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The Ancient World: Past, Present, and Future of Europe

Abstract: Shared notions of history are crucial for collective identities. This also applies to Europe. In this context, it is tempting to look for the unifying elements by separating themselves from the Other as the ultimate foreigner, comparable to the procedures common in nationalism. In this way, myths of Europe have emerged, such as the idea of a fundamental West–East antagonism. The text contrasts this with a differentiated picture of European history. It leads back to the roots, to the cultures of antiquity. After being definitely shaped in the Roman Empire, they had a significant impact on European civilisation. In this way, beyond all differences, essential commonalities become visible that long precede the formation of the individual nations. They will also be sustainable in the future if we do not forget their origin.

Keywords: community of destinies, conflict and debate, democracy, discourse, education, identity, language, rule of law, scientific method, self-image

1 Introductory remarks

Europe is a construction of the ancient Greeks. The beautiful Phoenician princess whom Zeus abducted in the form of a bull and took to Crete is perhaps its symbol. This alone shows us that East and West were not rigidly divided at that time. Much more important than this well-known myth, however, was the intellectual measurement of the world by the Greek philosophers and scholars of the Archaic period. Even today, the border between Europe and Asia is the same that Anaximander, Hecataeus of Miletus and others drew across the Hellespont and the two Bosporus. And yet this border is not the work of nature, but of man. It is a construction based on the rules and lines of geometry, which as such, as a mathematical discipline, was also invented at that time. However, this has an advantage: it is a construction that can help us to work and build further when we ask ourselves what Europe is and, above all, what is the deep bond that holds its inhabitants, the Europeans, together.

The stones of this edifice are to be found above all in history. In the case of any collective identity, it is true that it is essentially based on a common history. In the case of Europe, an artificial entity from its origins, this is true to a very special degree. It is precisely in this sense that common experiences form and sustain the

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111337852-004

identity of being European. Europe: that is its history. We should be aware of this in order to protect Europe and its culture and to develop it for the future. And certainly, with a joint effort.

But what do we have in common? What unites us? Again, this does not happen by itself. Unlike nations that have grown over centuries, it is not readily apparent. It has not yet become an integral part of a collective memory through long and repeated cultivation of memory, through public celebrations and commemorative rituals, through teaching, exhibitions, monuments, national literature. But it is precisely this that gives us more freedom to search for what constitutes Europe's common history; much is not predetermined. In addition, there are not only memories that create bonds, but also stories of terrible contrasts, conflicts and wars.

We cannot ignore the fact that there have been, and still are, differences and conflicts. History is an empirical science and, therefore, based on evidence and reality. It is precisely the conflicts that are part of the history of Europeans. But this is the key: if we understand European history as the common history of Europeans, then what we have in common is that Europeans have always had common experiences, in conflict and in reconciliation, in war and in peace, that they have felt these common experiences differently and that they judge them from different perspectives. It is this *concordia discors* that is the essence of European history.

It is here that we must look for the building blocks on which to construct our specific European history. I would like to briefly outline some of these, which seem to me to be particularly important. The fact that they can be discussed and that others can be added, that they can be weighted differently and judged differently, is in itself specifically European. We must avoid one-sidedness and take many perspectives into account if we are to seek a history of Europeans in this sense.

The focal points I have chosen are based on the aforementioned difference of sharing the same experiences and the same events that affected all or many people. It is therefore a matter of common destinies that have been perceived and processed in different ways. In this respect, what has been assumed for other collective entities also applies to Europe, in the sense that Leopold Ranke, one of the founders of modern academic history, formulated it in his first major work: "What can unite individuals and nations in a closer relationship if not participation in the same destiny, if not a common history?".[1] In this sense, Europe has a common destiny, it is, so to speak, a community of destiny ("Schicksalsgemeinschaft").[2] This aspect will be

1 Ranke 1957, 8.

2 The term is used in the sense in which the Austrian socialist Otto Bauer (1882–1938) used it for the definition of nation, see Bauer 1907, 112: "S*chicksalsgemeinschaft bedeutet nicht Unterwerfung unter gleiches Schicksal, sondern gemeinsames Erleben desselben Schicksals* in stetem Verkehr,

the focus of the following observations and reflections. There has been a constant exchange of ideas in Europe about these destinies — which are not least connected with the different experiences of conflict I mentioned earlier — and about much more. Europe has thus also become a community of discourse and a community of conflict.

2 Europe as a common destiny

2.1 Starting point: The (Roman) Empire

Let us look at the destinies that historically unite Europe. Obviously, we must go back to a time before the emergence of nation states, and this takes us back to antiquity. This fits in well with the 'inventors' of Europe, the ancient Greeks. Their culture had already become a world culture in antiquity, especially after Alexander's expedition. Contacts with the civilizations of the Near East, from which the Greeks had already learned a great deal, led to intensive processes of exchange. And in this configuration, Greek civilization had a profound influence — this alone is a highly significant phenomenon in world history — on those who subjugated Greece and the Hellenistic empires, i.e. the Romans. The Greeks, however, as Horace said, one of their most important poets, "captured the savage victor and introduced the arts into rustic Latium".[3] The fact that the Romans took over Greek culture, shaped it in their own way and passed it on to the rest of the world was decisive for the history of Europe: it was the destiny of the first European civilization, which had emerged in Greece in all its cosmopolitanism, to be developed by

fortwährender Wechselwirkung miteinander... Nicht Gleichartigkeit des Schicksals, sondern nur das gemeinsame Erleben und Erleiden des Schicksals, die Schicksalsgemeinschaft, erzeugt die Nation. Gemeinschaft bedeutet nach Kant *'durchgängige Wechselwirkung untereinander'*. (Dritte Analogie der Erfahrung: Grundsatz der Gemeinschaft) Nur das in durchgängiger Wechselwirkung untereinander, in steter Beziehung aufeinander erlebte Schicksal bringt die Nation hervor." ("*Community of destiny does not mean submission to the same destiny, but common experience of the same destiny* in constant intercourse, continuous interaction with each other.... It is not the sameness of destiny, but only the common experience and suffering of destiny, the community of destiny that creates the nation. According to Kant, community means *'continuous interaction with one another'* (Third analogy of experience: principle of community). Only destiny experienced in continuous interaction with one another, in constant relation to one another, produces the nation."). Cf. especially Langewiesche 2008, 63–66.

3 *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes | intulit agresti Latio* (Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.156–7).

the Roman Empire. In this respect, the Roman Empire is a very special European community of destiny, indeed a central core of Europe.

This can be shown easily and in detail in history itself. Contrary to what we are taught, the Roman Empire did not end with the end of antiquity, whenever this may be dated. We usually speak of Byzantium and the Byzantine Empire, and there is even an academic discipline called Byzantine Studies. In the West, we often speak of the German Empire as the successor to Charlemagne's Frankish Empire. Historically, i.e. in terms of their respective contemporaries, this is not correct: The so-called Byzantines were "Romans", "Rhomaioi", and the modern Greeks could still be called "Romioi", and Greekness "Romiosyne".[4] Charlemagne bore the Roman imperial titles of "Imperator" and "Augustus" after the transfer of the emperorship to the Franks (*translatio imperii*). His empire was the Roman Empire, not unlike its eastern part to which the empire had passed under Otto the Great.

Crucially, the Roman Empire was conceived as a universal or global entity. In other words, it was a political entity that was never nationally defined. Rather, it encompassed different nations and, as in the Roman Empire of antiquity, even the function of ruler was not tied to persons of a particular ethnic origin. At the same time, it was always clear to its contemporaries that the Roman Empire would exist as long as the world existed: according to the Christian view, it was the last empire, after which came the terrible events of the Apocalypse and the Last Judgement.

The Empire provided a solid political and legal framework within which life could develop. This was characterized by the great collection of laws decreed by the Emperor Justinian (527–564), the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*. On the one hand, it reflected the greatest achievements of Roman law in the previous millennium; on the other, as a fundamental legal system, it had a long-term impact on the future. In the eastern part of the Empire, which was dominated by Greek culture and language, two of the most important emperors, Basileios I (867–886) and his son Leon VI (886–912), ensured that it was edited and translated into Greek in order to keep it alive. In my country it still had some legal force until it was replaced by the new Civil Code (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*) on 1.1.1900, which was heavily influenced by the old principles. In general, important provisions and principles of Roman law have survived. They still form an essential part of the rule of law.

Repeatedly, the people in the affected areas — and these were mainly, though not alone, in Europe after the break-up of the unity of the Mediterranean world — have held on tenaciously to the Empire and its idea. This also affected all those who were not directly part of it or even in competition with it. And so, it simply did not

4 One may think particularly at the collection of poems published by the famous Greek poet Jannis Ritsos under the title Ρωμιοσύνη in 1954, set in music by Mikis Theodorakis.

go away: After the great catastrophe of Constantinople, the "Third Rome" was born in Moscow, and the imperial title remained "Tsar". And this "Rome" formally lasted until the revolutionary events of 1917. In the West, too, the Empire fell victim to the great changes brought about by revolution. It was dissolved by the Emperor himself on 6 August 1806. But by then the French Revolution had found its own emperor, Napoleon (1804). And not long afterwards, the last remaining emperor of the old empire, Franz II, took the title of emperor of Austria and was now also known as Franz I. Thus, there was one empire in three forms. The great battle of Austerlitz on 2 December 1805 between France, Russia and Austria was a battle of three emperors — with Franz himself embodying two empires, the Old Empire and the Austrian Empire. Even after its fall, the Empire lived on in some way, as an idea and with all its traditions.

This permanence and power, strong in all change, was also linked to religion. Despite the persecutions, the development of Christianity was encouraged by the existence of the Roman Empire. After Constantine the Great established the link between the Empire and the Church of the Christians, the Church developed in harmony with the Empire. Like the Empire, the Church was universal. It maintained this principle even when the Empire was in crisis and partially dissolved. With the Empire, the Church was also able to combine the idea of unity with that of duality or even plurality. But according to the claim, the Patriarch in the Second Rome represents the "Ecumenical Patriarchate", and the Pope in Rome regularly gives the blessing "urbi et orbi", "to the city and to the world".

All these connections are almost obvious in one particular coat of arms, the double-headed eagle, as we know it as the symbol of the Orthodox Church. However, since the time of the Palaiologans, it has also symbolized the Roman Empire — unity in double form — and was also introduced in the West (under Emperor Sigismund, 1411–1437). It remained the symbol of the Old Empire, and was then transferred to Austria. Consequently, it is also the coat of arms of the Russian Federation. At a glance, then, these foundations of European traditions can be seen in the Roman Empire in two forms.

2.2 State and Church(es)

The union of church and state in the form that was launched by Constantine constituted a crucial nucleus of the tradition, but did not fail, on the other hand, to constitute a heavy burden. In the two empires this union took a different form. In the East, where there was a direct continuity with the ancient empire of Rome, the position of the emperor was also very strong within the Church. One speaks of caesaropapism. But the relationship between emperor and ecclesiastical institutions was by no

means free of conflict. The emperor was not an absolute ruler; on the contrary, he was subject to the dictates of God. This was overseen, if nothing else, by the Patriarch, who could totally oppose the sovereign.

Things were completely different in the West, where the ancient empire had practically crumbled and only to a certain extent survived in the Germanic kingdoms, especially in the reign of the Franks. In times when everything was insecure, it was the representatives of the Church, the bishops in many regions and, not least, the Pope as the unchallenged spiritual head in the West, who also took care of worldly welfare. Moreover, the notion of a universal empire (also in connection with the East) remained vital within the Church. For this reason, the conferring of imperial dignity by the pope, for the first time on Christmas Day in the year 800 at the coronation of Charles as emperor, played an essential role.

Bishops also had important political functions in the medieval world, especially in the Western Empire. It was in the interests of both the ruler and the pope to decide on their investiture. Again, it was part of the emperor's self-image that he was the protector of the Church and had to ensure its well-being. He even supported the papacy in its disputes with secular opponents in Rome and in its efforts to reform the Church. On the other hand, the popes, strengthened by this, also asserted their claim to superiority over the emperors: as Christ's representatives on earth, they also broke the emperor's power when in doubt.

All this led to a very heated conflict, the Investiture Controversy, as early as the 11th century. But even after that, the relationship remained as tense as ever: the Pope relied on Scripture, the Councils and the rules and regulations of the Church, i.e. canon law. The emperor was supported in his claims to supremacy by the legal experts who, in the Corpus Iuris, brought to light more and more documents relating to the great power of the Roman emperors. Contrasts of this kind also cast a shadow over the history of the following centuries, such as the conflicts between Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) and Frederick II (1212–1250), or the Avignon captivity of the Church ordered by Philip IV the Fair. The Church did not recover from this blow, as evidenced by the Great Western Schism and the formulation of the theory of the supremacy of the Councils (conciliarism).

But the worst was yet to come: weakened by these problems, the Church, still barely able to regulate the spirituality and behavior of the clergy, was also tainted by political interests, corruption and nepotism. From the 14th century onwards, it had to contend with an increasingly popular religious sentiment and various attempts at reform. All this culminated in the Reformation, which spread across central and western Europe after the publication of Martin Luther's theses. Using the new medium of the printing press, new religious movements developed very quickly, all of them based on the Gospel: in particular, in addition to the Lutheran

orientation, there were the Reformed groups based on the theologians Ulrich Zwingli and Jean Calvin, and many others.

Enormous energies were involved; it was not just a matter of life and death, but of the eternal salvation of souls. Those who believed otherwise became heretics and were brutally persecuted. The Church reacted with a drastic internal reform, and the many conflicts turned into real religious wars, with massacres and bloodshed, but also with considerable political consequences, especially in France, Britain and the whole of Central Europe. The mighty French kingdom threatened to disintegrate, and in England there were civil wars and dictatorship. Finally, the empire in the West was about to fall apart altogether: The Thirty Years' War, a religious war between Catholics and Protestants in the Empire, became a true European war with the intervention of other powers, especially France, Sweden and Spain. It left a trail of blood across central Europe and affected neighboring regions.

Europe's religious wars, however, had significant consequences far beyond Europe. They gave rise to nothing less than the modern state, with its monopoly on the use of force. But it was precisely this monopoly that in this epoch had to be asserted not only against the traditional local powers, from warlords and robber barons to nobles and ecclesiastical princes, but also against the various religious parties that fought bitterly against each other. The monarchs, on the other hand, had to strengthen their position and eventually force everyone under their rule. The fact that there should be only one superior power in a state, i.e. a monopoly, was the only guarantee of internal peace. Thus, the Greek term for the order of a state, *politeia*, became the police! Thinkers such as the Frenchman Jean Bodin and the Englishman Thomas Hobbes (inter alia, translator of Thucydides) provided the intellectual foundations. The principle became established during the period of absolute monarchy, especially in France. And even after the revolutionary disempowerment of the monarchies, the idea of a monopoly on the use of force remained in the principle of popular sovereignty.

At the same time, these principles implied a religious neutrality of the state: precisely because it had to be superior to religious energies and powers in order to maintain internal harmony and peace, it had to stay out of religious conflicts. Thus, the modern state — unlike the Roman Empire — is not founded on or linked to religion. We talk about secularism, laicism and the separation of church and state — and we also know that there will always be debates about this, for example about allowing symbols that are considered religious in public spaces or institutions. They are inevitable, given the potentially explosive power of religion, which has not gone away; we must endure them and make sure we keep them within peaceful limits. This is what European history teaches us.

2.3 Self-government, democracy and the rule of law

There is a strong common European tradition behind the concept of popular sovereignty, dating back to Greek antiquity. Let us not forget that the term "popular sovereignty" is nothing more than a literal translation of the Greek word "demokratia". Nevertheless, our modern democracies are by no means copies of the Athenian democracy. But they would not have been possible without it, and the winding paths that lead from ancient Athens to us lie at the heart of Europe's common destiny. What matters is not so much the legal and administrative details as the underlying principles. The main point is that individuals belonging to a political community decide autonomously on community matters. This means that they subordinate themselves to certain rules which they have given themselves and which they themselves control: the law. In this form, self-determination guarantees freedom.

How wide the circle of individuals involved in decision-making processes should be was the subject of heated debate, even civil war, in ancient times. And yet, even in antiquity, the basic principle that this circle should include all those concerned was unambiguously accepted. Plato's Protagoras gave voice to this principle with an unprecedented formulation: that 'decorum' and 'law' (αἰδώς and δίκη), the foundations of common political life, should be relevant to the lives of all individuals and not be reserved for experts.[5] This was also discussed, and not infrequently there was a confrontation, even a violent one, about the best order, between democracy and oligarchy, ochlokratia and aristocracy, freedom and tyranny.

The organization of community life in Rome and the Roman cities was not very different. Of course, these were not democracies in the strict sense, but the principle remained that the individuals who make up a community should participate in an appropriate way and govern themselves. Indeed, it can be said that the Roman Empire, with its immense size, could only exist and function because, like the Hellenistic kingdoms, it could be based on thousands of autonomous cities.

In the European Union, we talk about the principle of subsidiarity, which means that as many things as possible should be regulated at the lowest possible level, i.e. at the grassroots, close to the people. This was indeed the case in ancient times. Thus, it is fair to say that the government of the Roman emperors was close to the people. In fact, it was in the cities of the Roman Empire that the concept of citizen was born. In principle, these communities were based on free citizens (even if in reality it was often a small circle). In the word *civitas* there is *civis*; and the proud "civis Romanus sum", also used by the Apostle Paul, guaranteed everyone a fair trial (or so it was claimed).

5 Pl. *Prt.* 322a–323a.

Many of these cities also managed to survive the caesuras that marked the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, maintaining a certain degree of autonomy. As early as the 11th century, what was essentially the ancient model of the city, based on a form of structured self-government, began to spread with impressive speed throughout Europe, even far beyond the borders of the ancient Roman Empire. Travelling through many European countries, for example, one immediately recognizes the common elements of these cities (urban planning, market squares with town halls, distribution of churches, etc.) and quickly feels familiar with them.

In addition to the civitas model, there were other forms of civic participation in the context of monarchies: the corporate participation of the nobility, the clergy and the communities. Urban and rural communities could join together in confederations, as in the Swiss cantons. The Confoederatio Helvetica, or CH for short, was a particularly European state. As early as the Middle Ages, self-governing communities had developed a concept of independence and sovereignty, as the famous Italian jurist Bartolo von Sassoferato put it: *civitas sibi princeps* — and *princeps* here is the Roman emperor, the highest form of state authority according to well-known Roman law.

In the course of the above-mentioned religious wars and related conflicts, people in the countries concerned struggled in theory and practice to find the right order for the now strong state. As elsewhere, especially during the Enlightenment, guidance was sought in antiquity, in this case especially in the debates on the proper order of the state, one of the central themes of ancient political theory. Following Plato and especially Aristotle, but also Polybius, Cicero and Livy, people developed their own concepts. The idea of the supremacy of law became essential. Even the ruler had to bow to the laws, or at least they kept his power in check. Ideas such as social contract and constitution prevailed, together with practical experience, which became principles, especially in the crucial principle of the separation of powers. The recourse to corporate representation, mentioned above, made it possible to extend participation and co-determination to areas larger than a municipality. In the combination of Stoic principles and Judeo-Christian principles of the value of the individual human being as a creature of God, human rights based on natural law were formulated.

With the revolutions in America and France, these ideas and principles were put to practice. From there they spread with incredible speed in Europe and in the territories colonized by Europe, already in the first decades of the 19th century, in Italy, Spain, Germany, Serbia, Greece, South America. It was in this age of revolutions that the common destiny became particularly apparent. In the Greek struggle for freedom, in particular, it was vividly expressed in the commitment of the fighters themselves and in the diverse sympathies of the Philhellenes.

The principles of the rule of law and the separation of powers are therefore reflected not least in the independence of the judiciary, the third branch of government, which is a particularly valuable asset among European principles and at the same time a striking example of common ground, from the supreme courts of the individual countries to the courts of justice in Europe. Here, essential European ideas have already become reality, and in a highly effective way. And yet the Court of Justice itself, since the time of the ancient Greeks, has also been a forum for conflict and dispute, albeit in a peaceful form: *concordia discors*, again under the banner of respect for the opponent, at least formally.

3 Europe as a community of discourse

This peculiar combination of difference and commonality is particularly evident in the discussions and debates that Europeans hold among themselves or with external interlocutors. The opinions and positions are different, but the terms of the debate are similar, and the starting points and assumptions are comparable: despite linguistic differences, the same language is spoken. In short, Europe is also a community of discourse, and this is evident with unparalleled clarity in the cultural sphere, in the realm of the mind and the arts.

The discourse that Europe has with itself and with others is in many ways a continuation of the debates of antiquity, between Greeks and Greeks, Egyptians and Greeks, Persians and Greeks, Greeks and Jews, Greeks and Romans, and so on. In the same way, European culture is in dialogue with antiquity. This dialogue with antiquity remained uninterrupted in the eastern part of the empire and in those western areas where there were no sharp cultural breaks in Late Antiquity. Significantly, the transfer of the empire to the Franks brought with it a major reform of the Latin language and script, and a marked revival of ancient culture, literature and learning. We are talking about the Carolingian Renaissance, which provided the intellectual basis for the revival of the Roman Empire in the West.

And above all: renaissances happen all the time. Europe has often been strengthened by its constant and extensive recourse to antiquity and has even come into contact with Mediterranean cultures. Even in the Eastern Islamic cultures, and from there to Spain, much of antiquity was preserved, especially in the case of philosophy. This heritage was also enriched with practical knowledge such as medicine, mathematics, astronomy and geography through Indian and Persian influence. A koine, a common language of scholars that ignored or transcended religious divisions, was thus gradually formed or continued. Its most privileged home was

the multicultural environment of Muslim Spain, and its influence was not least due to Jewish polyglot scholars.

For all the differences in detail, the common basis was the works of Aristotle. Above all, the works on logic set the standard. In the Greek-speaking East they were read in the original; elsewhere they were studied in Arabic or in Latin translations from Arabic. In this way, a real intellectual movement was born in Europe: Scholasticism, for which Aristotle was THE philosopher, *the teacher of those who know*, as Dante called him.[6] In intellectual circles there was a culture of dispute and discussion, lively, sharp and polemical, sometimes even balancing opposing positions, not very different from the ancient Greek sophists or the commentators on the Torah and the Koran. Such debates were always about similar issues and were conducted according to common rules and methods. The universities, founded from the Middle Ages onwards and a highly characteristic expression of medieval — and indeed European — culture, were the places of learning, fostered not least by such debates.

What did it mean for the Occident to become acquainted with the Greek spirit in its own linguistic garb? From the 13th century onwards, this began in places where Western Europe was already more orientated towards the East, in Sicily and southern Italy. A milestone in this process was the founding of the University of Naples, whose name it bears today, by the universally minded emperor Frederick II. The works of Aristotle were now translated directly from the Greek original. Finally, direct contacts increased, forced by the negotiations between the threatened empire in Constantinople and the powers of the West.

Humanism, inaugurated by Francesco Petrarch in the form of a debate on classical Latin, thus acquired its own physiognomy: the link between Latin and Greek, a link that took shape above all in Florentine intellectual circles and was fostered by the presence of Greek scholars such as Demetrius Chalkokondyles (1423–1511); the latter, for example, was one of the teachers of Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522), who in turn became one of the great educators of my country. In the age of humanism and the Renaissance, classical antiquity became the absolute standard. Under the banner of the *ad fontes* principle, antiquity became a model and the object of new research, carried out with an unprecedented critical approach.

The bearers of this culture were first and foremost the scholars, who created a *res publica litterarum*, in whose tradition we still stand today, in our republic of letters. But it was in the universities that the elites of the principalities, themselves characterized by an increasingly complex organization, were trained. Finally, through grammar schools and high schools, humanism spread to the cities, overshadowing

6 *Il maestro di color che sanno* (Dante, *Divina commedia Inf.* 4, 131).

the old monastic schools. The common language was Latin, but the practice of translation was also widespread. More and more people communicated in the different national languages. Humanists, such as the poets of La Pléiade in Paris and Jan Kochanowski in Poland, promoted and even perfected writing in the national languages. In the end, multilingualism was the order of the day, and translation was commonplace. In this way, the range of expression was expanded. And people could always understand each other.

Diversity and unity, expansion and not obstruction of exchange: Europe spoke and still speaks about the same things in different ways. And when one came across words that could not be translated, one could learn new nuances, admire the richness of the other language and grow in respect for the other. In his major speech at the Sorbonne (26 September 2017), one of Europe's oldest universities, French President Emmanuel Macron highlighted this multilingualism as a positive element of European culture and even acknowledged the importance of the untranslatable: "En quelque sorte, le Sisyphe européen a toujours son intraduisible à rouler. Mais cet intraduisible, c'est notre chance! It is the part of the mystique that exists in each of us, and it is the part of the confidence that exists in the European project. It is the fact that, at a given moment, because we do not speak the same language and because we have this part of incongruous and irreducible difference, we decide to work together when we should have separated. Je revendique cette part d'intraduisible, d'irréductible différence, parce que je veux imaginer Sisyphe heureux".[7]

It was in this environment that new observations and interpretations of nature were developed. Based on rigorous observations and calculations of the solar system (by experts such as Nikolaus Kopernikus, 1473–1543) and a new understanding of experience, scholars such as Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) founded new scientific methods based on experimentation, laying the foundations of modern science. These were remarkable European innovations. But even here there were — and still are — references to Greek philosophy. Two leading quantum theorists, both Nobel laureates of the 20th century, Erwin Schrödinger (1887–1961) and Werner Heisenberg (1901–1976) may suffice as examples. In any case, antiquity remains a source of reflection and inspiration.

As might be expected, this is all the more true of disciplines explicitly dedicated to classical culture. This was and is not only about science, but also about the education of the individual, beyond any limitation in a nationalistic sense, but rather in a universal respect for one's own and other's traditions, in the sense of humanism, the *studia humanitatis*. Much could be added in analogy to what has been said

7 https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-democratique (accessed 2023/06/28).

so far: Europe as a community of art, painting, music, literature. All these cultural expressions were born and developed under the inspiration of antiquity, but also under the banner of exchange, communication and receptivity: a give and take both in contact and at the level of the text. Works of art from one country were received in another and thus became European. Translations became masterpieces with a value of their own: in my German literature class at school, I happened to read Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' in the translation of the Romantic August Wilhelm Schlegel. There is no space to say more. But it will not be difficult for the reader to add to my few examples.

4 Europe as a community in conflict: War and Peace

The history of Europe is also marked by debate and confrontation in their extreme forms, namely violence and war. "The life of Europe is the energy of great confrontations": these are Ranke's words again.[8] Violence and war are intertwined with everything I have said so far. They cannot and must not be silenced. But we must not lose ourselves in them, nor allow ourselves to be discouraged by them. That is why I use the expression "community of conflict", which the Czech historian Jan Křen used to describe the conflictual relationship between Czechs and Germans.[9] From this perspective, it is also possible to see a relationship in the conflict. Of course, it is a relationship that is threatened by failure, even catastrophic failure; but it can also succeed and overcome failure, as long as it is not denied: it must be admitted, honestly. And that is what history, as a scientific discipline, should do.

Let us note, then, that Europe has very often been united above all by enmity, and that it has often directed its energies outwards, always in the name of noble aims, as in the case of the Crusades. This could go as far as perversion, as when the Christian crusaders turned against Christian Constantinople. Later, however, especially in times of catastrophe, a sense of belonging to a single community could mature, as can be seen in *De Europa* by the humanist Ennea Silvio Piccolomini, who, as Pope Pius II, called in vain for a crusade to liberate Constantinople. Several attempts were made to change the situation. It was an arduous task, not least because of the many conflicts with the Ottoman Empire over the centuries, known as the Turkish Wars. These are events that have profoundly shaped Europe's self-image

8 Ranke 1957, 221.

9 Křen 1990/1996.

and have left their mark to this day, whether we like it or not. But it is also true that Europe has not always been of one mind.

In many wars, especially the religious wars mentioned above, Europe tore itself apart. The lines of conflict did not always or primarily run along national borders. Colonialism, a particularly problematic phenomenon in European history, was from the outset, as the competition between the Iberian states of Spain and Portugal, an expression of the European community of conflict, a race for world domination. It ended with the First World War, "the great catastrophe",[10] the "primeval catastrophe" (*Urkatastrophe*) of the 20th century, which a contemporary, the painter Franz Marc (1880–1916), could already describe as a "European civil war".[11] With the Second World War, which in many ways grew out of the First and was triggered by Hitler's Nazi Germany, Europe seemed to have come to an end.

But what happened next, again in the wake of a catastrophe, shows the crucial feature of the European community of conflict, namely its ability to overcome wars. A particularly striking example is the Peace of Westphalia of Münster and Osnabrück (1648), which ended the particularly brutal and protracted Thirty Years' War after years of negotiations, compared to which the Brexit negotiations were a pleasant chat. Characteristically, it established a peace order that explicitly allowed for confessional differences, even antagonisms, and allowed for national interests, balancing them in such a way that the relatively stable system of European equilibrium could emerge — which in turn shaped the European community of destiny. The empire in the West, called the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation", was organized in such a complex way that it was almost unmanageable, but as an order of regulated conflicts it is now highly praised by historians.

Above all, it is what has happened in Europe over the last 75 years that allows us to be optimistic. Those who were enemies during the most terrible of wars, in some cases enemies for centuries, have come closer together and have lived together in peace for an incalculable length of time. In the light of the historical narrative I have traced here, I find it very significant that the decisive step towards a greater European Union was taken in Athens in 2003, in the reconstructed Stoa of Attalus, with a view to our deepest historical traditions. Reconstructed and reconstruction — these words may remind us that we cannot take this history for granted. We must constantly rediscover and re-examine it, from different perspectives, with divergent interpretations, in debate and discussion: in *concordia discors*.

We, as historians and classicists, the modern republic of letters, know something about debate and discussion, *linguae francae* and translation. It is therefore

10 Kennan, 1979, 3.

11 Marc 1915.

our task, above all, to keep reminding Europeans of the crucial point: that Europe has more in common than is generally believed, because it is older than the nation-states that almost destroyed it. Since antiquity, it has grown through various processes of exchange and demarcation, even in conflict, into a community of destinies. In this way we can work for the future by working on the past.

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