythical peoples also began to be represented as the Eastern barbarian.²¹ Studies on Greek vase-paintings have shown that before the mid-fifth century BC, the legendary Phrygian king Midas, the Trojan king Priam and prince Paris were often depicted like the Greeks themselves, but thereafter they wore Persian attire²². The treatment of the story of Heracles killing the Egyptian king Bousiris further illustrates the point. In a vase-painting of about 470 BC by the Pan Painter the artist contrasts the heroic figure of Heracles with the frightened Egyptians²³. Further studies have shown that earlier vase-paintings dealing with the subject emphasized the Egyptian characteristics of Bousiris and his priests, but now their Egyptian characteristics were replaced with Persian traits.²⁴ Thus we see

²⁰ Andrew Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome: Local Tradition and Imperial Power*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.7-8; see also Chapter 3. 'The Persian Wars and the Denigration of the Trojans'.

²¹ Edith Hall, op. cit., Chapter 3.

²² Keith DeVries, 'The nearly other: the Attic vision of Phrygians and Lydians', in Beth Cohen ed., *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, pp. 338-63.

²³ For a more detailed discussion of the Bousiris story by the Pan Painter, see Francois Lissarrague, 'The Athenian Image of the Foreigner', 101-24, in Thomas Harrison ed., *Greeks and Barbarians*, pp. 101-124 (originally published as 'L'immagine dello straniero ad Atene', in S. Settis ed., *I Greci*, 2.II *Definizione*, Giulio Einaudi: Turin, 1997, 938-58), esp. pp. 122-123.

²⁴ Bousiris and the Egyptian priests in contrast to Heracles, see Claude Bérard, 'The image of the Other and the foreign hero', in Beth Cohen ed., op. cit., pp. 390-412; The shift to Persian traits, see Margaret C. Millar, 'The myth of Bousiris: ethnicity and art', in Beth Cohen ed., op. cit., pp. 413-42.

that “the generic oriental developed, loosely based on a Persian model, and embracing all peoples to the north, east, and south, both mythical and real”.²⁵ This generic Oriental became the typical ‘Other’ of the Greeks. From our analysis it can also be said that in the course of constructing a generic ‘Other’, the Greeks endowed their myths with new orientalizing meaning. Orientalism had become a way of reinterpreting their cultural tradition for the Greeks.

It must be said that fundamentally the Orientalizing tendency of the Greeks in their perception of the eastern peoples arose from Greek ethnocentrism²⁶. The Greek worldview as developed in the archaic and early classical period was that of a binary opposition between Greeks and all other peoples (the barbarians). However, during and after the Persian Wars as military and political hostility was mainly between the East and Greece, as the East posed a constant threat, Greek ethnocentrism increasing twisted toward viewing the East as the archetype of the barbarian, as the locus that embraced all barbarian peoples. It is in this sense that Orientalism can be regarded as the dominant manifestation of Greek ethnocentrism.

Once the Orientalist discourse was created, it soon became a way of dominating the Orient. This domination was at first conceptual. Through the discourse over the ‘Other’, the Greeks had realized that they were culturally superior: they were free, brave, strong and victorious; in contrast the Orientals were servile, ugly, effeminate, weak and always defeated. A passage of the fourth-century orator Isocrates can illustrate this feeling of cultural superiority very well. Speaking of the enmity between the Greeks and barbarians he says,

“So ingrained in us is this hostility that in the realm of myth we most enjoy dwelling on the Trojan and Persian wars, in which we can read of their disasters. It will be found that it is in the wars between the Greeks and Persians which have given rise to the composition of triumphal odes... And I think even the poetry of Homer gained prestige from its magnificent

²⁵ Margaret C. Millar, *ibid.*

²⁶ I owe this point to my commenter, Mr. Yasuyuki Mitsuma, and to Professor Lisa Raphals. For Greek conception of self-identity, see Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture*, University of Chicago Press, 2002, esp. chapter 6.

eulogy of the warriors who fought against the barbarian world, and that was the reason why our ancestors desired his art to be celebrated in musical competitions and in the education of the young, so that our frequent hearing of the epics should enable us to learn by heart the hostility which was ingrained there, and so that emulation of the prowess of the men who fought there should lead to a desire for similar achievements." (*Panegyricus*, 158-9; A. N. W. Saunders' translation)

For Isocrates, Greek superiority should naturally lead to its conquest of Asia. As old as he was over ninety, he was still anxious to write to Philip, calling on him to unite the Greeks in order to conquer Asia. The reasoning behind his suggestion is that it is a great "disgrace" "to allow Asia to be more successful than Europe, barbarians more prosperous than Greeks". "None of this can be permitted. It needs to be altered to the exact opposite". (*To Philip*, 132) Isocrates' younger contemporary Aristotle expounded similar views, but at the philosophical level. He says that barbarians are by nature more slavish than Greeks, and Asiatics than Europeans (*Politics*, 1285a19-22). Therefore the Asiatics are naturally ruled and the Greeks are capable of ruling all other people (1327b27-32).

It is within this ideological context that we should perhaps understand the Macedonian attempt to conquer Asia and the Persian Empire. It is said that at the meeting of Corinth in 336 BC, Alexander was chosen the leader for an invasion of Persia, and he was congratulated by many Greek philosophers and politicians.²⁷ As mentioned above, Alexander's sacrifices at Troy represent a conscious attempt to link his action to the great feud between the 'East' and 'West' that started with the Trojan War and continued ever since. Moreover, Alexander and his supporters made full use of the Orientalist discourse of the fourth century Greeks and portrayed himself as a great civilizer comparable to the god Dionysus. As a matter of fact, the myth that Dionysus visited the 'East' and civilized the people there was probably created in the course of Alexander's expedition to justify his conquest. The story was that when Alexander conquered the Indian town of Nysa, the inhabitants there asked Alexander to forgive them, claiming that they were

²⁷ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 14.

descendants of the followers of Dionysos and the god founded this city when he visited the east. They even praised that Alexander surpassed the god of wine in his achievement²⁸. Here Dionysos was described as a great civilizer and Alexander's achievement was seen as comparable to that of the god of wine. As has been noted, this myth was not mentioned in earlier classical writers²⁹. Eratosthenes said that it was not credible, and Strabo believed that it was the fabrication of Alexander's flatterers³⁰. Arrian thought that Alexander wanted to believe that the myth was true and that Nysa was indeed founded by the god, so that he could consider himself even greater than the god³¹. We see here a complicated interaction between the Orientalist discourse and the domination over the 'East'. On the one hand, the Orientalist discourse provided justification for the conquest of the 'East'; on the other, the conquest of the 'East' enriched the Orientalist discourse through inventing new myths or reinterpreting old ones. From then on, Alexander's image as a great civilizer of the 'East' has lingered on in the Western mind. In a treatise entitled *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander* Plutarch praised Alexander's conquest of Asia, saying that he "sowed all Asia with Greek magistracies, and thus overcame its uncivilized and brutish manner of living"³². He further stated that although the Stoic philosopher Zeno thought of all men living in one community, it was Alexander the Great that put that idea into practice³³. As late as in 1948 the great English expert on Alexander, Sir William Tarn, still stuck to that idea, believing that Alexander promoted the ideal of the brotherhood of all mankind³⁴.

It is therefore no surprise to find that Alexander found favour with the Romans. As a nation who established its rule over a vast territory through naked conquest, the Romans needed a civilizer like Alexander to justify their

²⁸ Arrian, V, 1.

²⁹ A. B. Bosworth, *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph*, Oxford University Press, 1996, 120-122.

³⁰ Strabo, XV, 1, 7-9.

³¹ Arrian, V, 2, 1.

³² *Moralia*, 328e.

³³ *Moralia*, 329b-c.

³⁴ W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948, vol. II, p. 400; but see A. B. Bosworth's criticism of Tarn's view; Bosworth, op. cit., pp. 2-4.

actions. Thus Pompey the conqueror of Asia was called 'New Alexander' by Latin authors, and the supporters of Octavian, Cicero included, also likened him to Alexander³⁵. Octavian himself seems to have tried to create his own image on Alexander's model. It is said that when he was in Alexandria he paid tribute to Alexander's tomb, and later, he ordered to have many portraits of Alexander made. He even used a seal with Alexander's head³⁶. The Romans also created a myth of his birth in imitation of Alexander. According to this myth, Octavian's mother Atia gave birth to him after conception by Apollo disguised as a serpent, just like Alexander's conception by the god. Paul Zanker has demonstrated that Augustus made use of this myth for political propaganda³⁷. In AD 2 at the inauguration of the Forum Augustum, Augustus arranged for a show of the Battle of Salamis, which seemed to declare that he was a revenger of Persian aggression and conqueror of the 'East'³⁸. As a matter of fact, as early as when he was competing for power with Marcus Antonius, Octavian had already started to create an image of the defender of the western world and conqueror of the 'East', and his rivalry Antonius was derogated as an 'Easterner'. In 40 BC Octavian had a meeting with Antonius at Brundisium. The senator-historian Cassius Dio records that Octavian showed Roman courage and virtue, whereas Antonius behaved like an Oriental or an Egyptian. Dio's narrative clearly followed the Roman imperial ideology that can probably be traced back to Augustus' political propaganda. When Octavian broke his temporary truce with Antonius, he waged a tremendous political campaign to discredit Antonius, claiming that he lost any reason possessed by a Roman general, succumbed to Cleopatra Queen of the Orient, and became her instrument for conquering and ruling the 'West' (Rome). In 32 BC he declared war, but

³⁵ Pliny, *Natural History*, VII, 95-100; Plutarch, *Life of Pompey*, 2. Cicero, *Philippic*, V, 17. 48 compares Octavian to Alexander. See also Jacob Isager, 'Alexander the Great in Roman Literature from Pompey to Vespasian', in Jesper Carlsen, Bodil Due, Otto Steen Due and Birte Poulsen eds., *Alexander the Great: Reality and Myth*, Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1993, pp. 75-84.

³⁶ Paying tribute to Alexander's tomb, Cassius Dio, LI, 16. 3-15, Suetonius, *Augustus*, 18. 1; Alexander's portrait, Pliny, *Natural History*, 35. 93-94; seal with Alexander's head, Cassius Dio, LI, 3. 5-7, Suetonius, *Augustus*, 50.

³⁷ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988 (paperback edition 1990), pp. 50-51 and fig. 39.

³⁸ Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, I. 171ff; see Jacob Isager, op. cit.

formally against Cleopatra and the Orient which she symbolized, not against his real enemy Antonius. That is to say, he competed for supreme power with Antonius in the name of a just war against the Orient. Thus the Orient was further demonized and the Battle of Actium in 31 BC had been seen as the decisive battle between the 'West' and 'East'. The great Augustan poet Virgil thus sang:

"All Leucate, in a ferment of moving martial array, came into view; the waves shone out with gold. On one side was Augustus Caesar leading Italians into battle, having with him the senate and the populace, the Little Gods of Home and the Great Gods of the race. He stood on the high quarter-deck of his ship; gaily his brow discharged twin beams of light, and on his head dawned his father's Julian Star... Opposing them was Antony; with him, on board, he had Egyptians and the whole strength of the East even to most distant Bactria; on his side was the wealth of the Orient and arms of varied design, and he came victoriously from the nations of Dawn and the Red Sea's shore, followed – the shame of it! – by an Egyptian wife... Her gods, monstrous shapes of every species, even to the barking Anubis, leveled weapons against Neptune, Venus, and Minerva herself... But Apollo of Actium saw; and high on his vantage-point he already bent his bow. In dread of it, every Egyptian, the Indians, every Arab, and all the host of Sheba were on the point of turning in flight."³⁹

Virgil's immortal verses have left a profound stamp in the Western mind. It can be said that by then Orientalism had already become a well-established tradition in the Graeco-Roman civilization.

³⁹ *Aeneid*, VIII, 678-706. The translation is W. F. Jackson Knight's.