



Ute Schüren, Daniel Marc Segesser,  
Thomas Späth (eds.)

# Globalized Antiquity

Uses and Perceptions of the Past  
in South Asia, Mesoamerica,  
and Europe

Reimer



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Edited by

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# Contents

Acknowledgements

List of Figures

List of Contributors

Introduction: Antiquity, Globalization, and Constructions of the Past  
in South Asia, Mesoamerica, and Europe

*Ute Schüren, Daniel Marc Segesser, Thomas Späth* ..... 13

## Part I Constructions of the Past in and about South Asia

Between Uniqueness and Diversity – Historical Developments  
and Historiography in South Asia: A Brief Introduction

*Daniel Marc Segesser* ..... 23

Chapter 1 Historical Traditions: Were They Absent in Early India?

*Romila Thapar* ..... 39

Chapter 2 Constructions of the Past in and about India: From Jahiliyya  
to the Cradle of Civilization. Pre-colonial Perceptions of India

*Jamal Malik* ..... 51

Chapter 3 Ancient History as a Means of Transforming Colonial India  
in the Late-Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries

*Daniel Marc Segesser* ..... 73

Chapter 4 The Concept of a Classical Age in India's Contemporary Politics

*Jakob Rösel* ..... 93

Chapter 5 The Politics of National Histories in Urban Space:  
(Re-)Constructing Islamic Architecture in Early Post-colonial Delhi

*Clemens Six* ..... 127

## Part II Mesoamerica and Constructions of the Past

Mesoamerica: A Brief Introduction

*Ute Schüren* ..... 149

Chapter 6 Primordial Times in Mesoamerican Memory:  
Monuments, Tombs, and Codices

*Maarten E.R.G.N. Jansen* ..... 157

## Contents

Chapter 7 Imagining a Nation: Elite Discourse and the Native Past in Nineteenth-Century Mexico <i>Wolfgang Gabbit</i> .....	189
Chapter 8 Decolonizing Memory: The Case of the Ñuu Sau (Mixtec People), Mexico <i>Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez</i> .....	211
Chapter 9 On the History of Archaeological Research in Mesoamerica, with Particular Reference to Pre-Columbian Maya Civilization <i>Jeremy A. Sabloff</i> .....	219
Chapter 10 Heirs of the Ancient Maya: Indigenous Organizations and the Appropriation of History in Yucatán, Mexico, and Guatemala <i>Ute Schüren</i> .....	231
 Part III Images of European Antiquity and the Perception of Non-European Cultures	
European “Classical Antiquity”: A Brief Introduction <i>Thomas Späth</i> .....	253
Chapter 11 The Path of Ruins in the Graeco-Roman World <i>Alain Schnapp</i> .....	259
Chapter 12 Füssli, Schlegel, and Lucian: A “True Story” about Late Eighteenth-Century Fragmented Antiquity <i>Manuel Baumbach</i> .....	281
Chapter 13 The Making of a Bourgeois Antiquity: Wilhelm von Humboldt and Greek History <i>Stefan Rebenich</i> .....	297
 Conclusion	
Chapter 14 Provincializing Antiquity? Uses of the Past Compared <i>Thomas Späth</i> .....	319
Index of Personal Names .....	339
Index of Geographical Names .....	343
Index of Subjects .....	346

# List of Figures

Fig. 1: Physical map of South Asia	25
Fig. 2: Languages in modern South Asia	28
Fig. 3: Map of Mesoamerica	148
Fig. 4: The destruction of the world by water, Codex Vaticanus A, f. 4v.	162
Fig. 5: The opening sentence in Codex Yuta Tnoho (Vindobonensis), 52	166
Fig. 6: First sunrise, Codex Yuta Tnoho (Vindobonensis), 23	168
Fig. 7: Tomb 7 of Monte Albán, the gold pectoral	172
Fig. 8: Priest Lord 5 Alligator offering his blood to the Sacred Bundle, Codex Tonindeye (Nuttall), 25	173
Fig. 9: Tomb 7 of Monte Albán, Bone 203i: Lady 9 Reed is born from the Tree of Origin	175
Fig. 10: The Tree of Origin, Codex Yuta Tnoho (Vindobonensis), 37	175
Fig. 11: The war against the “Stone Men”, Codex Tonindeye (Nuttall), 3	176
Fig. 12: Tomb 7 of Monte Albán, Bone 203b: the “Stone Man” binds and conquers towns	176
Fig. 13: Tomb 7 of Monte Albán, Bone 174a: Lady 9 Reed comes down from Heaven and defeats the “Stone Men”	176
Fig. 14: Lady 9 Reed, Goddess of Flints and Arrowheads, Patron of the Town of Blood (Tonalá), Codex Tonindeye (Nuttall), 51	177
Fig. 15: Lord 5 Flower of the “Xipe Dynasty” marries Lady 4 Rabbit, Codex Tonindeye (Nuttall), 33	178
Fig. 16: The landscape of Monte Albán in Codex Tonindeye (Nuttall), 19b, left-hand side	180
Fig. 17: The landscape of Monte Albán in Codex Tonindeye (Nuttall), 19a, right-hand side	181
Fig. 18: Tomb 7 of Monte Albán, Bone 124	182-183
Fig. 19: Cartoon: the philologist’s caricature on an ‘ancient’ potsherd	283
Fig. 20: Johann Heinrich Füssli, <i>Der Künstler verzweifelt vor der Größe der antiken Trümmer</i> (“The artist moved to despair by the grandeur of ancient ruins”)	284

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# Chapter 14

## Provincializing Antiquity?

### Uses of the Past Compared

*Thomas Späth*

#### Abstract

The starting point for this final chapter is Dipesh Chakrabarty's observation of the "inequality of ignorance" between "third-world historians," who quite naturally refer to their European colleagues, while the opposite seldom occurs. The alleged "theft of history" decried by Jack Goody is unable to explain this unequal relationship, precisely since this "theft" does not reside in the fact that "Western" historiography has appropriated other cultures' alternative constructions of the past. Conversely, the contributions to the present book suggest that the Western view of the past does not constitute a single unified model: the cultures investigated have in common a construal of the remote past in terms of competing and various perspectives. A second finding emerging from this book's approach to the concept of *antiquity* from the margins is that the alleged opposition between a European, linear concept of time and the cyclical concept of non-European cultures can no longer be maintained. Finally, the comparative study of various constructions of antiquity reveals two fundamentally different modes of reference to the remote past: a primordialist model of the search for autochthony and a transformation model of historicity. Both modes occur in India and Mesoamerica, just as they do in Europe – the comparative studies on the concept of *antiquity* gathered here not only suggest a global interpenetration of notions of antiquity but also mark a contribution to the project of provincializing Europe.

"Provincialize Europe" was the provocative demand made by Dipesh Chakrabarty in his study of post-colonial thought and historical difference, first published in the year 2000. His book discusses the contradiction that "European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity."<sup>1</sup> For Chakrabarty's view of post-colonial history, this perspective entails "the everyday paradox of third-world social science [...] that *we* [scil. 'third-world historians'] find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of

1 CHAKRABARTY 2007: xiii. Chakrabarty published his first programmatic statement about "provincializing Europe" in CHAKRABARTY 1992.

‘us,’ eminently useful in understanding our societies.”<sup>2</sup> Chakrabarty’s project of provincializing Europe is therefore not about replacing such “European” thinking, which ranges from Marx through Heidegger to Foucault, but much rather about situating the European intellectual tradition, which determines social science concepts and methods across the world, first, within the history of European imperialism, whose global development shaped the dominating concept of modernity, and, second, within the anticolonial formation of nation-states outside Europe, which were involved at least in equal measure in establishing this dominance as “modernizing ideologies par excellence.”<sup>3</sup> Chakrabarty considers the European tradition – whose claim to continuity since Greek antiquity is a nineteenth-century construct<sup>4</sup> – as both indispensable and inadequate for debating the social and political structures of non-European nations. Thus, *Provincializing Europe* seeks to discover how this tradition can be developed from the periphery for the periphery.<sup>5</sup>

The present book attempts to contribute to this provincialization of Europe. Just as conceptions of *modernity* and human rights, and notions of *democracy* and civil rights are considered to be products of European Enlightenment, so too is *antiquity* a product of nineteenth-century Europe – and *classical antiquity* even more so. But the starting point of the contributions gathered here is not the construction of this antiquity; instead, they approach the *notion* of antiquity from the margins. In doing so, this volume attempts to set a counterpoint to what Chakrabarty terms the “inequality of ignorance”: “Third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate.”<sup>6</sup>

My concluding chapter compares the findings of the present studies of the past in India, Mesoamerica, and Europe, first in a critical discussion of the overly simplistic concept of a one-dimensional Eurocentrism (1.). This discussion leads to a plural notion of *antiquity* (2.). Notwithstanding diverse concepts of time, the cultural regions and epochs investigated in this book have in common notions of an idealized past (3.), which combines in various ways with a knowledge of “history” as an element in the practice of power (4.). The specific actualizations of the past illuminate the conditions under which history is construed, and give rise to new approaches to *antiquity* (5.).

2 CHAKRABARTY 2007: 29.

3 Ibid., 43.

4 See LIANERI 2011: 16–21; VLASSOPOULOS 2011.

5 CHAKRABARTY 2007: 16. For a survey of the relationship between post-colonial theory and historiography, see, for instance, SPIVAK 1999: “Chapter Three: History”, 198–311; GUNN 2006: 156–181; GOFF 2005; DECREUS 2007; TRIVEDI 2007.

6 CHAKRABARTY 2007: 28.

## 1 A Theft – or Rather an Entanglement – of History?

Antiquity stands at the heart of Jack Goody's recent critique of European historiography, polemically entitled *The Theft of History*. His title refers to "the take-over of history by the west. That is, the past is conceptualized and presented according to what happened on the provincial scale of Europe, often western Europe, and then imposed upon the rest of the world."<sup>7</sup> Goody sees his book as "the product of an anthropologist's (or comparative sociologist's) reaction to 'modern' history."<sup>8</sup> He denounces the construction of Europe's unique status in historiography, through which it sets itself apart from Asia and Africa. Starting from the assertion that the European concepts of time and space were imposed upon the whole world, Goody dismantles the "invention" of Greek and Roman antiquities as teleologically oriented towards Europe, an invention that screens out their Bronze Age and Near Eastern foundations. Further, he criticizes the universal claim to divide history into three periods, namely, antiquity, feudalism, and capitalism. He also disparages the European monopolization of both "civilization," such as by Norbert Elias, and the development of capitalism, such as by Fernand Braudel. Last but not least, Goody rejects the claim that Europe deserves exclusive credit for the discovery of urbanism and universities, humanism and democracy, and individualism and romantic love.

Goody's late work reads like an indictment of the Eurocentric representation of history.<sup>9</sup> While his introduction suggests that "ethnocentricity, of which Eurocentricity and Orientalism are two varieties, is not a purely European disease," he asserts that it is just as common among "the Jews, the Arabs and the Chinese"; and he observes, warningly, that the exclusive criticism of Eurocentricism is itself an ethnocentric trap, into which "post-colonialism and post-modernism frequently fall."<sup>10</sup> The particular problems of Eurocentrism, he further maintains, are that historiography gave it a superficial veneer of science and that this practice of viewing the world rose to global dominance between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Goody's book is written against awarding the semblance of science to history (without, however, presenting consistently persuasive arguments) – and yet he seems to fall into precisely the same trap as the post-colonial approaches he attacks. In contrast to Chakrabarty,<sup>11</sup> who readily assumes that European concepts form an inevitably integral part of non-European science, Goody evidently ignores the idea that the "ethnicity" of the widespread "ethnocentric" view of history is

7 GOODY 2006: 1.

8 *Ibid.*, 3.

9 *The Theft of History* echoes several earlier publications in which Goody opposed a Eurocentric perspective; see the bibliographical survey in Keith Hart's review (2007).

10 GOODY 2006: 5. On the notion of Eurocentrism, see the editors' introduction to CONRAD/RANDERIA 2002, especially 12ff.

11 And to many others, see, for instance, APPADURAI 1996; BHABHA 2004; SPIVAK 1990; SPIVAK 2012, SUBRAHMANYAM 2000; or, in the field of French-Caribbean literature, CHAMOISEAU 1997; CHAMOISEAU/CONFIAANT/BERNABÉ 1989; GLISSANT 1990; GLISSANT 1997.

itself a hybrid identity, just as it is among Jews, Arabs, and Christians.<sup>12</sup> Both the concepts of time and space and the methods of “Western” historical discourse have long been used productively by non-European historians, because (under the hegemonic “inequality of ignorance”) they could not have done otherwise.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, the alleged “theft of history” is indeed a most peculiar kind of theft, since the perpetrator has not really appropriated the foreign property: in affirming its own discourse, European history negates and thus ignores the alternative possibilities of another historicity.<sup>14</sup> In their contributions to this volume, Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez and Ute Schüren show that these alternatives have not vanished, but can be fought for.<sup>15</sup> The simple opposition between “the West and the Rest,”<sup>16</sup> which Goody evidently assumes, has given way to a more precise and more complex perspective on the manifold and unequally entangled histories to which post-colonial theories refer as the “West” has become part of the “Rest.”<sup>17</sup> And vice versa, if the position of the West has emerged only from a confrontation with the “Rest,” then the entanglement is neither egalitarian nor reciprocal – which in turn explains why “provincializing Europe” is indeed a *project*.<sup>18</sup>

- 12 Post-colonial or poststructuralist theory is not among Goody’s favourite reading; see, for instance, his assessment of cultural studies: “The field of cultural studies, both in its British and its American variants, is chaotic”; the latter, he adds, draw especially upon French philosophers, who “comment upon life without offering much data” (GOODY 2006: 305).
- 13 One of the fundamental critiques levelled at Edward Said’s (1995) concept of Orientalism is his failure to acknowledge that the *objects* of an orientalist (or, more generally, of an Eurocentric) discourse can affirm themselves as subjects; see Judith Butler (1997: 2ff.) on verbal abuse as a violent speech act, which, by naming its object, at the same time interpellates it as a subject, which thereby is empowered to respond.
- 14 A “historicity,” that is to say, which would ask for another name than the “discourse of ‘history’ produced at the institutional site of the university” (CHAKRABARTY 2007: 41).
- 15 See their respective contributions: supra, pp. 211–218 and pp. 231–250.
- 16 See the brief discussion on terms and concepts in ECKERT/RANDERIA 2009: 10. Johannes FABIAN (2002: 171, footnote 25) refers to SAHLINS 1976 as the “inventor” of the expression: “Marshall Sahlins uses this formula with disarming frankness in his recent attempt to set up a basic opposition between ‘practical reason’ (the West’s) and ‘culture’ (the Rest’s),” which was used again by HALL 1992 (without any acknowledgment, however). HALL specifies matters as follows: “‘the West’ is a *historical*, not a geographical construct”: he suggests *western* as a synonym for “modern,” for “an idea, a concept” (HALL 1992: 277). This refers to the temporal dimension, which FABIAN, in terms of the “denial of coevalness,” identifies as the central instrument of *Othering*, that is, the relegation or denigration of “an Other” by displacement or distancing (FABIAN 2002: 25–35ff.).
- 17 Recently, Phiroze VASUNIA has shown how “classical antiquity” was introduced in India between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries whilst being appropriated and developed by Indian nationalists; see especially his elucidating “Part I: Alexander in India,” in which he confronts British and Indian interpretations of Alexander’s conquests (VASUNIA 2013: 31–115).
- 18 When Sanjay SUBRAHMANYAM (2007: 331) refuses “to rehash the now hackneyed call to ‘provincialize Europe’ (and perhaps universalize Bengal),” he seems to me either too optimistic or simply writing to his (and his readership’s) amusement with his ironic pen. By warning of the constant “risk of reproducing that old and familiar history of the ‘global,’ where it all begins in

## 2 The Diversity of “Antiquity” and an Open Reading

The above qualification of Goody’s reflections does not want to call into question his critical view of the construction of the European notion of antiquity. In particular, his plea for analytical frameworks, which forsake predefined categories and instead employ analytical networks whose concepts are open to wide-ranging ideas and contents, strikes me as a not really new, but nevertheless convincing methodological approach<sup>19</sup> – especially for the “provincialization” project.

Therefore, “antiquity,” whose globalization is the subject of this volume,<sup>20</sup> is defined here in a way that accounts for the term’s synchronic and diachronic polysemy: Manuel Baumbach postulates the existence of a *fragmented* antiquity already in the 2nd century CE; he discusses the response of German Romanticism to this antiquity, which, as he further observes, by no means corresponds to that notion of “classical antiquity” whose emergence as a distinctive feature of early nineteenth-century bourgeois society is closely examined by Stefan Rebenich.<sup>21</sup> Before the establishment of “classical education” in that period, European “antiquity” was not a single unified concept: the interest in Graeco-Roman antiquity, which developed in the course of fifteenth and sixteenth-century Humanism, coincided with the European conquest of the New World; the ethnographic narratives and descriptions of nature furnished by Greek and Roman authors – among others, Herodotus and Pliny the Elder – provided explanatory models for classifying the unknown. Transferring the ancient depictions of foreign peoples onto the “savages” provided illustrative material – the literary “barbarians” of long bygone times could now be studied in present-day reality.<sup>22</sup> But simultaneously these strangers troubled or even contradicted the image of the “barbarian”: they lived in well-structured states and had stone monuments, which evoked the Roman past reduced to ruins in Spain – except for one crucial difference, namely, that this monumental architecture was intact, inhabit-

the Mediterranean, passes to the Atlantic, and eventually expands by means of concentric circles to the rest of the world,” he maintains the model proposed by WALLERSTEIN (“old Eurocentric wine in a shiny new plastic bottle labelled ‘world-systems theory’”).

19 “To affect a valid comparison would involve using not predetermined categories of the kind Antiquity, feudalism, capitalism, but abandoning these concepts to construct a sociological grid laying out the possible variations of what is being compared” (GOODY 2006: 304).

20 Its focus is therefore at the same time narrower and larger than the objective of several recent publications that attempt to treat *historiography* from a globalized perspective, such as the grand survey presented in the five-volume *Oxford History of Historical Writing* (2011–12), edited by Daniel WOOLF, or his synthesis (WOOLF 2011). The present collection, rather than considering historiography as the different modes of writing history, adopts a comparative approach to explore how the societies studied produced and used a far remote past – “antiquity” – for the requirements of their respective present age. Of course, several contributions, above all in the first volume of the *Oxford History* (FELDHERR/HARDY 2011), present interesting materials for our questions (see especially the concluding chapter, LLOYD 2011).

21 See Baumbach and Rebenich in this volume, *supra* pp. 281–296 and pp. 217–316.

22 NIPPEL 1990: 30–55; SCHNAPP 2010: 160.

ed, and still in use.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the exclusive continuity that the Humanists sought to establish between Graeco-Roman antiquity and a reborn – hence a *Renaissance* – Europe was called into question for the first time. As is well known, the authority of this antiquity was never beyond controversy during the following centuries – the “*Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*” in France in the late seventeenth century<sup>24</sup> is just one of many debates in Europe over the value of establishing a connection with the remote Greek and Roman pasts.<sup>25</sup>

Since no unified notion of a European antiquity exists, the exploration of “globalized antiquity” proposed in this volume cannot be a study of the diffusion of *the* European model of the “remote past.” But no unified past can be found in other regions of the world either: the contributions discussing the Mesoamerican and Indian uses of the past reach the same conclusion; in the long term, no past escapes transformations. Maarten Jansen<sup>26</sup> presents the Mesoamerican concept of the “suns” as a temporality constituted by epochal periods of destruction and renewal; the Spanish conquerors explained the past of the subjugated Mesoamerican societies with hypotheses about their Carthaginian, Phoenician or Egyptian origin, or considered them as descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.<sup>27</sup> The creole patriotism emerging at the end of the eighteenth century began to emphasize the pre-Columbian past, and, as Jeremy Sabloff shows, the (predominantly North-American) archaeology formed the “traditional three-period model of Mayan culture” with a “Classic high culture,” a “Preclassic” past, and a sombre “Postclassic Period” after the so-called “Maya collapse” in the ninth century CE. This model shaped Maya-archaeology well beyond the mid-twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> Wolfgang Gabbert’s discussion of nineteenth-century evolutions explains how the creole nationalist movement fashioned a history characterized by independence from Spain. Not only did this history invoke the legacy of the pre-Columbian past, but it also ostracized the indigenous communities. In recent decades, the indigenous population has forged a collective identity for itself beyond national borders, by returning both to its own language and to actual and fictional pre-Columbian traditions.<sup>29</sup>

23 SCHNAPP 2010: 162–64.

24 On the “*Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns*,” aroused by Charles Perrault with his poem on the superiority of his “*Siècle de Louis le Grand*” (1687) and its rationality over all the things ancient, see YILMAZ 2004 or the overview in SCHMITT 2002.

25 See, for instance, HARTOG 2003: 77–112 on the transition, following Chateaubriand, from the old “*régime d’historicité*” – that is, the occidental tradition and its interplay among the “ancients,” the “moderns,” and the timeless “savages,” for whom the past served as a point of reference – to the new “*régime d’historicité*” (following Tocqueville), which is oriented towards the future.

26 *Supra*, p. 161.

27 See Gabbert in this volume, *supra* p. 192.

28 This “traditional model” allowed for presenting the consequences of the “Maya collapse” as more severe for the population than the Spanish conquest and colonization; see Sabloff, *supra*, p. 226.

29 See Pérez Jiménez, *supra* pp. 217sq, and Schüren, *supra* pp. 242–245.

For early Indian societies, Romila Thapar posits a historiography brought within closer reach by both written and oral traditions, and which reveals the various Hindu-Brahman, Buddhist, and Jainist traditions – an example of the “multiple facets” and the “variant patterns of referring to and recording the many pasts” of each civilization.<sup>30</sup> Jamal Malik explains how the representation of the past under Muslim rule, since the establishment of the Sultanate of Delhi in the thirteenth century and later in the sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Mughal Empire, splits into two traditions.<sup>31</sup> One of these traditions rests on Muhammed, the founder of Islam, the other on Sassanid-Hellenic antiquity. Daniel Marc Segesser’s contribution discusses the view of history prevalent under British colonial rule, and thereby observes two competing patterns of representation: on the one hand, the British orientalists in the service of the East India Company construed, together with their students, who belonged to the Indian elites, a pre-Islamic “Golden Age” by analogy with a European notion of antiquity. On the other hand, utilitarianists like Mill or Macaulay described an Indian past in which they observed nothing else than the persistence of “Oriental Despotism” and thus an unalterable backwardness and an absence of history.<sup>32</sup> Clemens Six shows that Nehru’s government achieved a unified synthesis of Indian history, by repudiating the exclusion of Islamic rule from Indian history, as practised by the British orientalists.<sup>33</sup> Jakob Rösel, finally, looks at the invocation of a glorious *regional* past as an important argument in the election campaigns held in India’s constituent states since the 1960s.<sup>34</sup>

This rich diversity of pasts plainly suggests that subject to particular historical and cultural conditions (and needs) every present age produces its own “antiquity.” An attempt for a definition has to conceive “antiquity” as a polythetic classification:<sup>35</sup> such a period or time can be circumscribed as a notion of a remote past upon which specific functions for the present age are bestowed (among others, as a history of origin, as a way of legitimating claims to territorial ownership, as a basis for the collective construction of identity, as a differentiating contrast to current postulates of progress, and so forth). Raising such questions, which do justice to this diversity, allows one to pursue the “constructions of antiquity” in terms of how the past was used under the different (and specific) social and historical circumstances in Mesoamerica, India, and Europe. In this way, European antiquity becomes a particular kind of past, on a par with the pasts of the non-European regions studied in this volume: seen thus, Europe is one of the world’s many “provinces,” an approach which in turn enables a comparative study of the various constructions of antiquity.

30 Supra p. 49.

31 Supra p. 56.

32 Supra pp. 82–87.

33 Supra p. 136.

34 Supra pp. 105sq.

35 In the sense proposed by Rodney NEEDHAM 1975.

Interrelating the various pasts explored in this volume reveals not only different concepts of time, both between and within diverse cultural regions, but also the notion of an ideal antiquity as a common feature of different cultures and eras.

### 3 Concepts of Time and the “Golden Age”

Chronological uniformity is customarily considered a crucial feature of globalization: specifically, this means the dissemination and assertion of a linear concept of time, which originates in a Judeo-Christian teleology and subsequently evolves into the secularized concepts of progress in the Enlightenment and the Industrial Age. Non-European concepts of time are often sweepingly set against such linearity. Maarten Jansen’s discussion of the pre-colonial Mesoamerican calendar shows for the Maya area the combination of the ritual and astronomical 260-day cycles with the solar years of 365 days. But the number of years was counted referring to a virtual “zero point.” This element of origination (just as the dynastic registers referred to by Jansen<sup>36</sup>) points to an aspect emphasized by Romila Thapar, namely, that a “sharp dichotomy between linear and cyclic time is not feasible since some elements of each are often parallel although pertaining to different functions.”<sup>37</sup> She therefore suggests considering time in its specific forms – linear, spiral, cyclical – as well as allowing for their coexistence in one and the same culture: linear time can be a segment of cyclical temporality; vice versa, a cycle of time can form part of a linear time line. Thus, in accordance with teleological time, most people’s lives in medieval Christian Europe were determined either by the seasonal cycle of agricultural production or by the Liturgical calendar and its feast days.<sup>38</sup> Thapar further notes that the Indian *yugas* refer less to a cyclical concept of time than to a time spiral – a spiral, for that matter, can be stretched out along its axis until it approaches a straight line.

Since the concepts of time found in the societies studied here do not amount to a simple opposition between cyclical and linear time, one must examine each in terms of the interplay between the various forms suggested by Thapar. In contrast to the apparent differences, such a comparative study reveals the concept of an idealized past as a common feature of the geographical regions and historical periods discussed in the present volume. It seems reasonable to speak of a “Golden Age” in this respect – in the knowledge that such a concept traditionally is traced back to Graeco-Roman antiquity, but whose roots are in effect Near Eastern: in his didactic poem *Works and Days*, written around 700 BCE, the Greek poet Hesiod describes the Golden Age as the first age in which mankind lived a carefree life. In Hesiod’s conception, it is followed by the Silver, Bronze, Heroic, and Iron Ages; he es-

36 *Supra*, pp. 158sq (for the calendar), and pp. 165–169 (for dynastic registers).

37 *Supra*, p. 43.

38 And let us not forget that the putatively linear current “Western” calendar combines the 24 hour-cycle of the day, the 7 day-cycle of the week, the 12 months-cycle of the year with the linear conception of the year-count.

establishes this sequence of ages in order to account for a development towards degeneration, which is projected from the direst of conditions backward into the past.<sup>39</sup> Jakob Rösel emphasizes that the reference to a “classical,” that is, “Golden Age” is a fundamental element of *nation-building*, a process in which a consensus about the national past as an ideal age must be established.<sup>40</sup> However, unlike the ancient Greek model of degeneration, this “Golden Age” does not mark the beginning of a period of decline: the ideal past, which is transferred to a remote past, is contrasted with a negatively connoted colonial or post-colonial present, while it also holds the promise of a bright future. Rösel illustrates this particular use of the past with the example of the retrospective vision of India conjured up by Jawaharlal Nehru, the country’s first prime minister. For Nehru, the Buddhist empire under Emperor Ashoka (in the 3rd century BCE) epitomized Indian “Classicism” as a model of Indian greatness and unity within a non-violent “Hindu Buddhist state.” Nehru’s vision formed the basis of the Congress Party’s policy to unite the constituent states and to integrate minorities. The Congress, as Rösel shows, later manages to adapt this national strategy to regional endeavours, and thereby to determine Indian politics for over four decades. But this construction of the past was not uncontroversial: Clemens Six points out the competing historical programme of the Hindu nationalist movements, which, since the 1920s, had been invoking the “glorious past’ of a Vedic Community of all Hindus” in a pure paradisiacal state. This invocation served to justify Hindu nationalism’s anti-Muslim struggle, which involved the widespread deconsecration of mosques and Islamic cemeteries as well as the demand for an “exchange of populations” between India and Pakistan.<sup>41</sup> Writing from an ancient historian’s perspective, Romila Thapar also refers to these competing visions by contrasting the Puranic and Shramanic traditions.<sup>42</sup> She describes the latter as historical in the narrow sense, since these traditions use Buddhist and Jainist sources and thus refer to Buddha and Mahavira, the founders of religion, as historical figures. By contrast, Thapar associates the former with heroic myths, which claim to draw on Vedic Brahmanism, but, as she shows, are actually based on *puranas* dating from the first millennium CE.

Daniel Marc Segesser’s essay reveals that so-called “Golden Ages” are invoked not only with nationalist-anticolonial intentions in mind. He observes that while the British orientalist in the service of the East India Company doubted the supposedly great age of the Vedic texts, the *Asiatic Society of Bengal* nevertheless strived to discover the Vedic times (as yet) unsullied by “Oriental Despotism.” Coupled here were scientific curiosity and the intention to recruit well-trained administrative auxiliaries, whose loyalty one sought to win by involving them in maintaining their own educational curricula.<sup>43</sup> Thus began the

39 Hesiod, *erga*, 106–201; the description of historical periods in terms of metals occurs also in Roman literature; see GATZ 1967; GÜNTHER/MÜLLER 1988; KUBUSCH 1986.

40 *Supra* pp. 95–97.

41 *Supra* p. 137.

42 *Supra* p. 44.

43 *Supra* pp. 78sq. See also the chapter “*Competitionwallahs*: Greek, Latin, and the Indian Civil Service,” in VANSUNIA 2013: 193–235.

colonisers' "essentializing" of Indian society, against which B.R. Ambedkar published various protests in the 1940s. This orientalist's essentializing laid (a hardly intended) foundation for the struggle of Hindu nationalism for independence in the first half of the twentieth century, which was based on religious and social exclusion.<sup>44</sup>

The studies on Mesoamerica gathered here reveal the exact opposite of what Rösel and Six observe in their essays on the Nehru government's use of the past, namely, the actualization of a "Classical Age," which resulted in exclusion. What Jeremy Sabloff describes as the "traditional model" of the ancient Maya civilization, a view held by archaeologists well beyond the mid-twentieth century, is either the adoption of the "rise-and-fall" metaphor, which was already widespread in Greek and Roman antiquity,<sup>45</sup> or the use of a division into "Preclassicism," "Classicism," and "Postclassicism," based on quality judgments about literary works, which had been employed since Humanism, and on archaeological and art-historical objects, practiced since the eighteenth century.<sup>46</sup> By establishing a "Classic Period", which ended with a "collapse" around 900 CE, the Spanish conquest could be portrayed as the conclusion of a Postclassic era of decline.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, archaeological research embraced an explanation, which, as Wolfgang Gabbert demonstrates, creole nationalism advanced by overcoming various contradictions since the late eighteenth century: the creole descendants of the Spanish colonisers construed the indigenous builders of the monumental cities of Mesoamerica and in the Andes as their ancestors, and located them in a "Golden Age." Thus, they created for themselves an opportunity to identify with a national history independent of the Spanish monarchy, while excluding the impoverished indigenous population from this prestigious heritage.<sup>48</sup> Against the background of this creole appropriation of the past, it is hardly surprising that Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez, as a member of the Ñuu Sau people, refutes such a "Golden Age": "Our pre-colonial antiquity was not a 'Golden Age' that we should look back upon with nostalgia, but a historical and cultural reference point that helps us to un-

44 See Six in the present volume, p. 133.

45 See here the teachings on constitutional change (*metabolē politeiōn*) in Greek political philosophy, which posited an eternal rotation from good to bad forms of aristocracy, monarchy, and democracy (which is, incidentally, a very cyclical element in the supposedly merely linear ancient Greek concept of time); see also Herodotus 1.5.4: "For many states that were once great have now become small; and those that were great in my time were small before. Knowing therefore that human prosperity never continues in the same place, I shall mention both alike." It was also common in Graeco-Roman antiquity to metaphorically describe the history of the human collective in terms of the stages of life, i.e. childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age (and possibly rebirth); for a discussion of such a rise and fall as yet another example of a linear concept of time including cyclical elements, see DEMANDT 1978: 37–45.

46 PORTER 2006.

47 See supra, footnote 28. Sabloff (p. 226) asserts that he is convinced "that it was not the conscious intent of the key advocates of the traditional model, who clearly had great affection for the modern Maya with whom they worked [...], to separate these people from their past."

48 Supra p. 198.

derstand the onslaught of colonialism and that helps us to (re-)create a feeling of dignity and a positive self-image."<sup>49</sup>

#### 4 Knowledge of the Past as a Form of Power

Pérez Jiménez's anti-colonial claim to her community's own past can be seen as a claim to cultural capital: history, as Six writes in the introduction to his essay,<sup>50</sup> forms part of the capital that is contested by unequal actors in the field of politics. As is well known, the past is not found in "nature" as it were; what is found there are ruins, which, as Alain Schnapp shows, under certain historical conditions betoken death, transience, and thus a past age; under other conditions, however, social actors (re)construct such ruins in certain political fields as *testimonia* to a past age, which they integrate into their present and upon which they confer meaning for this present and the future.<sup>51</sup> Such a *construction* of the past may manifest itself, metaphorically, in the form of history as an actualizing narrative, and also, in concrete terms, as architectural structures. Clemens Six exemplifies these two possibilities in his discussion of the building programme undertaken by the Nehru government to renovate and restore sacred Muslim buildings in the early years of the Indian nation-state. Set against another background, and with different objectives in mind, the Mesoamerican archaeological research, restoration, and founding of collections and museums aimed at establishing a "traditional model of ancient Maya civilization" can be seen as a very concrete example of constructing the past. This construction is oriented towards the tradition of European archaeology, which, from the nineteenth century, had created in a visual and haptic way the so-called "classical antiquity" in the museums of northern Europe, to the point where the ancient artworks of the Mediterranean were whisked off. Today, these material constructions of the past are located in archaeological parks, through which hordes of tourists and school classes are shepherded in Greece and Italy, to acquaint them with "European heritage."

*What*, however, do these metaphorical and concrete constructions of the past actualize? Which elements of history serve to create cultural capital within these various contexts? As a tool for the analysis and comparison of the multifold constructions of antiquity, I would like to suggest distinguishing two ideal-type models of the construction of the past: autochthony and transformation.

The *search for autochthonous*<sup>52</sup> *origins in the past* can help establish the identities of religious or ethnic groups or nations closely related to concepts of primordialism. Jakob

49 *Supra* p. 217.

50 *Supra* pp. 129sq.

51 *Supra* pp. 259sq.

52 Fundamental to my use of the concept of autochthony is Nicole Loraux's (1990) study of the mythical self-understanding of the (male) citizens of the *polis* of Athens, who recount their origins as men born from Attic soil.

Rösel clearly distinguishes between what is by definition an ahistorical *primordialism*, which postulates “a first, a primeval order before history,” and *Classicism*, which defines a “Classical Age” as the outcome of a historical development.<sup>53</sup> But does this boundary – which is perfectly feasible in theory – not become blurred in actual scientific and political practice? Daniel Marc Segesser shows that late-eighteenth century British orientalists like William Jones and the *Asiatic Society of Bengal* were interested primarily in the most ancient Indian history, which they believed could be found in the Vedas.<sup>54</sup> Their philological-historical studies thus laid the foundations not only for Indo-European research, which subsequently enjoyed a great future especially in nineteenth-century (Continental) European historical philology, but also for the notion of an idealized Indian origin. Hindu nationalism adopted this notion in its struggle for independence against Great Britain,<sup>55</sup> just as Hindu fundamentalism has done in its political action to the present day, until the electoral victory of the BJP in May 2014. The orientalists created an “Indian-ness,” against which the Congress Party pitted a synthetic image of Indian history, and against which intellectuals like Gayatri Spivak are continuing to fight to this day: “‘Indian-ness’ is not a thing that exists. Reading Sanskrit scriptures, for example – I can’t call that Indian, because after all, India is not just Hindu.”<sup>56</sup> In his critique of the notion of ethnicity, Arjun Appadurai asserts “that Western models of political participation, education, mobilization, and economic growth, which were calculated to distance the new nations from their most retrograde primordialisms, have had just the opposite effect. [...] there is too much evidence that the cure and the disease are difficult to disaggregate.” Modernization concepts presuppose a notion of social collectives which “are seen to possess a collective conscience whose historical roots are in some distant past and are not easily changeable.”<sup>57</sup>

The autochthonous model of the relation to the past suggested here denotes the ahistorical construction of identity, which is by no means an exclusively non-European phenomenon: it manifests itself in the notion of the “Renaissance,” which is posited for various epochs of European history due to its association with Graeco-Roman antiquity. Rösel’s discussion of the regional election campaigns in India since the 1960s, which highlighted the particular values and the glorious past of the individual constituent states and their populations, at the expense of a synthetic image of history created with refer-

53 *Supra* p. 97.

54 *Supra* pp. 80sq.

55 See Six in the present volume, pp. 131–133.

56 SPIVAK 1990: 39.

57 APPADURAI 1996: see especially chapter 7, “Life after Primordialism,” 139–157; for the citations, see page 141. Harold R. Isaacs (1975) has argued that the formation of such a “we-identity” within a primary solidarity group is inseparably linked to setting oneself off from “the others,” and that this can result in irrational xenophobic violence. However, this explanatory model has been criticized, for instance, by HAUCK 2006: 111ff.; APPADURAI (1996: 149ff.) has challenged the rationale of this model with the concept of “Ethnic Implosions.”

ence to the Ashoka period,<sup>58</sup> indicates just how fragile the boundary is between a historically constituted *classicism* and primordialist viewpoints.

These viewpoints assume various shapes in the essays on Mesoamerica gathered here: while a primordial time is also construed as an external attribution,<sup>59</sup> such a construal finds little correspondence in the present. Jeremy Sabloff describes the above “traditional model” of ancient Mayan civilization as a condition removed from actual historical development: such a model encapsulates a theocratic community, which lived in seclusion and peace in the jungle and whose small elite was sustained by the peasant masses and their “primitive” swidden agriculture in ostentatious religious centres bearing no relation to urban structures. Interestingly, this primordial state was propagated by US-American archaeology just as much as it was appropriated by creole nationalism: by contrast to the uniqueness of Mayan culture, North-American institutions could point to the decadence of colonial and modern developments in Mesoamerica, and thus legitimate claims to the political hegemony of the United States.

However, this primordialist construction of the remote past bears no relation to the (ethnic) present, which, as Wolfgang Gabbitas demonstrates, the creole elites sought to claim for themselves. Thus, the connection between the indigenous population and the idealized past was not made until the second half of the twentieth century: Ute Schüren shows that the attempts made in Yucatán to construct a continuous development between past and present met with little popular acclaim; on the other hand, the grassroots campaign of the Mayan organizations in Guatemala fell on fruitful soil amid the civil war and racial discrimination. However, there is no evidence for a primordially inspired political movement in Mesoamerica, comparable to the importance of Hindu fundamentalism in India. If there are any claims to be made for a Mayan culture that has remained intact for over two thousand years, they are to be found in works of or strongly influenced by US-American authors.<sup>60</sup> Against the background of British Orientalism, a comparative perspective suggests that the construction of ethnicity based on primordial precepts may be viewed as the product of (neo)colonialism, or at least as the result of the interplay between colonial concepts and their anti-colonial appropriation.

The second model of a relation to the past is the *transformation model*. The starting point for this model is Pérez Jiménez's assertion that contemporary Mexican society originates neither in a “Classic Period” nor in a period before the European conquest, but instead in the three centuries of colonial rule. She argues that this is true for both the indigenous peoples and the Mexican population at large. One case in point is hegemonic masculinity,

58 See “Part II” of Rösel's contribution to this volume, pp. 107–121.

59 The important role of British orientalists in the construction of an ideal Vedic past finds an interesting parallel in the image of the glorious Maya civilization in a “Classical Age” painted mainly by North-American archaeologists. May we speak of an “etic primordialism”? The results of the comparative approach of this volume at least challenge the conventional definition of primordialist views as developed within communities from an emic perspective.

60 See supra pp. 243sq and the reference to FREIDEL/SCHELE/PARKER 1993.

which “was (and is) a characteristic of Spanish culture and became a dominant feature of Mexican society at large today, and particularly of indigenous communities.”<sup>61</sup> What is evoked here, on the basis of a present regarded as the result of various historical processes, is not a mythically glorified past. Rather, Pérez Jiménez’s fundamental assertion calls for an analytical view of those elements of the past which determined these processes, with a view to formulating a critical response to the intersectional dual discrimination to which indigenous women are exposed today.

Critically evaluating the present can radically alter the past (or rather its representation, which actually amounts to the same in a given situation): Sabloff suggests that a new model of Mayan civilization, capable of asserting itself against the above traditional model (even if the latter remains influential today), can be based on the quantitative and qualitative growth of archaeological research, whose use of new techniques generates ample new empirical data. Not even mountains of empirical data would have changed perceptions of Mayan civilization if the scientific premises determining research to date had not been called into question. Sabloff’s alternative view rests on a fundamental review of prevailing perspectives: a departure from archaeological research aimed at monumentalism and social elites; a rejection of the simple projection of European models of classical archaeology onto Mesoamerican soil research; and the historicizing of Mayan civilization, which freed itself from its purported “uniqueness.” Did Mesoamerican archaeology spontaneously decide to radically overhaul its research methods and questions? Hardly, and this raises questions about the conditions abiding in the politics of history and epistemology which prompted such a fundamental review among established, US-dominated archaeology: was this policy shift perhaps related to the demands of the indigenous peoples and their movements for their own history, which became more vociferous from the 1980s? Moreover, are there connections between the development of Mesoamerican archaeology and the turn in the history of science, which confronted European classical archaeology with prehistory, its neighbouring discipline, and thus expanded archaeological research to consider settlement patterns in terms of economic and socio-historical questions? Or are these new perspectives motivated by a new notion of *culture*, which, based on post-colonial approaches and the research on *cultural transfers*, is no longer understood as an entity, but as a permanent process of multiple hybridisation?<sup>62</sup> No matter how such questions regarding the history of science are answered, Sabloff’s discussion clearly demonstrates how current epistemological developments establish a completely

61 *Supra*, p. 213.

62 For the debate on *transfer* studies, see, for instance, the theoretical contributions in CELESTINI/ MITTERBAUER (2013: 19-150). Sabine MACCORMACK (2007) provides an excellent analysis of such a process of hybridisation in her study on the transformations of the meanings of the Roman Empire and of European antiquity in the confrontation of the Spanish conquerors with the Inca Empire between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. For the Near East and South Asia, Sanjay SUBRAHMANYAM presents highly interesting case studies and reflections on cultural transfer processes in the early modern world (without using the notion; his term is “connected histories”) in SUBRAHMANYAM 2005 and 2011.

different picture of a remote past. Historicizing an allegedly ideal and isolated “Classic Age” opens up possibilities for relating that remote past to the present-day rural lives of the Mayan peoples, not in terms of establishing continuity but rather in terms of historical transformations and a challenge for power relations.

Comparable to such a new perspective on the Mesoamerican past is the construction of a bourgeois antiquity in nineteenth-century Europe, as Stefan Rebenich explains using the example of Wilhelm von Humboldt:<sup>63</sup> while up until the eighteenth century European antiquity was a distinctive aristocratic feature, which manifested itself especially in the affinity of the French court with Roman antiquity, the Enlightenment “rediscovered” ancient Greece and embraced this particular past to foster the development of bourgeois values. Against the background of the bourgeois revolutions and the Prussian defeat to France, Humboldt propagated an intense engagement with ancient Greek language and culture as the cornerstone of an educational curriculum serving to promote civic individuality. Humboldt considered antiquity a timeless ideal, but at the same time he opposed Winckelmann’s principle of imitation: he traces the *idea* of Greek individuality, which leads him to call for an *historical* investigation of Greek antiquity. Such historicizing, however, conflicts with the normative timelessness of an idealized antiquity; in his older age, Humboldt, as Rebenich notes, opposed creating any hierarchy between cultures which would have privileged European antiquity.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, Humboldt made a major contribution to establishing humanistic education as a means of exclusively middle-class bourgeois distinction in the sense established by Bourdieu, and thus of European and, more narrowly speaking, of Greek *Altertumswissenschaft* as a leading discipline. Following these transformations, the plurality of “antiquity” was established more firmly: ancient Greece stood against Rome; Christian late antiquity was excluded; differentiated relations between the present and a fragmented antiquity<sup>65</sup> were postulated, between bourgeois German cities and Greek antiquity on the one hand, and between France and ancient Rome on the other.

The two models – autochthony and transformation – which I have used to outline the parallels and differences between the various constructions of the past are ideal types, since neither process can be observed in history in pure form. The resistance of today’s inhabitants of Yucatán or Guatemala, who see themselves as the descendants of the Maya and their history, could thus also be read as a demand for changing and adjusting this tradition. Similarly, the transformations undergone by European antiquity in the nineteenth century prompted the postulate of an idealized antiquity, which German Classicism championed as a primordial epoch, to which the German bourgeoisie imagined

63 *Supra* pp. 300sqq.

64 *Supra*. p. 305; such a relativization of the importance of the European past could also include considering to what extent the exchange of ideas with his brother Alexander von Humboldt, the great traveler, influenced Wilhelm von Humboldt’s thinking.

65 See Manuel BAUMBACH in this volume pp. 281–296.

close affinity. Similar imaginings, which are also evident in twentieth-first century political debates in Europe, indicate that the past is a contested form of cultural capital: one example is the notion of the “guiding culture” (*Leitkultur*) in Germany, which right-wing conservatives have introduced into the debate on immigration and the integration of “foreigners”,<sup>66</sup> another is the invoking of Switzerland’s past as that of an ahistorical, idyllic Alpine country home to dairymen producing cheese up on high, a notion central to the xenophobic propaganda of right-wing populists in Switzerland<sup>67</sup> and, albeit in different forms, in other countries. Calls for autochthony face critical historical viewpoints, which track the transformations of various pasts by interrelating current positions of power, scientific-epistemological debates, and the knowledge that the “West” and the “Rest” have long permeated each other.

## 5 A Global Perspective on Antiquity

In conclusion, we need to ask how important the “remote past” is as a form of capital. The English utilitarianists, as Segesser observes, gave a clear answer to this question. Thus, James Mill asserted: “Rude nations seem to derive a peculiar gratification from pretensions to a remote antiquity. As a boastful and turgid vanity distinguishes remarkably the oriental nations they have in most cases carried their claims extravagantly high.”<sup>68</sup> Mill’s assessment is just one more statement in the recurring quarrels between the ancients and the moderns (moreover it illustrates Edward Said’s Orientalism thesis almost in a caricature-like fashion). Juxtaposing the various constructions of the past in the three cultural regions studied in this volume reveals Mill’s misjudgment especially as regards diachrony: the canonization of a “remote antiquity” was subject to controversy in all cultural areas from the outset of historical transmission; probably not even Mill would have dared refer to these regions as “rude nations.” Alain Schnapp demonstrates that “antiquity” had been at the forefront of the minds of rulers, historiographers, and poets ever since Near Eastern and Greek antiquity.<sup>69</sup> Romila Thapar refers to the competing depictions of the past in the dynastic tables and genealogies of Indian history since the first millennium, which offered a different perspective beside the oral epic tradition.<sup>70</sup> Jamal Malik describes the Islamic historiography of India as a history of salvation, whose trajectory leads from the primordial state of *jahiliyya* through a barbaric age of lawlessness to the present;

66 In contrast to the nineteenth century, such terms and concepts attach far greater importance to the notion of a “Christian West” than they do to referring to Graeco-Roman antiquity, or rather, establishing a connection with antiquity that in turn was conceived as the prehistory of Christian Europe.

67 SCHÄR 2012; FALK 2012.

68 *Supra*, p. 86.

69 *Supra*, pp. 259–279.

70 See *supra*, p. 49 on the “bardic tradition” as a “counterpart to the official version as recorded by the royal court.”

however, this track of the historical account is completed with the *akhlaqi* tradition and its Persian-Islamic references on the one hand, and a strict orientation towards the *šarī'a* in the *adab* tradition on the other. Mill's "rude nations" would also need to include Germany, where a romantic notion of fragmented antiquity faced a classical one, and where "remote antiquity" evolved into *Altertumswissenschaft*.

From a global perspective, antiquity is a contested site of competing accounts and interpretations. This feature is common to all the cultural and historical periods investigated in this volume – provided that "antiquity" in the first instance simply means a "remote past." Seen thus, however, "antiquity" loses its singular nature: what the comparative perspective of the essays gathered here reveals, is a plurality of constructions of antiquity. Supposedly hegemonic European, Graeco-Roman antiquity is not a single unified whole: it is provincial. It is at the same time one of the world's provinces, whose borders are porous. Along with guns and ships, the European methods and viewpoints for exploring the remote past have spread from the province of Europe to other continents. On these other continents, these methods and views have been adopted, transformed in their confrontation with non-European material, and afforded new contents: this appropriation corresponds to what Marshall Sahlins in another context has termed "the risk of categories in action"<sup>71</sup> – and the categories used to construct antiquity do not survive their globalization undamaged. The present volume, however, shows that this "damage" is of utmost benefit if the exchange of ideas is open-minded *on both sides*: if that is the case, then the provincializing of European antiquity is well-placed to engender new perspectives.

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71 SAHLINS 1985: 145.

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