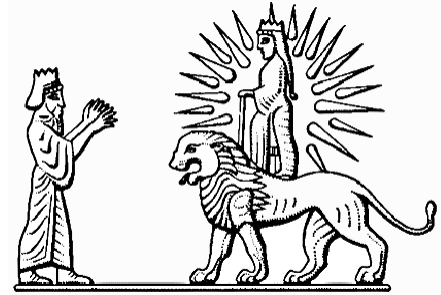


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“From Mazarino until Today: Italian Studies between East and West”

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ELEONORA CAVALLINI Ravenna

From Mazzarino until Today: Italian Studies between East and West

The first edition of Santo Mazzarino's *Fra Oriente e Occidente* (published in 1947) contains the last echoes of the contest provoked by the so-called "neo-humanists," and particularly by the "third humanism," which had contaminated classicism with racism, and substantially denied any influence of the Oriental cultures upon ancient Greece: on the contrary, the neo-humanism (particularly represented, from this point of view, by Helmut Berve's *Griechische Geschichte*, 1934) had claimed the originality and purity of the Greek people, as Indo-European and predestined to lay the foundations of modern German culture. This idea is strongly affirmed by Berve, who, in countering Victor Ehrenberg's objection that the unity of ancient history had to be sought in the tension between East and West, said that in such a way one would lose the sense of the 'nordic' function of Greek history and of its importance in mondial history ("Philologische Wochenschrift" 1937, p. 650). In Berve's reconstruction, the search of the peculiar values of the Greek people threatened to become a sort of determinism, which assigned fixed and unchanging roles to each people, depending upon their respective, predetermined 'missions.'¹

When Mazzarino's book appeared, the neo-humanists had almost completely lost their battle. The evidence of a clear

turnabout is given, for example, by Robert Cohen's handbook (published 1934). In his Introduction to the *Histoire grecque* (written with Gustav Glotz and Pierre Roussel), Cohen described the Greek as "a small people... that had come out late of the Balcanic woods" and "settled at the crossing of the roads bound to Europe and Asia, in the very heart of the most ancient cultures in the world. Soon this people – he continues – drew the best from all those cultures." Cohen's approach to the study of Greek history is, on the one hand, the acknowledgement of the peculiar Greek talent, but on the other hand it assumes that the Greek culture should be viewed as a 'melting pot' of various influences.

Nevertheless, another important work of that period (that is to say Victor Ehrenberg's *Ost und West*, Prag 1934) still shows the influence of the neo-humanist positions, even if it offers a very well-balanced and measured interpretation of the neo-humanist thought. Ehrenberg insists on the differences and the contrasts between Eastern and Western cultures; besides, he does not point out enough the so-called "dark centuries" and the archaic period, but lays stress especially to the Persian Wars, to Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Age.

In 1947, Mazzarino's book faced quite

¹ From this point of view, Berve's vision appears to be influenced by A. Rosenberg's *Der Mythos des 20* A. Panaino & A. Piras (eds.) *MELAMMU SYMPOSIA IV* (Milano 2004) ISBN 88-88483-206-3

Jahrhunderts (1930), one of the corner-stones of the Nazi propaganda.

a lot of questions that Ehrenberg's work had not answered. In particular, Mazzarino identified the two ways of communication and interaction between East and West, that is to say "the Microasiatic way" (Anatolia, Lydia, Lycia, Troas) and the "insular way" (or "the way of the alphabet," which was introduced into Greece by the Phoenicians during their trades with the islands of the Mediterranean sea). The innovative challenge of the book consisted in analyzing, in a critical and impartial way, a very complicated and dispersed documentation, and in elaborating, on the basis of such data, a general definition of the problem and of the ways of discussing it. However – because of the intrinsic scarceness of the documentary background – interpretative mediation, keen intuition and personal capacity to organize and synthesize the matter played a key role in the various stages of the research. The peculiarity of Mazzarino's work consisted in going deeply into the analysis of some detailed exegetical questions and then in gathering and connecting the single arguments in a comprehensive overall vision.

The author himself was conscious of the methodological problems and difficulties which his work involved. In the *Introduction* (p. 3), Mazzarino wrote: "These researchs... are not independent from one another, but mean to face the problem of the relations between Orient and Greece on the whole." Even in the most specialized and erudite treatment of the single subjects, the author never loses touch with his fundamental purpose, but pursues it with constant attention: and his purpose, as said, is to point out the central role of the cultural link between East and West in the development of Greek history. Just by recognizing the connexion and the tension between the

two worlds, Mazzarino identified a substantial unity not only in the Greek history, but in the Ancient history as a whole, this unity consisting in an uninterrupted sequence of exchanges and interactions, beginning from the 'gift' of the alphabet, introduced by the Phoenicians, to finish with the 'gift' of Christianity during the Roman Era.

In particular, as regards the period which coincides with the 'archaic' Greek history, and which represents the predominant subject-matter of the research, the author identified in the Microasiatic Area the principal scenery of the birth and of the development of the dialogue between East and West: a point of contact and cohabitation, of stimulating encounters, but also of opposition and elaboration of different cultural and political patterns. Here, in the perspective of an ancient, Microasiatic "koiné," Mazzarino tried to get beyond the old historiographical contrasts between those who asserted the absolute peculiarity of the Greek culture as compared with the Oriental world, and those who, on the other hand, preferred to qualify the Greek experience as a particular moment of a global and unitary historical process.

As we have seen, *Fra Oriente e Occidente* ascribed a particular importance to Minor Asia: but above all to Ionia, which is the mirror and the ensign-bearer of the Anatolic Greek people. Here, in a favourable climate of cultural exchanges, the Microasiatic Greek not only acquired from the Oriental world a lot of important "emprunts"; they realized their most peculiar and exclusive creation, a political pattern which finds no match in the other ancient cultures: that is to say, the *polis* as independent constitutional entity. Ionia was not a politically weak area, as some neo-humanists claimed; on the contrary, it was the place of birth of the

most original political discovery of the Greek people.

The research about the “via di terra,” i.e. the Microasiatic way, has a leading role in Mazzarino’s book. However, although in minor terms, the author also refers to the other way, “la via del mare” or of the alphabet, by means of which the Phoenicians could act as mediators between East and West and convey some important artifacts and cultural items from the far and inner East to the Greek islands and to the continental Greece itself.

In the following years, Ehrenberg’s position generally found more favour than Mazzarino’s one, especially in some countries, such as Italy, where the ideal of the ‘classicism’ persisted for a long time also after the 2nd World War Era.

Nevertheless, in 1951 the University of Pisa published the first issue of the periodical “Studi Classici e Orientali,” with contributions of the Greek historian Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli and other scholars (especially archaeologists), who showed a deep interest in the Aegean archaic cultures and in the links between the Eastern civilizations and the so-called ‘Classical antiquity.’ In the tenth issue (1961), an article by the archaeologist Silvio Ferri, entitled *Tracce di una koinè greco-anatolica nel secondo millennio a.C.*, substantially corroborated Mazzarino’s arguments about the existence of a cultural *koiné* in the Anatolic region, where the *Ahhijawa*, i.e. the Homeric Achaeans, could have cohabited with the Hittites about the half of the second Millennium B.C. Starting from the archaeological evidence, Ferri argued that the hypothesis of a historical-ethnographic *koiné* in the Bronze Age could be supported by linguistic elements, in particular by the presence of peculiar Greek (and Italic) toponymes in

the Caucasian region and on the coasts of the Black Sea.

In the Seventies, Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli and the other authors of *Storia e civiltà dei Greci* declared their intent of abandoning the traditional (that is to say, the so-called ‘neo-humanist’) interpretation of classical antiquity. In his *Presentation* of this important work, which aimed at offering a wide and comprehensive view of Greek culture (including social and political history, figurative art, literature and philosophy), Bandinelli wrote: “The *Storia e civiltà dei Greci* intends to offer, by means of a systematic exposition of the culture and of the social and economic history, the essential information for the acquisition of an updated knowledge of those themes which still contribute to make ancient Greece a fundamental element of our modern civilization. Although we confirm this acknowledgement, in this work we will not follow the traditional interpretation of the classical antiquity: that is to say, the so-called ‘humanist’ interpretation” (p. VII). Bandinelli also remarked that such an interpretation, generally supported by a thorough knowledge of the philological technique, had been used (sometimes in a very explicit way) to sustain conceptions deriving from the conservative viewpoint that had prevailed in the 19th century.

In the *Introduction* to the first part of the first volume, dedicated to the so-called “Greek Middle-Age,” Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli insisted on the pre-eminent role of Anatolia in the birth and development of the archaic Greek culture. Pugliese Carratelli reaffirmed the importance of that “melting pot of peoples and civilizations that was Minor Asia in the second Millennium before Christ,” and particularly on the close link between the complex and composite

Anatolic civilization, dominated by the Hittites, and the Minoic one, which in its turn was destined to influence the Greek insular and peninsular populations around the half of the second Millennium.

The fourth chapter of the first volume is entitled *L'età orientalizzante*, with particular reference to the archaeological and artistic point of view. This section also contains Lorenzo Braccesi's documented discussion of that political phenomenon called 'tyranny,' which he views as quite different from the Oriental concept of autocratic power, even though the Greek tradition associates the Hellenic tyranny with the Lydian king Gyges. As for Greek Literature, an important contribution is Bruno Gentili's thorough and original study of some 'orientalizing' poets such as Alcman, Sappho and Anacreon.

Just few years before (1975), Arnaldo Momigliano had written in English, and published in Cambridge, his book *Alien Wisdom*, dedicated to Persian culture and religion as seen and interpreted by the Greeks. But just in the same year, in Italy, the "Fondazione Lorenzo Valla" had issued Filippo Cassola's important edition of the *Inni Omerici*, where the author illustrated the Oriental origin of most Greek deities. In treating this subject, Cassola often referred to the latest archaeological discoveries and to some specific studies of the Fifties and Sixties, such as the Proceedings of the *Colloque de Strasbourg* (1958) about *Éléments orientaux dans la religion grecque ancienne* (published in Paris 1960). An exemplarily case is represented by the goddess Aphrodite, who is denominated Ourania or "celestial" in many places (see Pindar fr. 122,4s., Herodotus I 105, 2-3, Pausanias 1,14,7), "armed" in Corinth, Sparta and Cythera (Pausanias 2,5,1;

3,15,10; 3,23,1) but also in Cyprus (Hesychius s.v. ἑγγειος), and is surrounded by *hierodoulai* or sacred prostitutes at least in Cyprus (see Pseudo-Apollodorus III 182, with reference to the myth of Kinyras' daughters) and in Corinth (see Pind. fr. 122, Athenaeus 573c-574c, *SEG* XI 145). From these characters, Aphrodite clearly emerges as the Greek interpretation of the Phoenician Astarte: as a matter of fact, Astarte is the "queen of heaven" (see *Jeremiah* 7,18; 44,17,25), but also a "warrior" and advisor to the king in the administration of the political power. Moreover, the cult of Astarte includes the characteristic custom of the sacred prostitution. But Astarte is the Phoenician counterpart of the Sumeric Inanna and of the Assyrian Ishtar or Mylitta, whose cult was introduced into Greece by the Phoenicians as they crossed the 'maritime way' (Cyprus, Cythera), but probably was also conveyed through the 'Microasiatic way' and particularly through the Troas, as we can infer from the myth of Aphrodite and Anchyses. As Cassola pointed out, the Anatolic and the Chypriot cult of Aphrodite were independent from one another: in fact, the Greek of Cypros identified their goddess with the Astarte of Ascalon and Byblos, whereas the Ionians identified her with the Mesopotamic, Hittite and Phrygian Kybebe (see Hipponax fr. 125 Degani, where Kybebe is called – with a peculiar syncretistic operation – *Διὸς κόρη*, i.e. "daughter of Zeus"; moreover, see Charon of Lampsachus 262 F 5 J.). In this case, and in many other cases, Cassola confirms Mazzarino's basic idea of a double communication way between East and West.

Finally, Mazzarino's book returned to the limelight: the second edition appeared in 1989, with a strong and provoking introduction by Cassola himself,

who shows how *Fra Oriente e Occidente* continues to be an important, intense, stimulating book. *Fra Oriente e Occidente* still offers quite a lot of subjects for a discussion; but above all, the book's general statement of the problems is still valid, also on the basis of the latest archaeological data.

The reprinting of *Fra Oriente e Occidente* was an important turning point, which could open new horizons to the Italian studies on antiquity, in spite of some rigorously 'classicistic' positions which still appear to have quite a lot of followers in our country.