

OF EUROPE¹

Phiroze Vasunia

The geographical extent of Europe has been an unstable and shifting concept since the age of Herodotus. Where should the boundaries of Europe be drawn? Which natural or artificial markers should determine its size? What claims have been made about the European land mass and its connection to neighbouring continents such as Asia? Along with geography, the identity of Europe also seems to have been flexible for centuries. Anthony Pagden writes, ‘Like all identities it is a construction, an elaborate palimpsest of stories, images, resonances, collective memories, invented and carefully nurtured traditions.’² Across the generations, thinkers have variously stressed Europe’s classical Graeco-Roman, Christian, and Jewish currents. Critics and commentators speak also of Europe’s debt to the cultures of Asia, Africa, and to the Americas, to Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, and it seems that no coherent sense of Europe’s identity is easily stated or accepted.³ Another way of putting all this is to say that Europe’s geographical co-ordinates and its cultural identity have been contested for centuries, into our own present time.⁴

One reason for this instability about Europe is that its own founding myth reveals evidence of hybridity and cross-cultural mingling and implies that Europe’s origins lie in Asia rather than in Europe itself. In Book 4, Herodotus says,

as for Europe, no men have any knowledge whether it be surrounded or not by seas, nor whence it took its name, nor is it clear who gave the

¹ My deepest thanks to Tom Harrison and Joe Skinner for organizing the conference on which this volume is based and for providing immensely helpful comments on a draft of this chapter. I am very grateful as well to the other participants for their papers and criticism. I would also like to thank Simon Goldhill for inviting me to talk about ‘Herodotus in the nineteenth century’ at CRASSH, in Cambridge, in September 2015; Suzanne Marchand for presenting an erudite and insightful paper at that seminar; and Shinjini Das and Theodor Dunkelgrün for their perceptive responses.

² Pagden 2002: 33.

³ See e.g. Hall 2003: 37–38.

⁴ See the anthology of materials in Rougemont 1966 and Renger 2003.

name, unless we are to say that the land took its name from the Tyrian Europa, having been (as it would seem) till then nameless like the others. But it is plain that this woman was of Asiatic birth, and never came to this land which the Greeks now call Europe, but only from Phoenice to Crete and from Crete to Lycia.⁵

Herodotus appears to be denying that the continent took its name from the Phoenician princess, but with the implication that others made precisely such a claim; he may be referring to other Ionian writers in issuing his denial, but we do not know who they are.⁶ His remarks also raise the question, Who or what gave the continent its name if not the Tyrian Europa? Writers after Herodotus usually accept the view that it was a Phoenician woman, though some suggest a Thracian woman or an Oceanid, but he himself is sceptical that a Phoenician woman actually arrived on the Greek mainland and bestowed her name on the place.⁷

Herodotus' remarks about Europe in Book 4 are the more significant given that he refers to Europa at the beginning of his history when he mentions the abduction of women by Greeks and barbarians in what appears to be 'mythical' time: one of the abductions indeed involves Europa, who is said by the Persians to have been seized by Greeks in Phoenician Tyre. Rosalind Thomas writes that 'these legendary rapes are then set aside quietly in order to progress to the events which are really accessible to true knowledge (I 5.3), a striking juxtaposition of traditional knowledge and more "modern" ideas which recurs in the *Histories*'.⁸ In both instances, Herodotus puts forward views about Europa but then seems to draw himself back from them, as if he were uncertain about their legitimacy, or as if he wished not to give them a stamp of authenticity. Why this hesitation over the truth about Europe and Europa? Thomas offers a general explanation: 'We are perhaps at a point where ideas about knowledge and truth are on the move, different and competing conceptions coexist of how to get at the truth, the unknown, from the poets, from

⁵ Herodotus, *Histories* 4.45. Translations of Herodotus are from the Loeb version by A. D. Godley. Herodotus' conceptions of 'Asia' and 'Europe' are different from our own, though there are some significant overlaps: see Asheri et al. 2007: 0000.

⁶ On this passage, see Thomas 2000, ch. 3, and Harrison (forthcoming).

⁷ See the scholia to Euripides, *Rhesus* 29 (Schwartz).

⁸ Thomas 2000: 85.

experience and evidence of experience, to schematic or abstract theories, all with their own plausibility, none quite satisfying or sufficient by itself to jettison all the rest.’⁹ That may well be so. For whatever reason, however, it is significant that Europa’s identity is immersed in a cloud of uncertainty and doubt in Herodotus’ work, though it is important that she is unambiguously said to come from Asia and indeed from Phoenicia. Herodotus gives us the framework for movement between Tyre, Crete, and Lycia, but remains sceptical that a Phoenician Europa arrived on the Greek mainland.

There were many literary and visual representations of the myth of Europa in antiquity.¹⁰ Hesiod names her as one of the daughters of Oceanus and Tethys,¹¹ while the *Iliad* and early fragmentary texts refer to her as the daughter of Phoenix.¹² It is unclear against which versions of the Europa story Herodotus is reacting in his opening chapters, but by the fourth century BC the broad contours of the account that is familiar begin to fall into place: Europa, a Phoenician princess, is seduced by Zeus in the guise of a white bull and then deposited in Crete or on the mainland of the continent that is said to assume its name from her. This is the version that Moschus, Horace, and Ovid explore in their influential tellings of the story. And already in this myth of Europa, and its attendant themes of migration, kidnapping, rape, and metamorphosis, there is the suggestion of a journey that commences in Asia and comes to landfall in Europe.

Pagden refers to Herodotus’ account of Europa and he points to two other narratives that have contributed to the identity of Europe. The first of these is the story of Aeneas and the founding of Rome, a story which begins in Troy, that is, in what we could call ‘Asia’ today, and culminates in Italy, that is, in what we would call ‘Europe’ today. The second is the history of Christianity, which, needless to say, also has its origins in western Asia. Add these three stories together, and we arrive at the view that ‘Europe, which will fashion itself for generations in opposition to Asia,

⁹ Thomas 2000: 101.

¹⁰ See e.g. Cook 1914–1940: 3.615–28, Bühler 1968, and the survey in *LIMC* 4.1, s.v. ‘Europe I’ (Martin Robertson). Robertson makes the point that the personification of Europa as a geographical continent is ‘late and very rare’ and has ‘no iconographical tradition’ (*LIMC* 4.1, s.v. ‘Europe II’).

¹¹ *Theogony* 357–63.

¹² *Iliad* 14.321; Hesiod, fr. 140–41 M-W.

has always owed to Asia its historical origins'.¹³ 'Thus,' as Pagden says, 'an abducted Asian woman gave Europe her name; a vagrant Asian exile gave Europe its political and finally it[s] cultural identity; and an Asian prophet gave Europe its religion. As Hegel was later to observe, Europe was "the centre and end" of History, but History had begun in Asia: "characteristically the *Orient* quarter of the globe—the region of origination.'" The course of civilization, like that of empire and the sun itself, moves inexorably from East to West.'¹⁴ And as we just saw, the story of Europa itself—evocatively and influentially—captures this movement from east to west, from the Orient to the Occident, from Asia to Europe, and it is a story to which we shall have occasion to return a little later.

For many commentators who have tried to define Europe and its civilization, this non-European component has remained obscure and even a source of anxiety. Writers such as Voltaire, Gibbon, and William Robertson 'set about defining "Europe" as a secular civilization and supplying it with a secular history and an age of modernity'.¹⁵ These Enlightenment intellectuals were far clearer about Europe's southern or western or even northern borders than the borders in the east, with which they had the most trouble. Russia and Turkey (or the Ottoman Empire, the 'sick man of Europe' in the nineteenth century) were the customary stumbling blocks. As J. G. A. Pocock has shown, the regions to the east—'where Europe shades into Eurasia'¹⁶—and the regions outside the 'far-western Latin-speaking provinces of the former Roman empire' proved hard to accommodate into the framework of Enlightenment conceptions of the history of Europe.¹⁷ For Pocock, 'The lands originally called "Europa" [Pocock means the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire¹⁸] are those in which "Europe" experiences a continuing problem in defining itself.'¹⁹ Another area where the process of self-definition ran into obstacles, moreover, was associated with Israel and Palestine. Here the difficulty lay not just in the relationship with Judaism and Jews—which, of course, remained a large and

¹³ Pagden 2002: 35.

¹⁴ Pagden 2002: 35–36.

¹⁵ Pocock 2002: 62.

¹⁶ Pocock 2002: 66.

¹⁷ Pocock 2002: 60.

¹⁸ Pocock 2002: 60.

¹⁹ Pocock 2002: 67.

intractable problem at all times—but also in the kinship of this originary space to Europe. Was the birthplace of Europa also the birthplace of Europe? Who and what migrated along with the Phoenicians to the European mainland? And how were these real or symbolic migrations to be assimilated into the narratives that Europeans told each other about their own origins?

Herodotus' conception of Europe was a question of interest to nineteenth-century observers because Europe itself was still not a fixed entity. Its geography could not easily be fixed or secured but, as I have been suggesting, remained elusive, evasive, and obscure. The elusiveness of this geographical sense of Europe was grasped by commentators on Herodotus in the nineteenth century, from a very early date, and although they may have disagreed with each other on how to interpret Herodotus, they tended to agree on the open-ended nature of his description of Europe. At the same time, writers in Europe, especially western Europe, had an increasing sense of their own cultural difference from the rest of the world. The entry on 'Europa' in William Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography* states: '... Europe has repaid with large interest its original debt of civilisation to both Asia and Africa, and has become, in all the arts which elevate or refine our race, the instructor in place of the pupil.'²⁰ With the rise of nationalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, moreover, the relationship between European and national identities became more fraught than before. How was a person to be both French and European? What did Europeans share with one another? Who were Europeans, and where had they come from? This issue of European identity was being worked through by writers during the nineteenth century. It was 'natural' for them to be attracted to Herodotus since he had given one of the earliest accounts of Europe, its geography, its history, and even its origins.

In this context, and in the related contexts of historical geography and philology, let us look at what Herodotus offers to nineteenth-century discussions of Europe. As we move from James Rennell at the start of the period to Paul Valéry at the end, we can map out the changing positions that writers and scholars adopt on Europe. At the centre of this narrative is a remarkable concern about the search for

²⁰ Smith 1854–185, s.v. 'Europa'.

Europa and the question of her identity, and in one sense this chapter can stand as a gloss on Herodotus' Europa. Most scholars today are loath to believe that 'Europe' derives from a Semitic word, and Aldo Corcella says, for instance, that 'a Semitic origin ("land of the west") is no longer accepted'.²¹ At a basic level, *Europa* can be explained as the Greek for 'wide-eyed' or 'broad-faced', though this etymology, too, is open to debate. Almut-Barbara Renger writes that 'Europa is a word of unknown meaning from an unknown language that by the convoluted transmission of a myth found itself bestowed on a Phoenician princess who, according to Herodotus' *Histories* (4.45.4), never set foot on the European mainland'.²² Yet, the theory of a Semitic origin was extremely popular in the nineteenth century, from at least the geographical work of Friedrich August Ukert (1816) onward, and was the subject of many learned notes in commentaries and other publications on Herodotus.²³ The speculation was fuelled in part by attempts to understand Hesychius, who had interpreted *Europa* (Εὐρώπη) as 'land of sunset, or dark one' (χώρα τῆς δύσεως. ἢ σκοτεινή) and *europion* (εὐρωπών) as 'dark' (σκοτεινόν) and who seemed to hint at Semitic origins.²⁴ Gardner Wilkinson's long note on the meaning of Europa, in the translation of George Rawlinson, is the perfect summa of a type of muscular Victorian scholarship, and it could only have been written in that era.²⁵ In the early twentieth century, James Joyce was to incorporate the theory that Europa was derived from the Phoenician word *ereb*, which denotes the west or the land of the setting sun, by writing in *Finnegans Wake*: 'The phaynix rose a sun before Erebia sank his smother!'²⁶ Joyce was drawing on Herodotus, Ovid, and claims made by scholars in

²¹ In Asheri et al. (2007) 614. See also West 1997: 451, who is reluctant to accept a Semitic origin for 'Europa'.

²² Renger 2014: 357.

²³ Ukert 1816–1846. See Edwards 1979: 58. For the German intellectual context, see Marchand 2010 and in this volume. The Semitic origins of figures in the Europa myth were also postulated by Renaissance thinkers such as Samuel Bochart (1646) who were interested in connections between Phoenicia and other cultures. On Bochart, see Shalev 2012: ch. 4.

²⁴ Hesychius, *Lexicon*, s.v. Εὐρώπη and εὐρωπών.

²⁵ On Wilkinson, see Vasunia 2012 and below.

²⁶ 'The phaynix rose a sun before Erebia sank his smother! Shoot up on that, bright Bennu bird! *Va faotre!* Eftsoon so too will our own sphoenix spark spirt his spyre and sunward stride the rampante flambe. Ay, already the sombrero opacities of the gloom

the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. But to understand why Joyce found the Phoenician etymology so fecund, we need to approach it at some distance.

James Rennell's Geographical System

The first edition of *The Geographical System of Herodotus*, by James Rennell, was published in 1800 and a second revised edition in 1830. The book is an attempt to offer a detailed and systematic account of the geography of Herodotus. But the author tells his readers that the book is a small part of a larger project, on which he has been working for some years. This project is 'the task of correcting the geography, ancient and modern, throughout that part of Asia situated between India and Europe; in effect the great theatre of ancient history in Asia, as well as of European commerce and communication in modern times'.²⁷ And what were the aims of this ambitious enterprise? Rennell says that his 'first object was to adapt the system so formed to the use of statesmen and travellers; the next to apply it to the illustration of such parts of ancient military history as were, in his idea, deficient, from a want of the necessary aids of geography, and which have been, in a degree, supplied in later times'.²⁸ So, the first aim is immediately practical and has a contemporary relevance, for it is designed to assist 'statesmen and travellers' who might venture into the regions described by Herodotus; and the second aim is to help readers understand 'ancient military history' by providing them with up-to-date geographical information.

That Herodotus should serve as the basis for a practical geography is not surprising given the reputation he enjoyed since the middle ages as a traveller and explorer.²⁹ The continuing weight of the ancient Greek and Roman tradition on European men of letters, even men such as Rennell who knew no Greek, ensured that Herodotus and other classical authorities continued to be read and discussed in such matters. Besides, geography itself was gradually changing as the eighteenth century

are sphanished! Brave footsore Haun! Work your progress! Hold to! Now! Win out, ye divil ye! The silent cock shall crow at last. The west shall shake the east awake. Walk while ye have the night for morn, lightbreakfast-bringer, morroweth whereon every past shall full fost sleep. Amain' (Joyce 1939: 473). See Pappalardo 2011: 162.

²⁷ Rennell 1830: 1.xi.

²⁸ Rennell 1830: 1.xi.

²⁹ On Herodotus' reputation in later times, see e.g. Grafton 2010.

gave way to the nineteenth, and Herodotus was liable to be involved in the transformation of geography into a modern discipline.³⁰ Geography was becoming more practical and more based on autopsy and fieldwork than it used to be and it was moving away from its status as an armchair pursuit. Herodotus' presentation of specific distances and figures, however dubious they may now appear, appealed to writers seeking to ascertain a precise geographical and topographical knowledge. As Rennell himself observes, moreover, this knowledge could have a modern application and could be placed at the service of people who sought to travel beyond Europe, for trade, for conquest, for missionary activity, or for any other reason. The more that Europeans ventured into the lands described by Herodotus, the more important it was for them to have detailed, accurate, and practical knowledge of these regions. Slowly, Herodotus would be set aside in favour of more reliable sources, but until a satisfactory and reliable geographical account of these lands was obtained, he was liable to be consulted or at least used as a comparandum.

Herodotus' continuing reputation as a geographer, ethnographer, and historian and a growing 'planetary consciousness' came to intersect in classical studies. Within this field, Rennell's study of Herodotean geography quickly became important, and translators such as William Beloe were extravagant in their praise of Rennell.³¹ But Rennell was merely one of many writers to discuss the geography of Herodotus. Niebuhr published two dissertations, which were translated into English, on the subject in the early nineteenth century, and already by mid-century there were other treatments by Joannes Fridericus Hennicke (1788), Hermann Schlichthorst (1788), Wilhelm Doenniges (1835), Hermann Bobrik (1838), Gabriel Gottfried Bredow, and J. Talboys Wheeler (1854), in addition to small texts for students published at Oxford and Cambridge. Of course, editors and other scholars also commented on Herodotus' geography in notes, articles, encyclopaedias, and so on. The study of Herodotus' geography was thus a familiar subject of scholarly discussion, in German and increasingly in English, as the nineteenth century wore on. In this sizeable area of

³⁰ See e.g. Rennell's writings on India; and the chapters by Hall, Gange, and Marchand in this volume.

³¹ See Skinner, in this volume.

Herodotean scholarship, Rennell's work was widely read and cited and was considered the definitive treatment of its subject for many years.

The author of the *Geographical System of Herodotus* also reminds us of the ties that connected the British Empire to discourses of antiquity, a relationship that is explored in other chapters of this volume as well.³² One need only open the title page of the book to see Rennell described there as the Late Major of Engineers and Surveyor-General in Bengal. But Rennell is a more interesting figure than that pithy formulation suggests, for he was also the first modern surveyor of India and, at least in the eyes of many scholars, the founding figure of modern Geography. Rennell's *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan* was published in two versions, the first of which went into two editions, and the second into three (the latest published in 1793). An employee of the East India Company, Rennell was appointed surveyor-general in Bengal by Robert Clive, and he prepared some of the most influential maps ever drawn of British India during the period of colonial rule.³³ His biographer, Clements Markham, called him the 'first great English geographer', and Matthew Edney has observed that 'Rennell's maps provided the definitive image of India for the British and European public'.³⁴ Like other geographical works of the time, the *Memoir* drew on classical Greek and Latin sources, and Rennell devoted his opening sections to knowledge of India among Greco-Roman authorities and to ascertaining the route of Alexander the Great in south Asia. The author of the first substantial treatment of the geographical system of Herodotus was also an employee of the East India Company and the author of the definitive study of Indian geography.³⁵

In the form and scale that Rennell bestows on it, the analysis of Herodotus' geography surely gives the impression of being an imperial European exercise. The book is part of a grandiose and unfinished project, and itself comprises two long volumes. It contains numerous maps, obsessively lists the places mentioned by Herodotus, seeks to ascertain modern counterparts of lands and peoples, and attempts to verify correct distances and co-ordinates where these are mentioned by Herodotus. Such a project can only have been undertaken when the earth was better known, better

³² Gange, Harrison, and Skinner, in this volume.

³³ Markham 1895.

³⁴ Markham 1895: 9; Edney 1997: 9.

³⁵ On Rennell, see also Vasunia 2013: 55–59.

scrutinized, and more thoroughly traversed than it had been in Herodotus' time. It is a project that is made possible by accounts in European and non-European languages of the areas in question. It corresponds to a period in history when more and more of the earth was coming under European rule, and it shows an interest in regions that, to the western European observer, would have seemed remote, exotic, and strange. Even the digressions in the work reflect the period of composition, as Rennell discusses rivalries among European powers such as England and France or the advantages of travel and trade. In its panoptic ambition, its drive to encompass the entire geography of Herodotus, and its desire to devise a comprehensive system, Rennell's book is the quintessential scholarly study of the age of empire.

What seems surprising, in a work that declares a geographical system to be its main theme (remember the title), is the frequency with which Herodotus himself emerges from it as someone who actually confounds the notion that there might be a system in his *Histories*. In justifying the publication of his book, Rennell says in his opening sentence, 'As the writings of Herodotus furnish the earliest record of history, among the heathen authors whose works have reached us, so they also furnish the *earliest known* system of geography, as far as it goes. It may therefore be worth while to examine this system, in order to compare it with actual geography . . .'³⁶ But these words are almost immediately qualified by the remark that Herodotus' geography was 'by no means intended to form an abstract system'.³⁷ In fact, the opening chapter is given over to a series of qualifications that colour and complicate the nature of Herodotus' knowledge, accuracy, credulity, and overall achievement. It is true that these are presented in the manner of a defence of Herodotus, but the inevitable impression conveyed by Rennell's hesitations is that Herodotus can be imprecise, overly credulous, superstitious, and simply wrong. The two volumes as a whole are filled with remarks of this nature: Rennell will present Herodotus' observations but then temper or modify them to bring them closer in line with modern geographical knowledge. By the end of the book, the system of Herodotus ends up looking less like a system and more like a detailed exposition and assessment of the numerous geographical particulars provided by the author. If there is a system, it is legible in Rennell's table of contents and not in Rennell's Herodotus. Perhaps such an approach

³⁶ Rennell 1830: 1.1–2.

³⁷ Rennell 1830: 1.2.

allows Rennell to think of Herodotus as both a recognizable ancestor and a figure who can be easily improved by nineteenth-century scientific thoroughness.

Let us turn to Rennell's chapter on Europe. Like many commentators, Rennell remarks that Herodotus' conception of Europe is vague and hampered by a lack of knowledge, and the implied contrast here is with the modern understanding of Europe. Rennell says that western Europe was not very well known to Herodotus, that he did not specify a northern boundary, and that eastern Europe was not assigned a definite limit either by the author. Some Greek writers had argued that the eastern boundary lay in Scythia, by the river Tanais, but Herodotus went past this marker 'to the utmost verge of his geographical knowledge' and for him the eastern limits of Europe could not be determined precisely.³⁸ Within the overall picture of incompleteness and ambiguity in Herodotus' Europe, the eastern borders seem to constitute a region of particular murkiness.

Rennell was not alone in his diffidence on the point. If he was somewhat opaque on Herodotus' view of the division between Europe and Asia, the exact dividing line was a matter that exercised numerous other commentators as well and prompted much analysis. In the 1850s, Talboys Wheeler weighed in with his own discussion of Herodotus' text and noted that the problem had not been resolved for centuries. He added that 'the winding course of the Don, (the Tanais) . . . betrayed the geographers of the last century into an inextricable labyrinth of contradictions and absurdities' and that finally 'the Academy of St. Petersburg fixed the present boundary'.³⁹ Wheeler, like Rennell before him, is commenting on Herodotus' imprecision with regard to the eastern boundary of Europe, but one cannot help feeling from his comments, as from Rennell's, that the border of Europe continues to remain a problem in his own day and that it remains so largely in the area where Herodotus also found it to be a problem, that is, in the eastern frontier 'where Europe shades into Eurasia', to recall Pocock's formulation.⁴⁰

On another point where a commentator might have speculated about the origins of Europe, Rennell passes over the opportunity in relative silence. He declines

³⁸ Rennell 1830: 1.193.

³⁹ Wheeler 1854: 18.

⁴⁰ Pocock 2002: 86. Contemporary debates about the European Union, its future, and its relationship with its neighbours illustrate that where the eastern boundary falls is still a matter of contention.

to talk at length about the abduction of Europa or to talk about the origins of Europe. However, he does consider the travels of the Phoenicians in his study and considers their trading activities in the Mediterranean and other seas. When he discusses the area of Phoenicia and Palestine, he refers to Europa's brother, Cadmus, and to the world religion that arose in the area:

No man whatsoever was a truer friend to the interests of the human race than Herodotus: had he, therefore, been endowed with a prophetic spirit, to have foreseen that from Palestine there was to arise a Light to guide the footsteps of men to the highest state of happiness that this world affords, by humanizing them, and making them fitter for the purposes of society; and, moreover, by giving them hopes of a better state hereafter; he would have thought it a spot of much more importance than he attaches to it.

He refers to this quarter of the world the important invention of letters: and there seems to be no doubt, that the alphabets of the *Western* world were derived from this source alone. He observes, *Terpsichore*, 58, that “the Phoenicians who came with Cadmus (into Boeotia) introduced, during their residence in Greece, various articles of science; and amongst other things, Letters; with which, as I conceive, the Greeks were before unacquainted . . .”⁴¹

Rennell tries to explain why even so humane a traveller as Herodotus missed the significance of the area and he claims that had Herodotus been sufficiently clairvoyant, he would have predicted the birth of Christianity and, as he says elsewhere, registered the value of Jerusalem. As it is, Herodotus says nothing about the resonance of the area for Jews of his time and instead moves on to the invention of the alphabet, which, Rennell agrees, was introduced into Western culture by Cadmus the Phoenician.

The myth of Europa

With Europa's story, Herodotus' proem points to a movement that readers, from the nineteenth century to the present day, have interpreted as a transfer from Asia to Europe. In his monumental history of Europe (1996), for instance, Norman Davies writes,

⁴¹ Rennell 1830: 1.326–27.

The legend of Europa has many connotations. But in carrying the princess to Crete from the shore of Phoenicia (now south Lebanon) Zeus was surely transferring the fruits of the older Asian civilizations of the East to the new island colonies of the Aegean. Phoenicia belonged to the orbit of the Pharaohs. Europa's ride provides the mythical link between Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greece.⁴²

Davies later describes how the story of Europa speaks to broader issues of circulation, movement, and migration in the context of the Mediterranean, but here he reads Europa's journey as if it symbolizes the transfer of power from Egypt to Greece and from the old cultures of the East to the new cultures of the West, in the way that Cadmus brings the alphabet to Greece.

In fact, we can discern the ripples of her impact in remarks about the etymology of Europe/Europa made after Rennell.⁴³ That the nineteenth-century discussion centres around language is not unexpected, of course. From the 1780s, beginning with the discoveries of William Jones in Calcutta, a virtual revolution took place in philology and linguistics and transformed European understanding of the structures and roots of the world's languages. One account of the etymology of Europe, which Davies hints at and which was accepted by several nineteenth-century commentators, connects the names of Asia and Europe to the Assyrian words for setting and rising. Taking their cue from nineteenth-century commentators, How and Wells write that '[t]he names seem to be derived from the Assyrian, 'açu' and 'irib' (perhaps cf. ἔρεβος), i.e. the 'rising' and the 'setting', and no doubt reached the Greeks through the Lydian traders'.⁴⁴ How and Wells were writing about a famous section in book 4.45, from which I quoted at the start of this discussion, and they memorably say of this passage that 'there seems a trace of Greek contempt for women here and elsewhere in this chapter . . . , which makes it clear how completely the real meanings of 'Asia' and 'Europe' were forgotten in H.'s time'. Setting aside their surprisingly up-to-date observation about women, How and Wells appear to be implying that the words 'Asia' and 'Europe' were used in a limited sense initially and that the terms eventually grew to encompass the two continents. Like many others,

⁴² Davies 1996: viii.

⁴³ See Deroy 1959 and Dombrowski 1984.

⁴⁴ How and Wells, 1.320.

they also appear to be interested in the historicity of Phoenician colonization in Greece. Herodotus said that Cadmus and the Phoenicians sailed out in pursuit of Europa and he mentioned Thasos and Thera as two places that the Phoenicians colonized in their search.⁴⁵ How and Wells consider the views of several scholars and a great deal of evidence to assess the question of Phoenician colonization and ultimately arrive at the conclusion that a Phoenician settlement in Boeotia is ‘at least possible’.⁴⁶

In connecting the two terms ‘Asia’ and ‘Europe’ to Assyrian words, How and Wells were drawing on an older scholarly tradition that extended far into the nineteenth century. Writing in George Rawlinson’s edition, Gardner Wilkinson was clear about the origin of the word ‘Europe’: ‘The name of Europe is evidently taken from the Semitic word *ereb* (the Arabic *gharb*), the “western” land sought for and colonized from Phoenicia.’⁴⁷ In a long note, Wilkinson also commented on the significance of the Phoenicians’ search for Europa and their colonization of the island of Thasos.⁴⁸ Wilkinson’s interpretation of the myth of Europa makes sense in a nineteenth-century context and coalesces around his reading of particular passages in Herodotus.⁴⁹ Writing in the 1840s, Charles Anthon was also pretty clear that ‘*Europe*, then, will have been given by the Asiatics to the country which lay west of them, toward the evening (*Ereb*) sun, or the quarter of *darkness*’.⁵⁰ For him as for many other contemporaries, Europa ‘was nothing more than the lunar divinity or the moon’.⁵¹ But the association with the moon also contains within it the story of migration from east to west, for ‘the legend of Europa relates to the introduction of the lunar worship, by Phoenician colonists, into Crete’.⁵² Wilkinson and Anthon were merely two of many nineteenth-century scholars who perceived a connection between

⁴⁵ Herodotus 2.44 and 4.147.

⁴⁶ How and Wells, at 4.147.4.

⁴⁷ Rawlinson 1862: 3.33. On the Rawlinsons, see Harrison 2013.

⁴⁸ On Herodotus 2.44 and the Phoenician presence in Thasos, see Lloyd 1976: 205–11.

⁴⁹ See Vasunia 2012.

⁵⁰ Anthon 1848: 507.

⁵¹ Anthon 1848: 506.

⁵² Anthon 1848: 508.

the name and the myth of Europa, on the one hand, and an east-west movement, on the other.

In his wide-ranging survey of the Europa myth, Peter Gommers writes of the nineteenth century, that ‘there was an enormous growth in the numbers of writers and literary works, resulting in several references to the myth, especially among the poets’.⁵³ Poets do refer to the myth of Europa throughout the nineteenth century despite ‘the growing nationalism that nurtured Romanticism in post-Revolutionary Europe and despite ‘a theme that took as its premise Europe as a supranational entity’.⁵⁴ For these poets, Moschus, Horace, and Ovid rather than Herodotus appear to have been the inspiration, and the hints of cultural complexity that can be discerned in Herodotus are harder to find in their poems.⁵⁵ Yet, a few poets allude to the origins of Europa or refer to the voyage that brings her from Asia to the west. The poem ‘Europe’, by Louis Bouilhet (1822–1869), is perhaps illustrative in this respect, with the striking juxtaposition in the second line of Phoenicia and Europe:

Quand, sur le grand taureau, tu fendais les flots bleus,
Vierge phénicienne, Europe toujours belle,
La mer, soumise au Dieu, baisait ton pied rebelle,
Le vent n’osait qu’à peine effleurer tes cheveux!

When on the large bull, you braved the blue waves,
Phoenician Virgin, oh beautiful Europe,
The sea, subject of god, kissed your feet atop,
The wind hardly dared your hair to graze!⁵⁶

Where Bouilhet is pretty unambiguous about the Phoenician origins of Europa, and where Aubrey de Vere refers to ‘Asia’s lonely daughter’ in his poem, other nineteenth-century poets seem reluctant to develop her Semitic features in their work: Leconte de Lisle (1818–1894) seemingly points to a Greek origin for Europa in his

⁵³ Gommers 2001: 159.

⁵⁴ Zielkowski 2008: 29.

⁵⁵ Moschus, *Europa*; Horace, *Carmen* 3.27; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2.833–75 and *Fasti* 5.603–18.

⁵⁶ Translation in Gommers 2001: 161.

poem ‘L’Enlèvement d’Européia’, for example, and Arthur Rimbaud describes her arm as white (*bras blanc*) and her cheek as pale in ‘Soleil et chair’ (1870).⁵⁷ The Phoenician origin of Europa does not appear to be as prominent in nineteenth-century poetry as it is in the scholarship.

By the early years of the twentieth century, scholars were pouring cold water on the idea that Semitic or Assyrian roots lay behind Europa’s name, or were responsible for seriously complicating the idea. As early as the First World War, philologists were proposing that ‘Europa’ could be connected to an early stage of Greek and writers were arguing for a connection with Mycenaean or pre-Greek formations. A Pelasgian goddess called ‘Europa’ was postulated.⁵⁸ A few writers persisted in saying that Europa’s name had Semitic connections, if not always in straightforward terms. In 1920, for example, Charles Autran connected ‘the word Europa to the Indian Dravidian language, a tongue which he assumes was spoken by the Egyptians and Phoenicians’.⁵⁹ In his book on the Phoenicians and the *Odyssey*, Victor Bérard initially argued for a Semitic origin of ‘Europa’ and the cluster of names around her and said, ‘The name of Phoenix speaks for itself’.⁶⁰ But Bérard complicated his explanation considerably in the second volume by writing that the Egyptian Book of the Dead accounted for ‘all the names and all the details of the Cretan myth’.⁶¹ In his analysis, the bull of Europa was the bull of the Egyptian goddess Amentet. Later, Michael Astour, who argued for West Semitic impact on Mycenaean Greek culture, believed that he had ‘succeeded in discovering the Semitic prototype of Europa in authentic religious texts which . . . were contemporary with the Mycenaean epoch in Greece—the Ugaritic texts, and more precisely the first lot of tablets unearthed at Ras Shamra in 1929’.⁶² Astour and especially Bérard were widely read, but their arguments scarcely settled the issue to the satisfaction of all, and scholarly resistance to Phoenician origins remained strong in the second half of the twentieth century. The whole issue was given a sensational airing by Martin Bernal,

⁵⁷ Gommers 2001: 167 (Aubrey de Vere), 159–60 (Le Conte de Lisle), 161 (Rimbaud).

⁵⁸ Gommers 2001: 54.

⁵⁹ Gommers 2001: 54. See Autran 1920 and Autran 1937–1938.

⁶⁰ Bérard 1902–1903: 1.224

⁶¹ Bérard 1902–1903: 2.81.

⁶² Astour 1967: 132.

in the late 1980s, with the publication of the first volume of *Black Athena*, though a scholarly consensus still seems to favour the pre-Greek background.

Nationalism, anti-Semitism, and colonialism all played major roles in the development of ancient studies in the nineteenth century and contributed to the shaping of Europa. For all the recent revelations and controversy thrown up by *Black Athena*, debates over the Semitic origins of Europa and Semitic influences in ancient Greece, as we have discerned, appear to go back at least to the early years of the nineteenth century. These debates were perhaps also reactions to the Romantic Orientalism or Orientalizing Romanticism of the early nineteenth century when philology was developing as a “scientific” discipline. This is a point made by Tomaz Mastnak in a remarkable paper on the politics of the myth of Europa.⁶³ As Mastnak reminds us, fierce arguments over Asian and Near Eastern influences took place in nineteenth-century Germany, a case in point being Friedrich Creuzer’s writings on art and mythology, and the critiques of his writings by Karl Otfried Müller. For Müller, ‘Phoenix’ was an Hellenic name and Cadmus was an Hellenic hero, but Müller was not able to wave away the supporters of Phoenicia despite the prominence of his own scholarship. Both Karl Hoek and Frantz Karl Movers, for example, made a strong case for the Phoenician origins of the Europa myth and for early contact between the Phoenicians and Greeks. Wilkinson appears to be writing within this tradition, as do How and Wells, though in a more guarded fashion. Mastnak observes that as early as 1898 Robert Brown drew attention to the early nineteenth century in these matters. Long before Bernal, Brown was critical of Otfried Müller, though he remained respectful to the German scholar in his critique.⁶⁴ Brown blamed the British Raj and Max Müller for favouring developments that led to the ‘Indo-Aryan’ hypothesis and was also pretty scathing in his dismissal of German scholarship. Thanks to German

⁶³ The work of Mastnak and others such as Josine Blok (1998; a more recent version in van Binsbergen 2011, ch. 7) shows that, while *Black Athena* has much to offer, the particulars of Bernal’s argument are worth probing, improving, and correcting. Even when nineteenth-century scholars are manifestly racist or anti-Semitic, the details of their claims and the contexts in which they are writing need to be grasped if we are to arrive at a fuller understanding of the achievements and limitations of the historiography.

⁶⁴ Brown 1898: 83.

scholars, Brown said, ‘Semitic influence in Greece was scouted as an absurdity: and perhaps the high water mark in this reaction was reached when ‘Kadmos’ was declared to be a Hellenic name.’⁶⁵ It was not only illustrious German scholars such as Müller and Julius Beloch (who taught in Italy) who refuted Semitic influence on Greece: French scholars such as Salomon Reinach, an assimilated Jew, also minimized the impact of the Phoenicians on Greek culture.⁶⁶ Reinach named J.-J. d’Omalius d’Halloy, a Belgian, as the first person, in 1848, to refute ‘the theory of the Asiatic origin of Europeans’, i.e. the Indo-Aryan hypothesis.⁶⁷

Daniel L. Selden remarks that it is not logical to assume, because some scholars for ‘racist reasons—from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century shied away from exploring links between Greco-Roman writers and the Phoinikians, that such connections actually existed’.⁶⁸ The case for a Phoenician origin of the name ‘Europa’ seems relatively weak, at least to many scholars today. But, as Selden shows, arguments for and against Phoenician influence occur in particular socio-political contexts, which they in turn can shape. The Phoenician version is not intrinsically about the harmonious union of Asia and Europe, cultural borrowing, or the complex relationship between civilization and barbarism, but it was read in these terms in the nineteenth century. There are other ways of framing the Phoenician origin of Europa. Stuart Hall accepts the argument for a Semitic etymology and then poses a set of disconcerting questions:

Her very name derives from a Semitic root meaning “western”. She is indeed a prophetic figure for Europe: richly suggestive but difficult to decode. If she represents Europe, why is she from “elsewhere”? If this is “an allegory of love”, what has it to tell us about the European conception of the relation between love and seduction, sexual desire and marriage? And who or what, pray, is the bull?—deceptively white, but with a definite aura of “otherness”, of sexual power, male compulsion and patriarchal possessiveness, about him: something “dark” and dangerous, who comes lumbering out of the European collective unconscious and steals Europa away to Crete?⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Brown 1898: 82.

⁶⁶ Beloch 1898, Reinach 1893.

⁶⁷ Reinach 1892: 33.

⁶⁸ Selden 2014: 260–61.

⁶⁹ Hall 2003: 39.

Hall resists the multicultural reading of Europa in his discussion and emphasizes the ‘darker’ features of the myth. In his reading, the myth is about violence and abduction, male possession and female captivity, race and otherness. The implication of Hall’s remarks are that if some scholars denied the Phoenician origin for racist or anti-Semitic reasons, others accepted the Phoenician origin because of fantasies associated with patriarchy, racial bias, and Orientalism. The ‘Greek’ and the ‘Phoenician’ interpretations of the Europa myth respond to nineteenth-century contexts in different ways, but both are fraught with ideological baggage. Hall’s more general point is thus that the many interpretations of Europa’s myths ‘point in very different directions, and those differences are precisely what makes them a significant site, not of celebration but of *contestation*’.⁷⁰ As we see from our glance at the nineteenth century, scholars who argue both for European openness and for European cultural indigeneity refer to Europa and the cluster of myths around her. Their readings frequently contradict other and raise thorny questions about nineteenth-century understandings of myth, identity, race, gender, and other issues.

An Asian Peninsula

Europa is renowned for her mobility. Herodotus says that Europa was born in Tyre, abducted and conveyed to Crete, and then settled in Lycia with her son Sarpedon (1.2, 1.73). He remarks that he found a sanctuary of Heracles in Thasos, in the northern Aegean, that had been established by Phoenicians who had journeyed from their land in search of Europa and colonized the island (2.44); he also says that Cadmus’ search took him to Thera, which was settled by descendants of the Phoenicians (4.147). Herodotus does not present Europa’s story simply as a westward trajectory, nor does he say that the Phoenician Europa is responsible for the name of the continent, as we have seen (4.45). Yet, other writers read the myth of Europa in precisely these terms and find in Herodotus a framework for westward migration from Asia to Europe. Europe is seen as potentially dependent on Asia, as coming out of the East and evolving away from it while it progresses into a time to come. ‘Both the myth and the proposed (though questionable) etymology of the name indicate a will to

⁷⁰ Hall 2003: 42.

identify as a western outpost, a land of the future, to which civilisation moves and where it matures, rather than its original cradle.’⁷¹ Such a reading does not account for the complexity of Europa’s movements in Herodotus, who ends by locating her in Lycia.

The sense of Europe as a ‘western extension of the Asiatic land mass’ or an Asian peninsula has proved nonetheless to have an enduring appeal.⁷² Winston Churchill was dismayed by its ramifications, but numerous others deployed the image in art and text.⁷³ The idea is represented in a map published as early as 1592 ‘by a Czech printer from the designs of an Innsbruck draughtsman’.⁷⁴ Denis de Rougemont, correctly, points out that the image of Europe as a peninsula of Asia was used by Charles Noblot (*Geographie universelle, historique et chronologique, ancienne et moderne*, 1725), Malte-Brun (*Précis de Géographie Universelle ou Description de toutes les parties du monde*, 1810–1829), Pierre Lapie and Alexandre Emile Lapie (*Atlas universel de géographie ancienne et moderne*, 1829), Auguste Himly (*Histoire de la formation territoriale des états de l’Europe centrale*, 1876), Élisée Reclus (*Nouvelle géographie universelle, la terre et les hommes*, 1876–1894), F. Schrader, F. Prudent, and E. Antoine (*Atlas de géographie moderne*, 1890), and Raoul Blanchard (*Géographie de l’Europe*, 1936).⁷⁵ In the early years of the nineteenth century, Johann Christoph Adelung writes of Europe as ‘merely the western continuation of Asia’ in *Mithridates oder allgemeine Sprachenkunde*.⁷⁶ Nietzsche imagines his readers reflecting ‘sadly on old Asia and its protruding peninsula of Europe that desperately wants (over and against Asia) to stand for the “progress of humanity”’.⁷⁷ In their various ways, these authors are heirs to a particular reading of the myth of Europa.

The most well-known expression of the peninsular interpretation occurs in the writings of Paul Valéry. He raises the issue briefly in one essay

⁷¹ Fornäs 2012: 39.

⁷² Hay 1968: xvii.

⁷³ Hay 1968: xvii–xviii.

⁷⁴ Pocock 1993: 145 (see also 146).

⁷⁵ Rougemont 1966: 30. I have supplemented Rougemont’s list of authors and provided the titles of works.

⁷⁶ Adelung 1806–1817: 2.3.

⁷⁷ Nietzsche 2002: 48.

Will Europe become *what it is in reality*—that is, a little promontory on the continent of Asia?

Or will it remain *what it seems*—that is, the elect portion of the terrestrial globe, the pearl of the sphere, the brain of a vast body?⁷⁸

and then develops it further in the essay entitled ‘The European’. In that essay, Valéry uses expressions such as ‘true European’ and ‘absolutely European’ and explores the distinctive nature of the continent that he so admires. In answer to the question ‘What is Europe?’, he writes,

It is a kind of cape of the old continent, a western appendix to Asia. It looks naturally toward the west. On the south it is bordered by a famous sea whose role, or I should say function, has been wonderfully effective in the development of that European mind with which we are concerned. All the races who came to its shores mingled with each other; they exchanged merchandise and blows; they founded ports and colonies where not only articles of trade but beliefs, languages, customs, and technical achievements were the objects of traffic. Even before present-day Europe took on the appearance familiar to us, the Mediterranean had witnessed the establishment, in its eastern basin, of a sort of pre-Europe. Egypt and Phoenicia somehow prefigured the civilization we founded; then came the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Iberian peoples.⁷⁹

For Valéry, Europe is a cape, a headland, or a promontory, an Asian extension that faces west. This description of Europe makes it look like a ‘point of departure’, literally for the voyages made by its people, but also for its accomplishments, its inventions, and its intellectual and spiritual explorations.⁸⁰ At the same time, Valéry’s words give Europe a *bearing* that other cultures, namely and mainly, that of Asia, have followed. Europe is far out in front, looking west, and the rest of Asia has trailed behind in its wake. Egypt and Phoenicia are acknowledged, but they are in the distant past. Europe almost functions as Asia’s *telos*, the place that Asia has to catch up to,

⁷⁸ Valéry 1963a: 31.

⁷⁹ Valéry 1963b: 312. My reading of Valéry’s essay is indebted to Derrida 1992.

⁸⁰ Derrida 1992: 20.

even as Europe is about to sail off from the headland, and thus Europe is an ‘advanced point [which] is at once beginning and end’.⁸¹

In some respects, this reading of Europe navigates in the wake of the mid-century course charted by Wilkinson. Valéry’s European is a restless being, always searching, exploring, thrusting forth from a headland, and venturing further west into new worlds—new worlds with lands and peoples and new worlds of human activity, ‘economic, intellectual, political, religious, artistic’. Naturally, this European man travels not only to the west, like Cadmus, but also ‘in the opposite direction’.⁸² ‘Europe burst out of its borders,’ Valéry says, ‘went out to conquer other lands.’⁸³ And in comparison to other types of human being, the European has lived a full history and can even be described as ‘a kind of monster’. Why a monster? ‘His memory is too full and too continuous. He has extravagant ambitions, an unlimited greed for knowledge and wealth. As he usually belongs to some nation that in its time has more or less dominated the world and still dreams of its Caesar, its Charles V, or its Napoleon, his pride, hope, and regret are always on the alert . . . He is caught between marvelous memories and immoderate hopes . . .’⁸⁴ Such is Valéry’s European, an almost nineteenth-century figure, historically enriched, driven to strive and seek, marked by ‘the maximum of vitality, intellectual fruitfulness, riches, and ambition’.⁸⁵

In other respects—‘The European’ was written in 1922—the essay is of its time, for the author marks the end of the First World War as if a storm has just passed and reflects on the precarious, frightened, and confused state in which Europe finds itself after the violence. Valéry’s concern is not with the catastrophe but with what humankind has accomplished and what it might endeavour in the future. Our achievements have been realized mainly, Valéry writes, by a small fraction of people, living in a relatively small area, and these are the people of Europe. ‘This privileged place was Europe; and the European man, the European mind, was the author of these

⁸¹ Derrida 1992: 25.

⁸² Valéry 1963b: 313.

⁸³ Valéry 1963b: 313.

⁸⁴ Valéry 1963b: 315.

⁸⁵ Valéry 1963b: 313.

wonders.’⁸⁶ The defining characteristics of this privileged place, Valéry adds, are that it has been shaped by ancient Greece, Rome, and Christianity. ‘Wherever the names of Caesar, Caius, Trajan, and Virgil, of Moses and St. Paul, and of Aristotle, Plato, and Euclid have had simultaneous meaning and authority, there is Europe.’⁸⁷

To some extent, the French writer and the Greek-speaking historian from Halicarnassus resemble each other. Like Herodotus, Valéry thinks of the Mediterranean as a ‘sparkling and uncommonly salty water’, around which ‘a host of the most impressive gods and men in the world are said to have been seen’.⁸⁸ Like Herodotus, he speaks of ‘these shores, where so many peoples had already mingled and clashed and instructed each other’ and where ‘other peoples came in the course of the ages, drawn by the splendor of the sky, the beauty and special intensity of life in the sun’.⁸⁹ And he also writes of the Mediterranean as a land of longing: ‘a kind of irresistible *tropism* acting through the centuries has made of this admirably shaped basin the object of the world’s desire and the site of the greatest human activity’.⁹⁰

Yet, Valéry also signals a departure from the Cadmus whom Wilkinson identified in his discussion or indeed from the Herodotus of the nineteenth century. For Valéry, Europe is a place apart; it is unlike any other region on earth, culturally, politically, historically, and in virtually every respect. It is a small, defined entity, and all its energies and accomplishments have originated, he claims emphatically, ‘*within a very limited territory*’.⁹¹ When he writes of the Mediterranean in his essay, he appears to mean the lands and peoples of the northern Mediterranean. True, he mentions Egypt and Phoenicia, but only as the precursors to the civilization founded by Europeans in Europe. The perspective that opened outward to cultures and peoples beyond western Europe has narrowed, in Valéry, to a more constricted vision. He thought that Europe without Greece lacked something profound, deep, and elemental. For his part, Herodotus thought that the geography and history of Europe had to be conceived in relation to what lay both inside and outside Europe, and with that idea he gave the nineteenth century a chance of understanding the world.

⁸⁶ Valéry 1963b.

⁸⁷ Valéry 1963b: 322.

⁸⁸ Valéry 1963b: 312.

⁸⁹ Valéry 1963b: 312.

⁹⁰ Valéry 1963b: 312–13.

⁹¹ Valéry 1963b: 313.

