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Advocating Ancient Equalities: Pluralizing "Antiquity" in Enlightened Universal History
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Advocating Ancient Equalities: Pluralizing "Antiquity" in Enlightened Universal

History

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Abstract: This article investigates the constructions of Hebrew, classical, and "Northern" antiquities put forward by an eighteenth-century network of Anglo-German scholars. It asks to what extent these constructions propose a cultural equality between these competing "antiquities", how such equality relates to the contemporaneous conception of universal history, and to what extent this development is driven by emancipatory tendencies within Enlightenment thinking. By discussing the changing approaches to Homer, Old Testament texts, and "early" European literature, the article relates the emergence of primitivism and Orientalism to Enlightenment historicism and an interest in the sublime, which produces a growing focus on the importance of authentic culture and the role of the bard–poet. By discussing the connections between the work of Joseph Trapp, Thomas Blackwell, Robert Lowth, and Thomas Percy on the one hand, and Johann David Michaelis, Christian Gottlob Heyne, Johann Jakob Bodmer, and Johann Gottfried Herder on the other, the article illustrates the significance in this context of newly emerging Anglo-German scholarly networks and illuminates lesser-known aspects of Anglo-German relations in the second half of the eighteenth century.

This essay investigates the constructions of Hebrew, classical, and "Northern" antiquities put forward by a mid-eighteenth-century network of Anglo-German scholars and asks to what extent these constructions propose a cultural equality between these competing "antiquities", how such equality relates to the contemporaneous conception of universal history, and to what extent this development was driven by emancipatory tendencies within Enlightenment thinking.[1] The essay also illustrates the significance in this context of newly emerging Anglo-

German scholarly networks, illuminating lesser known aspects of Anglo-German relations in the second half of the eighteenth century.

While these three antiquities were each conceived as culturally distinct, their constructions are based on shared features regarding their social and political set-up, their core value systems, and their poetry. Original ancient culture was assumed to be characterized by simplicity, authenticity, and faith, and to exist in a setting that was intermittently pastoral and war-torn. In all three constructions, great significance was attached to the figure of the "bard", who encoded a group's values, recorded their history, and guaranteed their identity by facilitating a shared culture. The similarity of the images of Homer, Moses, and Ossian below illustrates that the eighteenth-century definition of especially this figure had, from the end of the century, become firmly established across the three "antiquities". Especially noteworthy are the inspired bard's closed eyes, his outstretched arm gesturing skywards, and the outdoor setting in dramatic liminal landscape (the edge of the sea, mountains, and forest).

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Fig. 1: Jean-Baptiste Massard, *Blind Homer at the Edge of the Sea* (1816). Engraving, 56.3 x 40.6 cm, after the painting by François Gérard (1814). National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/50584/homer). Image licensed for non-commercial use.

Fig. 2: Nicolai Abraham Abildgaard, *Ossian's Swansong* (c. 1782). Oil on canvas, 42 x 35.5 cm. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. Image: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the public domain.

Fig. 3: Gustave Doré, *Moses coming down from Mount Sinai*. Engraving from his illustrations for *La Grande Bible de Tour* (1866). Image: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the public domain.]

These three conceptions of antiquity are formulated in competition with each other, each initially claiming to represent a superior poetry and to capture a more profound understanding of humanity in its relation to the world—before, by the end of the century, it was explicitly acknowledged that while *each* was rooted in its particular historical circumstances, all were *typical* early or "primitive" cultures and, as equivalents, equal. Hebrew antiquity was formulated as a counter to the established ideal of classical antiquity (in which primitivity was initially not foregrounded) on the grounds that Hebrew poetry was older than early Greek poetry and inspired by the creator of the world. Classical scholars reshaped Homer and his world in more a "primitive" mould that partook of this kind of original humanity. Northern antiquity was set up in analogy to both and in particular contrast to classical antiquity and based its superiority on representing the original specificity of post-classical (northern) European culture, which, as the direct parent of contemporary modern culture, was most relevant to modern audiences.

This competitive process of formulation produced a constant cross-fertilization of ideas, which created the structural type of original, ancient human culture that all three share. Historically, "antiquity" was invariably described as a cultural moment *just before* the development of complex social and cultural structures which would evolve, in their specificity, nourished from this original root. This aspect made cultural antiquity foundational and, at the same time, a counter to later, more complex structures, which were increasingly seen as hierarchical and decadent.

Specific antiquities and universal history

These conceptions derive from Enlightenment historicism, as it developed around 1700 from the *Querelle* (a dispute about quality and progress) and global exploration (resulting in discovering profoundly different cultures): progress has structural patterns and can be scientifically evidenced. Any claims of specificity, superiority, or appropriateness were based on historical investigations and material evidence, even when divine inspiration was involved. Thus research methodologies for inquiring into "antiquities" focussed on ancient textual sources and, from mid-century, the "field trip" to ancient sites and regions. Linking conceptions of ancient specificity with progress—*within one culture* (an ancient stage preceding a complex society and civilisation) and *between cultures* (forming part of a historical chain following this pattern)—makes possible combining the syntagmatic aspect of telling a chronological story of humanity with the paradigmatic aspect of defining specific stages of his process as recurring features of human development. A recurring sequence of events establishes a regular universal pattern that can still accommodate linear progress in the shape of a spiral of increasing knowledge or achievement, combining the chronological narrative of culture(s) with a paradigm of culture. Eighteenth-century universal history, or "world history", had these twin aspirations.[2] In this way, cultural specificity, made evident by global exploration, could be accommodated within a relatively normative concept of cultural development, both in grand narratives of cultural progress or as different stages of cultural development existing at the same time.

Antiquities and Enlightenment

The eighteenth-century concept of antiquity relies not only on historicist thinking but equally on the notion of the primitive. In combining these two interests it reflects three key intellectual shifts of the time. Philosophically, it reflects the increasing tendency to look to

history for answers, rather than to revealed religion or pure science. Aesthetically, it reflects the contemporary interest in the "sublime" with its focus on human sensibility and immediate emotional engagement, making an analytical case for the one-sidedness of reason. And politically, it reflects the growing concern about contemporary "decadence", leading to an interest in non-decadent, primitive, "early" culture that was seen as more communal and participatory than contemporary social structures. These three drivers represent the complex and interlinking emancipatory tendencies of the Enlightenment; they illustrate the extent to which the increasing interest in antiquities did not just prepare key aspects of Romantic thought but represented a culmination of Enlightenment thinking.

The focus on the authentic, indigenous, and participatory nature of ancient culture ultimately supports different aspects of social change, although not all implications of this were necessarily fully obvious to all interested in antiquity in the first half of the century. At the same time, it is important to note that this focus also paved the way for restrictive concepts of cultural purity, conservatism, and anti-progress. However, an authentic culture, which is shared by the whole community, has the *potential* to increase social and cultural equality. Because it is directly engaging—that is, not accessed through a learned, hierarchical apparatus of education—it lowers the barriers to social, cultural, and political engagement. The recognition that such communal culture is necessarily different in different places under different conditions, again, has the *potential* to tolerate cultural plurality (even if this tolerance is based on universal anthropological patterns, which are easily subverted in the name of superiority). While recognizing cultural diversity does not loosen the norms for cultural development (*all* true "antiquities" are communal and potentially culturally foundational), it does loosen the prescriptions for cultural content (Greek, Hebrew, and Northern antiquity have different settings and players). Against this background, the newly defined characteristics of "antiquity", offering the individual an experience of the sublime

and a share in the community, made them attractive for cultural, social, and even political

reformers.

Classical and Hebrew antiquities

The starting point for investigating the construction of "antiquity" that created the startlingly

similar images of the three prophet-bards above, is the *Querelle*, in particular its historical

perspective. This perspective underpinned both the position of the moderns as more

"advanced" in terms of civilisation and (non-pagan) religion and the developing *ancien*

position that was beginning to define the age of Homer as beautifully simple, a departure that

culminated in Mme Dacier's defence of Homer in 1711.[3] Her assessment of his genius and

his times was in line with the notion of the primitive, the cultural-political appreciation of the

early and youthful stage of a culture's development.

This redefinition of the "prince of poets" (Pope) of neoclassicism was paralleled by

the emergence of early eighteenth-century "Orientalism", which makes the case that the

oldest parts of the Bible are the products of a similarly early culture, Hebrew antiquity, which

was sanctified by its temporal proximity to the Creation.[4] A key site of defining Orientalism

was Oxford, following the creation of the professorship of poetry in 1708. Its first incumbent,

Rev. Joseph Trapp (1679–1747), endeavoured in his *Praelectiones Poeticae* to define the

nature of poetry by investigating its origin, the earliest extant poetry: the Old Testament. The

competitively comparative nature of treating "antiquities" is evident in Trapp's

Praelectiones, which showcases the original qualities of ancient Hebrew poetry in contrast to

later Greek derivations.[5] Relying on Vossius, he claims that poetry does not originate in

ancient Greece, instead "the People of God, the first inhabitants of the World […] have the

best Title to this Honour", because

poetry flourished among the Israelites, not only before the Trojan War, but before the

coming of Cadmus to Boeotia, who first taught the Greeks the use of Letters. […]

[T]he Antiquity of Music would teach us that the Origin of Verse must be owing to

the Oriental Nations; […] Singing begun [sic] in the very Infancy of the World.[6]

The first volumes of his Latin lectures appeared in 1711, the same year as Mme Dacier's

Iliade.

For Trapp, the superiority of Hebrew poetry lies in the power of its language, which

results from the "inspired" state of its poets and establishes a close relation with the sublime:

If in the Poems of Job, and David, and other sacred Authors, we observe the

inexpressible Sublimity of their Words and Matter, their elegant and more than human

Descriptions; the happy Boldness of their Metaphors, the spiritual Ardour breathing

Heaven and winging the Souls of their Readers up to it, triumphing, as it were, by

royal Authority, over the narrow Rules of mortal Writers, it is impossible but we must

in Transport own, that nothing is wanting in them, that might be expected from the

Strength of Poetry heighten'd by the Energy of Inspiration.[7]

Trapp follows up on ancient Greek derivativeness ("the Grecians receiv'd their learning from

the Nations of the East") by suggesting that they borrowed the pastoral from the Song of

Solomon[8] and the ode from "Jews and Phoenicians". "Eastern Eloquence abounded not only

with Metaphors, and bold Hyperboles, but in long Digressions, as is sufficiently evident from

the Sacred Writings."[9] These "digressions" are important. Trapp explicitly identifies the

"lyrical" as the key original quality of poetry, which is linked to music.[10] This allows

freedom from (artificial and unnatural) rules: the "chief Property of lyrical Poetry" is that "it

abounds with a Sort of Liberty which consists in Digressions and Excursions", reflecting the

"internal Motions of the Soul". Hence "it will seem very probable that Poetry […] owes its

Rise to Nature herself, and was therefore join'd with Music. We have no instance of Poetry older than the celebrated Song, or Ode, of Moses."[11]

For Trapp, this kind of poetry has the power to transport its audience beyond a restrictive reality in which time inexorably moves away from an original (sacred) moment of beginning. Its language, like music, is capable of breaking through the barriers of order set by sequential time and gravitational space.[12] Hence he considers lyrical poetry the most original and, within the lyrical genre, the ode its supreme specimen.

Hebrew poetry possesses a language that triggers experiences of the sublime due to its historical proximity to the Creation. Facilitating such experiences came to occupy a key position in the eighteenth-century exploration of the function of art, art's relation to nature, and the definition of taste within the new discipline of aesthetics. Experiencing the sublime results from an exposure of the senses to a grandeur that overwhelms human reason and can only be expressed by poetic metaphor, not rational argument. Such experiences were linked to a religiously charged state or anthropologically primordial human condition. In practice, the sublime experience was facilitated by the awe inspired by the power of nature (dramatic natural processes, imposing landscapes) or the presence of divinity (sudden epiphanies or ecstatic experiences), or both in combination. This is clearly suggested in the images above.

While Trapp links the sublimity of such experiences to revealed religion, it is only a small shift to associate them, and their "antiquity", with any early culture inhabiting a world controlled by natural or divine forces. In either scenario, the language this experience produces and the poetic metaphors it inspires were thought to retain this awe-inspiring quality and were considered a truthful expression of a key and universal human experience.

A key mediator of the sublime was the inspired poet who is in touch with these great forces. Trapp begins his lectures by proposing that inspired poets repeat the divine act of creation in their imagination and suggests that this is why in antiquity poets and prophets

were frequently indistinguishable. He concludes that "those Books that have the greatest Sanction from Time […] have been dictated by God, or writ by Poets. […] Nay, why should we make this Difference between the Sacred Writers and Poets, since the sacred Writers were most of them Poets."[13]

The role of the "Bard"

The role of this "Oriental" poet–prophet is strongly communal, it entails creativity and leadership. Ancient Hebrew poetry, it seems, furnishes particularly evident examples of prophet–seers inspired by god and sanctified by the antiquity of the Old Testament. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the religious aspect of the Hebrew prophet–poet, the *nabi*, as purveyor of sacred insights, ensured poetic quality and divinely sanctioned truth. This concept of the sacred poet, inspired by higher forces and expressing his insights in a quasi-musical mode, is crucial for the emerging notion of the "bard".

A word of Celtic extraction, "bard" became an accepted rendering of the ancient Greek term *AOIDOS*, which was generally translated as "singer". In the course of the century, "bard" became a standard term in most modern European languages to describe inspired prophet–poets who (used to) communicate sacred truths and record the acts of humans (or their people), linking the communication of a historical narrative and normative truths, the two key aspects of the project of universal history and of the modern understanding of myth.

These newly prominent bard-qualities became attached to Homer as well as the Northern bards, of whom "Ossian" was the most influential among a range of North European contenders. *Nabi*, *AOIDOS*, *bard*, and *scald* were thought to occupy the same, and largely equal, positions in their respective early cultures. That the redefinition of Homer along these lines was supported by orientalist ideas has so far been little studied.

Within the context of emerging primitivism and Enlightenment historicism, Thomas Warton the Elder (c. 1688–1745) and Joseph Spence (1699–1768), who succeeded Trapp as Professors of Poetry at Oxford, developed further the notion of inspired early poetry. For them, Hebrew poetry remained the earliest example of this.[14] Spence, it seems, created the term "orientalism". It appears in his *Essay on Mr. Pope's Odyssey* (1726), a dialogic discussion of Pope's translation in which two fictitious (Greek) friends discuss the "nature of Homer",[15] going head to head on neo-classicism and the new primitive-sublime. "Orientalism", "a new Word, where we have no old one to my Purpose",[16] occurs in the context of describing the inspired poet's prophetic nature, when the "neo-classicist" friend acknowledges that Homer's epic also contains "the True Sublime" because it features a metaphorical language drawn from nature that is usually prevalent in biblical texts, sharing "that Eastern way of expressing [for example] Revolutions in Government by Confusion or Extinction of Light in the Heavens". In choice passages Homer comes close to "those noble Passages in holy Scripture".[17]

The link between "antiquity", including its foundational nature in cultural development, and the role of bards as true purveyors of this culture was worked out by Thomas Blackwell (1701–1757) in his *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735). Blackwell held the chair of Greek at Marischal College in Aberdeen. The *Enquiry* is a seminal text in the Enlightenment historicist study of culture: it went into at least three subsequent editions and by the end of the century had achieved canonical status among those interested in the historical role of cultural antiquity and "antiquity's" function for meaningful and relevant contemporary culture.[18] Blackwell influenced the Ossian-creator James Macpherson, who studied at Aberdeen at the end of Blackwell's tenure, the influential Zurich circle around Johann Jakob Bodmer, and Johann Gottfried Herder.

The *Enquiry*, based on extant historical sources, is an effort to explain why Homer was such an accomplished and affecting poet despite originating in a primitive cultural context. Unlike Trapp, Blackwell could not deploy divine inspiration to dignify Homer's pagan antiquity, but he also took up primitivism and orientalism to show that Homer's excellence was not due to random chance, but the result of his historical cultural context combined with this talents.

Employing Enlightenment historicism and Enlightened cultural anthropology, the *Enquiry* proposes that Homer is shaped by the specific historical moment when primitive early culture develops the first forms of civil society. It is still warlike, authentic, and uncorrupted, but no longer barbaric. This condition moulds its language and manners, shapes humans experience, and in the right hands produces poetry that communicates "truth" easily and movingly:

> The Fortunes, the Manners, and the Language of a People are all linked together, and necessarily influence each other. In most of the Greek Cities, Policy and Laws were but just a forming […]: They lived naturally, and were governed by the natural Poise of the Passions, as it is settled in every human breast. This will make them speak and act, without other Restraint than their own native Apprehensions of Good and Evil, Just and Unjust […]. These Manners afford the most natural Pictures, and proper Words to express them. While a Nation continues simple and sincere, whatever they say has Weight and Truth. […] Their Passions […] break out in their own artless Phrase and unaffected Stile. […] We feel the Force of their Words and the Truth of their Thoughts.[19]

While Blackwell, like Pope and the orientalists before him, calls Homer a "poet", he *presents* him as *AOIDOS*, which he consistently translates as "bard".[20] Homer belongs to "a Set of

Men, who distinguished themselves by Harmony and Verse" and combined the professions of historian, philosopher, scientist, and priest in the role of the inspired singer:[21]

> Who has it in his Power to charm our Ears, entertain our Fancies, and instruct us in the History of our Ancestors; who informs his wond'ring Audience of the secret Composition, and the hidden Harmony of the Universe, or the Order of the Seasons, and Observation of Days, such a Man cannot miss of Esteem and Attention: But if he adds a Sanction to his Doctrine and Art; if he pretends "That he is under the Direction of the Gods; that he describes their Natures, announces their Names and Decrees; that he does this by their imminent Orders, and then leads the way himself to the new Devotion;" he must needs become the Object of their Admiration and Reverence.[22]

As Blackwell could not easily argue for divine inspiration in the utterances of a pagan Grecian, he uses the term "pretend" but implies as much sanctity and divine inspiration for the Bardic Homer as possible. Quoting the historian and geographer Hecataeus of Miletus (c. 500 BCE), he points out that bards sang of the "Deeds of Gods and Men" to "Mortals and Immortals".[23] Blackwell closes this chapter with lines from the *Odyssey* which suggest that the Homeric *AOIDOS felt* divinely inspired: "A Bard, […] Untaught by others, in my Mind I bear, / By God himself implanted, all the Strains / Of Melody and Verse."[24] So in *his own* context, the ancient Greek bard was a prophet, "a Bard, with him, is Divine, Prophetick, most venerable […]; he sings from the Gods [...] he never begins to sing until he feels the Stirrings of this Mind and hath the Permission of his Muse."[25] Blackwell then enlists the testimony of a "wise Philosopher", "That God […] uses [the Poets] as his Ministers, Sooth-Sayers and holy Prophets, to make us, the Hearers, know."[26] The resulting type of poetry is not only linked to music, but also natural, original, and free: "in Greece, where Nature was obstructed in none of her Operations; and no Rule or Prescription gave a check to Rapture and Enthusiasm".[27] The Greek *AOIDOS* was an inspired "Genius",[28] whose effect was as

powerful as a prophet's: "Like some powerful Magician, he points his Rod, and Spectres rise

to obey his Call: Nay, so potent is his Spell, that hardly does the Enchantment vanish; it is

built upon Truth […] His Work is the great Drama of Life acted in our View."[29]

Homer is exceptional and predictable at the same time, he is outstanding, but lived in

favourable times.

Competition between "antiquities" was never far. Blackwell contrasts the natural

artistic "liberty" of the inspired bard, which the "orientalist" Trapp has also championed, with

the "Poetry and Allegory of the Egyptians [which] was […] bounded and prescribed by

Law".[30] Here Blackwell rejects the "orientalist" thesis that the Greeks learnt almost

everything from the Orient: "Grecian Character" and all that flows from it "was formed upon

no borrowed Model".[31] Blackwell makes Homer the equal of the Old Testament prophet–

poets. This equality will become the springboard for the bard of Northern Antiquity to take

his place in the triumvirate of ancient poets in the above picture gallery.

Orientalism, notwithstanding, develops apace. The claim that Eastern origins lie at the

heart of the finest poetry and the truest poetic practice was vigorously promoted by the Bible

scholar Robert Lowth (1710–1787), a friend of Spence's, who succeeded the latter as

Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1741. In his influential lectures on the ancient poetry of the

Hebrews (*De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum*), delivered between 1741and 1750 and published in

1753, Lowth concurs with Trapp that the Old Testament furnishes "the first and choicest

specimen of poetic taste",[32] and fleshes out the ideas surrounding the antiquity, sanctity, and

sublimity of Hebrew poetry, providing in the process a new universal yardstick:

> The sacred poetry is undoubtedly entitled to the first rank in this school, since from it
>
> we are to learn both the origin of art, and how to determine its excellence. […] Here
>
> we may contemplate poetry in its very beginning; not so much the off-spring of

human genius, but an emanation from Heaven, but from its birth possessing a certain

maturity both of beauty and strength.[33]

Unlike neo-classical models, this one aims at sublimity based on sensibility. It relies on

inspired, "natural" (rather than studied) creativity, it surpasses rationality, and is independent

of civilized polish. "Is it not probable that the first effort of rude and unpolished verse would

display itself in praise of the Creator, and flow almost involuntarily from the enraptured

mind?"[34] Although Lowth makes a distinction between the divinely inspired poetry of the

Hebrews ("the sublimer poetry of the Hebrews […] boasts a much higher origin"), he still

links the inspired fervour of "true poetic enthusiasm" to all poetic inspiration: "This species

of enthusiasm I should distinguish by the term *natural*".[35]

For Lowth, too, Hebrew poetry's supremacy rests on its extraordinary language,

which, again, derives from its antiquity and the sanctity conferred by (divine) inspiration. In

its oldest form, "poetry […] appears to be co-eval with the commencement of religion or […]

with the Creation of Man".[36] Throughout the lectures, Hebrew language is consistently

described as "strong" and "forceful". This produces the "sublime" effect that agitates the

"secret" imaginative operations of the mind and produces an immediate response from the

senses. Again, a key feature is the language's "simplicity", which is really a form of

concretization—through metaphors, allegories, similes, personification[37]—drawn from real,

and primitive, life, "borrowed from the most obvious or familiar objects".[38] Again, lyric

poetry and the ode are presented as exponents of this poetry, along with prophecy. In this

context, the ancient bard-figure appears by his Hebrew name *nabi*. For the ordained Lowth

this word is "ambiguous": it "equally denoted a prophet, a poet, or a musician, under the

influence of divine inspiration".[39]

Apart from identifying the "parabolic" style, Lowth's fame rests on his discovery of

the rhetorical device of parallelism in Biblical poetic texts, which balances opposites and

contrasts to produce order in complexity. Its dialogic structure, the "responsive form", involves, or prepares, communal participation. As with Homer, the excellence of Hebrew poetry rests in its rootedness in a specific culture and cultural moment, which, Lowth fears, can be hard to access in a highly civilized age. The rivalry between Greek and Hebrew antiquity surfaces here too. It is not easy "to assign a reason, why the writings of Homer, Pindar, and Horace engross our attention and monopolize or praise, while those of Moses, David, and Isaiah pass totally unregarded."[40] Although the "fabulous ages of Greece" and its "polished people" have produced "most finished productions", these are younger and less sublime.[41] Yet Lowth still puts them on a comparative footing (of equality): "Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel […] hold the same rank among the Hebrews as Homer, Simonides, and Aeschylus among the Greeks".[42]

At the heart of Lowth's endeavour lies a social critique, which surfaces initially as a contradiction. His contemporaries can barely grasp the sublimity and superiority of Hebrew poetry because they mistake its simplicity and cultural primitivism as inappropriate and rude, lacking in civilization, education, and understanding. And yet this kind of poetry does not just mark a particular point in human cultural development, it should be reinstated as a universal model. Its sublimity is presented as arising from a universal human experience based on human sensibility and linked to the activity of the human imagination. And as such Lowth proffers it as a model for better, truer, more sublime modern poetry.

The underlying competition is based on the very similarity that is established between the (primitive) ancient poetry of Homer and Hebrews: both are "natural", have an inspired origin, are shaped by a primitive cultural context, and share a powerful language. While Lowth's key ideas were prepared by Trapp and Spence, mid-century Lowth had the greater impact on the understanding of "antiquity" than his predecessors, both in Britain and in Germany.

Northern antiquity

Lowth's impact is evident in Thomas Percy's work. Percy (1729–1811) was well placed to build on Blackwell and Lowth. He studied classics and Hebrew at Oxford from the late 1740s, so may have heard Lowth's lectures, which, in any case, he knew well.[43] In 1765 Percy made corresponding claims for the sublimity and cultural antiquity of Northern bards and Scalds in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, a collection of early modern ballads and songs that has rightly been called "a seminal, epoch-making work of English Romanticism",[44] except it was probably no less influential in Germany.

In his "Essay on the Ancient Minstrel", which accompanied the collection, Percy seeks to establish the descent of the medieval and early modern minstrel, whom he sees as the originators of the pieces he is publishing, from the more ancient "British bard" and "Danish scald". The latter possessed sacred grandeur as they (were thought) to descend from Odin himself:

> The Minstrels seem to have been the genuine successors of the ancient Bards, who under different names where admired and revered, from the earliest ages, among the peoples of Gaul, Britain, Ireland, and the North; and indeed by all inhabitants of Europe, whether of Celtic or Gothic race; but by none more than our own Teutonic ancestors, particularly by all the Danish tribes. Among these they were distinguished by the name of Scalds.[45]

On the cover of *Reliques*, which was reproduced on many of its subsequent editions, Percy programmatically suggests in Latin that "Durat Opus Vatum" ("the work of the bards endures"). Significantly, he chooses a quotation from Ovid that speaks of *vates*,[46] (sages/prophets/priest–poets) rather than *poetae*.[47]

The strong comparative dimension of eighteenth-century research into antiquities is also evident in Percy's interests and publications. Trained in classics and Hebrew, he worked on both Hebrew and Northern "antiquities", publishing translations of the *Song of Solomon* in 1764 and *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* in 1763. At this time, the Middle Ages were becoming established as the foundational culture of modernity that hovered at the critical point between the primitive and civilised. Percy alludes to the medieval on the cover of *Reliques*, which features a gothic ruin behind a bard's lyre, thus gesturing at the cultural origin of his particular *vates*.

A seminal English text that makes the case for the Middle Ages as the foundational period of modern culture was Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, published three years before Percy's *Reliques*. Hurd proposes not just the importance but the moral and aesthetic superiority of Gothic-Northern culture (encapsulated in chivalry and romance) over classical culture. Its "improved gallantry" awakened "gentler and more human affections", which was supported by "a superior solemnity of their superstition" (Christianity). "The gallantry […] furnish[ed] the poet with finer scenes and subjects of description […] than the simple and uncontrolled barbarity of the Grecian". Hurd realised that for the feudal and Catholic "Gothic" times to be reconsidered, they needed to be equal to Homer's "heroic" times. To achieve this he deploys the structural uniformity of antiquity. Comparing the world depicted in the Homeric epics with that of the crusades described in medieval epics, he concludes that they closely resemble each other.[48]

The sublime, captured in a powerfully poetic language, and a shared communal culture, with the bard as its creator-mediator, have emerged as the key aspects of "antiquity's" cultural significance. Just as Percy and Hurd were making their cases for a Northern antiquity, James Macpherson (1736–1796) presents a bard–seer of Northern extraction to a highly receptive audience: Ossian. *Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in*

the Scottish Highlands, *Fingal*, and *Temora* appeared in 1760, 1761, and 1763 respectively, followed by the *Works of Ossian* in 1765. The phenomenal success of these poems across Europe partly rested on the belief that Ossian's epics were genuine Dark Age Gaelic poetry rather than Macpherson's recreations of early modern fragments. Nevertheless, even "recreated", Ossian may have done more than any other work to establish the relevance of "ancient" European culture for a modern identity to modern audiences.

Macpherson's poems, Hurd's *Letters*, and Percy's *Reliques* reinforced each other in the first half of the 1760s. They established a Northern antiquity that they considered *at least* equal in cultural quality and status to both Hebrew and classical antiquity. All three suggest that this antiquity forms the gloriously "primitive" stage of their own culture when Christianity and a martial culture are blending together. For their construction of this antiquity, all three rely on a comparative framework: Ossian's world was modelled on a cultural context the conception of which had emerged from a tussle for cultural superiority among classical and biblical scholars. The results of their competitve comparisonswere a new concept of what is valuable in culture (communality, immediacy, non-decadence) and in cultural development, and a new role for the poet.

Transnational lines of enquiry: Britain and Germany

The key texts in this development, by Blackwell, Lowth, Percy, and Macpherson, had an intensive German reception. They played an important role in inaugurating a period of intense literary and intellectual activity in Germany, beginning in the 1760s, which shaped the concepts of antiquity and history that dominated nineteenth-century thinking.

The following will briefly outline the key paths this reception took in the middle decades of the eighteenth century and how it shaped the German understanding of antiquity in its Greek, Hebrew, and Northern forms. The significance of British sources for the later

German Enlightenment, the *Sturm und Drang*, and other early Romanticisms does not need reiterating. The following adds more detail to this trend and, in a new departure, points out that already from the 1760s intellectual traffic also began to run in the opposite direction. The networks show how quickly British scholars recognised the significance of the new work by their German disciples. Before coming to Herder, I will focus on Michaelis, Heyne, and Bodmer.

Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791), orientalist at Göttingen, sought to advance the understanding of Hebrew antiquity by investigating and reconstructing the ancient Hebrew language in order to better understand the Old Testament. His interest was broadly philological, but based on a "culturalist" approach that sought to draw on historical, geographical, and anthropological information to reconstruct the ancient culture in which the ancient Hebrew texts were embedded.[49] His prize essay *Beantwortung der Frage von dem Einfluss der Meinungen in die Sprache und der Sprache in die Meinungen* (1758/1760) together with *Beurtheilung der Mittel, welche man anwendet, die ausgestorbene Hebräische Sprache zu verstehen* (1757) established this approach. It reduces the significance of divine inspiration and utilises the primitivist approach to antiquity in classical and Hebrew studies, pioneered by Mme Dacier, Blackwell, and Lowth. While Michaelis does not deny the divine origin of the Bible, he was more interested in establishing the *ancient* features of its oldest parts by analysing its language and the culture that had shaped it. His later *Mosaisches Recht* (1770–1771) is based on Montesquieu's approach to the reciprocity of laws and culture. Interested in increasing empirical information, Michaelis was a key instigator and the academic lead of a Danish-financed Eastern expedition (1761–1767) led by Carsten Niebuhr and Peter Fosskal. This (only partially successful) research trip aimed to investigate "on location" the cultural context of the Near and Middle East by addressing a catalogue of queries drawn up by Michaelis.

Michaelis was directly influenced by Lowth. Before being appointed at Göttingen in 1745, he left Halle in the spring of 1741 for an eighteenth-month journey via the Netherlands to Britain, where he spent the better part of a year, mainly in London, staying with Friedrich Ziegenhagen, the German pastor (*Hofprediger*) of the Hanovarian court of St James.[50] During an extended visit to Oxford, he was impressed by the lectures of the newly appointed Lowth. At the end of his life, he expressed deep regret about not meeting Lowth in person, who "could have become my closest friend in England".[51] The lack of a personal encounter, however, did not stop the two men from forming a close professional relationship. In 1758–1762 Michaelis edited, with extensive additions, Lowth's *Praelectiones* for the German market. His additions tended to be reprinted in subsequent editions and were included in the English translation of *Praelectiones* in 1787. In 1770 Michaelis asked Lowth to intervene on his behalf in British debates by correcting the erroneous report that the English translation of his 1759 Prize Essay had been approved by the author, which Lowth duly did.[52]

In turn, Michaelis became well known in England, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1789. Percy was well aware of him; in the preface to his *Key to the new Testament* (1766), a historical and cultural exposition of the "Books, their Contents and their authors and of the times, places and occasion on which they were respectively written", he acknowledges his debt to "Mr Professor Michaelis of his Majesty's university of Gottingen [sic]" and his *Einleitung in die göttlichen Schriften des Neuen Bundes* (1750), which had appeared, anonymously translated, in London in 1761.[53]

Similar, but not identical, ideas about the nature of the language and culture of early *classical* antiquity were put forward in Germany by the classicist Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812), who from 1763 was Professor of Poetry and Rhetoric at Göttingen and Michaelis's colleague. Like Blackwell, Lowth, and Michaelis himself, Heyne sought to explain the *natural* emergence of language and culture through philological, historical,

anthropological, and aesthetic explorations of antiquity.[54] His posthumous fame rests on making Göttingen's university library the first modern research library by introducing a ground-breaking acquisition and referencing system, and his work on the *sermo mythicus*, a term he coined to describe the language of early Greek antiquity. According to Heyne, the earliest human conceptual speech is metaphorical and parabolic in its conceptualization of the world owing to a lack of developed rational faculties. Understanding and interpreting this key linguistic–philosophical aspect of human language and history will shed light on this early stage of human culture. Dealing with a pagan antiquity, Heyne was not hamstrung by revealed religion when discussing early language; "oldest" here simply meant most primitive, which explains its properties. Although Heyne was fascinated by this cultural stage, he does not suggest that forms of primitivism are ways forward for modern culture. For him, it is a (past) stage in cultural history, a chapter both in universal history and within different cultural contexts.

Heyne must have been interested in British research. Looking at his 1764 list of typical linguistic or rhetorical devices in *sermo mythicus*, one notes simile, metaphor, allegory, personification[55]—all features that Lowth had identified as typical of ancient Hebrew poetry. If Heyne had not read Lowth before he arrived in Göttingen in 1763, he would have become aware of him then because his new colleague Michaelis, with whom he developed a close professional relationship, had just finished editing Lowth's lectures (1762).

It is likely that Heyne had read Blackwell early on in his research career. He prominently refers to the *Enquiry* in 1770,[56] but he would have had access to this volume and Blackwell's *Letters concerning Mythology* (1748) much earlier. Following his studies at Leipzig in 1748–1752, Heyne spent the decade before his appointment at Göttingen in 1763 in Dresden. According to its catalogue, Dresden University Library, an institution he frequented,[57] holds the original editions of the *Enquiry* and *Letters* as well as the 1736 edition

of the *Enquiry*, so it is not unreasonable to assume that these books were available to him in the 1750s. Heyne probably had sufficient English to read the originals; in 1785 he translated and edited volume V of William Guthrie's and John Gray's *History of the World* (1765–1767). Blackwell would also have come up in Heyne's conversations with his friend Herder, who was reading Blackwell in the late 1760s.

Someone who read Blackwell very closely was Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698–1783), the Zurich-based teacher, historian, writer, and critic. Bodmer is best remembered for initiating the discovery of the thirteenth-century version of the *Nibelungenlied* and for his influence on writers of "pre-Romantic" sensibilities, especially those with an interest in historicist approaches to literature and culture and an appreciation of the sublime. In the 1760s and 1770s Klopstock, Wieland, Haller, Fuesli, and Goethe all visited him in Zurich.

Bodmer was the same age as Spence (born 1699) and Blackwell (born 1701), and Anglophile: he translated Milton's *Paradise Lost* and founded a short-lived but influential periodical that was based on Addison's *Spectator* (*Discourse der Mahlern*). In his 1743 essay "Von den vortrefflichen Umständen für die Poesie unter den Kaisern aus dem schwäbischen Hause", Bodmer relies heavily on Blackwell's *Enquiry* to make the case that the twelfth and thirteen centuries in Germany provided ideal conditions for ancient epic poetry. Paraphrasing Blackwell extensively,[58] Bodmer, who acknowledges his debt to the anonymous author of the *Enquiry*, argues that the cultural and historical conditions in medieval Germany were so similar to the world of Homer (as Blackwell described it) that similar poetry *must* have flourished. He uses Blackwell's definition of Greek antiquity as a blueprint to establish the necessary existence of another antiquity in a different cultural context and historical period, rather as Hurd was to do in *Chivalry and Romance* twenty years later. Bodmer suggests that the "Middle Ages" are a post-classical, European or Northern. His hypothesis was confirmed when the *Nibelungen* manuscript, which he proceeded to edit, was unearthed in 1757.

Bodmer's influence on at least two generations of German writers is well established. It is captured by one of his former pupils, the Zurich-born painter and elective Briton Johann Heinrich Füssli, anglicized as Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), who visited his old teacher in 1778 and commemorated his visit, and Bodmer's role in his life, in the painting shown in Figure 4. The concept of the bard was probably more than just a conversational topic, as the towering figure in the background suggests.

[**INSERT HERE:** Fig. 4: Henry Fuseli, *The Artist and J. J. Bodmer in Conversation* (1778–1781). Oil on canvas, 163 x 150 cm. Kunsthaus Zurich. Image: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the public domain.]

One of the writers who investigated all three antiquities comparatively and in whose work all the strands of enquiry discussed here come together is Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). Herder had read Blackwell, Lowth, Percy, and Ossian by the late 1760s and found them deeply inspiring. His British reading fits into the Anglophile context that underpins, from the 1730s and 40s (Bodmer, Michaelis), the German conceptualization of antiquities and their function in cultural history outlined here. Herder's impact on the next generations of German writers and thinkers is well acknowledged. This essay presents him, as the youngest of the writers discussed here, as the beneficiary of those preceding him, galvanizing their work into a mix that contributes to the base from which many "romanticisms" grew.

Herder drew on the above writers to develop his concept of *Volkspoesie*, a communally shared and relevant literature that encouraged public spirit and cultural participation. He used the comparative equality of antiquities and their notion of a communal past to develop a

concept of literature that could inspire a contemporary culture that was accessible and relevant.

Herder developed Lowth's ideas in *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (that is, the Old Testament) (1774–1776) and *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie* (1782–1783). He opens the latter with a reverential reference: "Everyone knows the beautiful and much praised book on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews by Bishop Lowth."[59] Lowth's parallelism features prominently in Herder's book, but in his preface he moves on quickly to set out his own stall: "neither his [Lowth's] translator nor his imitator", he will investigate Hebrew poetry as ancient *poetry* and a source of historical information about antiquity, which is to enlighten his readers regarding the nature of humanity, based on its history from its origins.[60] In the following, he presents Hebrew poetry as an example of *Volkspoesie*, based on three elements that make clear the intellectual heritage of this concept. In powerful poetic language, it contains the Hebrews' original ideas ("Urideen") of the world and their history from the (earliest) legislator onwards. In this way it has evolved into a communal poetry of the people ("Hirten- und Landespoesie"); it was given voice by their prophets and expressed their sacred beliefs, thus had relevance and impact ("Wirkung").[61]

Herder had defined his concept over ten years earlier in "Briefwechsel über Oßian und die Lieder alter Völker" (1772/1773) in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*.[62] Key in Herder's concept of ancient poetry was, unsurprisingly, the *AOIDOS*:

> In ancient times, poets, scalds, learned men [Gelehrte] knew best how to join this sureness and strength of expression with dignity, melody, and beauty; thus they firmly linked soul and mouth and did not confuse but supported each other: in this way the aoidoi , singers, bards, minstrels, who were the greatest poets of the most ancient times, created what appear to us as half miracles. Homer's rhapsodies and Ossian's songs are both impromptus because impromptus were all anyone then knew. The

minstrels were the last in this line, albeit weak and late, […] until eventually art came and extinguished nature.[63]

Inspiration is not necessarily divine, or dependent on revealed religion, nor should it be dismissed as over-excited fancy or linked to cultural refinement and education. It is a natural human energy that generates poetry rooted in concrete cultural experience:

It is common to pass off the leaps and throws of such [ode-like] pieces as the madness of oriental heat, as the enthusiasm of the prophetic spirit, or as the pretty leaps of art in the ode. And a glorious theory of the ode regarding its plan and leaps has been spun. Here I let a cold Greenlander speak straight from the full images of his imagination, […] without heat and prophetic spirit or theory of odes.

Herder proceeds to present Greenland-themed folk poetry based on a contemporary source and equates this with the poetry of the Old Testament.[64] With this he provides an example of an equivalent Northern culture of concrete age-old "natural" poetry, the simplicity of which continues to be favoured by ordinary people. One of his key resource books for other examples is Percy's *Reliques*, or the "Dodsleiischen *Reliques*", as he calls it.[65] Hans Dietrich Irmscher has suggested that Herder's term *Volkslied* is his translation of Percy's "popular song" he found in the *Reliques*.[66]

For Herder, it seems almost immaterial whether inspiration is divine or not; if there is revelation, humans will most likely respond to it with spontaneous poetry. Cultures are diverse in their concrete manifestation, but the concrete in poetic language, which speaks to the senses and the imagination, is universally a culture's most powerful and most easily understood form of expression, because it only requires a shared cultural context, a 'shared imagination' [diesselbe Einbildung], as Herder put it, not academic study:

The Greenlander follows the finest laws of the elegy. […] Who has taught him these? […] If they are rooted in the imagination, […] for whom who shares this imagination

would they be difficult to grasp? […] All the songs of the Old Testament, songs, elegies, prophets' oracles are full of this, and they are hardly poetic exercises.[67]

In *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, the *nabi* is a key figure: "most Hebrew poets [are] sacred figures, sages [*Weise*] of the people, prophets".[68] Genesis is a "national document". His comparative investigation has revealed equivalence: "In short, in terms of personifications, Ossian is Job's brother".[69] Already in his Shakespeare essay (1773) Herder had proposed an analogy between the ways in which early literature was created: the dramatists Sophocles and Shakespeare ("du Nordischer Barde") were "brothers" "im Innern"; both are true to their culture and their historical moment.[70] In *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, the Shakespeare essay sits next to the *Ossianbriefe*, in which Herder discusses Ossian as a Northern Homer.

In Herder's thinking of the 1770s, classical, Oriental, and Northern antiquities are distinct but equivalent, and equal. *AOIDOS*, *nabi*, and bard occupy the same positions in their respective cultures and fulfil the same functions for their societies: providing relevant, representative, and engaging poetry that expresses historical truth and identity in specific cultural guises. Ossian, Homer, and Moses emerge as culturally distinct versions of the same historical patterns and conditions.

While it is clear from the above that in the first two thirds of the eighteenth century, the direction of inspiration, runs from Britain to Germany, two-way traffic emerges in the 1760s: Percy made Michaelis one his key sources in 1766, and Michaelis's additions to Lowth's *Praelectiones* were retained in subsequent editions. Respect for German expertise was responsible for the curious publication history of Robert Wood's *Essay on the Original Genius of Homer*, which appeared in German translation (1773) *ahead* of the English original (1775). Wood, whose essay is informed by his research trip to the regions of the Trojan War (and beyond), subscribed to the equivalence of antiquities: he equates, for example, the merit

of the collector of Homer's epics with that of the "ingenious Editor of Fingal", namely Ossian/Macpherson.[71] Aware of the work being done at Göttingen, Wood sent one of a handful of privately printed copies of his essay to Michaelis for comment in 1769. Michaelis showed it to Heyne, who reviewed it in *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* in 1770. Although Heyne did not agree with everything in Wood's *Essay*, he considered it an "eagle's flight of genius" that builds on but leaves behind Blackwell's work, not least because Wood has visited the Troade.[72] Heyne then reiterates the cultural equivalence and respective distinctiveness of Homeric and Northern antiquities: the "bard of the Northern world" and the "Grecian bard" from the coasts of Ionia are equivalents, both "singers of […] unfeigned nature [*unverstellter Natur*]" but shaped by and reflecting different cultures.[73] Wood died in 1771, before publishing his essay properly. In 1773, a German translation of the 1769 essay appeared, from the pen of Michaelis's son Christian Friedrich.

Conclusion

Transnational comparative research into the concept of "antiquity" explains the similarities between the images of prophet–bards above. In this process each antiquity underwent a status-change until, by the end of the century, they were roughly equal in status and similar in key features. Neoclassical Homer was "re-wilded", divine Moses de-sanctified, and both developments enabled the Northern bard to take his place in the pantheon of "singers" from original foundational cultures.

In the same process, non-Christian, pagan singers, such as Homer and Ossian, were sanctified, and poets of later, more civilized periods, such as Shakespeare, Milton, or Tasso, became original singers and prophets. While the competitiveness and the focus on cultural specificity foreshadow the restrictive aspects of modern nationalism, the comparative and universalizing tendencies in these negotiations reflect the emancipatory strands of

Enlightenment thought that seek to liberate culture and society from religious dogma, social hierarchy, and the dominance of a high culture fenced off by educational barriers and reserved for the few. The emancipatory driver is noticeable in the distinct but interlinking areas noted at the beginning: in the aesthetic it is the sublime, experienced by the senses (unaided by privileged learning), in the philosophical it is the premise that reasonable enquiry must be allowed, in the political it is the call for the engaged community of a broad audience. Broadly, "antiquities" are to unshackle culture and the human being, and restore a naturalness into an unnatural present.

The focus on analogy allows constructing *universal* history *historically*, by linking universal patterns with specific content, and recurrence with potential progress, allowing historicity and normativity to co-exist, even reinforce each other. In May 1789, Friedrich Schiller, in his inaugural lecture as the new Jena professor of modern history, recommended as a method for studying universal history the heuristic of analogy: "method of drawing conclusions by analogies is as powerful an aid in history as it is everywhere else".[74] It helps to make sense of the overwhelming mass of details, otherwise "our world history would but remain an aggregate of fragments and never deserve the name of science".[75] This approach is justified because the constancy of natural laws and human nature ("Gleichförmigkeit und unveränderlichen Einheit der Naturgesetze und des menschlichen Gemüths") will lead to similar outcomes under similar external conditions ("unter dem Zusammenfluß ähnlicher Umstände von außen").[76]

This analogy heuristic drives both the diversification of "antiquity" and the establishment of equality among them. It allows to integrate *difference* into a now *relative* constancy of human nature and natural law; but only up to a point; behind the historicity of different periods and their cultures stands the normativity of human development (under *these* conditions *this* will

happen). Structure, it seems, only varies to the extent to which the conditions are not *exactly* analogous.

Notes

1. For a summary of the emergence of Enlightenment universal history, see Bentley, "Theories of World History since the Enlightenment". Little comparative work has been done on antiquities as a modern cultural paradigm, although their function in individual cultural contexts is recognized: e.g., for Renaissance Italy, see Christian, "Antiquities"; or for the impact of the rediscovery of Tacitus's *Germania* on the interest in a Germanic antiquity, see Lee and Mclelland, *Germania Remembered*, 27–98.

2. Cf. William Guthrie's and John Gray's multi-volume *General History of the World from the Creation to the present Time* (1764–1767). Its full title is programmatic: *including All the Empires, Kingdoms, and States; the Revolutions, Forms of Government, Laws, Religions, Customs and Manners; the Progress of their Learning, Arts, Sciences and Trade, together with their Chronology, Antiquities, Public Buildings and Curiosities of Nature and Art*. The *History* seeks to integrate secular and pre-Christian sources with scriptural accounts without being overly concerned about discrepancies.

3. Anne Dacier*, L'Iliade d'Homère*, in Foerster, *Homer*, 13. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, modernity became associated, for some, with being over-civilised and decadent, which created interest in "simple" culture and authenticity. This was a useful approach for the ancients, beleaguered by the moderns' progressive superiority. Mme Dacier embraced the charges of the moderns and turned them into positive qualities in the *querelle d'Homère* (1710s), associating those "simple" qualities with the early stages of classical antiquity and creating a youthful stage of cultural excellence.

4. For a summary of early English "orientalism" see Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 15–62. The coining of the term "orientalism" (s.b.) was itself part of the intellectual development Edward Said described, although Said only pays scant attention to writers like Lowth (as he knows). In line with Said's findings, the engagement with the ancient "Orient" discussed here was also primarily focused on its own (European) identity and contemporary needs. Said excluded German scholarship because, unlike British and French sources, it came from a place that had no direct involvement in eightenth- and early nineteenth-century colonialism (Said, *Orientalism*, 17).

5. A comparative context permeates Trapp's own literary work, in which he quite practically seeks to establish equivalences between the epic poetries of different cultures. He translated Virgil's works into blank verse and Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Latin Virgilian hexameters.

6. Trapp, *Lectures on Poetry*, 28.

7. Ibid., 5.

8. Ibid., 174.

9. Ibid., 204.

10. Ibid., 209.

11. Ibid., 203–204.

12. See also Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 50–51.

13. Trapp, *Lectures on Poetry*, 4–5.

14. See Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 54–60.

15. Ibid., 58.

16. Spence, *Mr. Pope's Odyssey,* 214.

17. Ibid., 215.

18. The second edition appeared in 1736, the third and fourth followed in 1757 and 1761. A German translation appeared in 1776.

19. Blackwell, *Enquiry*, 55.

20. Ibid., 104, 107, 114, 128.

21. Ibid., 104–105.

22. Ibid., 105.

23. Ibid., 107.

24. Ibid., 126.

25. Ibid., 127.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 104.

28. Ibid., 128.

29. Ibid., 334.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 104.

32. Lowth, *Lectures*, 25.

33. Ibid., 23.

34. Ibid., 19.

35. Ibid., 178.

36. Ibid., 279–280.

37. Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 78-79.

38. Lowth, *Lectures*, 61.

39. Ibid., 194–195.

40. Ibid., 22.

41. Ibid., 18.

42. Ibid., 233.

43. See his preface in Percy, *Song of Solomon*, vi–vii.

44. Groom*, Making of the "Reliques"*, 3.

45. Percy, *Reliques,* I, xxii.

46. It is taken from Ovid's elegy on the death of this friend and fellow poet Tibullius: *Amores* 3.9.29.

47. Trapp, too, had linked the term "vates" to prophet–poets (*Lectures*, 5).

48. Hurd, *Chivalry and Romance*, 103–109.

49. Interest in Michaelis has recently increased: see Rauchstein, *Fremde Vergangenheit*; Carhart, *The Science of Culture*; and Löwenbrück, *Judenfeindschaft im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*.

50. See Michaelis, *Lebensbeschreibung*.

51. Ibid., 33: "mein wärmster Freund in England hätte werden können". All translations are my own.

52. Lifschitz, "Translation in Theory and Practice", 40-41.

53. Percy, *New Testament*, 10. I have been unable to check whether this preface is included in the preceding two editions. The translation Percy refers to is *Introductory Lectures to the Sacred Books of the New Testament*. Percy, in his own introduction, is well informed about Michaelis's publications, reporting that Michaelis has meanwhile produced an improved and enlarged edition (*New Testament*, 10–11).

54. His interdisciplinary, or rather, pre-disciplinary approach covered the now distinct areas of "Altertumskunde", antiquarianism, aesthetics, archaeology, history, and religious studies (Robert, "Göttinger Primitivismus", 166). Although there has been a recent upsurge in interest in Heyne, his work is relatively unexplored because much of it

remains in Latin and his ideas are dispersed across many occasional publications. For Heyne and antiquity, see Robert, "Göttinger Primitivismus".

55. Robert, "Göttinger Primitivismus", 175.

56. Heyne, "London", 257.

57. Heyne's nearly finished edition of Lucian, which was lost in the 1760 bombardment of Dresden, was based on a codex in Dresden library.

58. I have shown elsewhere how extensively Bodmer paraphrases Blackwell: see Oergel, "Die Verurtümlichung Homers", 187-189.

59. Herder, *Ebräische Poesie, Teil 1*, 215: "Jedermann ist des Bischof Lowths schönes und allgepriesenes Buch de sacra poesi Hebraeorum bekannt."

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., 215–216.

62. The essay appeared independently in 1772, dated 1773, in Hamburg: *Von deutscher Art und Kunst,* 141.

63. Herder, "Briefwechsel über Oßian", 35: "In der alten Zeit aber waren es Dichter, Skalden, Gelehrte, die eben diese Sicherheit und Vestigkeit des Ausdrucks am meisten mit Würde, mit Wohlklang, mit Schönheit zu paaren wußten, und da sie also Seele und Mund in den festen Bund gebracht hatten, sich einander nicht zu verwirren, sondern zu unterstützen, beizuhelfen: so entstanden daher jene für uns halbe Wunderwerke von *aoidoi*[], Sängern, Barden, Minstrels, wie die größten Dichter der ältesten Zeiten waren. Homers Rhapsodien und Oßians Lieder waren gleichsam impromptus, weil man damals noch von Nichts als impromptus der Rede wußte: dem letztern sind die Minstrels, wiewohl so schwach und entfernt, gefolgt; [...] bis endlich die Kunst kam und die Natur auslöschte."

64. Ibid., 50–52: "Da es gewöhnlich ist, Sprünge und Würfe solcher Stücke für Tollheiten der Morgenländischen Hitze, für Enthusiasmus des Prophetengeistes, oder für schöne

Kunstsprünge der Ode auszugeben, und man aus diesen eine herrliche Webertheorie vom

Plan und den Sprüngen der Ode ausgesponnen hat: so möge hier ein kalter Grönländer

[...] ohne Hitze und Prophetengeist und Odentheorie aus dem vollen Bilde seiner

Phantasie reden." Specimen after David Cranz, *Historie von Grönland* (1765): *Von*

deutscher Art und Kunst, 147.

65. Herder,"Briefwechsel über Oßian", 52, 44.

66. Herder, *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, 175.

67. Herder, "Briefwechsel über Oßian", 51–52: "Der Grönländer befolgt die feinsten Gesetze

der Elegie.[...] Von wem hat er sie gelernt? [...] Wenn sie in der Natur der Einbildung

liegen, [...] wem unmöglich zu fassen, der dieselbe Einbildung hat? [...].Alle Gesänge des

A.T., Lieder, Elegien, Orakelstücke der Propheten sind voll davon, und die sollten doch

wohl kaum Poetische Übungen sein."

68. Herder, *Ebräische Poesie, Theil 2*, 33.

69. Herder, *Ebräische Poesie, Theil 1*, 297: "Kurz, Oßian ist in Personificationen Hiobs

Bruder."

70. Herder, "Shakespear", 77, 84.

71. Wood, *Original Genius*, 278.

72. Heyne, "London", 257.

73. Ibid., 259.

74. Schiller, *Universalgeschichte*, 27: "die Methode, nach der Analogie zu schließen, ist, wie

überall, so auch in der Geschichte ein mächtiges Hülfsmittel".

75. Ibid., 26: "würde denn unsre Weltgeschichte nie etwas anders als ein Aggregat von

Bruchstücken werden und nie den Namen einer Wissenschaft verdienen".

76. Ibid., 27.

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Figure captions

Fig. 1: Jean-Baptiste Massard, *Blind Homer at the Edge of the Sea* (1816). Engraving, 56.3 x 40.6 cm, after the painting by François Gérard (1814). National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/50584/homer). Image licensed for non-commercial use.

Fig. 2: Nicolai Adbraham Abildgaard, *Ossian's Swansong* (c. 1782). Oil on canvas, 42 x 35.5 cm.Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. Image: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the public domain.

Fig. 3: Gustave Doré, *Moses coming down from Mount Sinai*. Engraving from his illustrations for *La Grande Bible de Tour* (1866). Image: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the public domain.

Fig. 4: Henry Fuseli, *The Artist and J. J. Bodmer in Conversation* (1778–81). Oil on canvas. Kunsthaus Zurich. Image: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the public domain.

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Advocating Ancient Equalities: Pluralizing "Antiquity" in Enlightened Universal History

Abstract: This article investigates the constructions of Hebrew, classical, and "Northern" antiquities put forward by an eighteenth-century network of Anglo-German scholars. It asks to what extent these constructions propose a cultural equality between these competing "antiquities", how such equality relates to the contemporaneous conception of universal history, and to what extent this development is driven by emancipatory tendencies within Enlightenment thinking. By discussing the changing approaches to Homer, Old Testament texts, and "early" European literature, the article relates the emergence of primitivism and Orientalism to Enlightenment historicism and an interest in the sublime, which produces a growing focus on the importance of authentic culture and the role of the bard–poet. By discussing the connections between the work of Joseph Trapp, Thomas Blackwell, Robert Lowth, and Thomas Percy on the one hand, and Johann David Michaelis, Christian Gottlob Heyne, Johann Jakob Bodmer, and Johann Gottfried Herder on the other, the article illustrates the significance in this context of newly emerging Anglo-German scholarly networks and illuminates lesser-known aspects of Anglo-German relations in the second half of the eighteenth century.

This essay investigates the constructions of Hebrew, classical, and "Northern" antiquities put forward by a mid-eighteenth-century network of Anglo-German scholars and asks to what extent these constructions propose a cultural equality between these competing "antiquities", how such equality relates to the contemporaneous conception of universal history, and to

what extent this development was driven by emancipatory tendencies within Enlightenment thinking.[1] The essay also illustrates the significance in this context of newly emerging Anglo-German scholarly networks, illuminating lesser known aspects of Anglo-German relations in the second half of the eighteenth century.

While these three antiquities were each conceived as culturally distinct, their constructions are based on shared features regarding their social and political set-up, their core value systems, and their poetry. Original ancient culture was assumed to be characterized by simplicity, authenticity, and faith, and to exist in a setting that was intermittently pastoral and war-torn. In all three constructions, great significance was attached to the figure of the "bard", who encoded a group's values, recorded their history, and guaranteed their identity by facilitating a shared culture. The similarity of the images of Homer, Moses, and Ossian below illustrates that the eighteenth-century definition of especially this figure had, from the end of the century, become firmly established across the three "antiquities". Especially noteworthy are the inspired bard's closed eyes, his outstretched arm gesturing skywards, and the outdoor setting in dramatic liminal landscape (the edge of the sea, mountains, and forest).

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Fig. 1: Jean-Baptiste Massard, *Blind Homer at the Edge of the Sea* (1816). Engraving, 56.3 x 40.6 cm, after the painting by François Gérard (1814). National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/50584/homer). Image licensed for non-commercial use.

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These three conceptions of antiquity are formulated in competition with each other, each initially claiming to represent a superior poetry and to capture a more profound understanding of humanity in its relation to the world—before, by the end of the century, it was explicitly acknowledged that while *each* was rooted in its particular historical circumstances, all were *typical* early or "primitive" cultures and, as equivalents, equal. Hebrew antiquity was formulated as a counter to the established ideal of classical antiquity (in which primitivity was initially not foregrounded) on the grounds that Hebrew poetry was older than early Greek poetry and inspired by the creator of the world. Classical scholars reshaped Homer and his world in more a "primitive" mould that partook of this kind of original humanity. Northern antiquity was set up in analogy to both and in particular contrast to classical antiquity and based its superiority on representing the original specificity of post-classical (northern) European culture, which, as the direct parent of contemporary modern culture, was most relevant to modern audiences.

This competitive process of formulation produced a constant cross-fertilization of ideas, which created the structural type of original, ancient human culture that all three share. Historically, "antiquity" was invariably described as a cultural moment *just before* the development of complex social and cultural structures which would evolve, in their specificity, nourished from this original root. This aspect made cultural antiquity foundational and, at the same time, a counter to later, more complex structures, which were increasingly seen as hierarchical and decadent.

Specific antiquities and universal history

These conceptions derive from Enlightenment historicism, as it developed around 1700 from the *Querelle* (a dispute about quality and progress) and global exploration (resulting in discovering profoundly different cultures): progress has structural patterns and can be scientifically evidenced. Any claims of specificity, superiority, or appropriateness were based on historical investigations and material evidence, even when divine inspiration was involved. Thus research methodologies for inquiring into "antiquities" focussed on ancient textual sources and, from mid-century, the "field trip" to ancient sites and regions. Linking conceptions of ancient specificity with progress—*within one culture* (an ancient stage preceding a complex society and civilisation) and *between cultures* (forming part of a historical chain following this pattern)—makes possible combining the syntagmatic aspect of telling a chronological story of humanity with the paradigmatic aspect of defining specific stages of his process as recurring features of human development. A recurring sequence of events establishes a regular universal pattern that can still accommodate linear progress in the shape of a spiral of increasing knowledge or achievement, combining the chronological narrative of culture(s) with a paradigm of culture. Eighteenth-century universal history, or "world history", had these twin aspirations.[2] In this way, cultural specificity, made evident by global exploration, could be accommodated within a relatively normative concept of cultural development, both in grand narratives of cultural progress or as different stages of cultural development existing at the same time.

Antiquities and Enlightenment

The eighteenth-century concept of antiquity relies not only on historicist thinking but equally on the notion of the primitive. In combining these two interests it reflects three key intellectual shifts of the time. Philosophically, it reflects the increasing tendency to look to

history for answers, rather than to revealed religion or pure science. Aesthetically, it reflects the contemporary interest in the "sublime" with its focus on human sensibility and immediate emotional engagement, making an analytical case for the one-sidedness of reason. And politically, it reflects the growing concern about contemporary "decadence", leading to an interest in non-decadent, primitive, "early" culture that was seen as more communal and participatory than contemporary social structures. These three drivers represent the complex and interlinking emancipatory tendencies of the Enlightenment; they illustrate the extent to which the increasing interest in antiquities did not just prepare key aspects of Romantic thought but represented a culmination of Enlightenment thinking.

The focus on the authentic, indigenous, and participatory nature of ancient culture ultimately supports different aspects of social change, although not all implications of this were necessarily fully obvious to all interested in antiquity in the first half of the century. At the same time, it is important to note that this focus also paved the way for restrictive concepts of cultural purity, conservatism, and anti-progress. However, an authentic culture, which is shared by the whole community, has the *potential* to increase social and cultural equality. Because it is directly engaging—that is, not accessed through a learned, hierarchical apparatus of education—it lowers the barriers to social, cultural, and political engagement. The recognition that such communal culture is necessarily different in different places under different conditions, again, has the *potential* to tolerate cultural plurality (even if this tolerance is based on universal anthropological patterns, which are easily subverted in the name of superiority). While recognizing cultural diversity does not loosen the norms for cultural development (*all* true "antiquities" are communal and potentially culturally foundational), it does loosen the prescriptions for cultural content (Greek, Hebrew, and Northern antiquity have different settings and players). Against this background, the newly defined characteristics of "antiquity", offering the individual an experience of the sublime

and a share in the community, made them attractive for cultural, social, and even political reformers.

Classical and Hebrew antiquities

The starting point for investigating the construction of "antiquity" that created the startlingly similar images of the three prophet-bards above, is the *Querelle*, in particular its historical perspective. This perspective underpinned both the position of the moderns as more "advanced" in terms of civilisation and (non-pagan) religion and the developing *ancien* position that was beginning to define the age of Homer as beautifully simple, a departure that culminated in Mme Dacier's defence of Homer in 1711.[3] Her assessment of his genius and his times was in line with the notion of the primitive, the cultural-political appreciation of the early and youthful stage of a culture's development.

This redefinition of the "prince of poets" (Pope) of neoclassicism was paralleled by the emergence of early eighteenth-century "Orientalism", which makes the case that the oldest parts of the Bible are the products of a similarly early culture, Hebrew antiquity, which was sanctified by its temporal proximity to the Creation.[4] A key site of defining Orientalism was Oxford, following the creation of the professorship of poetry in 1708. Its first incumbent, Rev. Joseph Trapp (1679–1747), endeavoured in his *Praelectiones Poeticae* to define the nature of poetry by investigating its origin, the earliest extant poetry: the Old Testament. The competitively comparative nature of treating "antiquities" is evident in Trapp's *Praelectiones*, which showcases the original qualities of ancient Hebrew poetry in contrast to later Greek derivations.[5] Relying on Vossius, he claims that poetry does not originate in ancient Greece, instead "the People of God, the first inhabitants of the World […] have the best Title to this Honour", because

poetry flourished among the Israelites, not only before the Trojan War, but before the

coming of Cadmus to Boeotia, who first taught the Greeks the use of Letters. […]

[T]he Antiquity of Music would teach us that the Origin of Verse must be owing to

the Oriental Nations; […] Singing begun [sic] in the very Infancy of the World.[6]

The first volumes of his Latin lectures appeared in 1711, the same year as Mme Dacier's

Iliade.

For Trapp, the superiority of Hebrew poetry lies in the power of its language, which

results from the "inspired" state of its poets and establishes a close relation with the sublime:

If in the Poems of Job, and David, and other sacred Authors, we observe the

inexpressible Sublimity of their Words and Matter, their elegant and more than human

Descriptions; the happy Boldness of their Metaphors, the spiritual Ardour breathing

Heaven and winging the Souls of their Readers up to it, triumphing, as it were, by

royal Authority, over the narrow Rules of mortal Writers, it is impossible but we must

in Transport own, that nothing is wanting in them, that might be expected from the

Strength of Poetry heighten'd by the Energy of Inspiration.[7]

Trapp follows up on ancient Greek derivativeness ("the Grecians receiv'd their learning from

the Nations of the East") by suggesting that they borrowed the pastoral from the Song of

Solomon[8] and the ode from "Jews and Phoenicians". "Eastern Eloquence abounded not only

with Metaphors, and bold Hyperboles, but in long Digressions, as is sufficiently evident from

the Sacred Writings."[9] These "digressions" are important. Trapp explicitly identifies the

"lyrical" as the key original quality of poetry, which is linked to music.[10] This allows

freedom from (artificial and unnatural) rules: the "chief Property of lyrical Poetry" is that "it

abounds with a Sort of Liberty which consists in Digressions and Excursions", reflecting the

"internal Motions of the Soul". Hence "it will seem very probable that Poetry […] owes its

Rise to Nature herself, and was therefore join'd with Music. We have no instance of Poetry older than the celebrated Song, or Ode, of Moses."[11]

For Trapp, this kind of poetry has the power to transport its audience beyond a restrictive reality in which time inexorably moves away from an original (sacred) moment of beginning. Its language, like music, is capable of breaking through the barriers of order set by sequential time and gravitational space.[12] Hence he considers lyrical poetry the most original and, within the lyrical genre, the ode its supreme specimen.

Hebrew poetry possesses a language that triggers experiences of the sublime due to its historical proximity to the Creation. Facilitating such experiences came to occupy a key position in the eighteenth-century exploration of the function of art, art's relation to nature, and the definition of taste within the new discipline of aesthetics. Experiencing the sublime results from an exposure of the senses to a grandeur that overwhelms human reason and can only be expressed by poetic metaphor, not rational argument. Such experiences were linked to a religiously charged state or anthropologically primordial human condition. In practice, the sublime experience was facilitated by the awe inspired by the power of nature (dramatic natural processes, imposing landscapes) or the presence of divinity (sudden epiphanies or ecstatic experiences), or both in combination. This is clearly suggested in the images above.

While Trapp links the sublimity of such experiences to revealed religion, it is only a small shift to associate them, and their "antiquity", with any early culture inhabiting a world controlled by natural or divine forces. In either scenario, the language this experience produces and the poetic metaphors it inspires were thought to retain this awe-inspiring quality and were considered a truthful expression of a key and universal human experience.

A key mediator of the sublime was the inspired poet who is in touch with these great forces. Trapp begins his lectures by proposing that inspired poets repeat the divine act of creation in their imagination and suggests that this is why in antiquity poets and prophets

were frequently indistinguishable. He concludes that "those Books that have the greatest Sanction from Time […] have been dictated by God, or writ by Poets. […] Nay, why should we make this Difference between the Sacred Writers and Poets, since the sacred Writers were most of them Poets."[13]

The role of the "Bard"

The role of this "Oriental" poet–prophet is strongly communal, it entails creativity and leadership. Ancient Hebrew poetry, it seems, furnishes particularly evident examples of prophet–seers inspired by god and sanctified by the antiquity of the Old Testament. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the religious aspect of the Hebrew prophet–poet, the *nabi*, as purveyor of sacred insights, ensured poetic quality and divinely sanctioned truth. This concept of the sacred poet, inspired by higher forces and expressing his insights in a quasi-musical mode, is crucial for the emerging notion of the "bard".

A word of Celtic extraction, "bard" became an accepted rendering of the ancient Greek term *AOIDOS*, which was generally translated as "singer". In the course of the century, "bard" became a standard term in most modern European languages to describe inspired prophet–poets who (used to) communicate sacred truths and record the acts of humans (or their people), linking the communication of a historical narrative and normative truths, the two key aspects of the project of universal history and of the modern understanding of myth.

These newly prominent bard-qualities became attached to Homer as well as the Northern bards, of whom "Ossian" was the most influential among a range of North European contenders. *Nabi*, *AOIDOS*, *bard*, and *scald* were thought to occupy the same, and largely equal, positions in their respective early cultures. That the redefinition of Homer along these lines was supported by orientalist ideas has so far been little studied.

Within the context of emerging primitivism and Enlightenment historicism, Thomas Warton the Elder (c. 1688–1745) and Joseph Spence (1699–1768), who succeeded Trapp as Professors of Poetry at Oxford, developed further the notion of inspired early poetry. For them, Hebrew poetry remained the earliest example of this.[14] Spence, it seems, created the term "orientalism". It appears in his *Essay on Mr. Pope's Odyssey* (1726), a dialogic discussion of Pope's translation in which two fictitious (Greek) friends discuss the "nature of Homer",[15] going head to head on neo-classicism and the new primitive-sublime. "Orientalism", "a new Word, where we have no old one to my Purpose",[16] occurs in the context of describing the inspired poet's prophetic nature, when the "neo-classicist" friend acknowledges that Homer's epic also contains "the True Sublime" because it features a metaphorical language drawn from nature that is usually prevalent in biblical texts, sharing "that Eastern way of expressing [for example] Revolutions in Government by Confusion or Extinction of Light in the Heavens". In choice passages Homer comes close to "those noble Passages in holy Scripture".[17]

The link between "antiquity", including its foundational nature in cultural development, and the role of bards as true purveyors of this culture was worked out by Thomas Blackwell (1701–1757) in his *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735). Blackwell held the chair of Greek at Marischal College in Aberdeen. The *Enquiry* is a seminal text in the Enlightenment historicist study of culture: it went into at least three subsequent editions and by the end of the century had achieved canonical status among those interested in the historical role of cultural antiquity and "antiquity's" function for meaningful and relevant contemporary culture.[18] Blackwell influenced the Ossian-creator James Macpherson, who studied at Aberdeen at the end of Blackwell's tenure, the influential Zurich circle around Johann Jakob Bodmer, and Johann Gottfried Herder.

The *Enquiry*, based on extant historical sources, is an effort to explain why Homer was such an accomplished and affecting poet despite originating in a primitive cultural context. Unlike Trapp, Blackwell could not deploy divine inspiration to dignify Homer's pagan antiquity, but he also took up primitivism and orientalism to show that Homer's excellence was not due to random chance, but the result of his historical cultural context combined with this talents.

Employing Enlightenment historicism and Enlightened cultural anthropology, the *Enquiry* proposes that Homer is shaped by the specific historical moment when primitive early culture develops the first forms of civil society. It is still warlike, authentic, and uncorrupted, but no longer barbaric. This condition moulds its language and manners, shapes humans experience, and in the right hands produces poetry that communicates "truth" easily and movingly:

> The Fortunes, the Manners, and the Language of a People are all linked together, and necessarily influence each other. In most of the Greek Cities, Policy and Laws were but just a forming […]: They lived naturally, and were governed by the natural Poise of the Passions, as it is settled in every human breast. This will make them speak and act, without other Restraint than their own native Apprehensions of Good and Evil, Just and Unjust […]. These Manners afford the most natural Pictures, and proper Words to express them. While a Nation continues simple and sincere, whatever they say has Weight and Truth. […] Their Passions […] break out in their own artless Phrase and unaffected Stile. […] We feel the Force of their Words and the Truth of their Thoughts.[19]

While Blackwell, like Pope and the orientalists before him, calls Homer a "poet", he *presents* him as *AOIDOS*, which he consistently translates as "bard".[20] Homer belongs to "a Set of

Men, who distinguished themselves by Harmony and Verse" and combined the professions of historian, philosopher, scientist, and priest in the role of the inspired singer:[21]

> Who has it in his Power to charm our Ears, entertain our Fancies, and instruct us in the History of our Ancestors; who informs his wond'ring Audience of the secret Composition, and the hidden Harmony of the Universe, or the Order of the Seasons, and Observation of Days, such a Man cannot miss of Esteem and Attention: But if he adds a Sanction to his Doctrine and Art; if he pretends "That he is under the Direction of the Gods; that he describes their Natures, announces their Names and Decrees; that he does this by their imminent Orders, and then leads the way himself to the new Devotion;" he must needs become the Object of their Admiration and Reverence.[22]

As Blackwell could not easily argue for divine inspiration in the utterances of a pagan Grecian, he uses the term "pretend" but implies as much sanctity and divine inspiration for the Bardic Homer as possible. Quoting the historian and geographer Hecataeus of Miletus (c. 500 BCE), he points out that bards sang of the "Deeds of Gods and Men" to "Mortals and Immortals".[23] Blackwell closes this chapter with lines from the *Odyssey* which suggest that the Homeric *AOIDOS felt* divinely inspired: "A Bard, […] Untaught by others, in my Mind I bear, / By God himself implanted, all the Strains / Of Melody and Verse."[24] So in *his own* context, the ancient Greek bard was a prophet, "a Bard, with him, is Divine, Prophetick, most venerable […]; he sings from the Gods [...] he never begins to sing until he feels the Stirrings of this Mind and hath the Permission of his Muse."[25] Blackwell then enlists the testimony of a "wise Philosopher", "That God […] uses [the Poets] as his Ministers, Sooth-Sayers and holy Prophets, to make us, the Hearers, know."[26] The resulting type of poetry is not only linked to music, but also natural, original, and free: "in Greece, where Nature was obstructed in none of her Operations; and no Rule or Prescription gave a check to Rapture and Enthusiasm".[27] The Greek *AOIDOS* was an inspired "Genius",[28] whose effect was as

powerful as a prophet's: "Like some powerful Magician, he points his Rod, and Spectres rise to obey his Call: Nay, so potent is his Spell, that hardly does the Enchantment vanish; it is built upon Truth […] His Work is the great Drama of Life acted in our View."[29] Homer is exceptional and predictable at the same time, he is outstanding, but lived in favourable times.

Competition between "antiquities" was never far. Blackwell contrasts the natural artistic "liberty" of the inspired bard, which the "orientalist" Trapp has also championed, with the "Poetry and Allegory of the Egyptians [which] was […] bounded and prescribed by Law".[30] Here Blackwell rejects the "orientalist" thesis that the Greeks learnt almost everything from the Orient: "Grecian Character" and all that flows from it "was formed upon no borrowed Model".[31] Blackwell makes Homer the equal of the Old Testament prophet–poets. This equality will become the springboard for the bard of Northern Antiquity to take his place in the triumvirate of ancient poets in the above picture gallery.

Orientalism, notwithstanding, develops apace. The claim that Eastern origins lie at the heart of the finest poetry and the truest poetic practice was vigorously promoted by the Bible scholar Robert Lowth (1710–1787), a friend of Spence's, who succeeded the latter as Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1741. In his influential lectures on the ancient poetry of the Hebrews (*De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum*), delivered between 1741and 1750 and published in 1753, Lowth concurs with Trapp that the Old Testament furnishes "the first and choicest specimen of poetic taste",[32] and fleshes out the ideas surrounding the antiquity, sanctity, and sublimity of Hebrew poetry, providing in the process a new universal yardstick:

> The sacred poetry is undoubtedly entitled to the first rank in this school, since from it
> we are to learn both the origin of art, and how to determine its excellence. […] Here
> we may contemplate poetry in its very beginning; not so much the off-spring of

human genius, but an emanation from Heaven, but from its birth possessing a certain maturity both of beauty and strength.[33]

Unlike neo-classical models, this one aims at sublimity based on sensibility. It relies on inspired, "natural" (rather than studied) creativity, it surpasses rationality, and is independent of civilized polish. "Is it not probable that the first effort of rude and unpolished verse would display itself in praise of the Creator, and flow almost involuntarily from the enraptured mind?"[34] Although Lowth makes a distinction between the divinely inspired poetry of the Hebrews ("the sublimer poetry of the Hebrews […] boasts a much higher origin"), he still links the inspired fervour of "true poetic enthusiasm" to all poetic inspiration: "This species of enthusiasm I should distinguish by the term *natural*".[35]

For Lowth, too, Hebrew poetry's supremacy rests on its extraordinary language, which, again, derives from its antiquity and the sanctity conferred by (divine) inspiration. In its oldest form, "poetry […] appears to be co-eval with the commencement of religion or […] with the Creation of Man".[36] Throughout the lectures, Hebrew language is consistently described as "strong" and "forceful". This produces the "sublime" effect that agitates the "secret" imaginative operations of the mind and produces an immediate response from the senses. Again, a key feature is the language's "simplicity", which is really a form of concretization—through metaphors, allegories, similes, personification[37]—drawn from real, and primitive, life, "borrowed from the most obvious or familiar objects".[38] Again, lyric poetry and the ode are presented as exponents of this poetry, along with prophecy. In this context, the ancient bard-figure appears by his Hebrew name *nabi*. For the ordained Lowth this word is "ambiguous": it "equally denoted a prophet, a poet, or a musician, under the influence of divine inspiration".[39]

Apart from identifying the "parabolic" style, Lowth's fame rests on his discovery of the rhetorical device of parallelism in Biblical poetic texts, which balances opposites and

contrasts to produce order in complexity. Its dialogic structure, the "responsive form", involves, or prepares, communal participation. As with Homer, the excellence of Hebrew poetry rests in its rootedness in a specific culture and cultural moment, which, Lowth fears, can be hard to access in a highly civilized age. The rivalry between Greek and Hebrew antiquity surfaces here too. It is not easy "to assign a reason, why the writings of Homer, Pindar, and Horace engross our attention and monopolize or praise, while those of Moses, David, and Isaiah pass totally unregarded."[40] Although the "fabulous ages of Greece" and its "polished people" have produced "most finished productions", these are younger and less sublime.[41] Yet Lowth still puts them on a comparative footing (of equality): "Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel […] hold the same rank among the Hebrews as Homer, Simonides, and Aeschylus among the Greeks".[42]

At the heart of Lowth's endeavour lies a social critique, which surfaces initially as a contradiction. His contemporaries can barely grasp the sublimity and superiority of Hebrew poetry because they mistake its simplicity and cultural primitivism as inappropriate and rude, lacking in civilization, education, and understanding. And yet this kind of poetry does not just mark a particular point in human cultural development, it should be reinstated as a universal model. Its sublimity is presented as arising from a universal human experience based on human sensibility and linked to the activity of the human imagination. And as such Lowth proffers it as a model for better, truer, more sublime modern poetry.

The underlying competition is based on the very similarity that is established between the (primitive) ancient poetry of Homer and Hebrews: both are "natural", have an inspired origin, are shaped by a primitive cultural context, and share a powerful language. While Lowth's key ideas were prepared by Trapp and Spence, mid-century Lowth had the greater impact on the understanding of "antiquity" than his predecessors, both in Britain and in Germany.

Northern antiquity

Lowth's impact is evident in Thomas Percy's work. Percy (1729–1811) was well placed to build on Blackwell and Lowth. He studied classics and Hebrew at Oxford from the late 1740s, so may have heard Lowth's lectures, which, in any case, he knew well.[43] In 1765 Percy made corresponding claims for the sublimity and cultural antiquity of Northern bards and Scalds in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, a collection of early modern ballads and songs that has rightly been called "a seminal, epoch-making work of English Romanticism",[44] except it was probably no less influential in Germany.

In his "Essay on the Ancient Minstrel", which accompanied the collection, Percy seeks to establish the descent of the medieval and early modern minstrel, whom he sees as the originators of the pieces he is publishing, from the more ancient "British bard" and "Danish scald". The latter possessed sacred grandeur as they (were thought) to descend from Odin himself:

> The Minstrels seem to have been the genuine successors of the ancient Bards, who under different names where admired and revered, from the earliest ages, among the peoples of Gaul, Britain, Ireland, and the North; and indeed by all inhabitants of Europe, whether of Celtic or Gothic race; but by none more than our own Teutonic ancestors, particularly by all the Danish tribes. Among these they were distinguished by the name of Scalds.[45]

On the cover of *Reliques*, which was reproduced on many of its subsequent editions, Percy programmatically suggests in Latin that "Durat Opus Vatum" ("the work of the bards endures"). Significantly, he chooses a quotation from Ovid that speaks of *vates*,[46] (sages/prophets/priest–poets) rather than *poetae*.[47]

The strong comparative dimension of eighteenth-century research into antiquities is also evident in Percy's interests and publications. Trained in classics and Hebrew, he worked on both Hebrew and Northern "antiquities", publishing translations of the *Song of Solomon* in 1764 and *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* in 1763. At this time, the Middle Ages were becoming established as the foundational culture of modernity that hovered at the critical point between the primitive and civilised. Percy alludes to the medieval on the cover of *Reliques*, which features a gothic ruin behind a bard's lyre, thus gesturing at the cultural origin of his particular *vates*.

A seminal English text that makes the case for the Middle Ages as the foundational period of modern culture was Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, published three years before Percy's *Reliques*. Hurd proposes not just the importance but the moral and aesthetic superiority of Gothic-Northern culture (encapsulated in chivalry and romance) over classical culture. Its "improved gallantry" awakened "gentler and more human affections", which was supported by "a superior solemnity of their superstition" (Christianity). "The gallantry […] furnish[ed] the poet with finer scenes and subjects of description […] than the simple and uncontrolled barbarity of the Grecian". Hurd realised that for the feudal and Catholic "Gothic" times to be reconsidered, they needed to be equal to Homer's "heroic" times. To achieve this he deploys the structural uniformity of antiquity. Comparing the world depicted in the Homeric epics with that of the crusades described in medieval epics, he concludes that they closely resemble each other.[48]

The sublime, captured in a powerfully poetic language, and a shared communal culture, with the bard as its creator-mediator, have emerged as the key aspects of "antiquity's" cultural significance. Just as Percy and Hurd were making their cases for a Northern antiquity, James Macpherson (1736–1796) presents a bard–seer of Northern extraction to a highly receptive audience: Ossian. *Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in*

the Scottish Highlands, *Fingal*, and *Temora* appeared in 1760, 1761, and 1763 respectively, followed by the *Works of Ossian* in 1765. The phenomenal success of these poems across Europe partly rested on the belief that Ossian's epics were genuine Dark Age Gaelic poetry rather than Macpherson's recreations of early modern fragments. Nevertheless, even "recreated", Ossian may have done more than any other work to establish the relevance of "ancient" European culture for a modern identity to modern audiences.

Macpherson's poems, Hurd's *Letters*, and Percy's *Reliques* reinforced each other in the first half of the 1760s. They established a Northern antiquity that they considered *at least* equal in cultural quality and status to both Hebrew and classical antiquity. All three suggest that this antiquity forms the gloriously "primitive" stage of their own culture when Christianity and a martial culture are blending together. For their construction of this antiquity, all three rely on a comparative framework: Ossian's world was modelled on a cultural context the conception of which had emerged from a tussle for cultural superiority among classical and biblical scholars. The results of their competitve comparisonswere a new concept of what is valuable in culture (communality, immediacy, non-decadence) and in cultural development, and a new role for the poet.

Transnational lines of enquiry: Britain and Germany

The key texts in this development, by Blackwell, Lowth, Percy, and Macpherson, had an intensive German reception. They played an important role in inaugurating a period of intense literary and intellectual activity in Germany, beginning in the 1760s, which shaped the concepts of antiquity and history that dominated nineteenth-century thinking.

The following will briefly outline the key paths this reception took in the middle decades of the eighteenth century and how it shaped the German understanding of antiquity in its Greek, Hebrew, and Northern forms. The significance of British sources for the later

German Enlightenment, the *Sturm und Drang*, and other early Romanticisms does not need reiterating. The following adds more detail to this trend and, in a new departure, points out that already from the 1760s intellectual traffic also began to run in the opposite direction. The networks show how quickly British scholars recognised the significance of the new work by their German disciples. Before coming to Herder, I will focus on Michaelis, Heyne, and Bodmer.

Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791), orientalist at Göttingen, sought to advance the understanding of Hebrew antiquity by investigating and reconstructing the ancient Hebrew language in order to better understand the Old Testament. His interest was broadly philological, but based on a "culturalist" approach that sought to draw on historical, geographical, and anthropological information to reconstruct the ancient culture in which the ancient Hebrew texts were embedded.[49] His prize essay *Beantwortung der Frage von dem Einfluss der Meinungen in die Sprache und der Sprache in die Meinungen* (1758/1760) together with *Beurtheilung der Mittel, welche man anwendet, die ausgestorbene Hebräische Sprache zu verstehen* (1757) established this approach. It reduces the significance of divine inspiration and utilises the primitivist approach to antiquity in classical and Hebrew studies, pioneered by Mme Dacier, Blackwell, and Lowth. While Michaelis does not deny the divine origin of the Bible, he was more interested in establishing the *ancient* features of its oldest parts by analysing its language and the culture that had shaped it. His later *Mosaisches Recht* (1770–1771) is based on Montesquieu's approach to the reciprocity of laws and culture. Interested in increasing empirical information, Michaelis was a key instigator and the academic lead of a Danish-financed Eastern expedition (1761–1767) led by Carsten Niebuhr and Peter Fosskal. This (only partially successful) research trip aimed to investigate "on location" the cultural context of the Near and Middle East by addressing a catalogue of queries drawn up by Michaelis.

Michaelis was directly influenced by Lowth. Before being appointed at Göttingen in 1745, he left Halle in the spring of 1741 for an eighteenth-month journey via the Netherlands to Britain, where he spent the better part of a year, mainly in London, staying with Friedrich Ziegenhagen, the German pastor (*Hofprediger*) of the Hanovarian court of St James.[50] During an extended visit to Oxford, he was impressed by the lectures of the newly appointed Lowth. At the end of his life, he expressed deep regret about not meeting Lowth in person, who "could have become my closest friend in England".[51] The lack of a personal encounter, however, did not stop the two men from forming a close professional relationship. In 1758–1762 Michaelis edited, with extensive additions, Lowth's *Praelectiones* for the German market. His additions tended to be reprinted in subsequent editions and were included in the English translation of *Praelectiones* in 1787. In 1770 Michaelis asked Lowth to intervene on his behalf in British debates by correcting the erroneous report that the English translation of his 1759 Prize Essay had been approved by the author, which Lowth duly did.[52]

In turn, Michaelis became well known in England, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1789. Percy was well aware of him; in the preface to his *Key to the new Testament* (1766), a historical and cultural exposition of the "Books, their Contents and their authors and of the times, places and occasion on which they were respectively written", he acknowledges his debt to "Mr Professor Michaelis of his Majesty's university of Gottingen [sic]" and his *Einleitung in die göttlichen Schriften des Neuen Bundes* (1750), which had appeared, anonymously translated, in London in 1761.[53]

Similar, but not identical, ideas about the nature of the language and culture of early *classical* antiquity were put forward in Germany by the classicist Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812), who from 1763 was Professor of Poetry and Rhetoric at Göttingen and Michaelis's colleague. Like Blackwell, Lowth, and Michaelis himself, Heyne sought to explain the *natural* emergence of language and culture through philological, historical,

anthropological, and aesthetic explorations of antiquity.[54] His posthumous fame rests on making Göttingen's university library the first modern research library by introducing a ground-breaking acquisition and referencing system, and his work on the *sermo mythicus*, a term he coined to describe the language of early Greek antiquity. According to Heyne, the earliest human conceptual speech is metaphorical and parabolic in its conceptualization of the world owing to a lack of developed rational faculties. Understanding and interpreting this key linguistic–philosophical aspect of human language and history will shed light on this early stage of human culture. Dealing with a pagan antiquity, Heyne was not hamstrung by revealed religion when discussing early language; "oldest" here simply meant most primitive, which explains its properties. Although Heyne was fascinated by this cultural stage, he does not suggest that forms of primitivism are ways forward for modern culture. For him, it is a (past) stage in cultural history, a chapter both in universal history and within different cultural contexts.

Heyne must have been interested in British research. Looking at his 1764 list of typical linguistic or rhetorical devices in *sermo mythicus*, one notes simile, metaphor, allegory, personification[55]—all features that Lowth had identified as typical of ancient Hebrew poetry. If Heyne had not read Lowth before he arrived in Göttingen in 1763, he would have become aware of him then because his new colleague Michaelis, with whom he developed a close professional relationship, had just finished editing Lowth's lectures (1762).

It is likely that Heyne had read Blackwell early on in his research career. He prominently refers to the *Enquiry* in 1770,[56] but he would have had access to this volume and Blackwell's *Letters concerning Mythology* (1748) much earlier. Following his studies at Leipzig in 1748–1752, Heyne spent the decade before his appointment at Göttingen in 1763 in Dresden. According to its catalogue, Dresden University Library, an institution he frequented,[57] holds the original editions of the *Enquiry* and *Letters* as well as the 1736 edition

of the *Enquiry*, so it is not unreasonable to assume that these books were available to him in the 1750s. Heyne probably had sufficient English to read the originals; in 1785 he translated and edited volume V of William Guthrie's and John Gray's *History of the World* (1765–1767). Blackwell would also have come up in Heyne's conversations with his friend Herder, who was reading Blackwell in the late 1760s.

Someone who read Blackwell very closely was Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698–1783), the Zurich-based teacher, historian, writer, and critic. Bodmer is best remembered for initiating the discovery of the thirteenth-century version of the *Nibelungenlied* and for his influence on writers of "pre-Romantic" sensibilities, especially those with an interest in historicist approaches to literature and culture and an appreciation of the sublime. In the 1760s and 1770s Klopstock, Wieland, Haller, Fuesli, and Goethe all visited him in Zurich.

Bodmer was the same age as Spence (born 1699) and Blackwell (born 1701), and Anglophile: he translated Milton's *Paradise Lost* and founded a short-lived but influential periodical that was based on Addison's *Spectator* (*Discourse der Mahlern*). In his 1743 essay "Von den vortrefflichen Umständen für die Poesie unter den Kaisern aus dem schwäbischen Hause", Bodmer relies heavily on Blackwell's *Enquiry* to make the case that the twelfth and thirteen centuries in Germany provided ideal conditions for ancient epic poetry. Paraphrasing Blackwell extensively,[58] Bodmer, who acknowledges his debt to the anonymous author of the *Enquiry*, argues that the cultural and historical conditions in medieval Germany were so similar to the world of Homer (as Blackwell described it) that similar poetry *must* have flourished. He uses Blackwell's definition of Greek antiquity as a blueprint to establish the necessary existence of another antiquity in a different cultural context and historical period, rather as Hurd was to do in *Chivalry and Romance* twenty years later. Bodmer suggests that the "Middle Ages" are a post-classical, European or Northern. His hypothesis was confirmed when the *Nibelungen* manuscript, which he proceeded to edit, was unearthed in 1757.

Bodmer's influence on at least two generations of German writers is well established. It is captured by one of his former pupils, the Zurich-born painter and elective Briton Johann Heinrich Füssli, anglicized as Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), who visited his old teacher in 1778 and commemorated his visit, and Bodmer's role in his life, in the painting shown in Figure 4. The concept of the bard was probably more than just a conversational topic, as the towering figure in the background suggests.

[**INSERT HERE:** Fig. 4: Henry Fuseli, *The Artist and J. J. Bodmer in Conversation* (1778–1781). Oil on canvas, 163 x 150 cm. Kunsthaus Zurich. Image: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the public domain.]

One of the writers who investigated all three antiquities comparatively and in whose work all the strands of enquiry discussed here come together is Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). Herder had read Blackwell, Lowth, Percy, and Ossian by the late 1760s and found them deeply inspiring. His British reading fits into the Anglophile context that underpins, from the 1730s and 40s (Bodmer, Michaelis), the German conceptualization of antiquities and their function in cultural history outlined here. Herder's impact on the next generations of German writers and thinkers is well acknowledged. This essay presents him, as the youngest of the writers discussed here, as the beneficiary of those preceding him, galvanizing their work into a mix that contributes to the base from which many "romanticisms" grew.

Herder drew on the above writers to develop his concept of *Volkspoesie*, a communally shared and relevant literature that encouraged public spirit and cultural participation. He used the comparative equality of antiquities and their notion of a communal past to develop a

concept of literature that could inspire a contemporary culture that was accessible and relevant.

Herder developed Lowth's ideas in *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (that is, the Old Testament) (1774–1776) and *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie* (1782–1783). He opens the latter with a reverential reference: "Everyone knows the beautiful and much praised book on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews by Bishop Lowth."[59] Lowth's parallelism features prominently in Herder's book, but in his preface he moves on quickly to set out his own stall: "neither his [Lowth's] translator nor his imitator", he will investigate Hebrew poetry as ancient *poetry* and a source of historical information about antiquity, which is to enlighten his readers regarding the nature of humanity, based on its history from its origins.[60] In the following, he presents Hebrew poetry as an example of *Volkspoesie*, based on three elements that make clear the intellectual heritage of this concept. In powerful poetic language, it contains the Hebrews' original ideas ("Urideen") of the world and their history from the (earliest) legislator onwards. In this way it has evolved into a communal poetry of the people ("Hirten- und Landespoesie"); it was given voice by their prophets and expressed their sacred beliefs, thus had relevance and impact ("Wirkung").[61]

Herder had defined his concept over ten years earlier in "Briefwechsel über Oßian und die Lieder alter Völker" (1772/1773) in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*.[62] Key in Herder's concept of ancient poetry was, unsurprisingly, the *AOIDOS*:

> In ancient times, poets, scalds, learned men [Gelehrte] knew best how to join this sureness and strength of expression with dignity, melody, and beauty; thus they firmly linked soul and mouth and did not confuse but supported each other: in this way the aoidoi , singers, bards, minstrels, who were the greatest poets of the most ancient times, created what appear to us as half miracles. Homer's rhapsodies and Ossian's songs are both impromptus because impromptus were all anyone then knew. The

minstrels were the last in this line, albeit weak and late, […] until eventually art came and extinguished nature.[63]

Inspiration is not necessarily divine, or dependent on revealed religion, nor should it be dismissed as over-excited fancy or linked to cultural refinement and education. It is a natural human energy that generates poetry rooted in concrete cultural experience:

It is common to pass off the leaps and throws of such [ode-like] pieces as the madness of oriental heat, as the enthusiasm of the prophetic spirit, or as the pretty leaps of art in the ode. And a glorious theory of the ode regarding its plan and leaps has been spun. Here I let a cold Greenlander speak straight from the full images of his imagination, […] without heat and prophetic spirit or theory of odes.

Herder proceeds to present Greenland-themed folk poetry based on a contemporary source and equates this with the poetry of the Old Testament.[64] With this he provides an example of an equivalent Northern culture of concrete age-old "natural" poetry, the simplicity of which continues to be favoured by ordinary people. One of his key resource books for other examples is Percy's *Reliques*, or the "Dodsleiischen *Reliques*", as he calls it.[65] Hans Dietrich Irmscher has suggested that Herder's term *Volkslied* is his translation of Percy's "popular song" he found in the *Reliques*.[66]

For Herder, it seems almost immaterial whether inspiration is divine or not; if there is revelation, humans will most likely respond to it with spontaneous poetry. Cultures are diverse in their concrete manifestation, but the concrete in poetic language, which speaks to the senses and the imagination, is universally a culture's most powerful and most easily understood form of expression, because it only requires a shared cultural context, a 'shared imagination' [diesselbe Einbildung], as Herder put it, not academic study:

The Greenlander follows the finest laws of the elegy. […] Who has taught him these? […] If they are rooted in the imagination, […] for whom who shares this imagination

would they be difficult to grasp? […] All the songs of the Old Testament, songs,

elegies, prophets' oracles are full of this, and they are hardly poetic exercises.[67]

In *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, the *nabi* is a key figure: "most Hebrew poets [are]

sacred figures, sages [*Weise*] of the people, prophets".[68] Genesis is a "national document".

His comparative investigation has revealed equivalence: "In short, in terms of

personifications, Ossian is Job's brother".[69] Already in his Shakespeare essay (1773) Herder

had proposed an analogy between the ways in which early literature was created:

the dramatists Sophocles and Shakespeare ("du Nordischer Barde") were "brothers" "im

Innern"; both are true to their culture and their historical moment.[70] In *Von deutscher Art und

Kunst*, the Shakespeare essay sits next to the *Ossianbriefe*, in which Herder discusses Ossian

as a Northern Homer.

In Herder's thinking of the 1770s, classical, Oriental, and Northern antiquities are

distinct but equivalent, and equal. *AOIDOS*, *nabi*, and bard occupy the same positions in their

respective cultures and fulfil the same functions for their societies: providing relevant,

representative, and engaging poetry that expresses historical truth and identity in specific

cultural guises. Ossian, Homer, and Moses emerge as culturally distinct versions of the same

historical patterns and conditions.

While it is clear from the above that in the first two thirds of the eighteenth century,

the direction of inspiration, runs from Britain to Germany, two-way traffic emerges in the

1760s: Percy made Michaelis one his key sources in 1766, and Michaelis's additions to

Lowth's *Praelectiones* were retained in subsequent editions. Respect for German expertise

was responsible for the curious publication history of Robert Wood's *Essay on the Original

Genius of Homer*, which appeared in German translation (1773) *ahead* of the English original

(1775). Wood, whose essay is informed by his research trip to the regions of the Trojan War

(and beyond), subscribed to the equivalence of antiquities: he equates, for example, the merit

of the collector of Homer's epics with that of the "ingenious Editor of Fingal", namely Ossian/Macpherson.[71] Aware of the work being done at Göttingen, Wood sent one of a handful of privately printed copies of his essay to Michaelis for comment in 1769. Michaelis showed it to Heyne, who reviewed it in *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* in 1770. Although Heyne did not agree with everything in Wood's *Essay*, he considered it an "eagle's flight of genius" that builds on but leaves behind Blackwell's work, not least because Wood has visited the Troade.[72] Heyne then reiterates the cultural equivalence and respective distinctiveness of Homeric and Northern antiquities: the "bard of the Northern world" and the "Grecian bard" from the coasts of Ionia are equivalents, both "singers of […] unfeigned nature [*unverstellter Natur*]" but shaped by and reflecting different cultures.[73] Wood died in 1771, before publishing his essay properly. In 1773, a German translation of the 1769 essay appeared, from the pen of Michaelis's son Christian Friedrich.

Conclusion

Transnational comparative research into the concept of "antiquity" explains the similarities between the images of prophet–bards above. In this process each antiquity underwent a status-change until, by the end of the century, they were roughly equal in status and similar in key features. Neoclassical Homer was "re-wilded", divine Moses de-sanctified, and both developments enabled the Northern bard to take his place in the pantheon of "singers" from original foundational cultures.

In the same process, non-Christian, pagan singers, such as Homer and Ossian, were sanctified, and poets of later, more civilized periods, such as Shakespeare, Milton, or Tasso, became original singers and prophets. While the competitiveness and the focus on cultural specificity foreshadow the restrictive aspects of modern nationalism, the comparative and universalizing tendencies in these negotiations reflect the emancipatory strands of

Enlightenment thought that seek to liberate culture and society from religious dogma, social

hierarchy, and the dominance of a high culture fenced off by educational barriers and

reserved for the few. The emancipatory driver is noticeable in the distinct but interlinking

areas noted at the beginning: in the aesthetic it is the sublime, experienced by the senses

(unaided by privileged learning), in the philosophical it is the premise that reasonable enquiry

must be allowed, in the political it is the call for the engaged community of a broad audience.

Broadly, "antiquities" are to unshackle culture and the human being, and restore a naturalness

into an unnatural present.

The focus on analogy allows constructing *universal* history *historically*, by linking

universal patterns with specific content, and recurrence with potential progress, allowing

historicity and normativity to co-exist, even reinforce each other. In May 1789, Friedrich

Schiller, in his inaugural lecture as the new Jena professor of modern history, recommended

as a method for studying universal history the heuristic of analogy: "method of drawing

conclusions by analogies is as powerful an aid in history as it is everywhere else".[74] It helps

to make sense of the overwhelming mass of details, otherwise "our world history would but

remain an aggregate of fragments and never deserve the name of science".[75] This approach is

justified because the constancy of natural laws and human nature ("Gleichförmigkeit und

unveränderlichen Einheit der Naturgesetze und des menschlichen Gemüths") will lead to

similar outcomes under similar external conditions ("unter dem Zusammenfluß ähnlicher

Umstände von außen").[76]

This analogy heuristic drives both the diversification of "antiquity" and the establishment of

equality among them. It allows to integrate *difference* into a now *relative* constancy of human

nature and natural law; but only up to a point; behind the historicity of different periods and

their cultures stands the normativity of human development (under *these* conditions *this* will

happen). Structure, it seems, only varies to the extent to which the conditions are not *exactly* analogous.

Notes

1. For a summary of the emergence of Enlightenment universal history, see Bentley, "Theories of World History since the Enlightenment". Little comparative work has been done on antiquities as a modern cultural paradigm, although their function in individual cultural contexts is recognized: e.g., for Renaissance Italy, see Christian, "Antiquities"; or for the impact of the rediscovery of Tacitus's *Germania* on the interest in a Germanic antiquity, see Lee and Mclelland, *Germania Remembered*, 27–98.

2. Cf. William Guthrie's and John Gray's multi-volume *General History of the World from the Creation to the present Time* (1764–1767). Its full title is programmatic: *including All the Empires, Kingdoms, and States; the Revolutions, Forms of Government, Laws, Religions, Customs and Manners; the Progress of their Learning, Arts, Sciences and Trade, together with their Chronology, Antiquities, Public Buildings and Curiosities of Nature and Art*. The *History* seeks to integrate secular and pre-Christian sources with scriptural accounts without being overly concerned about discrepancies.

3. Anne Dacier, *L'Iliade d'Homère*, in Foerster, *Homer*, 13. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, modernity became associated, for some, with being over-civilised and decadent, which created interest in "simple" culture and authenticity. This was a useful approach for the ancients, beleaguered by the moderns' progressive superiority. Mme Dacier embraced the charges of the moderns and turned them into positive qualities in the *querelle d'Homère* (1710s), associating those "simple" qualities with the early stages of classical antiquity and creating a youthful stage of cultural excellence.

4. For a summary of early English "orientalism" see Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 15–62. The coining of the term "orientalism" (s.b.) was itself part of the intellectual development Edward Said described, although Said only pays scant attention to writers like Lowth (as he knows). In line with Said's findings, the engagement with the ancient "Orient" discussed here was also primarily focused on its own (European) identity and contemporary needs. Said excluded German scholarship because, unlike British and French sources, it came from a place that had no direct involvement in eightenth- and early nineteenth-century colonialism (Said, *Orientalism*, 17).

5. A comparative context permeates Trapp's own literary work, in which he quite practically seeks to establish equivalences between the epic poetries of different cultures. He translated Virgil's works into blank verse and Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Latin Virgilian hexameters.

6. Trapp, *Lectures on Poetry*, 28.

7. Ibid., 5.

8. Ibid., 174.

9. Ibid., 204.

10. Ibid., 209.

11. Ibid., 203–204.

12. See also Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 50–51.

13. Trapp, *Lectures on Poetry*, 4–5.

14. See Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 54–60.

15. Ibid., 58.

16. Spence, *Mr. Pope's Odyssey,* 214.

17. Ibid., 215.

18. The second edition appeared in 1736, the third and fourth followed in 1757 and 1761. A German translation appeared in 1776.

19. Blackwell, *Enquiry*, 55.

20. Ibid., 104, 107, 114, 128.

21. Ibid., 104–105.

22. Ibid., 105.

23. Ibid., 107.

24. Ibid., 126.

25. Ibid., 127.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 104.

28. Ibid., 128.

29. Ibid., 334.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 104.

32. Lowth, *Lectures*, 25.

33. Ibid., 23.

34. Ibid., 19.

35. Ibid., 178.

36. Ibid., 279–280.

37. Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 78-79.

38. Lowth, *Lectures*, 61.

39. Ibid., 194–195.

40. Ibid., 22.

41. Ibid., 18.

42. Ibid., 233.

43. See his preface in Percy, *Song of Solomon*, vi–vii.

44. Groom*, Making of the "Reliques"*, 3.

45. Percy, *Reliques,* I, xxii.

46. It is taken from Ovid's elegy on the death of this friend and fellow poet Tibullius: *Amores* 3.9.29.

47. Trapp, too, had linked the term "vates" to prophet–poets (*Lectures*, 5).

48. Hurd, *Chivalry and Romance*, 103–109.

49. Interest in Michaelis has recently increased: see Rauchstein, *Fremde Vergangenheit*; Carhart, *The Science of Culture*; and Löwenbrück, *Judenfeindschaft im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*.

50. See Michaelis, *Lebensbeschreibung*.

51. Ibid., 33: "mein wärmster Freund in England hätte werden können". All translations are my own.

52. Lifschitz, "Translation in Theory and Practice", 40-41.

53. Percy, *New Testament*, 10. I have been unable to check whether this preface is included in the preceding two editions. The translation Percy refers to is *Introductory Lectures to the Sacred Books of the New Testament*. Percy, in his own introduction, is well informed about Michaelis's publications, reporting that Michaelis has meanwhile produced an improved and enlarged edition (*New Testament*, 10–11).

54. His interdisciplinary, or rather, pre-disciplinary approach covered the now distinct areas of "Altertumskunde", antiquarianism, aesthetics, archaeology, history, and religious studies (Robert, "Göttinger Primitivismus", 166). Although there has been a recent upsurge in interest in Heyne, his work is relatively unexplored because much of it

remains in Latin and his ideas are dispersed across many occasional publications. For Heyne and antiquity, see Robert, "Göttinger Primitivismus".

55. Robert, "Göttinger Primitivismus", 175.

56. Heyne, "London", 257.

57. Heyne's nearly finished edition of Lucian, which was lost in the 1760 bombardment of Dresden, was based on a codex in Dresden library.

58. I have shown elsewhere how extensively Bodmer paraphrases Blackwell: see Oergel, "Die Verurtümlichung Homers", 187-189.

59. Herder, *Ebräische Poesie, Teil 1*, 215: "Jedermann ist des Bischof Lowths schönes und allgepriesenes Buch de sacra poesi Hebraeorum bekannt."

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., 215–216.

62. The essay appeared independently in 1772, dated 1773, in Hamburg: *Von deutscher Art und Kunst,* 141.

63. Herder, "Briefwechsel über Oßian", 35: "In der alten Zeit aber waren es Dichter, Skalden, Gelehrte, die eben diese Sicherheit und Vestigkeit des Ausdrucks am meisten mit Würde, mit Wohlklang, mit Schönheit zu paaren wußten, und da sie also Seele und Mund in den festen Bund gebracht hatten, sich einander nicht zu verwirren, sondern zu unterstützen, beizuhelfen: so entstanden daher jene für uns halbe Wunderwerke von *aoidoi*[], Sängern, Barden, Minstrels, wie die größten Dichter der ältesten Zeiten waren. Homers Rhapsodien und Oßians Lieder waren gleichsam impromptus, weil man damals noch von Nichts als impromptus der Rede wußte: dem letztern sind die Minstrels, wiewohl so schwach und entfernt, gefolgt; [...] bis endlich die Kunst kam und die Natur auslöschte."

64. Ibid., 50–52: "Da es gewöhnlich ist, Sprünge und Würfe solcher Stücke für Tollheiten der Morgenländischen Hitze, für Enthusiasmus des Prophetengeistes, oder für schöne

Kunstsprünge der Ode auszugeben, und man aus diesen eine herrliche Webertheorie vom Plan und den Sprüngen der Ode ausgesponnen hat: so möge hier ein kalter Grönländer [...] ohne Hitze und Prophetengeist und Odentheorie aus dem vollen Bilde seiner Phantasie reden." Specimen after David Cranz, *Historie von Grönland* (1765): *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, 147.

65. Herder,"Briefwechsel über Oßian", 52, 44.

66. Herder, *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, 175.

67. Herder, "Briefwechsel über Oßian", 51–52: "Der Grönländer befolgt die feinsten Gesetze der Elegie.[...] Von wem hat er sie gelernt? [...] Wenn sie in der Natur der Einbildung liegen, [...] wem unmöglich zu fassen, der dieselbe Einbildung hat? [...].Alle Gesänge des A.T., Lieder, Elegien, Orakelstücke der Propheten sind voll davon, und die sollten doch wohl kaum Poetische Übungen sein."

68. Herder, *Ebräische Poesie, Theil 2*, 33.

69. Herder, *Ebräische Poesie, Theil 1*, 297: "Kurz, Oßian ist in Personificationen Hiobs Bruder."

70. Herder, "Shakespear", 77, 84.

71. Wood, *Original Genius*, 278.

72. Heyne, "London", 257.

73. Ibid., 259.

74. Schiller, *Universalgeschichte*, 27: "die Methode, nach der Analogie zu schließen, ist, wie überall, so auch in der Geschichte ein mächtiges Hülfsmittel".

75. Ibid., 26: "würde denn unsre Weltgeschichte nie etwas anders als ein Aggregat von Bruchstücken werden und nie den Namen einer Wissenschaft verdienen".

76. Ibid., 27.

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Figure captions

Fig. 1: Jean-Baptiste Massard, *Blind Homer at the Edge of the Sea* (1816). Engraving, 56.3 x 40.6 cm, after the painting by François Gérard (1814). National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/50584/homer). Image licensed for non-commercial use.

Fig. 2: Nicolai Adbraham Abildgaard, *Ossian's Swansong* (c. 1782). Oil on canvas, 42 x 35.5 cm.Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. Image: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the public domain.

Fig. 3: Gustave Doré, *Moses coming down from Mount Sinai*. Engraving from his illustrations for *La Grande Bible de Tour* (1866). Image: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the public domain.

Fig. 4: Henry Fuseli, *The Artist and J. J. Bodmer in Conversation* (1778–81). Oil on canvas. Kunsthaus Zurich. Image: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the public domain.

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Figure

HOMERE

Dédié à Monsieur le Chevalier

ENNIUS QUIRINUS VISCONTI,

Membre de l'Institut de France

Figure

Figure