

## **When did Britain join the Occident?**

### **On the origins of the idea of ‘the West’ in English**

#### ABSTRACT:

This article takes issue with the current orthodoxy that the idea of ‘the West’ as a supranational self-description based on civilizational commonality first emerged in English in the 1890s and 1900s in the context of the needs of British high imperialism. Instead it shows, first, that there were, already in the eighteenth century, some incipient attempts that groped towards a term denoting a distinctive West-European cultural unity. It further argues, second, that such uses were rather casual and always interchangeable with overwhelmingly more references to ‘Europe’ as the supranational civilizational entity that the authors identified with, until -- roughly -- the middle of the nineteenth century. The first conscious and sustained attempts in Britain to articulate a distinctive ‘Western’ identity and a concept of ‘the West’ that was promoted as an alternative to the allegedly confusing term ‘Europe’ came in the 1850s and 1860s as a result of the relentless activism of the British Comtists. Thus, while some of the first, relatively inconsistent, uses of ‘the West’ conform to the stereotype of celebrating a liberty-cherishing ‘West’, others -- the most sustained and consistent articulations of an idea of ‘the West’ -- were inspired by an overtly illiberal project. It also emerges that ‘the West’ was imported into English usage from Continental languages, where it had been employed earlier and more extensively.

#### KEYWORDS:

The West; Western Civilization; Europe; Gibbon; Comtists; E.A. Freeman

‘Others, however, like Britain, might imagine themselves to be of the West but not of Europe’.<sup>1</sup>

‘Messieurs, l’Angleterre est une île. Maintenant, vous en savez autant que moi sur son histoire.’ (Jules Michelet).<sup>2</sup>

‘Ideas are extraterritorial, and pay no duty as they pass from land to land.’<sup>3</sup>

It is taken for granted by many (a) that Britain and America are *the* leading members of ‘the West’ or ‘Western Civilization’; and (b) that the ‘quintessence’ of the ‘West’ is a staunch attachment to liberty, democracy, human rights and related so-called ‘Western values’. Both assumptions beg many questions and need challenging. In this article I wish to argue against a number of misrepresentations regarding both when a socio-political concept of ‘the West’ as a supranational self-description based on civilizational commonality emerged in English, and what it meant when it entered the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark B. Smith, *The Russia Anxiety and how History can resolve it* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), 195.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Gentlemen, England is an island. Now you know as much as I do about its history.’ (My translation).

<sup>3</sup> John E.E. Dalberg-Acton, *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, Vol. III: *Essays in Religion, Politics, and Morality* (ed. J. Rufus Fears, Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Classics, 1988), 644.

political and cultural vocabulary.<sup>4</sup> I take issue with two different extreme positions. On the one hand there are those who think that people always talked of ‘the West’ as a civilizational and socio-political concept (or at least since the time of the ancient Greeks or/and Romans) and hence take the term and its meaning more or less for granted.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand there are those who argue, as Kwame Anthony Appiah did very recently, that ‘[i]n English, the very idea of the “West,” to name a heritage and object of study, doesn’t really emerge until the 1880s and 1890s, during a heated era of imperialism’.<sup>6</sup> Appiah follows the now established scholarly orthodoxy with regard to the timing of the emergence of the idea of the West as argued by Christopher GoGwilt, Alastair Bonnet and others who take their cue from them.<sup>7</sup> GoGwilt claimed (and Bonnett agreed) that the first sustained elaboration of ‘the West’ as a political and cultural unit was that found in books published by the social Darwinist Benjamin Kidd in 1894 and 1902.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The uses of ‘the West’ (to mean something other than their own shifting Western frontier) came later in the US.

<sup>5</sup> For an example of how an East – West distinction is projected onto ancient Greek texts where it was absent (where, instead, a simple distinction between Greeks and ‘barbarians’ was the case) see the following translation: ‘Πως ειπας; ου γαρ παν στρατευμα βαρβαρων περα τον Ελλης πορθμον Ευρωπης απο;’ (Greek original, 104). This was translated: ‘What do you mean? Hasn’t the whole of the Eastern army crossed back from Europe over the straight of Helle?’ (Translation, 105). Aeschylus, *Persians*, in: *Aeschylus I [Persians, Seven Against Thebes, Suppliants, Prometheus Bound]*, ed. and trans. by Alan H. Sommerstein (Cambridge, Massachusetts: LOEB Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 2008), 104-105. Emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity: Creed, Country, Colour, Class, Culture* (London: Profile Books, 2018), 200.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher GoGwilt, *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995); Alastair Bonnett, *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). For a recent distinguished historical work taking its cue from Bonnett see: Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 86-87, 933 n.36.

<sup>8</sup> GoGwilt, *Invention of the West*, 54, 238-40; Bonnett, *Idea of the West*, 29-30; see also Bonnett, ‘The Rise of Occidental Heroes and Villains’, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 27 August 2004: ‘The first sustained elaboration in

## I. Insular Britain versus Continental Occident

Instead I will argue, first, that there were, already in the eighteenth century, some incipient attempts that groped towards a term denoting a distinctive West-European cultural unity, especially as a response to the entry of Russia into the political and cultural system of 'Europe' since the time of Peter the Great. I further argue, second, that these uses were rather casual and always accompanied by, and interchangeable with, overwhelmingly more references to 'Europe' as the supranational civilizational entity that the authors identified with, until -- roughly -- the middle of the nineteenth century. Such uses intensified as of the early nineteenth century, without directly or explicitly opposing themselves to the dominant collective self-description of 'Europe'. They coexisted with 'Europe' and were employed in parallel with it. However, the first conscious and sustained attempts in Britain to articulate a distinctive 'Western' identity and a concept of 'the West' that was promoted as an *alternative to* the allegedly confusing term 'Europe' came as of the 1850s and 1860s thanks to the relentless activism of the British followers of the French philosopher and founder of Positivism, Auguste Comte.<sup>9</sup> A third and related argument is that, besides Positivism itself having been imported from France, the authors who had most often used 'West' or 'Western' in English (no matter how casually or inconsistently), before the conscious propagation of these terms by the Comtists, were people who

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English of the West as a political and cultural unit I know of is from a spiky social Darwinist, Benjamin Kidd.'

<sup>9</sup> See Georgios Varouxakis, 'The Godfather of "Occidentality": Auguste Comte and the Idea of "the West"', *Modern Intellectual History*, 16/2 (2019): 411-441.

had lived in Continental Europe or were deeply influenced by Continental thought and mastered one or more of the Continent's languages.<sup>10</sup>

What emerges in relation to the theme of Britain and European liberty is a complex picture, which challenges dominant stereotypes. While some of the first uses of 'the West' in a socio-political sense conform to the widespread picture of celebrating a liberty-cherishing 'West', others – those, moreover, representing the most sustained and consistent articulations of an idea of 'the West' -- were inspired by an overtly illiberal project. Meanwhile, to add to the paradoxes or surprises, the rival supranational self-description 'Europe' had emerged in late-seventeenth-century England as part of an explicitly Whig political discourse promoting William III as the defender of the liberties of Europe.

It is important to stress from the beginning that there is a clear difference between uses of 'the West' in English on the one hand, and uses of equivalent terms in French or German on the other. In the latter languages, uses of *l'Occident* or *der Okzident/das Abendland* were much more common in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as earlier.<sup>11</sup> I attribute the difference to the fact that,

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<sup>10</sup> It should go without saying that I by no means assume that there is *one* 'idea of the West' in general or in British debates in particular. Instead I analyse the various *uses* of 'the West' and related concepts and the intentions with which these terms were employed.

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Fischer, *Oriens – Occidens - Europa: Begriff und Gedanke "Europa" in der Späten Antike und im frühen Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1957); see also: M. Schulze Wessel, 'Westen; Okzident', in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. by Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer and Gottfried Gabriel, Vol. 12 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004), 661-672. On German thought in particular -- and on the more recent uses of a third related term, '*der Westen*' -- see: Riccardo Bavaj and Martina Steber (eds.), *Germany and 'The West': The History of a Modern Concept* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2015). See also Heinz Gollwitzer, *Europabild und Europagedanke: Beiträge zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte des 18. Und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1964). For early French uses of '*l'Occident*' see: [D'Alembert,] *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, nouvelle impression en facsimilé de la première édition de 1751-1780, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1988, Vol. XI, 331; Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire*

given that England/Britain was not part of Charlemagne's Empire (nor of the later Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation), the word was less available and less attractive as part of the country's own past than it was in German or in French. It is probably not accidental that, in the nineteenth century, French authors would come up with federal solutions to Europe's problems that would take the shape of the resurrection of the 'Western Empire' with France as its leader.<sup>12</sup> It had by then (not least through Napoleon's efforts) become entrenched in French national mythology that France was the descendant and successor of Charlemagne's 'Empire of the West', while simultaneously it was claiming the older mantle of Latin Rome.<sup>13</sup> 'The West' or 'the Western Empire' was part of what nineteenth-century French thinkers or politicians regarded as their own national past. Such co-option through elective affinities was impossible for insular Britons.

## II. Early uses of 'West' and 'western'

Of course 'west' and 'western' had been used in English (or in Latin texts written by English authors) in a geographical sense. John Milton referred to 'this goodly tower of a Common-wealth, which the *English* boasted they would build, to overshadow kings, and be another *Rome* in the west'. But 'the west' was clearly used in a geographical sense in Milton's sentence. Moreover, when, in that same page, Milton

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*Universel du XIXe Siècle*, XI Deuxième partie, Geneva – Paris, 1982 [Reimpression de l'édition de Paris, 1866-79], 1210-1211.

<sup>12</sup> F. Dumons, *Un Mot à propos de la Question d'Orient sur le Devoir de la France et l'Avenir de l'Europe* (Bordeaux: A. Pechade, 1840); Arthur de Grandeffe, *L'Empire d'Occident Reconstitué: Ou L'Équilibre Européen Assuré par l'Union des Races Latines* (Paris: Ledoyen, 1857).

<sup>13</sup> Claude Nicolet, *La fabrique d'une nation: La France entre Rome et les Germains* (Paris: Perrin, 2006), 96-99, 145-153; see also: James Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* (London: Macmillan, 1928 [1864]), 403-404.

referred to the supranational community that the English should beware of being ridiculed in front of, it was ‘the common laughter of *Europ*’ that he was worried about.<sup>14</sup> The geographical sense also prevailed when Adam Smith wrote that ‘Greece, and the Greek colonies in Sicily, Italy, and the Lesser Asia, were the first countries which, in these western parts of the world, arrived at a state of civilized society.’<sup>15</sup> Moreover there are some few examples where, besides geography, even historical or cultural similarities among the nations of ‘western Europe’ might be implied. Francis Bacon referred to ‘nos, occidentales...Europæ nationes’ or ‘nos Europæos occidentales’.<sup>16</sup> In the Conclusion to the Second Part of *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes referred to ‘these Western parts, that have received their Morall learning from *Rome*, and *Athens*’.<sup>17</sup>

Some rare uses that do grope towards a distinction between *Western* Europe and other parts, beyond, did begin to emerge more clearly in the latter part of the eighteenth century. They appeared in the context of suspicion of the newcomer into the political and cultural table of ‘Europe’, Russia. One of the most striking uses occurs in an epistolary novel by the Irish writer Oliver Goldsmith. Given that the novel began being published in the *Public Ledger* in 1760, it appeared earlier than Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s expression of deep pessimism about the long-term prospects

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<sup>14</sup> John Milton, *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), in: *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, VII (volume editor Robert W. Ayers, New Haven and London, 1980), 357.

<sup>15</sup> Adam Smith, ‘History of Astronomy’ in: *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, edited by W.P.D. Wightman and J.C. Bryce, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 51.

<sup>16</sup> Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620), in: *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath, London 1872), I, 186, 187.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (edited by Richard Tuck, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 254.

of Peter the Great's reforms in *Du Contrat Social* (1762).<sup>18</sup> The main comparisons are between the Chinese and 'the Europeans', or between China and 'Europe'. When a juxtaposition with Russia was the subject, however, 'Europe' alternated with 'the western parts of Europe'. In 'LETTER LXXXVII' we read one putative correspondent censuring 'the people of Europe' for their habit, when at war with one another, to 'apply to the Russians, their neighbours and ours, for assistance.' For all subsidies that 'the people of Europe' paid for such aid, were strengthening the Russians. And that was a bad idea, given that: 'I cannot avoid beholding the Russian empire, *as the natural enemy of the more western parts of Europe*'.<sup>19</sup> He added: 'It was long the wish of Peter, their great monarch, to have a fort in some of the western parts of Europe; many of his schemes and treaties were directed to this end; but, happily for Europe, he failed in them all.' Success would have been fatal, because: 'A fort, in the power of this people, would be like the possession of a flood-gate', as 'they might then be able to deluge *the whole western world* with a barbarous inundation.'<sup>20</sup> Even here, in the most striking case of a differentiation between two

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<sup>18</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (6 volumes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999-2015), II, 72-82, 395-6; Henry Laurens, *Orientales* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2007), 17-19. There were many accounts of Russia in previous centuries, most of them negative (see Francine-Dominique Liechtenhan, 'La Russie, ennemi héréditaire de la chrétienté? La diffusion de l'image de la Moscovie en Europe occidentale aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles', *Revue Historique*, T. 285, Fasc. 1 (577) (Jan.-March 1991): 77-103. For works comparing the periods before and after Peter, see: Dieter Groh, *Russland und das Selbstverständnis Europas: Ein Beitrag zur europäischen Geistesgeschichte* (Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1961); M.S. Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia 1553-1815* (London: Macmillan, 1958).

<sup>19</sup> Emphasis added: [Oliver Goldsmith,] *The Citizen of the World: Or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher, residing in London, to his Friends in the East* (2 vols, London: R. Whiston, J. Woodfall, T. Baldwin, R. Johnston, and G. Caddel, 1785 [1762]), I, 180-185.

<sup>20</sup> Emphasis added: [Goldsmith,] *The Citizen of the World*, 103-105. See also Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia*, 123-124. Anderson argues that Goldsmith's was one of two isolated cases among a generally positive attitude towards Russia at the time (*ibid.*, 122-124).



parts within -- the author's contemporary -- Europe, there is no gainsaying the alternation between 'Europe' and 'the western parts of Europe' to denote the advanced part of the world that was threatened by alleged Russian designs. There was no fully-fledged distinction yet, between 'Western Europe' versus 'Eastern Europe', let alone any fully articulated concept of 'the West' to describe a contemporary supranational community founded on civilizational commonality.

The distinction introduced (even partially and half-inconsistently) by Goldsmith was rather exceptional for the mid-eighteenth century, but it was to become much more common and pronounced progressively in the nineteenth century. It was a distinction *within* Europe between Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Following Peter the Great's reforms, Russia had been admitted as part of 'Europe'. Those who were uneasy with Russia being thus identified as 'European' began to look for ways to distinguish between themselves and the political-cum-cultural newcomer. In the eighteenth century, however, the vast majority of authors were thinking in terms of a North-South distinction in their mental maps of Europe.<sup>21</sup> And within that scheme, Russia was seen as a 'Northern' power in the eighteenth century – and well into the nineteenth.

The term 'the West', *tout court*, does appear in as major and influential a work in the late eighteenth century as Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788). And it appears with a vengeance, innumerable times. However, it is used in a specific sense. 'The West' begins to appear in Gibbon's

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<sup>21</sup> Hans Lemberg, 'Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs im 19. Jahrhundert Vom "Norden" zum "Osten" Europas,' *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 33 (1985): 48-91; Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Euro-Orientalism: Liberal Ideology and the Image of Russia in France (c. 1740-1880)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006). For a work arguing that the distinction was already there in the eighteenth century see: Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994).

narrative once the Roman Empire was divided into Western and Eastern Empires (395 CE), to denote the Roman Empire of the West. And then it continues to be used with reference to the Germanic conquests in the territories of the former Western empire and subsequently the pretender successor realms in Western Europe, Charlemagne's empire and the later Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, as well as the French. Gibbon chose to concentrate in the last two volumes of his *History* on the Eastern Empire.<sup>22</sup> But even with that Eastern focus, 'the West' is ubiquitous through its interactions with the empire of Constantinople – the Crusades being part of those interactions. In other words, Gibbon's 'West' was a (long) phase in the history that he was writing. It was used in contradistinction with the Eastern Roman (Byzantine/Greek) Empire. But Gibbon did not use 'the West' to describe the supranational civilizational entity whose member he felt he was in the eighteenth century. For that, there was another word.

At the end of the third volume (1781), Gibbon inserted his 'General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West'.<sup>23</sup> There he proposed to enquire whether such re-barbarization of his part of the world could occur again:

It is the duty of a patriot to prefer and promote the exclusive interest and glory of his native country: but a philosopher may be permitted to enlarge his views, and to consider Europe as one great republic,<sup>24</sup> whose various inhabitants

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<sup>22</sup> Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*; J.G.A. Pocock, 'Barbarians and the Redefinition of Europe: A Study of Gibbon's Third Volume', in: Larry Wolf and Marco Cipolloni (eds), *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 35-70; Pocock, 'Some Europes in Their History', in: Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 55-71.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (3 vols, ed. David Womersley, London, 1994), II, 508-516. The 'General Observations' were written several years before the composition of the third volume to which they were attached: see: Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, II, 392-6.

<sup>24</sup> Emphasis added.

have attained almost the same level of politeness and cultivation. The balance of power will continue to fluctuate, and the prosperity of our own, or the neighbouring kingdoms, may be alternately exalted or depressed; but these partial events cannot essentially injure our general state of happiness, the system of arts, and laws, and manners, *which so advantageously distinguish, above the rest of mankind, the Europeans and their colonies.*<sup>25</sup>

He went on to concede that: ‘The savage nations of the globe are the common enemies of civilized society; and we may enquire with anxious curiosity, whether Europe is still threatened with a repetition of those calamities, which formerly oppressed the arms and institutions of Rome.’<sup>26</sup> His verdict was that there were crucial differences between the Romans of old and the Europeans of his own time, and those differences led him to argue that the latter were safe. The Romans had been ‘ignorant of the extent of their danger, and the number of their enemies.’ Beyond the Rhine and Danube, ‘the northern countries of Europe and Asia were filled with innumerable tribes of hunters and shepherds, poor, voracious, and turbulent; bold in arms, and impatient to ravish the fruits of industry.’ But in his own time ‘[s]uch formidable emigrations no longer issue from the North’. Instead of ‘some rude villages’, Germany in his time could display ‘a list of two thousand three hundred walled towns’. What was more, ‘*Russia now assumes the form of a powerful and civilized empire.*’<sup>27</sup> In addition, Europeans were in his time living in different and diverse states and could not be conquered in one go as Rome had been. All this meant that: ‘If a savage conqueror should issue from the deserts of Tartary, he must repeatedly vanquish the robust peasants of *Russia*, the numerous armies of *Germany*,

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<sup>25</sup> Emphasis added: Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, II, 511.

<sup>26</sup> Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, II, 511.

<sup>27</sup> Emphasis added: *ibid.*, 512.

the gallant nobles of *France*, and the intrepid freemen of *Britain*; who, perhaps, *might confederate for their common defense*.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, when he wrote the ‘General Observations’ in the early 1770s, Gibbon did not share Goldsmith’s or Rousseau’s apprehensions about Russia a decade earlier. On Peter’s reforms, he was rather with Voltaire, the author of the *Histoire de l’Empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand* (1760-72).<sup>29</sup> Here at least, Gibbon talked of Russia as part of the civilized Europe that he was optimistic about – and he even included it as one of the countries that ‘perhaps, might confederate for their common defense’, along with Germany, France and Britain.<sup>30</sup>

### III. ‘The liberties of Europe’ and the North – South orientation

What has been said in the previous section does not mean that Gibbon did not have a Western-Europe-centric view of history. He did and, as Karen O’Brien has shown, one of the features that distinguishes him from his Scottish contemporaries was his refusal fully to accept their generic ‘progress of society’ (or stadial-history) explanations that could apply potentially to all societies. Gibbon thought, instead, that

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<sup>28</sup> Emphasis (all five times) added: *ibid.*, 513-14.

<sup>29</sup> Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 2, 396; *ibid.*, 72-82.

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, more than a century later, one of Comte’s British disciples saw Gibbon as a precursor of the founder of Positivism in conceptualizing Europe as a republic. But he also noted crucial differences, remarking that Comte gave the idea ‘a definiteness, an exactness, which Gibbon’s language does not express, and which cannot be realized except by reference to Comte’s theory of history.’ Henry Ellis, ‘Comte’s Conception of Western Europe as a Republic’, *Positivist Review*, VI, no. LXV (May 1, 1898): 88-93, at 89. And, even more to the point: ‘It is, however, essential to remember that the republic thus alluded to is the republic of *Western Europe* – is limited, that is, to the nations which had been more or less *Catholicised*; whereas Gibbon speaks loosely of “Europe” – a geographical term which would embrace Russia and Turkey; is incompatible with any idea of republican community of thought and life; and has not the historical significance attaching to Comte’s definition.’ *Ibid.*, 91.

the history of the ‘Europe’ that emerged from the merger of the ruins of the Western Roman Empire with the Germanic ‘barbarians’ who conquered it was a contingent and unique story of a singularly progressive civilization.<sup>31</sup> But he followed the common practice of his contemporaries and called the eventual outcome of that West-European story ‘Europe’.<sup>32</sup>

In thinking in terms of ‘Europe’ Gibbon was typical of eighteenth-century British thinkers. Though ‘Europe’ had been used from time to time sporadically in earlier centuries,<sup>33</sup> the dominant self-description used to name the overarching supra-national cultural entity or wider community that West-European thinkers identified with was ‘Christendom’, certainly until the end of the seventeenth century. From that time onwards, ‘Europe’ came to compete with – though by no means completely to supersede – ‘Christendom’. One explanation for the popularity of ‘Europe’ as of the late seventeenth century was that it was part of a process of secularisation.<sup>34</sup> But in Britain in particular, the popularity of ‘Europe’ was also related to the need for the Whigs to find a term different than ‘Christendom’, given that the King of France was presented by their (Jacobite) opponents as the defender of ‘Christendom’, the Most Christian King. As a response, the Whigs began to call William III the defender of the

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<sup>31</sup> Karen O’Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), 167-203.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Pocock, ‘Some Europes’, 62-67 [‘The Enlightened Narrative’].

<sup>33</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Useful Enemies: Islam and the Ottoman Empire in Western Political Thought, 1450-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 59-60; Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968).

<sup>34</sup> Heinz Gollwitzer, ‘Zur Wortgeschichte und Sinndeutung von “Europa”’, *Saeculum*, 2 (1951): 161-72; Peter Burke, ‘Did Europe exist before 1700?’, *History of European Ideas*, 1 (1980): 21-29.

liberties of ‘Europe’.<sup>35</sup> John Toland was only one of many who referred to William III as ‘both the restorer and supporter of the Liberty of *Europe*’ (1700).<sup>36</sup>

In what I have argued so far I refer to uses of ‘the West’ as a socio-political supranational category rather than to whether or not there was an East-West orientation in people’s geographical consciousness (a related, but different question). An East-West orientation was common in Greek and Roman antiquity, when ‘from Cadiz to the Ganges’ was the usual way of speaking of the whole *oikoumenê*.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, by the eighteenth century, when people were clear about the location of the North and South poles, Edward Gibbon could confidently write (in 1790 or 1791) on the margins of his own famous book:

The distinction of North and South is real and intelligible; and our pursuit is terminated on either side by the poles of the Earth. But the difference of East and West is arbitrary, and shifts round the globe. *As the men of the North not the West*<sup>38</sup> the legions of Gaul and Germany were superior to the south-eastern<sup>39</sup> natives of Asia and Egypt. It is the triumph of cold over heat; which may however and has been surmounted by moral causes.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> H.D. Schmidt, ‘II. The Establishment of “Europe” as a Political Expression’, *The Historical Journal*, 9/2 (1966): 172-78. See also Wout Troost, ‘“To Restore and Preserve the Liberty of Europe”: William III’s Ideas on Foreign Policy’, in: David Onnekink and Gijs Rommelse (eds), *Ideology and Foreign Policy in Early Modern Europe (1650-1750)* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 283-303; Paul Stock, *Europe and the British Geographical Imagination, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 143.

<sup>36</sup> Emphasis in original: John Toland, ‘To the Lord Mayor, Adelmens, Sherifs, and Common Council of London’, in: *The Oceana of James Harrison and His Other Works...*, edited by John Toland (London, 1700), viii.

<sup>37</sup> G.W. Bowersock, ‘The East-West Orientation of Mediterranean Studies and the Meaning of North and South in Antiquity’, in: W.V. Harris (ed.), *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 167-78.

<sup>38</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>39</sup> Underlined in the original.

<sup>40</sup> Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, III, Appendix 2, 1095.

The original text, on which this was a marginal comment read: ‘In all levies [of soldiers], a just preference was given to the climates of the North over those of the South’.<sup>41</sup> These statements are typical of a very long tradition. In 1576, Jean Bodin was following and summarising longstanding Mediaeval theories when, in *Six Books of the Republic*, he insisted that (and explained why) the North – South divide was much more important than the West – East divide.<sup>42</sup> That mind-set and orientation took a long time to change and it only changed in the course of the nineteenth century towards the now more familiar East – West distinction.

That transition was gradual and slow. While the epithet ‘western’ in contradistinction with ‘eastern’ might appear from time to time, used in a geographical sense, and while ‘western parts’ or ‘western world’, to describe the part of the world one was referring to, would sometimes be used, socio-political uses of ‘the West’ or ‘Western Civilization’ were very rare in early- and mid-nineteenth-century British writings. In his widely discussed *History of Civilization in England*, whose first volume was published in 1857, H.T. Buckle nowhere mentioned ‘Western Civilization’ or ‘the West’. Instead, besides talking of national civilizations (‘English’, French, American, German), his major generalization was that referring to the differences between ‘European civilization’ and ‘the non-European division’ of civilization (or between ‘the East’ and ‘Europe’).<sup>43</sup> Though it was that very year that

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Jean Bodin, *The Six Books of a Commonweale [A Facsimile reprint of the English translation of 1606...]* (ed. by Kenneth Douglas Mc Rae, Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 545-68. On the tradition Bodin was following see: Miriam J. Tooley, ‘Bodin and the Mediaeval Theory of Climate’, *Speculum*, 28/1 (1953): 64-83.

<sup>43</sup> Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England* (3 vols, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1869).

Richard Congreve published two pamphlets promoting a different term,<sup>44</sup> Buckle's use was still the norm.

#### **IV. Different 'others':**

##### **'The West' versus 'Northern'/'Eastern' Russia, Oriental Jews, and Turkey**

Meanwhile, there were some early manifestations of uses that were to become much more common some decades later. And there was a particular context in which they arose, as of the early 1830s. Russia had become very unpopular because of the way it suppressed the Polish uprising of 1830-31 and then suspended the Kingdom of Poland's special constitutional status that the Treaty of Vienna had stipulated. One of the factors that would affect debates in Britain and France from 1831 onwards would be the immense sympathy with Poland in both countries and the assiduous campaigning of great numbers of Polish refugees (many of them highly sophisticated and well connected members of the Polish aristocracy).<sup>45</sup> Then, in 1833, Russia caused the other powers shockwaves of anxiety by managing to capitalise on the threat posed to the Ottoman Empire by Mehemet Ali of Egypt and provisionally turn the Sultan to all intents and purposes into its protégé. For a short period Russia was allowed to station military forces around Constantinople and then signed the Treaty of

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<sup>44</sup> See *infra*, Section VI.

<sup>45</sup> Adam Gielgud (ed.), *Memoirs of Prince Adam Czartoryski and his Correspondence with Alexander I* (2nd edition, 2 vols, London: Remington, 1888), II, 316-336; M. Kukiel, *Czartoryski and European Unity, 1770-1861* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 193-250; John Howes Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain: A Study in the Interaction of Policy and Opinion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950).



Unkiar Skelessi (Hünkâr İskelesi) with the Porte.<sup>46</sup> Two decades later the Crimean War would both be a result and an additional cause of Russophobia for most British commentators.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, in most of the limited cases when the terms ‘West’ and ‘Western’ were used in Britain in the 1830s and 1840s the reason why they were employed usually involved (a juxtaposition to) Russia. For a short time Foreign Secretary Palmerston spoke of the treaty of alliance that he forged between Britain, France, Spain and Portugal in 1834 as ‘a quadruple alliance among the constitutional states of the West, which will serve as a powerful counterpoise to the Holy Alliance of the East’ (or as ‘a formal union between the four constitutional states of the West to drive absolutism out of the [Iberian] Peninsula’).<sup>48</sup> It is most likely that the use was imported from the discourse of Palmerston’s French interlocutors and allies, who were talking much of a ‘Western’ alliance between the constitutional powers of France and Britain at the time in question.<sup>49</sup> Like the expression ‘the Eastern Question’ itself, it is likely that the ‘Western’ alliance came to Palmerston from the language of his French counterpart, the Duc de Broglie, and the French ambassador in London, Talleyrand, with whom he was in constant negotiations throughout that time.<sup>50</sup> Another Continental source of

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<sup>46</sup> Alexander Bitis, *Russia and the Eastern Question: Army, Government, and Society 1815-1833* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 465-479; Gleason, *Genesis of Russophobia*, 135-163.

<sup>47</sup> See Orlando Figes, *Crimea: The Last Crusade* (London: Allen Lane, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in: Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston 1830-1841: Britain, the Liberal Movement and the Eastern Question*, 2 vols (London, 1951), I, 397.

<sup>49</sup> For a very explicit evocation of a new distinction between Western and Eastern Europe emerging from the outcome of the French Revolution of 1830 (due to France having, as a result of it, become a constitutional monarchy like Britain) see: Baron Sirtema de Grovestins, *La Pologne, la Russie et l'Europe Occidentale: ou De la Nécessité de résoudre la Question Russo-Polonaise dans une Conférence des Grandes Puissances* (Paris: Amyot, 1847), 216-18.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, *Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand* (5 volumes, ed. by the Duc de Broglie, trans. by Mrs Angus Hall, New York and

Palmerston's language may have been Prince Adam Czartoryski, the Polish leader living in exile in London and Paris after the suppression of the Polish uprising of 1830-31 and assiduously advising Palmerston on the unavoidable struggle between what he was describing as the liberal West and the despotic East.<sup>51</sup> But, at any rate, Palmerston alternated between calling the other side (Russia, Prussia and Austria) 'the Eastern Powers' and 'the three Northern Powers'<sup>52</sup> – typically displaying the inchoateness of these distinctions in the early nineteenth century. Most others also referred to Russia, Prussia and Austria as 'the Northern Powers' or 'Northern Courts' at the time.<sup>53</sup>

One of the people who sometimes employed the term 'Western' from early on was the highly idiosyncratic activist and politician, David Urquhart. His Russophobia became proverbial as of the 1830s.<sup>54</sup> His impact was considerable, and those captivated by the charms of his magnetic personality included King William IV. Urquhart referred to 'the Empires of the West', 'the Western nations', or 'the Powers of the West' when he wanted to make a distinction between France and Britain on the one hand, and Russia (which he loathed) or the Ottoman Empire (which he admired)

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London: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1892), V, 166-311; see also Henry Laurens, 'La Question d'Orient', in: Alphonse de Lamartine, *La Question d'Orient: Discours et articles politiques (1834-1861)*, ed. by Sophie Basch and Henry Laurens (Paris: André Versaille, 2011), 7-58, at 18-20. On the first uses of 'the Eastern Question' see also: Holly Case, *The Age of Questions* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press), 156, 290-291 n.15. See also Georgios Giannakopoulos, 'Re-staging the "Eastern Question"', in this issue.

<sup>51</sup> Kukiel, *Czartoryski and European Unity*, 229-32.

<sup>52</sup> Webster, *Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, 406.

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., [Henry Rich] 'History, Present Wrongs, and Claims of Poland', *The Edinburgh Review*, 55/109 (April 1832): 220-270, at 243, 246, 248, 266, 267, 268; [David Urquhart], 'Quadruple Treaty', *British and Foreign Review*, 1/1 (July 1835): 217-237, at 227, 228, 236; Talleyrand, *Memoirs*, V, 166-311.

<sup>54</sup> Gleason, *Genesis of Russophobia*, 153-57, 164-204, 257-66; Charles Webster, 'Urquhart, Ponsonby, and Palmerston', *The English Historical Review*, 62/244 (July 1947): 327-351; Margaret Lamb, 'The Making of a Russophobe: David Urquhart: The Formative Years, 1825-1835', *The International History Review*, 3/3 (1981): 330-357.

on the other.<sup>55</sup> He did convince many of the Russian danger and Palmerston's alleged role, including -- for a while and partially -- Karl Marx.<sup>56</sup> The German-born and London-based Marx, meanwhile, was one of the authors writing in English -- not least for the *New York Tribune* -- in the 1850s using 'West' and 'Western' much more extensively than most native speakers did at that time.<sup>57</sup>

Sometimes 'West' or 'western' would be used in contradistinction to 'Oriental' Jews. Dr Thomas Arnold wrote to a correspondent that Providence had communicated 'all religious knowledge to mankind through the Jewish people', and 'all intellectual cultivation through the Greeks'. A propos he remarked that he had 'occasion in the winter to observe this in a Jew, of whom I took a few lessons in Hebrew, and who was learned in the writings of the Rabbis, but totally ignorant of all the literature of the West, ancient and modern.' The man in question was, Arnold continued, 'consequently just like a child, -- his mind being entirely without the habit of criticism or analysis, whether as applied to words or to things; wholly ignorant, for instance, of the analysis of language, whether grammatical or logical; or of the analysis of a narrative of facts, according to any rules of probability external or internal.'<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> David Urquhart, *Recent Events in the East: Being a Reprint of Mr. Urquhart's Contributions to the Morning Advertiser during the Autumn of 1853* (London: Trübner, 1854), 8, 22, 71, 99, 293.

<sup>56</sup> 'He [Urquhart] is a romantic reactionary -- a Turk, and would gladly guide the West back to Turkish standards and structures.' Karl Marx to Ferdinand Lassalle, 1 June 1854, in: *Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 39 [1852-55] (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983), 455.

<sup>57</sup> For examples see Shlomo Avineri (ed.), *Karl Marx on Colonialism & Modernization* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969).

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Arnold to the Archbishop of Dublin, March 22, 1835, in: Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold* (2 vols, fifth edition, London: B. Fellowes, 1845), I, 418. Cf. 'the ancient western world' (*ibid.*, II, 315).

There were other early users as well. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the social theorist Harriet Martineau was writing to the poet and politician Richard Monckton Milnes ‘to ask a favour’:

I want – much – to read again a political article of yours in a quarterly review, -- but cannot remember which review it was, nor its title. It is the article in wh[ich] you gave a broad & striking view of the conflict, natural & future, -- of the barbaric Eastern, with the civilized Western mind & empire. I know *that your view has been given by you in many places*;<sup>59</sup> but this one, -- I think a review of Custine, -- is the exposition I want to read over again.<sup>60</sup>

The article Martineau wished to read again was indeed striking in its juxtaposition of Russia with what the author repeatedly referred to as ‘Western civilization’. Milnes opined that despotic power had always been ‘repugnant to western civilization’. On the other hand what he wanted to draw attention to with regard to the Russians’ attitude to power was ‘its Oriental character’.<sup>61</sup> And after treating his readers to a long list of features in Russia that he considered typically ‘Eastern’, Milnes added:

And, above all, there is the strange and complicated array of the same feelings with which all these races have regarded Western civilization; the same ambitious hatred which precipitated Xerxes on Greece, the Turks on Europe,

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<sup>59</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>60</sup> Deborah Anna Logan (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Harriet Martineau* (5 vols, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), III, 154. Martineau mentioned that she wanted to re-read the article for the purposes of her History. She duly made use of Milnes’s review of Custine’s book and of the language of ‘Western Civilization’ that she found there. See Harriet Martineau, *The History of England during the Thirty Years’ Peace: 1816-1846* (2 vols, London: Charles Knight, 1849-1850), II, 361, 362, 366, 637.

<sup>61</sup> [Richard Monckton Milnes,] ‘The Marquis de Custine’s Russia’, *Edinburgh Review*, 79/160 (1844): 351-396, at 369-70.

*and the Czar on Poland*;<sup>62</sup> the same desire of rivalry which sent Peter into the Dutch dockyards, and has now filled Russia with copies...of Italian art, of French manners, of English intelligence – just as it has dressed the Turkish army in stocks and trousers...: the same jealous animosity of all that is felt to be beyond their reach;... Let, then, this consideration of the Oriental characteristics of the Russian people and institutions never be lost sight of;...<sup>63</sup>

It would have been tempting to argue that Milnes used ‘Western’ as much as he did in this review article simply because he was borrowing the language of the French book that he was commenting on, Astolphe de Custine’s *La Russie en 1839* (1843). This is *prima facie* plausible, given how strikingly often the Marquis de Custine used ‘l’Occident’, or ‘civilisation occidentale’ in his 4-volume book – a book in fact considered to be one of the main milestones in the consolidation of a distinction between a ‘West’ of Europe versus an ‘oriental’ Russia.<sup>64</sup> And yet, Milnes’s is a more interesting instance than just a case of him translating terms from the particular French work that he was reviewing.<sup>65</sup> In 1832 he had travelled to Greece, then at the very beginning of its independent existence.<sup>66</sup> Some of the poems he wrote and

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<sup>62</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>63</sup> [Milnes,] ‘The Marquis de Custine’s Russia’, 378-9. Given such views on Russia it is not surprising that he later, as Lord Houghton, became President of ‘The Literary Association of the Friends of Poland’. See Gielgud, *Memoirs of Prince Adam Czartoryski*, 334.

<sup>64</sup> Michel Cadot, *La Russie dans la vie intellectuelle française, 1839-1856* (Paris: Fayard, 1967), 173-278; Francine-Dominique Liechtenhan, *Astolphe de Custine, Voyageur et philosophe* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1990); Vera Milčina, ‘La Russie en 1839 du Marquis de Custine et ses Sources contemporaines’, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 41/1 (2000): 151-163; George Kennan, *The Marquis de Custine and His RUSSIA IN 1839* (London: Hutchinson, 1972); Figes, *Crimea: The Last Crusade*, 86-88.

<sup>65</sup> In the other main British review, the West versus East focus is absent: [Roderick Impey Murchison], ‘Tour in Russia by the Marquis de Custine’, *The Quarterly Review*, 73/146 (1844): 324-374.

<sup>66</sup> James Pope-Hennessy, *Monckton Milnes: The Years of Promise 1809-1851* (London: Constable, 1949), 52-61.

published subsequently are striking for the purposes of what I am discussing here.

This is how one of them ended:

*‘ O breezes of the wealthy West!’<sup>67</sup>*

Why bear ye not on grateful wings

The seeds of all your life has blest

Back to their being’s early springs?

Why fill ye not these plains with hopes

To bear the treasures once they bore,

And to these Heliconian slopes

Transport civility and lore?

For now, at least, the soil is free,

Now that one strong reviving breath

*Has chased that Eastern tyranny*

*Which to the Greek was ever death.’<sup>68</sup>*

Now that, though weak with age and wrongs,

And bent beneath the recent chain,

*This motherland of Greece belongs*

*To her own western world again.’<sup>69</sup>*

This was unusual. For the Philhellenic British men of letters in the previous decade, the motto had been *The Cause of Greece, the Cause of Europe* -- as a

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<sup>67</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>68</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>69</sup> Emphasis added: From ‘The Flowers of Helicon’, in: Richard Monckton Milnes, *Selections from the Works of Lord Houghton* (London: Edward Moxon, 1868), 142. Cf. ‘St Mark’s at Venice’, *ibid.*, 163.

characteristically titled pamphlet they published in 1821 put it.<sup>70</sup> In that widely circulated pamphlet,<sup>71</sup> there were literally dozens of evocations of the *European* character and civilization of the Greeks in common with the people addressed by the pamphlet (European public opinion), and a smaller number of references to their shared belonging to Christendom (the author was a Professor of Theology at Leipzig). Meanwhile, there was no single mention of ‘the West’.<sup>72</sup> And the Greek Declaration of Independence, issued in the beginning of 1822, again tried to appeal to the European and Christian commonalities between the Greeks and their aspired audience, but not a word was said on ‘the West’. The ‘western’ dimension that Milnes was to give the new state and the community it was supposedly re-joining was an innovation.

#### **V. Edward Freeman and the eternal struggle of ‘the West’ against ‘the East’**

Another early case of persistent uses of ‘the West’ was that of the historian Edward Augustus Freeman, from the mid-1850s onwards. But even in the texts where he most solemnly posited an eternal struggle between ‘the West’ and ‘the East’ Freeman’s use of the terms was peculiar and not consistent. He argued ‘that the whole history of Europe forms the record of one long struggle, a struggle of which the earliest known

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<sup>70</sup> Paul Stock, *The Shelley-Byron Circle and the Idea of Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 175-97.

<sup>71</sup> See ‘German Pamphlet: The Cause of Greece the Cause of Europe’, *The Calcutta Journal*, 25 January 1822.

<sup>72</sup> *The Cause of Greece the Cause of Europe* (translated from the German, London: Ridgeway, 1821). The original was: Heinrich Gottlieb Tzschirner, *Die Sache der Griechen, die Sache Europas* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1821). On Philhellenic agitation ‘in the name of Europe’ see also: Claude D. Conter, *Jenseits der Nation – Das vergessene Europa des 19. Jahrhunderts: Die Geschichte der Inszenierungen und Visionen Europas in Literatur, Geschichte und Politik* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2004), 426-461.

phases will be found in the opening chapters of Herodotus, while the latest as yet will be found in the morning's telegrams.<sup>73</sup> It was, he noted, 'the present Lord Derby who, in a sneering fit, first spoke...of "the eternal Eastern question."' By so doing, Lord Derby had 'stumbled on the happiest epithet that man ever lighted on.' For Freeman, the 'Eastern question' was 'indeed "eternal"'. It was, he went on, 'in the cant of diplomatists, "awaiting its solution" at the first beginnings of recorded history; it is "awaiting its solution" still.' To his mind, that 'solution cannot come as long as a single rood of European and Christian soil is left in the grasp of barbarian intruders.' Therefore: 'The strife is indeed eternal. It is the strife between light and darkness, between freedom and bondage; it is the strife between *the West* and *the East*, between *Europe* and *Asia*,<sup>74</sup> the strife which in its earliest days took the shape of the strife between Greek and barbarian, the strife which, for the last twelve centuries, has been sharpened to its keenest as the strife between Christendom and Islam.'<sup>75</sup> The tale was 'the same in all ages, from the Plataean who gave his life for right at Marathon to the Russian who gave his life for right at Plevna.'

It is clear from the reference to the battle of Plevna during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 that Freeman included Russia in 'the West' whose eternal struggle against 'the East' was the most striking feature of 'the unity of history' he was so vociferous about. And he knew that some would be surprised that an Englishman could 'speak well of Russia'. But to him it seemed that Russia and its rulers were

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<sup>73</sup> Edward A. Freeman, 'A Review of my Opinions', *The Forum*, 13 (1892): 145-157, at 155-57.

<sup>74</sup> Emphasis (all four times) added.

<sup>75</sup> Freeman, 'A Review of my Opinions', 155-57.



‘simply like any other nation and its rulers, capable of righteous action at one moment and of unrighteous action at another.’<sup>76</sup>

Freeman wrote of ‘the strife of East and West’ in several other works.<sup>77</sup> Though he is not discussed in that work, he offers an example of what Holly Case has referred to as the ‘misdating’ of ‘questions’ during what she calls ‘the age of questions’: ‘at the very instant they were born, questions were often endowed with a history that backdated them by decades, sometimes centuries, before their actual emergence.’<sup>78</sup> Freeman backdated the ‘Eastern Question’ and the ‘strife of East and West’ by millennia. He was and is in good company.<sup>79</sup>

But when addressing distinctions within Europe and within Christendom, Freeman would use ‘Western’ in contradistinction to the Eastern Roman Empire. He was unusually sympathetic to the Empire of Constantinople. He complained about many of his contemporaries ‘showing how little they know of that mighty Empire which for so many ages cherished the flame of civilization and literature when it was well nigh extinct throughout Western Europe – which preserved the language of

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<sup>76</sup> Freeman, ‘A Review of my Opinions’, 155-57. Freeman had started by being in favour of the Crimean War against Russia, but during the course of the war he changed his mind. W.R.W. Stephens, *The Life and Letters of Edward A. Freeman* (2 vols, London: Macmillan, 1895), I, 148-153.

<sup>77</sup> Edward A. Freeman, *The History of Sicily from the Earliest Times* (4 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891-1894), I, 11; Freeman, *The Chief Periods of European History* (London: Macmillan, 1886), 5-6. On Freeman see: Vicky L. Morrisroe, ‘“Eastern History with Western Eyes”: E.A. Freeman, Islam and Orientalism’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 16, no. 1 (2011): 25-45; Vicky L. Morrisroe, ‘“Sanguinary Amusement”: E.A. Freeman, the Comparative Method and Victorian Theories of Race’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 10, no. 1 (2013): 27-56; William Kelley, ‘Past History and Present Politics: E.A. Freeman and the Eastern Question’, in: G.A. Bremner and Jonathan Conlin (eds), *Making History: Edward Augustus Freeman and Victorian Cultural Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 119-135; Theodore Koditschek, ‘A Liberal Descent? E.A. Freeman’s Invention of Racial Traditions’, in: Bremner and Conlin, *Making History*, 199-216.

<sup>78</sup> Case, *The Age of Questions*, 155.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Anthony Pagden, *Worlds at War: The 2,500-year Struggle between East and West* (New York: Random House, 2008).

Thucydides and Aristotle, and the political power of Augustus and Constantine, till *the nations of the West* were once more prepared to receive the gift and to despise the giver.<sup>80</sup> This did not mean that he ranked the Eastern Empire above the modern ‘Teutonic’ realms, of course: ‘but, essentially conservative and unprogressive, it had not the same hope for the future which dwelled in the vigorous barbarism of the Western nations.’ Thus, ‘Its old age lived on alongside of the youth of the Western nations, till they had sufficiently advanced to give the world a lesson in a higher, and we trust, more enduring civilization.’<sup>81</sup> Clearly, in his hierarchy, some of the ‘Western’ nations (the ‘Teutonic’ ones especially) were superior, not least thanks to the free institutions they developed (with the English and their brethren in America leading the way). ‘Western’ was in these contexts used to distinguish between the two Roman Empires and their respective later successor states. However, these were both ‘European-Aryan’ in Freeman’s terms, and, therefore, *both* ‘Western’ in the other sense in which he used the term, when it came to universal history’s ‘eternal strife’. *That* ‘West’ was represented (or led) by different actors-peoples in each epoch, and included – successively -- the ancient Greeks, Alexander’s empire, and *both* Roman empires, that of the East as well as that of the West (and in his own time by the Balkan Christians as well as – in the 1870s -- their Russian would-be protectors). Thus, talking of the East Roman Empire’s ‘great war with Persia’ in the early seventh century, Freeman commented: ‘The Roman had succeeded the Macedonian as the champion of the West against the East, and the work of that championship was as worthily done from the New Rome as from the Old.’<sup>82</sup> The New Rome was, of

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<sup>80</sup> Emphasis added: Edward A. Freeman, ‘The Byzantine Empire’, in: Freeman, *Historical Essays*, Third Series [1879] (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 231-277, at 232.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 254-55.

course, Constantinople. The ‘Emperor of the East’ (in the intra-Roman or intra-European division), the so-called Byzantine Emperor, was ‘the champion of the West against the East’ in the broader, universal-historical eternal ‘strife between East and West’. That was not necessarily a widespread view among ‘Teutomaniacs’ at the time.<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, the ‘West’ of the ‘eternal strife’ included the Slavs. Time and again in his writings on the Eastern Roman Empire Freeman wistfully commented how differently things would have turned out had the Slavs conquered Constantinople during one of their attempts instead of the Ottoman Turks. He repeatedly drew an analogy between the renewal of the Western Roman Empire by the conquering youthful Teutons and the (counterfactual) would-be renewal of the Eastern Roman Empire by the conquering youthful Slavs.<sup>84</sup> Elsewhere, Freeman explained that, despite the initial racial or linguistic kinship of all Aryans, the ‘Western Aryans’ who lived in Europe had developed a different civilization from the ‘Eastern Aryans’ (‘the Persian and the Hindoo’).<sup>85</sup> The Western Aryans ‘all form part of one historic world, the world of Rome. They all share, more or less fully, in the memories which are common to all who have been brought within the magic influence of *either of the two*

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<sup>83</sup> Charles Kingsley, as Regius Professor of Modern History, told his Cambridge students in 1864 that the Muslim invaders had ‘[saved] Europe’ by distracting the Eastern Roman Empire and preventing it from defeating their (the students’) Teutonic ancestors during the centuries of their weakness from A.D. 550 - to A.D. 750: ‘...and if you hold (with me) that the welfare of the Teutonic race is the welfare of the world; then, meaning nothing less, the Saracen invasion, by crippling the Eastern Empire, saved Europe and our race.’ Charles Kingsley, *The Roman and the Teuton: A Series of Lectures delivered before the University of Cambridge* (London: Macmillan, 1901 [1864]), 304-305. Freeman relished the chance to ridicule this argument in his devastating – anonymous -- review of Kingsley’s book: [E.A. Freeman,] ‘Mr. Kingsley’s Roman and Teuton’, *Saturday Review*, 17/441 (9 April 1864), 446-448, at 448.

<sup>84</sup> Freeman, ‘The Byzantine Empire’, 264-67, 272-73.

<sup>85</sup> Edward A. Freeman, *Ottoman Power in Europe: Its Nature, its Growth, and its Decline* (London: Macmillan, 1877), 5-7.

*seats of Roman dominion.*<sup>86</sup> Thus ‘*All Europe, Eastern and Western*’, had ‘a common right in Rome and in all that springs from Rome’.<sup>87</sup> There had been two centres of roman influene, Old Rome and New Rome: ‘from the city of Romulus and from the city of Constantine, has come the civilization which distinguishes Europe from Africa and Asia. In that heritage all Europe has a share.’<sup>88</sup> In the ‘eternal strife’, Freeman’s ‘West’ was ‘Aryan Europe’, which included the Russians and other Slavs.

Freeman sometimes jested about his lack of interest in other parts of the world, but retorted that the part he did study was not negligible: ‘Indian things are commonly beyond me. I am parochially minded; but my parish is a big one, taking in all civilized Europe and America’.<sup>89</sup> He often referred to America next to Europe, as an extension of Europe and a ‘third home’ to the Teutonic English nation.<sup>90</sup> But he did not use the term ‘the West’ to lump Europe and America together (as Comte and his followers did). The very fact that an author who used ‘the West’ as frequently as Freeman did included Byzantium and Russia as part of it is telling regarding the different and often

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<sup>86</sup> Emphasis added: *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Emphasis added: *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>89</sup> Stephens, *Life and Letters*, II, 406.

<sup>90</sup> Edward A. Freeman, *Lectures to American Audiences* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates -- London: Trübner, 1882), 1-204; Freeman, *Ottoman Power in Europe*, 8.

conflicting meanings of the term in the nineteenth century.<sup>91</sup> The multiplicity of meanings and definitions continued in the twentieth century of course.<sup>92</sup>

## VI. The Comtists' illiberal West

And yet, there had emerged at around the same time a very different 'West'. For meanwhile Comte (as of the 1840s) and some of his British followers (as of the 1850s-1860s) opted for the term 'the West' to describe the entity they proposed to re-organise, instead of the hitherto used term 'Europe', exactly because 'Europe' was simultaneously too broad (to the extent that it included Russia and Eastern Europe), and too narrow (to the extent that it did not include the two Americas and Australia-New Zealand).<sup>93</sup> There are other examples one could adduce of early uses of 'the West', some more casual than others, some more consistent than others. But the first time a conscious decision was made by a group of thinkers and political activists systematically to substitute the term 'the West' for 'Europe', and to define it in exhaustive detail in contradistinction with 'Europe', was when the British Comtists published their long volume on *International Policy* (1866), headed by the essay 'The

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<sup>91</sup> Freeman's friend Henry Maine also used 'West' and 'Western' more than most contemporaries, already in his best-selling *Ancient Law* (1861). And his use of 'Western' in the 1870s comes much closer to later uses: 'The view of land as merchantable property...seems to be not only modern but even now distinctly Western. It is most unreservedly accepted in the United States, with little less reserve in England and France, but, as we proceed through Eastern Europe, it fades gradually away, until in Asia it is wholly lost.' Henry Sumner Maine, 'The Effects of Observation of India on Modern European Thought' (1875), in: Maine, *Village-Communities in the East and West* (7th edition, London: John Murray, 1895), 203-239, at 228.

<sup>92</sup> For an instructive twentieth-century example see Richard Toye, "'This famous island is the home of freedom": Winston Churchill and the Battle for "European Civilization"', in this issue.

<sup>93</sup> Varouxakis, 'Godfather of "Occidentality"': 431, 435-7.

West’, signed by their leader, Richard Congreve.<sup>94</sup> There had been no such explicit and thorough definition of what ‘the West’ meant and what ‘it’ ought to become in English up to then -- and the closest to have come to anyone doing so, had been contributions by Congreve himself a decade earlier.<sup>95</sup> And in the future it was only to be rivalled in the following decade by the English edition of Comte’s ultra-detailed four-volume *System of Positive Polity* (1875-1877), translated by some of the self-same leading British disciples (John Henry Bridges, Frederic Harrison, Edward Spencer Beesly, Vernon Lushington, Godfrey Lushington, Fanny Hertz, Samuel Lobb, Richard Congreve, Henry Dix Hutton).<sup>96</sup> The bewilderment of reviewers when it came to ‘the West’, to say nothing of ‘Occidentality’/’Westernness’ and other related terms that the Positivists attempted then to introduce into English political vocabulary, has been shown elsewhere.<sup>97</sup> In that context it is important to emphasize how astonishingly widely known Comte’s work was, and how vociferous his British followers were. As Terence Wright has shown, ‘nearly all the major British thinkers of the second half of the nineteenth century seem to have studied Comte’. And ‘[n]o student, it was claimed, could “pass through the ’sixties untouched by curiosity about the new philosophical system”...and from 1860 to 1880 it seemed impossible for any

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<sup>94</sup> Richard Congreve, ‘The West’, in: Congreve (ed.), *International Policy: Essays on the Foreign Relations of England* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866), 1-49.

<sup>95</sup> Richard Congreve, *Gibraltar: Or the Foreign Policy of England* (1857), in: Congreve, *Essays: Political, Social, and Religious*, Vol. I (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1874), 1-65.

<sup>96</sup> There were disagreements about the particular ways in which the leader, Congreve, was promoting the cause, already in 1856. See Harrison’s letters to Beesly in late 1856: *Frederic Harrison Papers*, British Library of Political and Economic Science [LSE], Archives, Box 1/4, 11, 25-35. ‘He [Congreve] has no shadow of an idea that does not come straight from “the system”’, Harrison complained of Congreve’s pamphlet *Gibraltar: ibid.*, Box 1/4, 35 (Meanwhile, the author of ‘the system’ was very pleased with *Gibraltar: Auguste Comte, Correspondance Générale et Confessions*, VIII (ed. Angèle Kremer-Marietti, Paris: Vrin, 1990), 356-358). But they followed Comte in using ‘the West’ to describe the supranational ‘vanguard’ of Humanity that they wanted to reform.

<sup>97</sup> Varouxakis, ‘Godfather of “Occidentality”’: 438-40.

major “literary or scientific figure who ventured into public controversy” not to “defend his position in relation to Positivism”.’ Thus, in the later nineteenth century, ‘it became almost impossible for educated people *not* to have encountered Comte’s ideas.’<sup>98</sup>

In the Conclusion of her widely cited article arguing for a Russian origin of the idea of the West in the West, Peggy Heller wrote that ‘even in the British context, the West did not emerge simply out of the discourse of imperialists, but played an important role in anti-imperialism.’<sup>99</sup> In a note attached to that statement she added that: ‘The anti-imperialism of some of the early accounts of Western civilisation, such as Francis Sydney Marvin’s...has not been appreciated in the work of GoGwilt or Bonnett.’ (Then she went on to suggest a probable Russian influence, calling for further research to establish it).<sup>100</sup> Heller was right to point to the significant anti-imperialist current of thought among people who wrote extensively on ‘the West’ and ‘Western Civilization’ around the time of the First World War. But she was wrong to look for the sources of their combination of anti-imperialism and focus on ‘the West’/‘Western Civilization’ in Russian connections. Francis Sydney Marvin was indeed one of the most prolific authors writing on Western Civilization during and

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<sup>98</sup> T.R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1, 5, 15, 72. Comte’s influence was also immense in the rest of the world, from Brazil to Bengal. For the most recent scholarship see: Mary Pickering, ‘Conclusion: The Legacy of Auguste Comte’, in Michel Bourdeau, Mary Pickering and Warren Schmaus (eds.), *Love, Order, & Progress: The Science, Philosophy, & Politics of Auguste Comte* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 250-304; Johannes Feichtinger, Franz L. Fillafer and Jan Surman (eds.), *The Worlds of Positivism: A Global Intellectual History* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>99</sup> Peggy Heller, ‘The Russian dawn: How Russia contributed to the emergence of “the West” as a concept’, in: Christopher S. Browning and Marko Lehti (eds.), *The Struggle for the West: A divided and contested legacy* (London: Routledge, 2010), 33-52, at 47. The major impact of the Comtist Positivists on British anti-imperialism (without connecting it to their views on the West) has been highlighted in: Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 47-123.

<sup>100</sup> Heller, ‘The Russian dawn’, 49 n.17.

around the Great War. He was also a well-known and highly active Comtist.<sup>101</sup> He contributed more than a hundred articles to the Comtist *Positivist Review* between 1893 and 1925. And besides publishing books on *The Unity of Western Civilization*, and similar titles,<sup>102</sup> he also authored a book on Comte.<sup>103</sup> The link between British anti-imperialism and British writings on the West and Western Civilization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the legacy of Auguste Comte.<sup>104</sup>

## VII. The wages of foreign influence

One more observation suggests itself in the light of what this article has shown. Comtist Positivism had come to Britain from France. Hobbes had lived for years in France before he published *Leviathan* (a book written in France); Goldsmith had spent some years in the Netherlands and other parts of Continental Europe before he wrote *A Citizen of the World*. Gibbon had spent many years in Switzerland and his Continental credentials were notorious.<sup>105</sup> Milnes, besides long sojourns on the

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<sup>101</sup> Wright, *Religion of Humanity*, 122, 242-3, 246-8, 271.

<sup>102</sup> F.S. Marvin (ed.), *The Unity of Western Civilization* (London: H. Milford, 1915).

<sup>103</sup> F.S. Marvin, *Comte: The Founder of Sociology* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1936), 122-161, 187-212.

<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, it may not be accidental that the three British thinkers that Bonnett identifies as the first to develop the idea of the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bonnett, *Idea of the West*, 28-31), had close connections of varying degrees with Comtean Positivism. Ramsay Macdonald had strong links with the Comtists and there are explicit references to their *International Policy* in his writings: James Ramsay Macdonald, *Imperialism: Its Meaning and Its Tendency* (London: Independent Labour Party, 1900); Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 199. Benjamin Kidd's debts to Comte were immense: D.P. Crook, *Benjamin Kidd: Portrait of a Social Darwinist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 3, 277, 283, 295, 375, 397 n84. And we have already said a few words on Francis Sidney Marvin, whose name appears in front of more titles than any other in Bonnett's bibliography.

<sup>105</sup> For the later editor of *Decline and Fall* noting Gibbon's 'foreign education and the influence of French thought' see: J.B. Bury, 'Introduction', xl.



Continent, had studied in Bonn before his first visit to Greece.<sup>106</sup> Urquhart had lived in Switzerland and France for several formative years; and ‘his education and whole experience were continental’.<sup>107</sup> Marx was German. Thomas Arnold was immersed in German thought and strongly influenced by Barthold Georg Niebuhr, Christian von Bunsen and other German scholars. So was his staunch admirer, Freeman.<sup>108</sup> And Maine’s debts to the German historical school of law of Friedrich Carl von Savigny, to Georg Ludwig von Maurer and to Niebuhr’s Roman History are well known.<sup>109</sup> The ‘comparative method’ so dear to Freeman and Maine owed its appeal to the philological researches into the ‘Aryan’ languages of Bunsen and Friedrich Max Müller, both Germans based and highly influential in Britain.<sup>110</sup> These examples may at least indicate that the earliest uses of ‘the West’ and ‘Western’ came to Britain from Continental European languages and discourses, in which they were much more

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<sup>106</sup> Pope-Hennessy, *The Years of Promise*, 26-27, 31-33. In the Preface to his collection of poems inspired by a visit ‘in the Levant and in Egypt in the winter of 1842-43’, *Palm Leaves* (1844), two thirds of his references were to German sources and the one that looms largest there was Goethe’s *West-östliches Divan*. He also quotes from a related poem by the German orientalist poet Friedrich Rückert (On Rückert’s importance see: Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 138-41). Lamartine’s *Voyage en Orient* is also cited. Uses of ‘European’ and ‘Western’ alternate in the text of the preface: Richard Monckton Milnes, *Palm Leaves* (London: Edward Moxon, 1844), viii, ix, xi, xiv, xviii, xx, xxii, xxiii fn., xxvii fn., xxix, xxx.

<sup>107</sup> Gleason, *Genesis of Russophobia*, 153.

<sup>108</sup> On the strong and multiple connections between Arnold, Freeman and German philologists and historians see: Oded Y. Steinberg, *Race, Nation, History: Anglo-German Thought in the Victorian Era* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

<sup>109</sup> Nick O’Brien, “‘Something Older than Law Itself’: Sir Henry Maine, Niebuhr, and ‘the Path Not Chosen’”, *Journal of Legal History*, 26/3 (2005): 229-251; J.W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 137-178; Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 62-65, 98, 125, 128-129.

<sup>110</sup> On Bunsen and Max Müller’s central role regarding the ‘Aryan idea’ in Britain see: Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 177, 181-185.

common. Lord Acton was of course right that ideas are ‘extraterritorial’. As far as John Bull’s isle was concerned, the idea of the West was a case of *ex oriente lux*.

### VIII: Conclusion

It should be clear from the evidence adduced in this article that there were several different uses of ‘the West’ in British thought in the nineteenth century and that they did not all mean the same thing or entity. And it should also be clear by now that most of them were inchoate or incoherent uses, which juxtaposed an undefined ‘West’ (most of the time used interchangeably, without any differentiation, with ‘Europe’) against various ‘others’ (Eastern Roman Empire of the medieval ‘Greeks’, or Russia, or the Jews, the Saracens, or ‘the Turk’) with rarely defined and often contradictory criteria of selection or membership. The only conscious and thorough attempt at a comprehensive definition of an entity that they proposed to call ‘the West’ was that undertaken by the Comtists, in the footsteps of their French master. There is an irony in all this with regard to the theme of Britain and European liberty. As we noted (Section II), most of the first uses of ‘Europe’ as a supranational self-description arose in England in the late seventeenth century very much in relation to the theme of liberty. But when ‘the West’ came to be programmatically promoted, it was to very different purposes. Far from conforming to the widely-held belief that Britons invented ‘the West’ to celebrate their primacy in liberal credentials or to legitimize their empire, the first time a coherent and thoroughly elaborate idea of the West was explicitly promoted in Britain, it was as part of the ‘liberticide’ as well as anti-imperialist system proposed by Comte.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> On Comte’s project see: Varouxakis, ‘Godfather of “Occidentality”’.

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