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# MULTIPLE ANTIQUITIES – MULTIPLE MODERNITIES

*Ancient Histories in Nineteenth Century  
European Cultures*

campus

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# Introduction

## The Research Problem

European nations in the modern sense began to take shape at the end of the eighteenth century, and, even more so, in the nineteenth century. Existing theories link the invention of the nation primarily to two complementary processes: the modernization of European societies and the parallel historicization of the view of themselves, which developed in contrast to traditional, mainly religious views. The present volume is based on a perspective that stresses the plurality of developments and also analyses the processes through which these developments influenced one another. If the aim is to find elements that link European cultures to one another, these cannot be found at the level of contents, but rather within the diverse, often fraught regional and national interactions between the cultures.

The principal enquiry of the volume focuses on the various images of antiquities that have shaped European humanities since the end of the eighteenth century. As an initial examination reveals, the construction of Antiquity and Modernity had a fascinating impact upon each other in European societies. There was hardly any project on modernity that was not accompanied by images, representations and constructions of the past, just as, on the other side, there was hardly any reconstruction of Antiquity without reference to the projects of modernity and concepts related to the present or the future. The political history of the classical humanities and the social sciences is always presenting itself in a double embedment in visions of antiquity and modernity, the past and the future, which are articulated as if in continuous communication with each other.

Antiquity in this case implies first and foremost classical Greek and Roman antiquity, which was considered the origin and norm of European culture. Secondly, antiquity refers to a somewhat hazily defined “oriental past” with many versions, which chronologically preceded or normatively chal-

lenged classical antiquity. Various combinations of both notions of antiquity featured in nearly all European reconstructions of the past, which makes them ideal for a comparative analysis. One might add that some countries that did not have their own antique traditions to draw upon (in Northern and Eastern Europe) introduced “substitute” antiquities for the same purpose: archaic Celtic, Nordic, Germanic, Scythian traditions, or medieval, gothic, and used these “national” antiquities with similar intentions.

In the sixteenth century, Greco-Roman antiquity became the key cultural point of reference for Europe’s intellectual elites. The secular nature of antiquity was stressed and played out against the background of a purely Christian past. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the verification of the reference to classical tradition became the target of a number of scholarly undertakings. One outcome was the creation of new or the restructuring of existing academic institutions. Following the educational reforms, which took effect in most European states at the start of the nineteenth century (the origin of Germany’s modern humanistic gymnasiums), the classical reference became the main concern of bourgeois educational institutions. Classical antiquity was historicized without, however, losing its normative function. One of the distinguishing characteristics of this classical reference is the internal categorization into a Roman-Latin and a Greek component, which, depending on the country and historical situation could end up competing with each other. While scholars in many countries clung to Roman dominated concept of antiquity, others began to play off the Greek and Latin elements against each other. The lines of demarcation often ran straight through the national groupings. Even in a country like France, which was traditionally more drawn to Rome, strong references to Greece were constructed at the end of the eighteenth century and during the first half of the nineteenth challenging German and English “claims” to Greece. In Orthodox Eastern Europe, Greek antiquity assumed a supplementary importance derived—via Byzantium—from direct cultural ties.

As an alternative to Greek and Roman antiquity, counter-ideas of an oriental antiquity began to emerge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At least five main variants exist: First, Egypt, which was often seen as the predecessor of Greece, with its hermetic tradition. Yet it was also seen as a mystical counterpoint to Greek classicism. Second, India, which was considered the cradle of “Indo-European” civilization or the incarnation of the “other” orient. Third, a Jewish orient, which had separated itself from the Christian tradition since the middle of the eighteenth century and begun to

develop its own profile, allying itself to other oriental cultures, such as Babylonian and Assyrian. Furthermore, the Arabic orient emerged as a sub-variant, which, however, was only selectively and varyingly acknowledged, depending on the country in question (here we also have to take into account the situation in Spain and Portugal), and, finally, China, which also enjoyed a special status.

In a coordinated research agenda the studies collected in this volume set out to offer a detailed comparative examination on a European scale to discern the uses of antiquities in the long nineteenth century. They devote particular attention to an *histoire croisée* of appropriation, reinvention, academic classification, dissemination, and representation of antiquities in various fields of the emerging humanities and the broader public space.<sup>1</sup> What kinds of concepts of Antiquity were handed down and adopted by the various curriculum models and the educational institutions? How were they represented in school textbooks? How was “authentic” antiquity represented and displayed in museums of art and history? How did the restoration of architectural monuments, the presentation of archaeological finds, and tourism affect the social construction and dissemination of images of antiquity? What were the connections between the translation into modern languages of classical texts (Latin, Greek, Sanskrit and eventually Persian) and the development of national literary canons?

The point is to compare the appropriation of Antiquity as a heritage in its various forms and across national borders in order to understand the recurrent patterns of the transfer of cultural models.

## Focus Groups at Collegium Budapest— Institute for Advanced Study

The studies in this volume are the results of a decade-long series of collaborative research, animated by a series of Focus Groups. The whole enquiry was initiated by a group in the academic year of 1999/2000 dealing with *The Humanities in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, convened by Sally

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<sup>1</sup> For the concept of *histoire croisée* see Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 145–166.