Part III: **Time**

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The Global Renaissance: Extended Palimpsests and Intercultural Transfers in a Transcontinental Space

To study the global circulation of literary works, we must necessarily imagine a global history of culture that goes beyond the circulation of printed objects themselves. The historiography of Renaissance culture, for instance, has its own history that begins with Burckhardt's famous work on the history of the Renaissance. Burckhardt is interested in art and literature, but his work mainly concerns the political and cultural context they fit into; thanks to his work, the Renaissance is often defined as a network of global – or at least transcultural – relations. "Renaissance" may be used interchangeably as the name for a historical period or a certain style of intertextual references to the ancients, and it is also a term used by historical actors and an analytical term.

The German historian Bernd Roeck (2017) recently endeavoured to provide a definition of the Renaissance from a cultural transfer and global-historical perspective by approaching the Renaissance as the result of a process of circulation involving the whole inhabited world. Roeck's successful work, which builds on an entire body of recent publications on the topic (Gamsa 2013; Blitstein 2021; Maissen and Mittler 2018), will provide a central common thread for the contribution we aim to make in this chapter. The balance he establishes between synchronic and diachronic circulation is an invitation to use a figure familiar to rhetoric[1] but not so deeply rooted among historians, that of the palimpsest.

The term *Renaissance* typically refers to a period of closely interwoven literary and artistic history that developed, mainly in Italy and particularly in Tuscany, in the 15th century.[2] The period begins with a "pre-Renaissance" that includes Dante Alighieri's writings at the beginning of the 14th century, most notably the *Divine Comedy*, and it is characterised by a return to literary works and artistic forms from Antiquity, by the rediscovery of Latin literature, and by the renunciation of the literary and artistic forms specific to the Middle Ages. The Renaissance became an object of particular fascination and study during the 19th century, as the analysis of pictorial forms gave rise to art history and the nascent science of

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1 Even high school students nowadays know the book of Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* (Paris, Seuil 1982), which inherited a long tradition of rhetoric criticism but rejects any historical use of the notion.
2 The term "rinascita" appeared first in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (c. 1550).

philology, developed in Germany, aimed to reconstruct the primitive forms of ancient literature. In German-speaking Switzerland, Jakob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) founded a new historiography around the notion of the Renaissance. Curiously, Burckhardt's work does not focus on literature or art in themselves, but rather on the conditions that enabled the emergence of these aesthetic forms in Italy. In turn, Roeck's monumental Renaissance history, first published in 2017, aims to complete Burckhardt's approach under a different paradigm, situating the Renaissance in a global context where Italy is viewed as one country among many.

Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Renaissance was the main subject studied by art historians in general, and by founding figure Aby Warburg in particular. From his thesis on Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (Warburg 1980) onwards, Warburg's critical work has emphasised the close links between literature and art. A close inspection reveals that many pictorial works from the Italian Renaissance were rooted in ancient literary works that had been assimilated into the mainstream of the period; Botticelli himself was inspired by Homeric hymns, which had been introduced to Italians by the Renaissance philologist Politian. But Warburg also underlines a more important dimension of Renaissance works of art: if they took the forms of Antiquity and gave them a kind of second life, bringing them back to life, it was by completely modifying their meaning, by giving them a kind of second life and moving them from their original semantic context into a new semantic context that transformed them. The Renaissance, as Warburg understands it, represents a kind of diachronic cultural transfer (Espagne and Werner 1988; Espagne 2013) that can be compared with later schools of thought from the Chinese context, inviting us to generalise the principle.

A historian's role in assessing this cultural transfer therefore involves studying both pictorial and literary works of art to look for former configurations of meaning that have been erased by subsequent semantic layers. This process could be described through the figure of the palimpsest, which is too seldom used in historiographical approaches to studying cultural transfers. A palimpsest is a parchment – or any manuscript created prior to the use of paper – on which an earlier text has been scratched away or otherwise erased to write a new text. The old text, which is often ancient, can generally be deciphered, so many fragments of ancient works have been transmitted through palimpsests. Palimpsests can also be found on materials other than parchment, such as wax tablets, and they can even involve the use of superscribing symbols.

The notion of the palimpsest, which is useful for understanding the connections between the Renaissance and Antiquity, can be abstracted from there. It is also worth noting that the search for a text under the text inevitably leads to a widening of the old strata beyond the linguistic or geographical space of the

text that the analysis begins with. Viewed as a palimpsest, Renaissance literature can be understood as a literature that encompasses not only literary forms inscribed over a long period of time, but forms inscribed in a spatial dimension that transcends national, cultural or linguistic borders and could qualify as global – even if we often lack an understanding of how these formal traditions coalesce in the Renaissance palimpsest text.

If the Renaissance revived a transformed Antiquity, it was certainly also aware that the text below the text was itself only the upper layer of a complex palimpsest that drew not only on older periods of Greco-Latin Antiquity, but also on foreign cultures. Plato visited Egypt; Herodotus, who had Carian ancestry, also made a trip to Egypt (Bernand 1994), later described in his work. Democritus is considered a great traveller because he visited not only Egypt but also Persia and Babylon, and because he drew inspiration from sources he found among the priests and scholars of these countries. Pyrrho's scepticism is supposed to have been inspired by his trips to India as a member of Alexander's armies, and the many parallels that have been noted between Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the Assyrian epic of Gilgamesh and other Hittite texts make Homer's texts the result of older literary circulations (Schrott 2008). As they were bringing Antiquity back to life and even travelling through time to complete its journey through space, the artists and intellectuals of the period designated as the Renaissance were not necessarily aware of the fact that the texts they transmitted anew had already been nourished during Antiquity itself by global circulations; however, these circulations did exist and are of increasing interest to philologists.

These circulations became even more visible in the Middle Ages. First, it should be noted that the Middle Ages discovered Antiquity long before the time of Dante and Petrarch, even if the period was not addressed as clearly as it was during the Renaissance. For example, Charlemagne's biographer Alcuin, has been connected to a movement that has been called the Carolingian Renaissance, and the *Liber glossarum*, from the same period, was a large compendium of ancient sources intended to provide a framework for teaching. Rabanus Maurus, a Benedictine monk from Fulda, also passed on knowledge inherited from Antiquity and made a great contribution to the Carolingian Renaissance. This discovery of Antiquity is not, however, limited to the Western Middle Ages: The Koran is now considered to have been nourished with references to Antiquity. The Suda, a vast compilation of ancient literature, originated in Byzantium during the High Middle Ages and conveys information about Antiquity that was lost elsewhere. After the Carolingian Renaissance, one might also speak of a Renaissance of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, since the poets of this time (Hugh Primas of Orleans, of course, and a small circle of elites) used Ovid, Homer and Sallust in their production in Latin at the end of the eleventh century.

The Renaissance reproduces what happened during the Carolingian period or the eleventh–twelfth century, and each of these stages was characterised by a circulation that encompassed a space much larger than that of the Italian peninsula, a space that integrated, at a minimum, Byzantium and the Arab world.

Arab mediation is a classic phenomenon in the transmission of ancient texts. Gerard of Cremona (1114–1187) translated many Arabic texts into Latin, many of which were Greek texts that had been translated into Arabic. Among these very numerous Latin transpositions were Galen; Ptolemy; and, notably, Aristotle. Gerbert of Aurillac, who became pope under the name of Silvester II, was said to have studied occult sciences among the Arabs; at the very least, it is certain that he introduced Al Kwarizmi's mathematical texts to Europe. Many mediaeval Arab philosophers, like Al Ghazali (1058–1111) and Averroes (1126–1198), were also aware of Greek philosophers, and Dante thus refers to Averroes as a well-known commentator on Aristotle. In general, the role of Arab mediators between Greek philosophy and the Christian West is now part of Hellenist philology's classical fields of research (Büttgen, Libera, Rashed, and Rosier-Catach 2009). Sicily played a central role in the organisation of circulation between Antiquity, the Arab world and the Christian West, home to Greek-to-Latin translators such as the Archdeacon of Catania Henricus Aristippus, who proposed a Latin version of the Phaedo of Plato, and geographers like Al Idrissi (1100–1166), who wrote a description of the world for King Roger of Sicily. Not only is the rediscovery of Antiquity inseparable from the phenomenon of Arab mediation, but one could also speak of a Renaissance in the Arab world to which the Renaissance in the Latin West may have been, more or less indirectly, the heir. We have to accept that Renaissance refers less to an historical period in a clear, defined space than to the revival of cultural layers that may have been imported from another part of the world (Goody 2010). In the Middle Ages, for instance, Baghdad was a capital for the translation of Aramaic, Persian, Greek and Sanskrit texts into Arabic (Teixidor 2007). Bernd Roeck reminds us that the Renaissance refers to a global circulation of ancient writings, which themselves are the result of an even more archaic circulation.

If the Renaissance is to be defined as a form of diachronic transfer of ancient texts or works of art into a more recent period, this movement must be correlated with alternative forms of circulation. We know, for example, that the great Persian king Khosrow I (531–579) was himself the author of some writings on Aristotle's logic and on astronomy, and that one could find at his court not only Greek scholars, but also Chinese and Indian scholars (Abdullaev 2016). Furthermore, elements of Greek thought fertilised intellectual contexts that are not directly linked to the Florentine Renaissance but nevertheless evoke forms of Renaissance. The role of southern Spain in the dissemination of ancient texts is also worth recalling. Maimonides (1135–1204), for example, was not only a connoisseur of the texts of

Judaism, but also of Aristotelian texts in the versions provided by Al Farabi, a commentator on Plato and Aristotle. Maimonides went into exile in Cairo, making the city a centre for the development of dialogue between Arab and Jewish traditions, and for the development of Greek heritage – a sort of Cairo Renaissance. These alternative circulations are clearly documented in a number of canonical texts. For example, the legend of Barlaam and Josephat has an Indo-Persian origin and narrates the life of the Buddha, but it gave rise to several later versions – first Zoroastrian, then Arabic, then Georgian, then Greek, before being integrated from the thirteenth century onwards into the Golden Legend of Jacobus da Varagine (Forster 2012). The final stages of the text's metamorphosis and its geographical displacement have led many to overlook its primitive versions, which invites us to apply the characteristic treatment of the palimpsest, which consists in analysing the texts under the texts. The examples of the humanist pre-Renaissance and late Renaissance are not as drastic as that of this legend,[3] but both were nevertheless fed by broad peregrinations. Erasmus of Rotterdam studied in Paris and London, where he met Thomas More, before settling in Basel. Written in London, the *Praise of Folly* draws on a tradition of ironic panegyric dating back to Lucian of Samosata. Within the framework of the late Renaissance, the life of Giordano Bruno (Arnould 2021), which was marked by his debates on Aristotelianism, was also a life of peregrination, since Bruno crossed France and went to England and Germany, where a part of his work was published, before returning to Italy.

The classical Renaissance, which extends from Dante to Michelangelo and unfolds mainly in central Italy, is also the result of a cultural transfer. Cardinal Bessarion, Patriarch of Constantinople, who came to Italy in the middle of the fifteenth century, brought with him a thousand manuscripts that were deposited in the Saint Mark's library in Venice and went on to nourish the Hellenist branch of humanism. After arriving from Greece, Manuel Chrysoloras occupied a chair of Greek studies in Florence from 1397 onwards. The displacement of handwritten texts that go on to join the lower strata of a kind of palimpsest is part of the history of humanism. The large libraries that have been formed, not only in Italy, indicate movements of knowledge across space (Nuovo 2013). Even before they were integrated into new productions as a deep stratum, the works collected in these libraries gave rise to a search for the original version. The notary Salutati, representative of Florentine humanism, endeavoured to save ancient works (Virgil, Lucian, Horace) from disappearance by acquiring the manuscripts, and to

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3 The model of *translatio* may still be used for the pre-renaissance. See Curbet and Reche (2014).

correct the texts transmitted and restore them to a primitive form. The idea of an authentic text, free from the dross of history, is in fact a preparatory step for reinterpretation. Any palimpsest results in a transfer. Renaissance authors considered even "imitatio" and copying a compliment to the original author.

The Renaissance period is concurrent with the discovery of America, and the manuscripts that circulated during the period and earlier preparatory periods were often travelogues. Christopher Columbus wrote notes in the margins of his copy of Marco Polo's *Travels*, thus extending the world to Asia. After Columbus's probable reading of Strabo, translated in 1469,[4] he was able to conclude that the riches of Asia could be accessed not only by land, as the mediaeval travellers Giovanni Da Pian del Carpine, William of Rubruck, or Marco Polo himself had accessed them, but also by sailing around the globe in the other direction. This global perception of the world – the idea of entering Asia after sailing around the world – is a moment of return to Antiquity. The Renaissance was accompanied by concern that the rediscovery of Antiquity should not be limited to Italy. This is why the German Konrad Celtis, editor of the tragedies of Seneca, Germania of Tacitus, and Apuleius, incited Apollo in one of his poems to move from Italy to Germany as he had once passed from Greece to Italy. Celtis's interest in incorporating spatial travel into the use of ancient literary models is reflected in his project of creating a general description of Germany. The palimpsest takes on an archaeological dimension for him, as he is interested in the material traces of the Roman Empire on German soil (*Germania Illustrata*). This keen awareness of human inscription within a global space is characteristic of the Renaissance period, independently of Europe. Admiral Zheng He, who left Nanjing at the beginning of the fifteenth century on an exploration that would take him to Mozambique, was as much inspired by the idea of a global world as Timur, who tried in vain to keep the two parts of Eurasia together in the same framework.

If we look back on the history of Renaissance literature, it is largely a history of reformulations of ancient literature – reformulations that involved constant semantic shifts. Prometheus is present in the work of Boccaccio, but he is not chained to the Caucasus; instead, he crosses the mountain, and the eagle that tears his liver becomes simply the weight of the thoughts that obsess him when he tears at nature's secrets. In the twenty-sixth Canto of Dante's Inferno, Ulysses is equated with the thirst for discovery that guides human wanderings, while in Petrarch, he seems to embody human intellectual freedom. These two heroes of the Italian Renaissance represent the recasting and reinterpretation of two heroic

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4 The whole literature concerning Columbus mentions that he read Strabo and was inspired by Greek geography.

figures of Antiquity. The *Dream of Poliphilus* (Hypnerotomachia) is a text full of innumerable Hellenisms that are lost in the description of architectural works of Antiquity. Homer, Virgil, and Ovid provide models that we encounter, for example, in Sannazaro's *Arcadia* (1504). Machiavelli's work is one of the attempts to resuscitate Antiquity, and he even defines this resurrection as Italy's role in history. This form of revival is not simply the result of the Italian Renaissance: the German Meistersinger Hans Sachs used and transformed ancient motifs in the thousands of poems and dramas that make up his work, relying on Greco-Latin texts by Aristophanes, Plautus and Terence, Apuleius, Plutarch, and Pliny, among others. In his hands, these are less sources than transformed materials.[5]

There is a strong link between episodes of humanism and the councils that convened scholars from across Europe and even the Ottoman empire. The Council of Constance, for instance, provided Cardinal Guillaume Fillastre with an opportunity to copy an ancient cosmography and a work by Ptolemy. The papal secretary explored the manuscripts of the cloister of Sankt Gallen, where he found a manuscript of Vitruvius, the speeches of Cicero, a manuscript of the rhetoric of Quintilian, and above all the manuscript of Lucretius's *De natura rerum*. The Councils of Basel (1431) and Florence (1437) both represent stages in the constitution of the collections of manuscripts that humanists would go on to focus their attention on. And it was in connection with the Council of Ferrara that Cardinal Bessarion's famous collection of Greek manuscripts arrived in Italy. These manuscripts were not immediately readable by most Italians, but the teaching of Greek was spreading. Leonzio Pilato, a Greek from Calabria, taught Greek in Florence and translated Homer, in particular. This translation facilitated the constitution of the Homeric palimpsest in Renaissance culture. Even as they are translated, ancient texts are simultaneously analysed to define the first version – the so-called archetype – and a philological investigation takes shape. The knowledge gathered from this investigation is also transformed in new works; Salutati's text *The Labors of Hercules* was a sort of compendium of references to Antiquity that developed, in the process, a poetics inspired by Aristotle. If Montaigne's essays made extensive use of excerpts from ancient literature, sometimes by juxtaposing quotations, these excerpts paradoxically ended up highlighting a subject, and are not an addition of scholarly references. Here, again, the palimpsest corresponds to a dynamic of transformation.

The resemantisation of the ancient heritage of the Renaissance is particularly – and perhaps above all – about the Christian interpretation of ancient

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5 We could refer for instance to the translation and rewriting of Plautus by Hans Sachs "Ein comedi Plauti/heist Monechmo unnd hat 5 actus" (1548).

literature. The goal was to show that the ancient gods celebrated by Greek or Roman literature were closely related to the great figures of the Christian tradition, even if every connection between a Greek god and a Christian figure can be analysed differently according to its historical context. Once again, we must keep in mind that this Renaissance palimpsest actually begins very early, since as early as the eleventh century, the Byzantine theologian Psellos (1017–1078) strove to bring Plato's philosophy and Christian doctrine closer together. Dante and Petrarch readily cited Plato for religious purposes, suggesting that he offers a key to understanding Revelation. Apollo, because of his beauty, was brought close to Christ; Venus approached the Virgin Mary, and the Renaissance only inherited the preestablished link between Marian worship and courtly love. Even Ovid was Christianised. This palimpsest thus led to the emergence, from the deep layers beneath Renaissance literature, of a kind of primary theology of whose development Christianity would essentially ensure. This was the idea of Gemistus Pletho (1355–1452), who mingled Zarathustra and Greek philosophy in the palimpsestic reconstruction of a theology of origins while representing Greece at the Council of Ferrara. The notion that various forms of rites, at different times, make it possible to pay homage to God is a constant among Renaissance writers, and it was expressed by Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), among others.

In order to understand Christian texts, Renaissance thinkers had to study ancient Egypt, the India of the Brahmans, and the Orphic rites. The Hellenized Jews made Moses an ancestor of Plato. The recognition of this diversity in the forms of the divine was favoured by the councils. Generally speaking, humanists performed the work of reforming theologians – translating of the Bible, for example – which presupposed philological work. The concern for Antiquity among humanists in the service of theology takes various forms. Reuchlin (1455–1522) felt that learning Hebrew must be encouraged to enable a new reading of the Bible and provide new access to the divine word. Konrad Gessner (1516–1565), who published a bibliography of 10,000 Hebrew, Greek and Latin titles, introduced a global dimension to this search for a link between ancient languages and religious literature with his 1555 text *Mithridates*, which presented a hundred different documented languages, notably, through as many versions of the Our Father prayer (Gessner 1974). Gessner was not only a linguist; he was also a proponent of a holistic approach to theology involving different fields of knowledge.

The invention of the printing press was one of the characteristic phenomena of the Renaissance that globalised the palimpsest in the way Konrad Gessner's book did. Robert Estienne and his son Henri Estienne published a gigantic thesaurus of the Greek language that served as a supplement to the Greek edition of the Bible, but also to editions of Terence, Plautus, and Aristotle. Vast compilations could now take stock of ancient texts spread over the space of cultures. Hartmann

Schedel (1440–1514) published a universal chronicle, illustrated with xylography, that brought together everything that was known about the world's countries in a single text based on ancient geographers. Schedel was one of the first Germans to learn Greek. The globalised Renaissance – that is to say, Renaissance on a large scale involving many parts of the world – moved from Tuscany to Nuremberg. It also moved to England, and we know that the texts of Shakespeare, which represent a late Renaissance, incorporate allusions to Plautus, Ovid, and Boccaccio – in other words, to Antiquity, or to the treatment of Antiquity by the Italian Renaissance. They even transfer early Italian plays. Finally, the Renaissance moved to France, where Montaigne willingly used sceptical and stoic authors and did not fail to refer to Seneca, Plutarch, Lucretius, or Pyrrho.

Nevertheless, the attempts to organise Antiquity – and the world more broadly – in such vast compilations also resulted in arrangements and a return to practices that relativize Antiquity. It seems, then, that the palimpsest turned against itself. Against this backdrop, Petrus Ramus, who reorganised knowledge in his philosophy, would place reason above Aristotle, and the works of Giordano Bruno evinced a desire to break away from research into a primary theology specific to Antiquity. Galileo was very interested in Dante's poetry and his topography of Hell, but even if his physics started from the Greek physics he had practised, they eventually turned to empirical research. The palimpsest must stop imposing its authority; superscription must be renewed.

The model we have applied to Italy and Europe between the end of the fourteenth and the middle of the sixteenth century is also valid in other contexts that are distant in time or in space. Moreover, it also has validity in the field of art history, which is difficult to separate from the history of literature. When Aby Warburg analyses Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, he turns to Lucretius (Rubinstein 1997). In the quattrocento, the decorative motifs were borrowed from old decorations, even they took on a new value in their new, different context; the Florentine architecture of the time derived its legitimacy from a reading of Vitruvius. This use of Greco-Roman Antiquity in art spread even in a very early globalised world. A silver cup of Persian origin that depicted Greek warriors leaving for Troy was found in the tomb of the Roman general Li Xian, who died in Guyuan in Ningxia in 569. The Bolognese architect Aristotele Fioravanti, who built the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Virgin in the heart of Moscow's Kremlin at the end of the fifteenth century, reveals the global dimension of the use of ancient forms and the export of Italian models. The ancient palimpsest can be found as early as the first century in the Buddhas of Gandara, syntheses of Indian, Persian, Greek, and Roman references that were found on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan and later transported to China. One might also recall how the urban geometry characteristic of the work of Hippodamus of Miletus is

found in countless urban contexts as distant as, for example, Baghdad. The universal dimension of the Renaissance palimpsest is all the more evident when one includes works of art in the field of systems of signs, which are likely to contain in their deep layers moments from ancient literatures.

The palimpsest, which concentrates the literature of the Italian Renaissance and the deep layers of a reinterpreted ancient literature, spread throughout the world through what has been called the "Hybrid Renaissance" (Burke 2016; Singh 2021). A particularly striking example of this form of Renaissance can be found in Garcilaso de la Vega (1539–1616), who represented an "indigenous Renaissance". The son of a Spaniard and an Inca woman, he focused in his *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* on giving a description of Inca culture. To find the system of references that would allow him to complete this exercise, he referred to Greco-Latin Antiquity. He uses the Roman Empire to understand the nature of the Inca Empire and Neoplatonism to explain the influence of the Inca himself. His work is an example of how a Renaissance text presenting a then-unknown world can be crossed with ancient references that it reinterprets according to this new usage. This configuration of the Hybrid Renaissance is widely found in the history of the various regions of Latin America before the Conquest. Efforts to understand the nature of the Aztec gods, such as the texts of the missionary and proto-ethnologist Sahagun (1500–1590), often compared them to ancient Roman: Chicomecoatl referred to Ceres and Tzatzolteotl was equated with Venus. Ovid enjoyed particular success in America and made a significant contribution to the Hybrid Renaissance and the specific palimpsest it represents. His *Metamorphoses* particularly inspired the Métis populations who formed after the Conquest, whose motifs can be found in frescoes, and in 1577, the first American edition of *Metamorphoses* was published in Mexico City. In a house of Cuzco, the war between various factions of conquistadors was described via the struggle of Caesar and Pompey. The gods of Antiquity found new life in this specific Renaissance, appearing in frescoes on the walls of Latin American mansions, and in travelogues, we find allusions to the warrior women of antiquity, the Amazons. A few monastery libraries that were well-fitted with works of Greco-Roman literature have served as reservoirs for these Indian reactivations of Antiquity (Bernand and Gruzinski 1993).

Virgil also played a special role in the hybrid forms of the Renaissance, as we can observe in at least two cases. When Luís de Camões (1525–1580) wrote the *Os Lusiadas*, he chronicled Portugal's expansion around the world, recalling Vasco da Gama's voyage and his own stay in Macao in the middle of the sixteenth century, which allows his epic poem to claim a form of globality. But *Os Lusiadas* also borrows much from Virgil, and one of the poem's underlying figures is the navigator Aeneas, founder of another empire – that of Rome. Another case is that of the Spanish poet Alonso de Ercilla (1533–1594) author of *La*

Araucana, an epic poem that describes the Spanish conquest of Latin America, and especially the struggle against the Indian populations of the continent's southern reaches. Ercilla's epic is the founding text of Chilean literature, and it is also marked by references to Virgil. Ercilla's humanist orientation leads him to present a Mapuche Indian as the true hero of the fight against the Spaniards. As in Virgil's epic, the poem's actual topic is the birth of a nation, Voltaire compared one of the heroes of *La Araucana* to Nestor in the *Iliad*. Thus, Virgil is one of the Latin-language authors with the most visible presence in the palimpsest of the Renaissance, found as much in the founding epic of the Portuguese Empire as in the founding epic of Chilean national literature. In efforts to rediscover an early theology, Virgil is also recast as a Christian poet. He is a constant figure in the palimpsest of hybrid Renaissance.

If Virgil belongs to the deep text of the founding epics in Portugal or Latin America, Antiquity more broadly served to found national historiographies during the Renaissance. The founding myths that developed during the Renaissance are like invitations to create a nation (a collective entity formed on ethnic basis) in line with the greatness of ancient origins. The Germania of Tacitus remains, so to speak, a moment in the Roman Empire. This empire is much more directly present in the work of State historians like the Venetian Paolo Parute (1540–1588), who strove in his history of Venice to present the Republic as a counter-model to the Roman Empire, and therefore always connected with it. Moreover, the history of science calls for ancient models. Copernicus refers to Cicero to criticise Ptolemy, and he readily mentions the Pythagoreans. This gesture characterises historians who base their discourse on references to Antiquity, and Copernicus's development of scientific knowledge cannot do without it either. Antiquity invites us to reconstruct filiations and appears as an instance of legitimation.

In his attempt to write the definitive book about a Global Renaissance, Bernd Roeck opens up important historiographical avenues on several levels. First, the Renaissance is plural. If we focus on the period defined in the most traditional sense as the Renaissance, we must observe on the one hand that the aforementioned deep layers are not only Greco-Latin but also Arabo-Persian. The ancient texts themselves resulted from imports and crossing, though nineteenth century readings of Renaissance texts were largely blind to the wealth of knowledge underneath the palimpsest, because readers had gradually become more ignorant of those cultural references. The figure of the palimpsest, which Bernd Roeck perhaps does not completely grasp, accounts for these multiple textual configurations.

On the other hand, Roeck insists on a break, an overview of the Renaissance that results in its distancing from Antiquity. In the field of medical writings, the name and legendary figure of Paracelsus (1494–1541) stands out, since he wrote prolifically, was one of the German language's first authors, and

developed the theory of a vital force. But Paracelsus also wanted to break free from the writings of the Ancients, and he burned Galen and Avicenna to study the action of natural substances, which led to the emergence of the idea of a natural substance. This rejection of Antiquity is symbolised, so to speak, by a caricature from 1550 that depicts Virgil's Laocoon transformed into a monkey fighting against snakes. Giovanni Battista della Porta (1535–1615), the author of the 20-volume *Magic of Nature*, outlined an evolution from magical thinking to an understanding of the laws of natural causality that leads him to gradually detach himself from the world of signs linked to the reception of ancient texts. Peter Ramus (1515–1572) reorganised the order of knowledge according to its practical applications. As we can see, even all the authors who announced their intention to overtake the Renaissance were nourished with Greco-Roman and Arab literature, and the turn itself is a form of allegiance.

There are obviously many Renaissances, and we can encounter them in many regions of the Ottoman Empire, in the Arab world, in India. Some of them took place long after the sixteenth century, like the Maori Renaissance in the second half of the 20th century. But ultimately, Bernd Roeck defends the paradoxical thesis that the Renaissance really was born in the European region. In Japan, for example, the only opening to the wider world came through very limited Dutch studies until the 19th century, and in the Ottoman Empire, Sultan Bayezid's (1447–1512) ban on printing in Arabic characters had the effect of isolating the Arab world and freezing it in time. Even authors like historian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) remained unknown in the Arab world. The production of books in China also experienced a period of long stagnation; even though Ricci had translated Euclid, Chinese science remained in a situation of poor development for a long time. The Arab world has long ignored the turn embodied by Galileo and Kepler. The states that came out of Renaissance Europe, even if they presently represent only 12% of the planet's population, have produced more than half of the world's wealth. And the conclusion is far less hopeful than that of Roeck's volume brought if we take into account the first decades of the twenty-first century, when wars were fought over the ethnocentrism that Roeck's whole volume on the globalised Renaissance claimed to overcome. This decline reveals the difficulty of controlling the classic oppositions between centre and periphery over time.

In order to place the nodal periods of cultural history – and, to a more limited extent, literary history – within a globality, we must be able to analyse them as palimpsests. In particular, the figure of the palimpsest makes it possible to bypass national or ethnocentric reconstructions of the history of literature in the broadest sense of the term, that of transmitted writings. Diachronic circulation gives rise to chain reinterpretations. There are no continuous filiations; rather, there are many

knots, and the Renaissance or Renaissances constitute a knot of this kind. The danger is that a cultural space will claim a kind of hegemony over this phenomenon. If it is relevant to define the Renaissance as a "morning of the world," as Bernd Roeck does, it is still necessary to remember the fact that mornings constitute a recurring phenomenon, and that regardless of the vagaries that periodically favour the economy of one part of the world or another, palimpsests retain the same value as a tool for criticism.

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