

Barbarians and Empire

Greek and Roman Conceptions of the East

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In the ancient world, art, wisdom and culture originated in the East. The Greeks were strongly influenced by the Achaemenid, Assyrian and Egyptian cultures. The way Romans looked at it, after having conquered Greece they had, in turn, brought civilisation home to the previously rustic Rome, or as Horace put it: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio* (*Ep.* 2.1.156–157). However, Empire as an institution and power also originated in the Orient, combined with wealth and abundance. What the Greeks and Romans admired and wished to emulate was therefore often to be found in the Orient. When the Greeks grew stronger and first defeated, then subdued the Persians, they began to look down on them and to emphasise the negative aspects of the ‘barbarians’: autocracy, despotism, weakness, effeminacy, decadence, corruption, greed etc. The East was frequently turned into the opposite of all virtues the Greeks and later the Romans strove for.

The gaze directed at the East has been compared to looking into a mirror, where the Greeks and Romans could see all the wonders they admired and strived after. Mirrors can on the other hand also be dangerous; getting too attached to what one sees is not good, in addition to which the mirror may distort or invert the reality.¹ The Orient has also been described in the terms of mirages, as a phantasm, a space of occlusion and illusion.² The mirage is an optical phenomenon, typically associated with the deserts

1 The first one to use the idea of a mirror in this context was Hartog 1980. Morgan 2016 approached the Greek perspectives on Persia through the twin analogies of mirrors and looking-glasses, the looking-glasses narrowing the view, picking out only some aspects of the society being observed.

2 Cf. e.g., Pinney 2018, according to whom mirages beginning from the late eighteenth century became a symbol ‘of Oriental despotism, a negative, but also enchanted emblem’. The term *le mirage Oriental* has on the other hand been used to describe both positive and negative illusions concerning the Orient. For Reinach 1893 it represented the, according to him, false belief in the Orient as the cradle of civilisation, whereas Bertrand 1910 uses it to describe the western inability to see the real development of the Orient, which instead is stereotyped as an exotic and backward region. Lepage 2000 uses the term in connection with ‘Orientalist’ paintings.

of the Middle East, through which displaced hazy images of distant objects are produced. Exactly what the images represent is determined by the interpretative skills of the viewer, thus producing both positive and negative visions.³

Identities are often constructed through the articulation of a common origin or shared characteristics (language, religion etc.). Yet the capacity to exclude or to abject people also plays an important role in the shaping of identities. Identity is to a large degree built through difference, on the relation to the opposite of how people regard themselves.⁴ Ethnic stereotypes, or culturally shared assumptions about other people, are often strongly involved in the creation and strengthening of one's own identity – either as an individual or as a group – or in bringing people together around a common cause. The effect of ethnic stereotypes can be strengthened by emic stereotypes, that is, mostly positive stereotypes about oneself or one's own in-group.⁵ Identities are never static and monolithic, but rather continuously reshaped and adapted to new circumstances. What more, identities are typically also multiple and overlapping. Most ancient Greeks thus identified themselves first of all with their *polis*, but they could simultaneously feel belonging to other groups such as a *demos*, a tribe or an *ethnos*. Greeks slowly also developed a common Hellenic identity, although this was not especially strong to begin with, and in practice was mostly foregrounded in reaction to out-groups. Similar multiple identities were also characteristic to the Roman world, where the shaping of a strong common Roman identity took centuries.⁶

The development of stereotypes about the East during antiquity is clearly connected to the need of creating stronger common Hellenic and Roman identities. However, it would be wrong to believe that there existed anything like a monolithic image of the Orient. The picture of the East developed and changed continuously, and during this process many Eastern peoples were characterised interchangeably through the same motifs. There may thus be a need to define a set of different 'repertoires' of stereotypes used in different chronological/cultural contexts, beginning from differences between Greek and Roman strains. This is complicated by the fact that part of the stereotypes tended to turn into literary *topoi* that were repeated numerous times, often even with

3 'Mirror' and 'mirage' are both developed from the Latin verb *mirari*, meaning 'to wonder at, admire'.

4 For identities, cf. e.g., Hall 1996 or Ehala 2018. Hölscher 2000 speaks about the importance of *Gegenwelten* (counterworlds/antipodes), also present in the mythical context. In a similar way Cartledge 1993 focuses on Greek self-definition through five pairings of classical thought constructed as binary oppositions (polarities): Greek-barbarian, men-women, citizen-alien, free-slave and gods-mortals.

5 For the sociopsychology of in-group/out-group cognition and identity-building, see Ehala 2018, 159–163. On the entanglement between 'autostereotypes' (the beliefs of the in-group about themselves) and 'heterostereotypes' (the beliefs about out-groups or the others), cf. Zacharasiewicz 2010, 36; Leerssen 2016, 16–17.

6 For the creation of a Hellenic identity, see e.g., Hall 1997; Hall 2002; for the development of a Roman identity, see e.g., Dench 2005; Farney 2007; Wallace-Hadrill 2008.

close to similar formulations. Pausanias, for instance, was very fond of re-using Herodotean formulations in his second-century AD *Periegesis*.⁷ The free borrowing of the 'Oriental' stereotypes in the subsequent tradition, and their application to different societies – sometimes by societies which in themselves were stereotyped as 'Oriental' by other groups – points to the inescapable conclusion that 'Orient' was and has always been a moving '(n)everwhere', and each society in the Western tradition has been prone to construct their own 'Orient' and 'Orientals'.

There is also a clear correlation between imperialist conceptions and the way groups viewed as enemies were perceived. Within an imperial discourse of power and providentiality, the empire is usually presented as triumphant and superior, whereas the defeated enemy militarily inferior and weak. This imperialistic perception of power was embraced by all Middle Eastern empires going back at least to the Assyrians.⁸ Part of the Greek and Roman stereotypes of the East find their roots among these eastern imperial ideals, being taken over by the Greeks when they began to subdue the Persians, and then being reproduced and applied in various ways in literature with the aim of marginalising the others.⁹ It has even been suggested that the Greek stereotypes of the East – including the concept of the 'barbarian' – and the Hellenic ethnic identity would go back to the Achaemenid imperial administrative system, where focus was laid on ethnic specificity and distinctions inside the empire.¹⁰

Edward Said suggested in his seminal 1978 book *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient* that there existed a link between the Greek and Roman stereotypes of the East and the mainly during the nineteenth century prevalent prejudiced and imperialist European picture of the Muslim world, which was considered exotic, stagnant, decadent and dangerous, and contrasted with the western societies that were seen as developed, rational, flexible and above all superior.¹¹ It is due to Said's influence that the words 'Orient' and 'Oriental' have struck a negative chord and warnings have been issued about projecting the use of them to antiquity, because doing so would be both anachronistic and potentially circular.¹² However, there are also several ambiguities connected with the alternative term 'Asiatic', although it clearly was used already from the Classical era onwards.¹³ In order to facilitate this, we have chosen in this volume to use 'Orient', 'Asia',

7 Cf. e.g., Lampinen, this volume.

8 For the imperial conception of power and its influence on stereotypes, cf. Isaac 2004. For the empire and imperialistic notions in a diachronic perspective, see most recently the contributions in Bang *et al.* 2021. Imperial power is usually combined with military authority and masculinity, whereas the defeated with slavery. Cf. e.g., De Souza 2011; McAvoy 2017; Merrill 2015 with further references.

9 Cf. e.g., Isaac 2004. For the Latin literature serving the interests of Roman power, see Habinek 1998.

10 Kim 2013, 32–36.

11 Said 1978.

12 Skinner 2012, 74. Cf. also Farris 2010, 268.

13 Lenfant 2017, 22–24, who argues against using 'Asiatic' as a synonym for 'Orientals'.

'East' or any derivation of them parallel to each other, the words 'Orient' and 'Oriental' in no way implying a diachronically unitary 'Orientalist' tradition.

Said's suggestion of a link between the Greek and Roman stereotypes of the East and the Orientalist attitude of the Europeans towards the Muslim is not the main topic of this volume, although touched upon in some contributions. The aim of this collection is rather to identify and discuss sets of – frequently interconnected – stereotypes that structured ancient thinking and writing about the East and its peoples with a reference to respective repertoires of stereotypes in given chronological and cultural contexts. When and why did the different stereotypical motifs about the Orient develop? What role did the shaping of common Hellenic and Roman identities, or of an imperial identity, play in this? Which were the in-groups and out-groups connected with the stereotypical conceptions and how did they change over time? What role was played by the literary and rhetorical use of *topoi* based on established stereotypical elements? Due to the vast field, all these questions cannot be dealt with in detail, nor is it possible to provide any all-covering answers, but we hope that this volume still can rise the interest of the reader and stimulate to further work in the field.

Research trends

As already noted, the modern research on stereotypes of the East during antiquity is strongly influenced by post-colonial frameworks and especially of Edward Said. When Edith Hall wrote her *Inventing the Barbarian. Greek Self-definition through Tragedy*, a decade after the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, she fixed the main horizon for the exacerbation of Greek images of Persia to the shock reaction of the Persian Wars. She noted that the term *barbarophonos* already had Homeric pedigree, but emphasised the way in which the tragedy as a genre shows early signs of a rise in oppositional imagery between the Hellenes on the one hand, and the barbarians on the other – and the role of the Persians as a significant group of barbarian enemies.¹⁴ Hall explicitly acknowledged the inspiration that Said's *Orientalism* had offered for her thinking.¹⁵ The link to Said and modern Orientalism definitely helped not only to make Hall's book a classic, but also turned the study of ancient stereotypes of the East into a popular and topical subject.

On the other hand, Said's importance for Hall should not be overstated. The ancient perceptions of the Eastern barbarians in Greek tragedies had already before her been discussed by, for instance, Walther Kranz in *Stasimon. Untersuchungen zu Form und Gehalt der griechischen Tragödie*, or Helen H. Bacon in *Barbarians in Greek Trage-*

14 Hall 1989, esp. 56–100, 184–224; see also Bridges *et al.* 2007; Isaac 2004, 257–298; Barbantani 2014.

15 Hall 1989, 99.

dy.¹⁶ The topic in other genres of literature or in general terms had also been addressed in several studies, among which the most influential were Adrian N. Sherwin-White's *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome*, Arnaldo Momigliano's *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization*, François Hartog's *Le miroir d'Hérodote. Essai sur la représentation d'autre* and Timothy Long's *Barbarians in Greek Comedy*,¹⁷ most of which were referred to by Hall. Though some of these may have been influenced by post-colonial thinking to a degree, the earlier of these studies obviously received their inspiration from other lines of thinking. Julius Jüthner's less known *Hellenen und Barbaren. Aus der Geschichte des Nationalbewusstseins*, for instance, was influenced by the inhumanity experienced during the First World War.¹⁸

Hall's *Inventing the Barbarian* offered inspiring grounds for further explorations of the Helleno-barbarian interfaces. The subsequent range of contributions are far too numerous to be fully covered here, but a few observations and thematic highlights seem useful. James Romm in *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* studied the Greek perceptions of the furthest reaches of the *oikoumene*; Tom Harrison in *The Emptiness of Asia* continued focusing on the Eastern realities informing Aeschylus' *Persians*; while Benjamin Isaac in *Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (as well as Erich Gruen in his decidedly more optimistic response to it, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*) debated the degree to which conceptions of ethnicity and cultural identities intermingled with the dialectics of discrimination and belonging in Greek and Roman thinking.¹⁹ The representations of Persia in Herodotus and Ctesias have seen a great deal of nuanced scholarship, too.²⁰ In contrast, imagology – the study of historical characterisations of population groups – has remained a largely peripheral approach, with no significant impact on Ancient Studies.²¹

Parallel with the virtual boom of publications on the stereotypes of the East appearing during the last three decades, the scholarly world has also witnessed a burgeoning interest in questions concerning ancient identities and ethnicity. The shaping of identities and ethnicity within the Greek cultural sphere have been masterfully discussed by the likes of Jonathan Hall and Irad Malkin, also with reference to the picture of the East.²² Malkin traces the formation of a Greek ethnic identity back to the ninth century

16 Kranz 1933; Bacon 1961.

17 Sherwin-White 1967; Momigliano 1975; Hartog 1980 (see also Pelling 1997, 52–54); Long 1986.

18 Jüthner 1923. Jüthner covers the topic diachronically beginning from Homer all the way through to the Byzantine period.

19 Romm 1992; Harrison 2000; Isaac 2004; Gruen 2011.

20 Briant 2002; Miller 2006; Munson 2009; Harrison 2011 and 2015; Lenfant 2012; Lenfant 2019; Abe 2014; Provencal 2015; Morgan 2016; Llewellyn-Jones 2017.

21 On imagology, see Leerssen 2016 with a review of past research trends; a major challenge he identifies is to find non-Eurocentric working methods and a priori models (27), which also applies to the study of ancient imagery.

22 Hall 1997; Hall 2002; Malkin 1998; Malkin 2001.

BC, whereas Hall rather envisioned it formed during the Archaic period through interaction between local elites during the panhellenic games, though also emphasising the change in Greek self-definition from an aggregative to an oppositional in the wake of the Persian Wars, from an identity constructed 'cumulatively from within' to one 'being defined without'.²³

Qualitative change in the Greek self-definition in response to the Persian Wars seems likely, but it also is fairly clear that parts of the iconosphere of ethnically framed elements about the Eastern peoples certainly predated the Persian Wars. Hyun Jin Kim has for instance suggested that Ionia during the late sixth century BC might have offered the context for the development of a dichotomy between Greeks and barbarians.²⁴ It has also been noted long ago that behind some of the early Greek articulations of Eastern difference was the need to explain why the numerically fewer and in material terms seemingly disadvantaged Greeks were able to beat back two major Persian interventions.²⁵ Yet the oppositional dichotomies are not the only way to look at even this stage of the Orientalist imagery – or rather, we have to acknowledge that even as the general assemblage of ideas may have gravitated towards negative content, practical connections, interactions and entanglements would have gone on much as before, or even intensified. This is entirely in keeping with the dynamics between stereotypes and real-life interactions. As Kostas Vlassopoulos has shown in his *Greeks and Barbarians*, the mobility of goods, ideas and technologies never reflected particularly strongly the alienating currents of the Greek and Roman discourse. That said, many literary testimonies to intercultural communication are nonetheless inflected through the already-existing pool of stereotypes.²⁶

According to Benjamin Isaac the meaning of *barbaros* changed during the fifth century. He emphasises that there is no evidence that the Persians would have been considered inferior during the first half of the fifth century BC – they were rather considered worthy opponents. The appearance towards the late fifth century of the picture of the Asiatics as different and inferior, Isaac sees in correlation to the emergence of imperialist conceptions among the Greeks.²⁷ Roman authors influenced by similar conceptions adopted from the Mid- and Late Republic onwards the Greek stereotypes of the East, directing them first against the Greeks and later towards the monarchies

23 For the change from aggregative to oppositional, see Hall 1997, 47; Hall 2015, 25.

24 Kim 2013, in principle accepted by Hall 2015, 25. For supporters of the horizon of the Persian Wars, cf. e.g., Shapiro 2009; Huang 2010.

25 Jouanna 1981; Chiasson 2001.

26 Vlassopoulos 2013.

27 Isaac 2004, 261–303, 509–513. Bernhardt 2003 reaches independently of Isaac a similar interpretation, Miller 2006 again a somewhat similar result while studying the representation of Persians in Attic vase paintings, where the Persians, after first having been depicted as worthy opponents, around 460 BC began to be belittled until they finally around 400 BC totally disappeared from the iconographical palette.

of Anatolia and the Near East.²⁸ The stereotypes clearly played a role in shaping a new broader imperial Roman identity although this has not been as strongly emphasised.²⁹

Chronological stages and cultural contexts

According to Edith Hall the negative stereotypes of the Orient were created during the early fifth century BC in response to the Persian threat and with the aim of shaping a common Greek identity.³⁰ Recent research has shown that the development of the negative stereotypes clearly was a more complex and non-linear process that stretched over centuries. The type and preserved number of sources obviously restricts our possibilities to elucidate the development of the sets of stereotypes, especially for the early phases dating to the Archaic period. However, a series of consecutive chronological/cultural milieus can still be discerned, two of which pre-date Hall's suggested appearance of the stereotypes of the Orient.

During the period preceding the Persian Wars, Greeks travelling out of their homelands in pursuit of trade and mercenary contacts would have formed an important interface for the formation of early ideas about the East. The Eastern Mediterranean was dominated by a series of empires and other polities characterised by higher population density, military power, wealth and prestige. The centralised wealth produced by the Eastern empires attracted traders and pirates, but also made it possible for both the local and imperial rulers to hire mercenaries from peripheral areas like the Aegean world. Greek mercenaries fought for nearly every single Near Eastern empire at least from the mid-seventh century until the Hellenistic period, with the first cases probably dating as early as the second half of the eighth century BC.³¹ Mercenaries tend to be canny observers of the realities that they depend upon, and would typically have respected the wealth and power of those who hired them, even though at the same time they despised them for being weak and deceitful, having to hire others to fight for them and not always paying correctly. Reflections of this can already be found in the Homeric epics written during the late eighth or early seventh century BC.³²

28 Gruen 1984, 260–272; Isaac 2004, 304–323, 371–380. Cf. also Lerouge 2007 for the Roman picture of the Parthians.

29 Cf. e.g., Dench 2005 or Wallace-Hadrill 2008. Before the Romans expanded towards the East, they rather considered other Italic people barbarous (e.g., Dench 1995; Farney 2007).

30 Hall 1989.

31 Cf. Skinner, this volume, but also e.g., Luraghi 2006; Halle 2013; Iancu 2014; Iancu 2016; Rop 2021. Fantalkin and Lytle 2016 recently disputed the presence of Greek mercenaries in Neo-Babylonian service, a statement opposed by Iancu 2016.

32 Iancu 2014; Skinner, this volume. For admiration of Oriental wealth and power, cf. Hom. *Od.* 4.81–90; 4.120–135; 4.227–232; 4.613–619; for eastern wealth combined with subtle allusion to femininity, cf. Hom. *Il.* 2.867–875.

In the Greek worldview, seafaring and trade were also – despite their ubiquity and necessity – often associated with deception and luxury. Accordingly, Phoenicians could from very early times onwards be portrayed as slavers and potentially untrustworthy merchants.³³ For the inhabitants of the Syro-Palestinian, Cilician and Egyptian coasts, it may on the other hand well have been the ‘Yauna’ (Ionians) who were the tricksters, merchants and slavers – not to mention mercenaries. The Greek traders, pirates and later mercenaries brought not only ‘Egyptian and Assyrian merchandise’ home,³⁴ but also formed impressions of the eastern lands and thereby surely influenced early Greek stereotype-forming. The interactions of the Greek mercenaries formed not only ‘information’ and ‘facts’ that then began their circulation among the Greeks, but also ‘meaning’ – value assessments, symbolically and culturally important expressions of difference.³⁵ The objects they brought with them were the physical carriers of such symbolic meanings.

The Greek *poleis* along the western coast of Anatolia first came under Lydian rule during the late seventh and early sixth century, followed by Achaemenid rule from the second half of the sixth century BC. This brought along a clear change in relation to the Eastern empires, which even may have formed the very context for the development of the category of ‘barbarian’, as suggested by Hyun Jin Kim.³⁶ Part of the early Greek stereotype-formation certainly took place within the complex network of the multi-cultural Achaemenid Empire, where many population groups were conceptualised and portrayed according to their typical outfit and produce. The early focus on Eastern luxury products and wealth could thus reflect the commodity-oriented knowledge ordering of the Achaemenid Empire as much as it reflects the meaning-making about the exotic products that the Greeks encountered through trade and looting.

33 See Skinner 2012, 86–89; also Isaac 2004, 324–327.

34 Cf. e.g., Hdt 1.1–2, describing how Phoenician traders captured Io of Argos, whereas Greeks captured Europa from Tyre in Phoenicia and Medea from Aea in Colchis. Herodotus mentions the Phoenician traders bringing ‘Egyptian and Assyrian merchandise’ to Greece, but such could of course as well have been brought back by Greek traders, or as reciprocity gifts connected to mercenary service (Iancu 2014). For an overview of such Egyptian gifts ending up in Greek sanctuaries, see Agut-Labordère 2012, for similar Assyrian finds of the eighth and seventh centuries, cf. Luraghi 2006, or Dezsö and Ver 2013. The Oriental bronze reliefs found in Olympia probably represent the best example of Assyrian objects found in Greece. They seem to originate from bronze sheeting of columns or doorposts at an entrance to an important Assyrian building in northern Syria, probably stolen in connection with the collapse of the Assyrian Empire in 612 BC, whereafter acquired by an itinerant trader or bronzeworker, who brought them to Greece. Trade with scrap metal was apparently widespread and voluminous already around 600 BC. Cf. Borell and Rittig 1998; Guralnick 2004.

35 Skinner, this volume.

36 Kim 2013, 32–36. According to Kim the word ‘barbarian’ goes back to the Old Persian *barabara*, which means ‘he who carries a burden/load’. In New Persian *barabara* or *barbara* could either mean ‘carrier/bearer of a burden or tax, that is taxpayer’ or indeed tribute. The barbarians would thus be those people who paid tribute/taxes to the Achaemenid Great King.

Written sources dating to the sixth century BC are rare, but we can draw certain conclusions about this epoch on the base of a growing number of vase paintings. Using vase paintings as sources for ancient sets of stereotypes and cultural identities has to factor in several methodological problems. There is apparently no clear link between depictions of barbarians in Athenian iconography on the one hand and the picture given by literary sources on the other, not to speak of real intercultural encounters. The large number of Scythians and Thracians appearing in Attic vase paintings between c. 530 and 500 BC can, for instance, be shown to represent Greeks dressed in elements of Thracian and Scythian costume, elements that emphasise their skills as horsemen, peltasts and archers or their inclination to immoderate drinking. The artists have thus employed elements of the ethnographic record not to depict barbarians, but rather to stress certain characteristics of Greek figures. For representations of barbarians *per se* in Attic vase painting before 490 BC we are restricted to rarer mythological scenes including Busiris and Memnon. The situation changes after the Persian Wars when Persians appear in frequent battle scenes at the same time as Amazons and Trojans begin to be depicted by elements of Orientalising visual stereotypes.³⁷ Nonetheless the late sixth century BC vase paintings indicate the existence of ethnographic stereotyping of at least Thracians, Scythians, Ethiopians and Egyptians already before the battle of Marathon.

The conflict with the Persians between 490 and 480 BC clearly led to a new chapter in the Greek relation to the Eastern empires, the stage singled out by Edith Hall, during which the Greeks began to define themselves ever more in 'oppositional terms'.³⁸ The number of preserved literary sources also increase strongly during the fifth century, heavily influencing our interpretations. The Persians were first described as worthy opponents, although characterised by negative stereotypes. However, Greek military successes during the late fifth century, crowned by the march of the Ten Thousand in 401 BC, slowly changed their picture of the eastern adversaries. Military success also brought along slaves, creating another important source for ethnically framed knowledge, at the same time as fostering an imperialistic attitude.³⁹ Rainer Bernhardt and Benjamin Isaac have identified what could be described as a fourth chronological/cultural stage developing towards the late fifth century, typical for which was the fact that the Orientals increasingly were considered inferior as compared to the superior Greeks.⁴⁰ This imperialistic image of the adversary most likely also was taken over from

37 Vlassopoulos, this volume. For the depictions of Persians in Attic vase painting, cf. Miller 2006.

38 Hall 1989. For the difference between this 'oppositional' self-definition compared to the 'aggregative' one preceding it, cf. Hall 1997, 42; Hall 2015, 25.

39 See Harrison 2019.

40 Bernhardt 2003; Isaac 2004.

the eastern empires, probably by Greeks employed by the Great King: Ctesias being the best example of this.⁴¹

When analysing stereotypical images in literary works we need to put emphasis on when, why and for whom they were written. Aeschylus' *Persians* was written from a perspective of defiant resistance, not confident supremacy,⁴² whereas for instance Ctesias' *Persica* and even *Airs, Waters, Places*, a partially preserved work of the Hippocratic school, in which ethnographic stereotypes are seen as environmentally determined, are both influenced by the imperialistic attitude towards developing the late fifth century where the Eastern people were considered inferior.⁴³ Herodotus, who wrote during the third quarter of the fifth century, belongs somewhere between these stages. Thus, from the late fifth century BC onwards we see an intensifying influence of a belief according to which the spread of eastern vices led to the decline and fall of empires, which cannot be found in such a schematic form in Herodotus' work.⁴⁴

Different chronological/cultural stages of stereotypes can also be discerned when surveying how the Greeks related to the religion of the others, a topic which so far has received only little attention. The first signs of development of a common Greek religious identity, on a level above separate religious or *polis*-identities, can be found in sixth-century BC Naucratis, where the Greeks originating from different *poleis* obviously felt a need to emphasise a religious communality of their own, separated from the Egyptian one. After the Persian Wars, appeals to a common Greek religious identity appear also in the Aegean area, with the stereotype of Persian ruler-worship and impiety occurring already by Aeschylus. The emphasis is on exclusion – the things that the Greeks should not practice – rather than any distinct listing of in-group practices. However, it is not until towards the late fifth century BC and beyond that barbarian religion begins to be described as primitive, inferior and even ridiculous, in a clearly imperialistic way.⁴⁵ It is hardly surprising that especially strong mockery of the foreign can be found in comedies, as for instance revealed by a fragment of the comedy author Anaxandrides (F 40 K-A), where Egyptian customs are ridiculed: 'you bow down to a cow, but I sacrifice it to the gods'.

When using literary sources, we also need to distinguish between ethnic stereotypes and literary *topoi*. The latter rely on their communicative power on the active stereotypes among the audience, and often make use of them in order to strengthen the picture given of a people's or person's characteristics.⁴⁶ For a writer to use for instance

41 See Vickers 1990.

42 Bang *et al.* 2021, 11, correctly characterising the *Persians* as 'anti-imperial'.

43 For *Persica*, see Almagor 2012; for the Hippocratic *Airs*, see Chiasson 2001; Lenfant 2017; Kennedy 2016.

44 Bertrand 2003, 122

45 Harrison, this volume.

46 For the relationship that *topoi* bear to commonly shared stereotypes, cf. Zerjadtko 2020a and 2020b.

the cliché of ‘Punic perfidy’ or ‘Syrian greed’ without explanations requires for their audience to understand the reference – it needs, in other words, to be an active component in their pool of stereotypes about the Carthaginians. During the Hellenistic period the stereotypes of the East had already developed into a set of literary *topoi* that was re-used about a range of different, not always necessarily Oriental peoples, sometimes even tapping into other sets of stereotypes, always with the aim of emphasising in-group’s own military and cultural superiority vis-à-vis the adversary, something that was further developed by the Romans.

During the growth of the Roman Republic into an Empire, the Roman encounter with societies of the Eastern Mediterranean took many forms and was anything but one-directional. Depending on the context, many different aspects of the received Greek stereotypical pool could be triggered or brought to the foreground in literary genres. From Cato’s time onwards the denigration of Greeks at Rome had sometimes taken the form of stereotypes about ‘over-clever’, devious or emasculated foreigners – which testifies to the Hellenistic *koine* of Oriental imagery being adopted and reapplied fairly early into the Roman self-fashioning. The very fact that Greece had, indeed, been conquered, seems to have testified to the reality of these stereotypes. The ideas only gathered strength, and Cicero’s *Verrine Orations*, for instance, show that the imagery was plausible also in the intensely Hellenised Late Republican context.⁴⁷

Interactions in the East, especially after Pompey’s fully imperialist ‘reorganisation’ there, made the area more significant in his Roman contemporaries’ minds. The first shocks of Roman defeats against Parthians – especially at Carrhae (53 BC) – would also have played a role in foregrounding the role of the East in Roman worldview.⁴⁸ But once again, the picture is complex and not solely based on enemy imagery: in concrete terms, an increasing number of Syrians, Jews, Egyptians and other representatives of Levantine societies would have made lives for themselves in the city of Rome. Interaction can lead to understanding, but as is clear from the xenophobic outbursts that Juvenal echoes (or perhaps parodies), these groups would frequently face discrimination, too.⁴⁹ The pool of stereotypes was so widely spread and shared in the Imperial era in both Greek and Latin communication that they could be very easily activated in the minds of the audience. Once again, the kaleidoscopic reflections of the Orient could be put into a vast range of uses.

47 See e.g., Henrichs 1995; on Cicero’s representation of Verres’ as corrupted by exposure to Greek *mores*, see Vasaly 1993, 199–217, also cf. 109–110, 143–145.

48 Lerouge 2007; for the complex relations and images in the Augustan era, see Rose 2005, Parker 2011; on High-Imperial era, see Hartmann 2008; Landskron 2006.

49 On Juvenal’s xenophobic utterances, see Gellérfi 2019; Geue 2015.