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An Oriental Acropolis:
Classics as a Liminal Space Between East and West

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In the heart of Berlin stands the Altar of Pergamon: a roughly 115-foot wide, 110-foot deep altar[1] dedicated to the Greek god Zeus. The frieze on the altar depicts a battle between the gods and giants, which modern scholars named "gigantomachy," to reflect the battle as it appeared in Hesiod's *Theogony*. In the 2nd-century BCE, King Eumenes II commissioned the altar to be constructed atop of the acropolis of Pergamon to commemorate victory over invading "barbarians," who were presumably from Gaul.[2] In 1871, thousands of years after the altar's construction, Karl Humann, a citizen of Wilhelmian Prussia, discovered some of its fragments while surveying land for the Turkish government. Soon after, the German government obtained permission from Turkey to excavate the rest of the altar, and the pieces were shipped off to Berlin.[3]

In the following years, the altar's scale and detail impressed scholars of the classical world and of the Orient. In an 1882 letter to a friend in Basel, art historian Jacob Buckhardt registered awe, describing the altar as "unsuspected stored up Greek energy of the Greek sensibility and of Greek art."[4] Johann Adolf Overbeck, a professor of archeology in Leipzig, echoed Buckhardt's observations and wrote that "a work of such scope, dynamicism, and complete technical mastery … was a totally unexpected phenomenon … that caught everyone by surprise and swept [them] off [their] feet."[5] Of course, Overbeck and Buckhardt's senses of shock could be attributed to the impressive size and detail of the altar; however, both men were writing at a time in which German national identity had strong ties to notions of classical Greece. In contrast to an uncivilized Orient, the newly formed German empire was to become "die Griechen der Neuzeit."[6]

During the 19th century, European scholars of antiquity, including Overbeck, tended to believe that Greek culture became contaminated as it traveled into Asia Minor during the Hellenistic age. Heinrich Brunn, a professor of classics in Munich, subscribed to this view and in the context of Pergamon, said, "under Eumenes [II], art corresponds to Asian rhetoric … that explains why in spite of the surface agitation of the scenes represented in the Pergamon sculptures and the excitement these arouse in us, our deepest feelings are so little touched by them."[7] The altar's status as a blend of Hellenistic and Asian art and culture confused scholars such as Buckhardt, Overbeck, and Brunn, who felt the need to separate a 'civilized Occident' from a 'barbaric Orient.' The altar of Pergamon, with its history of Western "barbarians" and influences of Greek mythology, denies this interpretation, however, as it stands as proof of a liminal — if existent at all — border between the classical Greeks and the so-called Orient.

The continued emphasis on classical Greece and Rome as the birthplace of Western civilization perpetuates the myth of a separate and contained Orient. In

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[1] "Pergamonmuseum," Staatlicher Museen zu Berlin, Accessed December 6, 2021, https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/pergamonmuseum/home/.

[2] Lionel Gossman, "Imperial Icon: The Pergamon Altar in Wilhelminian Germany," *The Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 3 (2006): 554, https://doi.org/10.1086/509148.

[3] Gossman, "Imperial Icon," 554.

[4] Ibid, 551.

[5] Ibid, 554.

[6] Ibid, 553.

[7] Ibid, 564.

recent years, scholars such as Edward Said, Martin Bernal, and Suzanne Marchand have worked to dismantle the problematic relationship between classics and Oriental studies in the West; however, the status of both academic fields remains uncertain.

Defining the Orient

The term 'Orient' connotes a European looking east. It is a term primarily of spatial, but also of cultural, religious, and intellectual relations. In his field-defining book *Orientalism*, Edward Said wrote, "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. Now it was disappearing; in a sense it had happened, its time was over."[8] Said placed the invention of the Orient in antiquity, by which he meant Ancient Greece and Rome. Since then, he argued, the Orient came to encompass the totality of European views toward the East. Said also acknowledged the binary that the term created: "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'."[9] Further, he claimed that this "style of thought" — that is, Orientalism — was not an "inert fact of nature"[10] but rather a relationship of power that gives "positional superiority" to the West.[11]

Because perspectives on the East change with each scholar in each epoch, the definition of the term 'Orient' must allow for flexibility. For this reason, I define the Orient here as a perceived East, towards which Western (European and American) scholarship is directed. Even this definition suggests a stable relationship between a distinct West and a distinct east, which is a misconception that is contained within the term 'Orient' itself.

In recent decades, the terms 'Orient' and 'Oriental' have come under more scrutiny as products of European imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries; however, Orientalism has a much deeper past. In fact, according to Marchand, "there never seems to have been a time during which Europeans did not want to learn about Eastern cultures."[12] Through observations of approaches to classics and the Orient over time, this paper aims to dismantle conceptions of a classical origin of the East/West binary that Said's notion of Orientalism aided in creating.

Classical Perceptions of the East

While historians and classical scholars frequently — and oftentimes rightly — present the Ancient Greeks and Romans as highly ethnocentric, not all

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[8] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 1.
[9] Ibid, 2.
[10] Ibid, 4.
[11] Ibid, 7.
[12] Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Racem and Scholarship* (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6.

Greeks and Romans had the same attitude towards the Eastern 'other.' In his book, *Homer's Turk*, Jerry Toner pointed out that there was never a "fixed point of comparison" between the Mediterranean and the East, even during the classical era.

If one compares the works of well-known ancient Greek and Roman authors, it is clear that each of these authors has a different perspective on what later scholars would call the Orient. Toner cited Xenophon as a Greek author who admired the Persian Empire and who saw Cyrus as a role model and as a rational leader.[13] Toner also mentioned Aeschylus' *Persae*, which Edward Said dubbed the first Orientalist work helping to solidify the concrete idea of the Greeks opposing the Barbarians; however, Toner acknowledged that Aeschylus wrote during the Persian invasions of the 5th-century BCE — a hostile context that would have promoted a binary between the Greeks and the Persians.[14] Said's characterization of Aeschylus' play as a superficial representation of the Orient rather than as a "natural depiction" of it[15] also contributed to perceptions of a living East/West binary during the classical period. Although Aeschylus oversimplified Eastern cultures, he tried to make his characters relatable to a Greek audience. He therefore strengthened while simultaneously breaking any divide between the Greeks and the Orient. Given the complexity of his portrayal of Greeks and Persians, it would be incorrect to portray Aeschylus as the original orientalist.

Further, the Greek word *βάρβαρος*[16], which scholars frequently point to as a reflection of an ethnocentric attitude among the Greeks, does not often appear in Ancient Greek discourse of the East.[17] The misconceptions surrounding the frequency of the Greek *βάρβαροι*, along with Xenophon's admiration for Persia, show that the Greeks had diverse perspectives on the East that were not limited to ideas of barbarism. It also shows that the classical idea of the uncivilized barbarian could be projected westward as well as eastward. The construction of the Pergamon Altar after a victory over the Gauls in the west, who many in the kingdom of Pergamon viewed as barbarians, further shatters the binary of the Greek and the Eastern 'other.'

Martin Bernal, a historian of China known for his ground-breaking, though highly-controversial work, *Black Athena*, put forth that Ancient Greece itself was a product of eastern influences. To illustrate this point, he pointed to Herodotus, who he claims had a genuine interest in understanding non-Greek cultures. Bernal quoted Herodotus as writing in his *Histories*, "the Phoenicians who came with Kadmos … introduced into Greece, after their settlement in the country, a number of accomplishments, of which the most important was writing, an art till then, I think, unknown to the Greeks."[18] Herodotus' account indicates a level of respect for the Phoenicians, to whom he gives credit for the development of Greek identity and culture. Bernal also pointed out that Herodotus refused to

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[13] Jerry Toner, *Homer's Turk: How Classics Shaped Ideas of the East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 15.

[14] Toner, *Homer's Turk*, 15.

[15] Said, *Orientalism*, 21.

[16] Translates to "barbarian" or "foreigner."

[17] Toner, *Homer's Turk*, 15.

[18] Herodotus in Martin Bernal, *Black Athena*, Vol. 1 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 98-99.

admit that the similarities between Greek and Egyptian culture were coincidental: "had that been so," Herodotus wrote, "our rites would have been more Greek in character and less recent in origin."[19] Herodotus' acknowledgement of Greece's cultural indebtedness to Eastern cultures, accompanying his portrayal of an irrational Xerxes, shows a conflicted view of the Orient. Further, Herodotus' separation of the Egyptians, the Phoenecians and the Persians (even the individual rulers of Persia) suggests that he did not view the East as a constant and monolithic entity. It is not until the 18th century that scholars such as Voltaire cited 480 BCE as the beginning of western history and placed emphasis on the chapters that dealt with the Persian War.[20]

Despite his perspectives of Egypt and Persia from a more physically 'western' position, Herodotus' view of the East remained flexible and at times, contradictory. For example, Herodotus included individualized portrayals of Persian rulers such as Cyrus and his successors, Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes, while also focusing on a broader Persian character and opinion.[21] Although Herodotus could have made generalizations about Persia from his own perspective as a Greek, he made an effort to understand the cultures and people he wrote about. At the same time, Herodotus' prejudices towards those he spoke to seeped into his narrative. For instance, he consistently portrayed Xerxes as wrathful and uncompromising — a reflection of the overall Greek perceptions of Persian brutality. In one description, Xerxes had the body of the oldest son of Pythius of the Lydians cut in half because Pythius asked that his son stay in the city rather than join Xerxes in battle. Xerxes' troops proceeded to walk between the two halves of the corpse.[22] In another scene, Herodotus depicted Croesus as calling the Persians "unruly" and "without wealth."[23] While this is a stereotype, considering that Croesus was the King of Libya, it would be unfair to view his attitude towards the Persians as Orientalist.

Even beyond Herodotus, Homer, Aeschylus, and Xenophon, Ancient Greek and Roman receptions of the East were never fixed. Yet, the diversity in the perspectives of these authors alone left an East that was undefined and open to interpretation for later scholars studying classical writings. According to Toner, "the relationship between classics and the East was never stable, and indeed it was this very instability that made classics such a useful resource for writers seeking to portray the Orient to their audiences back home."[24] As Europe moved into the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and onward, these ancient texts took on meanings that their authors could no longer control; therefore, in the following epochs, the perception of a solid boundary between Orient and Occident took hold.

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[19] Herodotus in Bernal, *Black Athena*, 100.
[20] Suzanne Marchand, "Herodotus and the Idea of Western Civilization," (lecture, Freie Universität Berlin, October 18, 2022).
[21] Rosaria Vignolo Munson, "Who Are Herodotus' Persians?" *The Classical World* 102, no. 4 (2009): 457, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40599878.
[22] Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. George Rawlinson (Digireads.com Publishing, 2016), 7.38-7.39.
[23] Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.89.
[24] Toner, *Homer's Turk*, 11-12.

The European Invention of the Oriental 'Other'

From the Middle Ages onward, biblical scholarship motivated much of European interest in the Middle East and Asia. In 1907, Indologist Hermann Brunnhofer said, "the Bible is the book through which the world of the West, even in times of the most melancholy isolation, remains persistently tied to the Orient."[25] To Brunnhofer, the East and the West, although separate, remained connected through Christianity's Eastern origins. Before the Bible reached Western Europe, it was translated into Ancient Greek then into Latin, allowing classical Greece and Rome to maintain their positions as an intermediary between modern Western Europe and the Orient. Of course, the perceived threat of Islam, with its presumed barbary, despotism, and lustfulness, also provided Christian scholars motivation to study the East.[26] Accompanying Ancient Greece and Rome, the Bible also transgressed the false boundaries between East and West.

While the Bible continued to hold importance in European scholarship of the Orient, other motivations emerged during the Enlightenment as European imperialist endeavors and pursuits of more secular, 'rational' subjects grew. Throughout the following centuries, Orientalism moved beyond Near-Eastern biblical lands to India, Anatolia, and the Far East[27] and took on far more scientific characteristics, outside of the Bible.

While it is difficult to summarize individual motives for studying Eastern cultures, Marchand proposed that "what enabled the forming of new canons of scholarship and ultimately, though gradually, the breaking with traditional authorities and texts was unquestionably Europe's new economic and political status in the world."[28] Marchand also claimed that the 18th century saw a simultaneous neo-classical and Oriental renaissance, and scholars such as C.G. Heyne and Friedrich Schlegel contributed to scholarship in both fields. Although many scholars saw the boundary between East and West as firm, the coexistence of classical and Oriental studies breached that boundary. For example, in 1786 William Jones recognized Sanskrit as the ancestor of Greek, Latin, and modern European languages,[29] therefore emphasizing the similarities rather than the differences between classical Greece and Rome and the Orient. Despite the vague stance of the classics in relation to growing conceptions of an East/West binary, there was an idealizing stance among eighteenth and 19th-century scholars that the Orient, with its "simplicity, courage, charismatic leaders, and cultural autonomy," but also its effeminacy and barbarity, served as a foil to an increasingly rational Europe.[30] To many researchers, the ancient Orient was to be looked down upon, but also a time and place to have nostalgia for as one might have been expected to have nostalgia for Ancient Greece or Rome.

One of the most important pieces of scholarship on classics in the Enlightenment period was Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman*

[25] Brunnhofer in Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, xvii.
[26] Toner, *Homer's Turk*, 105.
[27] Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, 15.
[28] Ibid, 92.
[29] Ibid, 15.
[30] Ibid, 54.

Empire (1776). From the opening lines, Gibbon demonstrated a feeling of nostalgia for the Roman empire: "In the second century of the Christian Era, the empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind."[31] The idea of "civilized" Romans also shines through this first sentence and suggests a less-civilized "portion of mankind" to coincide with it. Gibbon also demonstrated an uncertain boundary between the classical world and the Orient in his discussion of the perceived corruption of Greek and Latin:

> The situation of the Greeks was very different from that of the barbarians. The former had long since been civilized and corrupted. They had *too* much taste to relinquish their language and too much vanity to adopt any foreign institutions. Still preserving the prejudices after they had lost the virtues of their ancestors, they affected to despise the unpolished manners of the Roman conquerors, whilst they were compelled to respect their superior wisdom and power.[32]

Although Gibbon upheld the idea of Greek superiority in the face of a "barbarian other" and the separation between Greek "civilization" and outside "barbarity," he also acknowledged that by the time Rome conquered Greece, Greece had come to occupy an uncertain space between barbarity and civilization. In coming to this conclusion, Gibbon strengthened the invented binary between East and West in the ancient world while also destroying it.

Gibbon ultimately fell into the trappings of his own time, in which the binary between East and West found strength in public discourse. Gibbon upheld stereotypes of the East as "barbaric" and of Ancient Greece and Rome as the epitome of Western civilization.

> Our education in the Greek and Latin schools may have fixed in our minds a standard of exclusive taste; and I am not forward to condemn the literature and judgment of nations, of whose language I am ignorant. Yet I *know* that the classics have much to teach, and I *believe* that the Orientals have much to learn: the temperate dignity of style, the graceful proportions of art, the forms of visible and intellectual beauty, the just delineation of character and passion, the rhetoric of narrative and argument, the regular fabric of epic and dramatic poetry. The influence of truth and reason is of a less ambiguous complexion. The philosophers of Athens and Rome enjoyed the blessings, and asserted the rights of civil and religious freedom. Their moral and political writings might have gradually unlocked the fetters of eastern despotism, diffused a liberal spirit of enquiry and toleration, and encouraged the Arabian Sages to suspect that their caliph was a tyrant and their prophet and imposter.[33]

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[31] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Washington D.C.: The Library of Congress, 1800), 27.

[32] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* 34.

[33] Gibbon in Toner, *Homer's Turk*, 127-128.

In this passage, Gibbon reflected his own background as an English writer during the height of British imperialism and the prevailing anti-Muslim sentiment. He also strengthened the false views of the "Orientals" as uneducated and in need of Western culture, which he claims began with Ancient Greece and Rome.

During the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, upper-class Europeans considered classics fundamental for a complete education. Despite differences in individual education, Toner pointed out that it was difficult for scholars to think outside of the education they were brought up with.[34] For example, Toner referenced George Sandys, who, in 1610, compared Ottoman Janissaries to "something in antiquity" and made allusions to Homer's Paris. For Sandys, "the Turk could be fully comprehended, and indeed made fully comprehensible, only as part of a landscape that stretched back to a mythical past."[35] Classics provided Sandys with a direction from which to approach the Ottoman Empire but at the same time limited his point of view to the narrow context of Ancient Greece and Rome. Once again, European reception of the classics bridged East and West while also fueling a fundamental sense of separation.

From the 17th century through the 19th century, classics served as an important entry point for Europeans who were interested in the Orient; however, the function of classics largely depended on the scholar. Even within each individual work, authors employed the mythic Greek and Roman past both to understand the East and to distance themselves from it.

From "The Orient" to "Orientalism"

In the decades following the Second World War, the study of the Orient faced its reckoning, and scholarship focused on Orientalism — or the historiography of the Orient — entered more frequently into academic circles. Many of the new outcries against Orientalism within the context of decolonization efforts challenged European hegemony. The most vocal critic of Orientalism was Said, who focused on Orientalism as a discourse and a "political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, us) and the strange (the Orient, the East, them)."[36] Scholars such as Anouar Abdel-Malek also criticized Orientalism as an ahistorical, imperialist tool.[37] Others such as Bryan S. Turner took a Marxist approach and considered Orientalism an "anachronism of the nineteenth-century imperial legacy." To abandon Orientalist perspectives, Turner argued, "the anthropological gaze should be directed towards the otherness of Western cultures to dislodge the privileged position of dominant Western cultures."[38]

Like their Orientalist predecessors, many scholars in Said's generation continued to link Orientalism with the classics. Said traced the myth of the Orient

[34] Toner, *Homer's Turk*, 6.
[35] Ibid, 4.
[36] Said, *Orientalism*, 45.
[37] Anour Abdel-Malek, "Orientalism in Crisis," In *Orientalism: A Reader*, edited by A.L. Macfie (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 47-53.
[38] Bryan S Turner, "From Orientalism to Global Sociology" In *Orientalism: A Reader*, edited by A.L. Macfie (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 372-373.

back to Ancient Greece and cited figures such as Homer, Herodotus, and Aeschylus as the original perpetrators of Orientalism.[39] He did not, however, question their positions as existing within a loosely-formed boundary between perceived Occident and Orient. Nevertheless, Said was critical in prompting Western scholars to think critically about their relationship with the East.

Unlike other scholars who assumed a divide between Orient and Occident, Said acknowledged that both entities are constructed and said that the Orient is not "merely *there*, just as the Occident itself is not just *there* either."[40] In this questioning of the existence of such categories, Said allows for breaches in the binary thought pattern that accompanies it. Said does admit, however, that although the Orient and Occident are constructed, they can be made real:

> As both geographical and cultural entities — to say nothing of historical entities — such locales, regions, geographical sectors as the "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other.[41]

While Said's assumptions that discourse about an Orient and Occident upholds their existence, he does not recognize that scholarship on the Orient was not a monolith. Rather, it was porous — one could travel through its holes, as I have shown with intellectuals such as Herodotus and Gibbon, to completely deconstruct the East/West binary. Nevertheless, Said prompted his readers to rethink the existence of an Orient.

While Said used Ancient Greece and Rome as the origin of Orientalism, Bernal denoted them as orientals themselves. He proposed a new method for studying classics that combines the narratives of Ancient Greece and Rome with those of the Middle East and Egypt, therefore denying European assumptions of primordial superiority in a Greek and Roman past. Bernal proposed two models for studying Ancient Greece: the "Aryan Model," which describes Greece as "essentially European or Aryan," and the "Ancient Model," which situates Greece "on the periphery of Egyptian and Semitic cultural area."[42] The "Aryan Model" was rooted in European prejudices towards the East that accompanied and framed 18th- and 19th-century imperialism and Orientalist scholarship.

Bernal advocated for a return to the "Ancient Model" with some revisions, including the recognition of northern influence on the development of Greek civilization.[43] In his criticism of the "Aryan Model," which continues to dominate Western perceptions of Ancient Greece, Bernal argued that, "the Ancient model had no 'internal' deficiencies, or weaknesses in explanatory power. It was overthrown for external reasons. For 18th- and 19th-century Romantics and

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[39] Said, *Orientalism,* 84, 21, and 52.
[40] Ibid*,* 4.
[41] Ibid, 5.
[42] Bernal, *Black Athena*, 1.
[43] Ibid, 2.

racists it was simply intolerable for Greece, which was seen not only as the epitome of Europe, but also as its pure childhood to have been the result of the mixture of native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites."[44] Bernal does not adequately address the progression of classical reception in post-renaissance Europe. Even his "Ancient" and "Aryan" models are too limiting to accurately describe European intellectual activity and ultimately feed a binary between the incorrect 'western' perspective and the eastern 'truth'. While he was correct in his assumption that most European classical scholars after the 19th century ignored the connections between Ancient Greece and the Near East, this certainly was not the case with all scholars. As Suzanne Marchand pointed out in a critique of *Black Athena*, "Bernal is certainly not alone in ignoring the interplay of external and internal forces on the study of the Ancient World."[45]

In their discussion about the relationship between the Near East and Greece, both Bernal and Said uphold their own sorts of east/west binaries. For Said, this binary begins with orientalism in Ancient Greece (which I have proven to be non-existent). Bernal places his binary in the European reception of the classical world (another misconception, given the coexistence of oriental scholars and classicists and the variety of individual European perspectives) .

Despite the contradictions in their arguments, Bernal and Said, joined by many other scholars, were instrumental in redefining the Orient and questioning European presumptions of the East and previous scholarship on the East. Their work in the 1970s and 1980s opened the possibility for future scholars to further deconstruct the imagined barrier between East and West and begin to investigate the space in between.

After Orientalism?

Forty-three years after the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, one might expect a slightly more deconstructed boundary between East and West than we currently have. Political turmoil in the Middle East — especially following the September 11 attacks in the United States — has further ostracized Europe and the United States. 21st-century prejudices of the Middle East and of Islam as 'barbaric,' 'authoritarian,' and 'violent' reflect the European perspectives in 18th- and 19th-century texts.

Although there has not been a large-scale breakdown of the concept of the Orient, scholarship has tended in that direction. For example, there have been ongoing discussions as historians, anthropologists, and philologists correct flaws in the works of Said and Bernal and fill in missing information. The main flaws that I see in the work of Said and Bernal are the lacking commentary on the modern reception of the connection between near eastern studies and classical studies and the scholarly progress that modern "orientalists" made. This is a gap that Suzanne Marchand fills in her books *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire* and *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany,*

[44] Bernal, *Black Athena*, 2.
[45] Suzanne Marchand and Anthony Grafton. "Martin Bernal and His Critics." *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 5, no. 2 (1997): 13.

1750-1970. In these works, Marchand rejects Said's Foucauldian model of discourse and instead prioritizes the particulars of the German intellectual environment by focusing on specific scholars. According to Marchand, "Like 'Hellas,' the 'Orient' and 'Germandom' were by no means fixed, stable concepts whose interrelationship, once demarcated in the late eighteenth century, remained preserved in imperialist or racist amber."[46] Unlike Bernal and Said, who largely ignore the instabilities of these ideas, Marchand confronts them. Her approach should be used as a model which preserves the authenticity of both classics and near eastern studies while also bringing the binary between modern understanding of Ancient Greece and the "Orient" into question.

Back to Pergamon: The Question of Memory

Dismantling the east/west binary in our own thinking about Ancient Greece and the near east will be difficult, but will ultimately help us gain a better understanding of the history surrounding it.

Returning to the Pergamon Altar can be useful in reorienting us to the past. The last few decades have seen discussion regarding the repatriation of artifacts in museums to their countries of origin. Many of the arguments for retention of these objects are made on the basis of "limited resources and political instability,"[47] such as in Syria and Iraq, which once again shows prevailing European ideas of non-European countries as dangerous. Despite these arguments, there have been greater efforts to work with countries from which the artifacts originate. Overall, the idea of repatriation has grown in favor as a tool for strengthening international relationships.[48] While there have been no discussions regarding the return of the Pergamon Altar to Turkey — logistical reasons being partly to blame — the Pergamonmuseum adopted a zero-acquisitions policy going forward. The adoption of this policy demonstrates changing attitudes regarding the ethics of European acquisitions of non-European antiquities.[49]

The Pergamon Altar carries with it memories of a mythological past, a Hellenistic past, a Western past, an Eastern past, a Turkish past — and, as it continues to stand in Berlin — a German past. Perhaps the altar's coexisting memories serve as a representation of Ancient Greece and the entire field of classics as being both here and there, whether that be the Orient or the Occident, and nowhere at all.

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[46] Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), xxii.

[47] Jack Green, "Museums as Intermediaries in Repatriation," *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies* 5, no. 1 (2017): 7, https://doi.org/10.5325/jeasmedarcherstu.5.1.0006.

[48] Green, "Museums as Intermediaries," 7.

[49] Green, "Museums as Intermediaries," 12.

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