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Cultural Fictions and Cultural Identity

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Cultural identity is a hot topic in the academy these days. The phenomenon has swept through the halls of ivy. Courses, curricula, programs, and departments have undergone wholesale transformation in recent years. The affirmation of ethnic, racial, or religious roots has translated itself into new catalogue offerings, lecture series, majors, undergraduate degrees, and graduate specializations—not to mention scholarly conferences by the score. At Berkeley, an Ethnic Studies Division encompasses separate units for African-American studies, Native American studies, Asian-American studies, and Chicano studies, each offering a raft of courses and seminars. Nor is this an instance where Berkeley is so far in the vanguard as to have lost claim to representative status. In fact, the reshaping of academic disciplines in terms of cultural identity is a nationwide development, firmly entrenched in numerous institutions and in process of implementation in many others.

Where does the Classics fit into this? Sadly, our discipline too often regards the development as a threat, girding its loins for retrenchment or resistance. And, sadder still, Classics frequently supplies a prime target for attack, labelled as the quintessential representative of elitism, the custodian of western tradition, the pillar of Eurocentrism. The current drive for multiculturalism appears in this light as the enemy, a menace to those old dead languages, that bygone civilization, that one-dimensional and stodgy academic pursuit that largely studies and is studied by aging white males of European extraction.

Certainly our discipline does not need additional enemies. At a time when tight-fisted administrators face budgetary shortfalls and receive directives to cut expenditures, Classics departments become inviting victims. Too many programs have already been reduced, amalgamated, or eliminated, too many individuals reckoned as expendable. This is hardly the time for retreat into the bunker, a rear-guard action to preserve hoary values against the presumed barbarian. Multiculturalism should, in fact, serve as a challenge and a stimulus, an occasion to reach out to concerns that swirl about the academy.

I do not here suggest truckling to the trendy. Nor do I refer to *ad hoc* strategies for survival, a mania for mounting enrollments. Tactical moves are not the issue. Many are already in place, and have been for more than a generation. They include, of course, Classics in translation, Classical Civilization majors, or courses in mythology—very successful, entirely legitimate, and altogether laudable enterprises—even though they have not always prevented the shutting down of departments or the laying off of personnel.

My point is a different one. The proposition that multiculturalism and the study of classical antiquity are somehow at cross-purposes strikes me as peculiar and paradoxical. Few societies have ever been more multicultural than those clustered about the Mediterranean. The worlds of the ancient Near East, Greece, and Rome encompassed a bewildering range and diversity of peoples, races, colors, languages, attitudes, conventions, and beliefs. As Dio Chrysostom observed, with reference to the population of Alexandria in the late 1st or early 2nd century C.E., the inhabitants consisted of Greeks, Italians, Syrians, Libyans, Cilicians, Ethiopians, Arabs, Bactrians, Scythians, Persians, and Indians (*Orat.* 32.40). No need to devise artificial constructs in order to meet the tests of political correctness or to stave off the predatory dean. Far from being a threat to the study of antiquity, multiculturalism stands at its very core. This is precisely the area that can and should excite research, writing, and instruction—without defensiveness and without romanticizing.¹ The ancient world did not constitute a melting pot, some congenial mixing bowl that blended and integrated its pieces to form the origins of western civilization. The ingredients came from east as well as west, from north as well as south. And the differences among ancient societies are at least as striking as the similarities, the confrontations at least as significant as any assimilation. A sense of cultural identity, after all, can hardly take form unless defined against or with reference to other cultures.

The treatment of cultural identity as applied to ancient societies in recent years has not always been salutary. Emphasis can be misplaced, and false or unproductive issues have taken precedence. Take, for instance, the matter of cultural theft. Who stole what from whom? A singularly pointless debate. Cultures do not become impoverished if their creations are borrowed by others. This is no zero-sum game. Interaction enriches the legacy, rather than diminishing the contributors. Or, to cite another bustling enterprise, excessive energy has been expended in searching out origins. Our understanding of the

¹The wise words of Molly Myerowitz Levine, "Multiculturalism and the Classics," *Arethusa* 25 (1992) 215-220, deserve attention.

Hellenic achievement is no more enhanced by postulating an occupation of Boeotia by the Hyksos than by belief in a Dorian invasion of the Peloponnese. Speculation along these lines can rapidly degenerate into polemics, with unwelcome overtones of politics and ideology. A decision on whether or not Cleopatra was black would bring us no insight into her character or accomplishment—let alone those of contemporary blacks, whites, Greeks, or Egyptians.² Or consider a different line of inquiry that is quite familiar: the tracing of cultural influences from one society to another. That has long been a staple item of classical scholarship, and it can occasionally be fruitful and interesting. But it generally presupposes a rather passive recipient, thus posing a distinction between cultural benefactor and beneficiary. It also implies an unspoken privileging of one culture over another. And it ignores or suppresses what should capture attention: the dynamics of the interchange and the active transformation of a cultural inheritance into a new entity.³

Emphasis needs to be shifted. I want to place stress on the development of a cultural consciousness through experience with and by reference to other cultures. Antiquity supplies an especially rich repository for such an investigation. How did ancient societies come to articulate their own identities? The question presents numerous difficulties and stumbling-blocks. One topic of inquiry, however, may bring some useful results. I refer to the manipulation of myths, the reshaping of traditions, the elaboration of legends, fictions, and inventions, the recasting of ostensibly alien cultural legacies with the aim of defining or reinforcing a distinctive cultural character. Research into this subject encounters intricate and involved tales of national origins, of borrowings, kinship, and interconnections among societies, of common heritage, and of intercultural associations.

²Reference, of course, is to the heated debate still raging over Martin Bernal's ambitious, admirably learned, occasionally brilliant, and productively provocative *Black Athena*, a projected multi-volume work, of which two have appeared; *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 1: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985* (New Brunswick 1987); vol. 2: *The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence* (New Brunswick 1991). Numerous discussions and disputes have found their way into print, with Bernal frequently offering rebuttal. See, especially, *The Challenge of 'Black Athena'*, special issue, *Arethusa* (1989), ed. by M. M. Levine and J. Peradotto; and a range of articles in *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 3 (1990). Note also the trenchant remarks of Edith Hall, "When is a Myth not a Myth? Bernal's 'Ancient Model'," *Arethusa* 25 (1992) 181-201, with Bernal's response, 203-214. A valuable bibliography on the controversy may be found in M. M. Levine, "The Use and Abuse of Black Athena," *AHR* 97 (1992) 440-460.

³Cf. the salutary comments of H. von Staden, "Affinities and Elisions: Helen and Hellenocentrism," *Isis* 83 (1992) 578-595.

Scholarly interpretation of such stories, of course, has a long history. But it has not always taken the most promising direction. That is to say, interpreters have exercised undue ingenuity in attempting to determine the historicity of these tales, efforts that can be debated endlessly without approaching a consensus. Yet the stories are no less intriguing—indeed more so—if they are imaginative inventions. For they thereby raise the more important questions about motives for adoption and adaptation of the fables, the context in which they were framed, the attitudes they reveal toward other cultures, and the role they played in forming a people's sense of cultural distinctiveness.

The present occasion forbids a detailed exploration of this topic. But certain revealing examples can bring it into vivid focus. I want to pursue the matter on two fronts, one quite familiar to Classicists, the other rather less so. It might be noted, with some relief, that neither one involves the debate about the origins of Greek civilization or the competing claims of Egyptians, Semites, and Indo-Europeans on those origins. Rather, I look first at the legends of Rome's connection with Troy, and then at some of the fascinating tales that associate the Jews with the traditions and peoples of Greece. Each represents an illuminating case of appropriation and adaptation of alien traditions, in order, on the one hand, to establish a place within a broader cultural framework and, on the other, to assert superiority within it.

First, Rome and Troy.⁴ It is no secret that the legends associating the forebears of Rome with the survivors of the Trojan War were conceived by Greek writers and intellectuals. They generated what was later to become the canonical tradition on Rome's beginnings. The orthodox tale, of course, has the city derive from a settlement of Trojan refugees, remnants of a people defeated by the Achaean expedition that sacked Troy. Aeneas holds center stage in this version, leader of the Trojans who survived that calamity and who, after countless setbacks and detours, successfully reached the shores of Italy. The progeny of Aeneas eventually carried out their destiny, the founding of Rome, via the cities of Lavinium and Alba Longa. Vergil's *Aeneid* enshrines the tale, and Livy's history encapsulates it.

What is not so well known, however, is the fact that this version took quite a long time before it attained canonical status and that it had some very different and very strong competitors along the way. The earliest Hellenic explanations, in fact, had Greeks themselves, not Trojans, as the ancestors of Rome. As might be expected, the stories began to take shape in the era of

⁴For what follows, see the much fuller treatment in E. S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (Ithaca 1992) 6-51.

Greek colonization, a process that naturally sparked Hellenic interest in the west. Greeks, in characteristic fashion, inclined to interpret the western past in light of their own national traditions. The circumstances would readily call attention to legends like the western adventures of Herakles or the settler-heroes of the *Nostoi*—most particularly, the wanderings of Odysseus.

One intriguing item appears very early in the record. The concluding lines of Hesiod's *Theogony* register the union of Odysseus and Circe, a union that produced as offspring Agrius and Latinus, future rulers over the Tyrrhenians (1011-1016). Those lines disclose early Hellenic interest in central Italy, possibly Etruria and certainly Latium, and the introduction of those lands into the Greek legendary complex. More significant, Odysseus takes the role of ultimate ancestor to the rulers of those regions. The passage appropriately exemplifies the Greek penchant for reshaping foreign experiences by imposing Hellenic lore.

A strong Greek component continued to cling to the legends of Rome's beginnings. Heracleides Ponticus, for instance, a pupil of Plato writing in the mid 4th century B.C.E., referred to Rome simply as a "Greek city" (Plut. *Cam.* 22.2). Aristotle himself endorsed a version that had Achaean, not Trojan, warriors driven by storm to Italy while trying to return home after the fall of Troy. They got no further. Their ships were burned, an act of defiance by the Trojan women brought as captives from Troy. The stranded Achaeans had to remain in Italy and took up permanent residence in a site which Aristotle called "Latinium" (D.H. 1.72.3-4). Aristotle's pupil Heracleides Lembos was more precise: the shipwrecked Achaeans settled a city on the Tiber named for the woman who had set their ships ablaze, Rhome (Festus, 329 L).

The foregoing are but a small sample of the abundant tales of Rome's origins that trace those origins to Greek founders. The phenomenon is a familiar one, a form of Hellenic cultural imperialism, a spinning out of tales in accord with Greek legends, and ascription of foreign cities to Greek colonists—a standard characteristic of the Hellenic mentality.

That ingredient had a tenacious quality. One finds it still present and, in even more vivid form, in a contemporary of Vergil and Livy, the Greek rhetorician and historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus. For Dionysius Rome was a Greek city many times over. He postulated successive waves of migrants from the east: Arcadians, Pelasgians, yet more Arcadians, then the followers of Herakles (1.31, 41-44, 60, 89). Dionysius engaged in a form of Hellenic overkill, swamping Rome with eastern settlers in order to reinforce its role as torch-bearer of Greek civilization. He even went so far as to have Romulus

defend the rape of the Sabine women by assuring the victims that this constituted hallowed Hellenic practice (2.30).

The orthodox version that has Aeneas as ancestor of Rome is, in fact, a later and, initially at least, a less prevalent one. It appears among Sicilian Greek writers who propagated the tales of Trojan migrants to their island. Western Greeks, on the edges of the Hellenic world, had a special incentive to attach their own pedigrees to the great legends that grew out of the epic tradition and that had served to define a common Greek culture. And when such writers perceived Romans expanding their influence into the Greek-speaking areas of central and southern Italy in the 4th century B.C.E., they extended those tales to encompass the new emerging power. It is not surprising that the earliest extant historians to associate Aeneas with the origins of Rome are Sicilian historians (Gruen 14-16).

The traditions subsequently overlap, becoming amalgamated or blended in confusing fashion. The eponymous creation Roma or Rhome took on a number of roles in the hands of various creative writers. Some gave her solid Greek lineage as granddaughter of Herakles, or Telemachus, or Odysseus. Others made her wife of Aeneas or Ascanius, or granddaughter of Aeneas.⁵ One bizarre combination of traditions has Aeneas come to Italy together with Odysseus and become founder of the city which he designated as Rome, taking the name from one of the Trojan women who set fire to the ships (D.H. 1.72.2). That version evidently patches together a variety of independent traditions: the western migration of Odysseus, the flight of Aeneas, the burning of ships after return from Troy, and the foundation story of Rome.

All of these tales derive from the Hellenic imagination. But it is the Roman response to which I seek to call attention. When Greek accounts of Rome's origins first impinged upon Roman consciousness, they came, as we have seen, in several different varieties. And many of them gave a greater role to Achaean than to Trojan heroes. Yet it was the Trojan tale that eventually prevailed, an outcome that could not have been forecast from the beginning. How does one explain it? Why did the Romans, in their own estimation, become Trojans rather than Greeks? The question goes to the heart of Rome's cultural awakening and its own sense of identity.

The canonical tale in its full blown form associated Rome most closely with two Latin towns: Lavinium and Alba Longa. As the story has it, Aeneas established a Trojan settlement at Lavinium, and, after an interval of thirty years, his son Ascanius departed to found a new city at Alba Longa. Ascanius

⁵Plut. *Rom.* 2.1-3; D. H. 1.72.6; Festus, 326, 328L; Servius, ad *Aen.* 1. 273.

thereby instituted the line of Alban kings who reigned for three centuries until the birth of the twins Romulus and Remus who would be the creators of Rome. The special prestige accorded to the Latin towns in this narrative supplies a vital clue.

Appropriation of the legend by Rome can reasonably be set in the late 4th century B.C.E. That period brought a convergence of political and cultural circumstances that made the Trojan connection in a Latin context particularly attractive. This was the era in which Rome defeated the forces of the Latin League and extended military and political control over the cities of Latium. It was also the era in which Rome spread its influence into Campania and entered into diplomatic relations with Greek cities like Naples. The time proved propitious for adoption of the fables that linked Rome and Latin cities to the heritage of the Hellenic past. Rome found especially welcome benefits in the legends. They lent a cultural legitimacy to its position of authority in Latium. Rome was now heir to the region's glorious past—not just its conqueror and suzerain but its cultural curator. And, equally important, the assimilation of the legends announced a connection with the Hellenic world, thereby to validate Rome's association with the Greek cities of Italy (Gruen 26-29).

This brings us back then to the central question. Why did the Romans choose to consider themselves as descendants of Trojans rather than Greeks? Were they drawn to Aeneas rather than to Odysseus because the latter had a reputation for sly shrewdness, a dubious quality, whereas the former exemplified *pietas*, the preeminent Roman virtue? An unsatisfactory solution. The Romans were not shopping for heroes in some divine supermarket, weighing respective qualities and selecting their favorite. The embrace of Troy had more subtle and more significant meaning. It enabled Rome to associate itself with the rich and complex fabric of Hellenic tradition, thus to enter that wider cultural world, just as it had entered the wider political world. But at the same time it announced Rome's distinctiveness from the dominant element in that world.⁶ Rome's literate classes welcomed incorporation into the cultural legacy of Hellas—but preferred to carve out their own niche within it. They thereby sharpened a sense of their identity and laid the foundations for a national character.

Troy supplied an especially attractive ingredient in that endeavor. The celebrated Trojan past lay in remote antiquity, its people no longer extant, the city but a shell of its former self. Troy, unlike Greece, persisted as a symbol,

⁶Cf. A. Momigliano, *Settimo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome 1984) 109, 447, 459.

not a current reality. So Rome ran no risk of identification with any contemporary folk whose defects would be all too evident—and all too embarrassing. The Romans could mold the ancient Trojans to suit their own ends. As in so much else, they astutely converted Hellenic traditions to meet their own political and cultural purposes. In short, the successful and enduring version that made Trojans the forebears of Rome owed its origin to Greek inventiveness, but its reformulation to Latin ingenuity. The Greeks imposed the Trojan legend upon the west as a form of Hellenic cultural imperialism, only to see it appropriated by the westerner as a means to define and convey a Roman cultural identity.

The embrace of Troy made its mark on the international scene during the next century and more. That development has led scholars to render a familiar negative verdict on Roman character. Rome, so it is asserted, exploited the Trojan legend in order to facilitate interventionism and expansionism in the Greek east (e.g., Momigliano 453). Such a verdict misplaces the emphasis and misconceives the motivation. The Romans had larger aims in view: they advertised this association to announce their credentials as legitimate participants in a broader Mediterranean civilization. To that end, for example, they installed a temple to Venus Erycina on the Capitoline in 215, a cult whose origins lay in Sicilian Eryx where, so legend had it, Aeneas had dedicated a shrine to his mother.⁷ Similarly, the Romans transferred the worship of Magna Mater, protective deity of the Trojans, from her locus on Mt. Ida to her new home on the Palatine. The striking festival inaugurated for the goddess exhibited the high value that Romans placed upon public proclamation of their cultural legacy.⁸ Roman commanders in the east reinforced that objective when they made a point of offering sacrifice to shrines in Ilium. The gesture was accompanied by carefully orchestrated and mutual expressions of joy delivered by Romans and Ilions at the common heritage that bound them to one another (Liv. 37.9.7, 37.1-3). Such acts had purposes other than conventional aggrandizement. Contemporary Ilium was an utterly insignificant town that could hardly supply substantive assistance to expansionism. Nor is it likely that other Greek cities would render allegiance to Rome on the basis of a Trojan connection. The symbolic connotations took precedence—and the cultural, rather than the political, meaning was central. Rome shunned the label of barbarian and struck the pose of heir and standard-bearer of an antique civilization shared by Trojans and Achaeans. The words of T. Quinctius Flamininus, victor

⁷Liv. 22.9.7-10, 10.10; 23.30.13-14, 31.9.

⁸Sources and discussion in Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (Leiden 1990) 5-33.

over Philip V of Macedon and self-proclaimed liberator of Greeks, epitomized the posture. Flamininus dedicated precious objects at Delphi inscribed with his own verses in Greek, reminding the Hellenes that their liberation had come at the hands of a descendant of Aeneas (Plut. *Flam.* 12.6-7). That is a significant image. Flamininus had no military goals to achieve with this gesture; Roman martial supremacy had already been established. The conjunction of Greek freedom and Trojan ancestry delivered a different message. Flamininus not only enunciated Rome's claim to a place in the cultivated community of the Mediterranean but he declared Rome's centrality as the protector of that heritage.

The Jews approached Hellenism from an angle quite different from that of the Romans. The Romans, of course, held a political and military ascendancy. But the greater their success in those arenas, the more urgently they asserted an antique connection to that cultural world which they had, in fact, only recently entered. The Jews, on the other hand, constituted a numerical minority in the Diaspora and a subordinate state at home, dependent on the suzerainty of greater powers. Yet they too staked a claim on a shared cultural lineage with Hellenic society. And they too, like the Romans, propagated tales that both associated themselves with Greek traditions and reaffirmed their own special character.

An intriguing set of stories circulated declaring kinship between Greeks and Jews. As a notable example, consider the tradition that Jews and Spartans were both descended from the line of Abraham. That particular tall tale supposedly received acknowledgment in a letter by a Spartan king, Areus I, in the early 3rd century B.C.E. The evidence for his missive comes to us only in Jewish sources, I Maccabees and Josephus, reason enough for suspicion (I Macc. 12.20-23; Jos. *AJ* 12.225-227). Scholars, however, have manufactured a host of ingenious hypotheses in order to establish the authenticity of the letter. They include theories that the Spartans had read the Scriptures and were familiar with the narrative of Abraham, that they employed Aramaic-speaking scribes, even that they hoped, by flattering the Jews, to recruit Jewish soldiers to fill the depleted ranks of the Spartiatai!⁹ No need to engage in lengthy refutation of these ideas. The tale that Jews and Spartans were kinsmen is plainly a Jewish invention. That is clear enough from the language of the supposed letter sent by Areus which contains the very Biblical phrase "Your cattle and

⁹W. Wirgin, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 101 (1969) 15. See J. Goldstein, *I Maccabees* (New York 1976) 455-460.

property are ours, and ours are yours" (I Macc. 12.23). No Spartan would have expressed himself in that fashion.

If the Jews invented this correspondence, to what end? Concoction of a fictitious kinship of this sort has been described as "a ticket of admission to the Hellenic club."¹⁰ If that were the objective, however, one would expect that the putative ancestor of both peoples would be a Greek divinity or a Greek hero, hardly a Hebrew patriarch. The naming of Abraham as the common forefather makes it plain that, while the Jews claimed links with the Hellenic community, they were bringing the Greeks within their own traditions rather than subordinating themselves to Hellenism. This attitude emerges unmistakably from the tone of the fabricated correspondence between Jewish leaders and the Spartan royal house. The Hasmonean High Priest Jonathan writes to the Spartans, reassuring them that the Jews remember them in their sacrifices and their prayers, thereby securing for the Spartans the favor of the true God. And they add that they seek renewal of their relationship not because they have any need of the Spartans, for they (the Jews) have recently emerged victorious over all their enemies through the aid of Heaven, but only to reaffirm their friendship and brotherhood (I Macc. 12.6-19). The Jews, in short, are the benefactors, not the beneficiaries. The assertion of their συγγένεια goes beyond declaring links between the Jewish and Hellenic worlds; it announces the primacy of the Jews.

A comparable tradition appears in Josephus and Eusebius, ascribed to an otherwise unknown writer, Cleodemus Malchus, probably of the 2nd century B.C.E (Jos. *AJ* 1.239-241; Eus. *PE* 9.20.2-4). There it is reported that among Abraham's many children were three sons who joined with the Greek hero Herakles in his war on the Libyan giant Antaeus. After conclusion of that contest in which, according to Greek legend, Herakles conquered Antaeus and brought civilization to Libya, the Jewish version has the Greek hero marry the daughter of one of Abraham's sons, from whom the continent of Africa derived its name. A fascinating and illuminating tale. Whatever its provenance, it is plainly an *interpretatio Judaica*, not *Graeca*. The ultimate progenitor is again Abraham, given prime of place over Herakles. Hellenic tradition is neatly incorporated and appropriated: Herakles marries into the family, Abraham's sons share in his triumph, and one of them becomes the eponymous forebear of Africa. Once more, the kinship of Greeks and Jews places the Biblical patriarch in the center.

¹⁰E. J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, MA 1988) 184.

Nor are these the only allusions to connections between the two peoples that go back to remote antiquity. A presumed decree issued by the kingdom of Pergamum made reference to an ancient and warm friendship between Pergamenes and Jews that stems from the time of Abraham, "father of all Hebrews" (Jos. *AJ* 14.247-255). Here too the Hellenic people are put in the secondary category and the origins of the relationship are defined in terms of the Biblical figure. A plethora of legends evidently made the rounds, a product of learned speculation that imagined ancestral bonds. One might cite, for instance, the conjecture that Jews derived from the island of Crete, an idea prompted by the similarity of the name *Judaei* with that of the *Idaei*, the tribe located near the Cretan mountain Ida. Or the theory that identified Jews with the nation of the Solymoi, a Lycian people celebrated in the Homeric epics, an identification suggested by the Jewish capital Hierosolyma (Jerusalem) (Tac. *Hist.* 5.2).

In a somewhat different category, various attractive fables placed Jews in conjunction with prominent rulers of the Hellenistic world. In each case the story sets the Jews themselves in the most favorable light.

Perhaps the most memorable of such tales involves Alexander the Great. The Macedonian ruler, with the flower of his invincible army, marched in rage against Jerusalem because the Jews had maintained allegiance to Persia instead of switching to the Macedonian side. But the all-powerful Alexander was stopped dead in his tracks when the Jewish High Priest appeared, resplendent in blue and gold robes, a mitre on his head with a gold plate on which was inscribed the name of Jehovah. Thereupon the mighty Alexander prostrated himself before the Priest, declaring that the Jewish god was the great god who would lead him to victory over Persia. Alexander proceeded to sacrifice to Jehovah, to honor the Jewish priests, and to grant privileges to the land of the Jews (Jos. *AJ* 11.317-339). The tale, of course, is a fiction; Alexander never went anywhere near Jerusalem. But it is a quite interesting fiction. The Jewish inventors did not concoct a tale that humiliated Alexander and rendered the Jews triumphant, as in many comparable stories. Alexander remains the great conqueror, but he turns from foe to friend. It is the Jewish god who guarantees him victory. The legend underscores a partnership between Jews and Greeks, with the Jewish faith authorizing the Macedonian conquest.

A more conventional tale of this variety occurs in III Maccabees. There the wicked Ptolemy IV attempted to force his way into the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem, only to be felled by a stroke inflicted by God. Ptolemy then became the more furious and instructed that all Jews in Egypt be rounded up and herded into the hippodrome in Alexandria, where they were to

be trampled by five hundred intoxicated elephants. But Jewish prayers were heard again: two angels of the Lord suddenly materialized, and the elephants turned around to trample the soldiers of the king instead. Then, at last, Ptolemy saw the error of his ways, released the Jews, arranged a festival in their honor, and directed all his governors to assure their protection (III Macc. *passim*). This narrative plainly has a sharper tone and a more hostile attitude toward Hellenistic rule than the Alexander story. But the message is comparable: Jewish faith is vindicated once again. The Hellenic king mends his ways, recognizes the magnitude of the Jewish god, and becomes the protector of their community. Both tales acknowledge by implication a subordinate status for the Jews in the political and military circumstances of the Hellenistic world—but a status to which the rulers of that world pay respectful homage.

More telling still are the fictions that accommodate Jewish traditions to Hellenic culture. And, as one might expect, the Jewish contribution in these stories takes central place. A noteworthy example exists in the fable composed by the Egyptian-Jewish writer Artapanus in the 3rd or 2nd century B.C.E. It depicts Moses not in the conventional mode as great lawgiver to the Israelites. Rather he appears as author of most of the religious and cultural practices of other peoples, including the introduction of animal worship to the Egyptians and of circumcision to the Ethiopians. For the Greeks, according to Artapanus, Moses was a revered figure, identified with the mythical Greek poet Mousaios, reckoned as the teacher of Orpheus, and even made equivalent to Hermes in his capacity as patron of literature and the arts (Eus. *PE* 9.8.1-2; Clement, *Strom.* 1.154.2-3). So Moses emerges here as culture hero, a source of inspiration to Hebrews, Greeks, and Egyptians alike.

The 2nd century Alexandrian Jew Aristobulus focused more pointedly upon Hellenic culture and its putative Judaic roots. He had read widely in the works of Greek authors—including some that they probably never wrote. And he repeatedly ascribed the wisdom and insights found therein to the Jewish lore that they must have been familiar with. So, Plato found the source for his *Laws* in the Pentateuch, Pythagorean philosophy was an adaptation of Hebraic doctrine, Orpheus imitated Moses in his verses on the Hieros Logos, all Greek philosophy with a monotheistic tinge derived from the Bible, and the Jewish reverence for the Sabbath found its way into the verses of Homer and Hesiod (Eus. *PE* 7.32.16-18; 13.12.1-16). Never mind that the Septuagint was not composed until the Hellenistic period. Aristobulus simply postulated some earlier unknown translation of the Pentateuch into Greek, so as to have its doctrines available to Hellenic poets and philosophers of the archaic and classical

eras (Eus. *PE* 13.12.1). Once more the assimilation is not of Judaism to Hellenism, but the other way around.

The reinterpretation of authentic statements and the invention of spurious utterances affords valuable insight into the motives of Jews learned in Hellenic literature and lore. Their activity goes beyond what is conventionally termed apologetic writing. This is no mere defensive posturing by a subordinate minority in an alien world. The Jews, to be sure, were in no position to challenge the political supremacy of Hellenic powers—nor did they do so. Indeed, many of the stories reaffirm that supremacy. But by selectively appropriating Hellenic culture, they redefined it in their own image, thus not only asserting their place in the larger community but articulating their cultural identity in terms intelligible to that community.

On this broad level, therefore, Romans and Jews each gave their own spin to Hellenism. The cultivated elite among both peoples welcomed Hellenic traditions but reshaped them to sharpen their own identity and declare their own primacy. Two final illustrations can underscore the point.

First, from the Roman side. When that crusty old conservative, Cato the Elder, visited Athens, he came as a Roman officer in the campaign against Antiochus III. He delivered an address to the Athenian assembly, a brief and pointed speech in Latin, knowing full well that no one in the audience could understand a word of it. He then had a subordinate deliver a translation of that speech in Greek. The Greek version took twice as long to say the same thing. Cato thus exhibited the inferiority of Hellenic rhetoric to the forceful brevity of the Latin language. But he did more than that. He let it be known that he could have delivered the speech in Greek, had he wished to do so (Plut. *Cato* 12.4-5). Whatever the truth of that claim, it emphasized that the Romans held the upper hand. Unlike his monolingual audience, so Cato implied, Romans had mastered both tongues, had the option of employing either, and chose the superior one. Rome's cultural confidence matched its military might.

Now, a final Jewish illustration, a quite irresistible one. As the story has it, a Ptolemaic army conducting a march to the Red Sea included a number of Jewish soldiers. Among them was a certain Jewish archer named Mosollamus. In the course of the march, the whole company halted because a bird was spotted overhead. The Greek seer who accompanied the army wished to observe its movements so as to be able to forecast what was in store. He proceeded to explain the rules that governed his divination: if the bird stays still, the army ought to wait; if it flies forward, the forces should advance; if it flies backward, the troops better retreat. When Mosollamus, the Jewish archer, heard this, he drew his bow and shot the bird dead. Of course, the Greeks were

horrified, turned on Mosollamus with fury, and demanded an explanation. “Look,” he said, “if this bird was so smart and could predict the future, how come he didn’t know I was going to shoot him?” (*Jos. Ap.* 1.201-204). The setting of the story is authentic enough. Jewish soldiers served in the army of the superior power, the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt, as participants in the larger Hellenistic enterprise. But the point of the tale, of course, lies elsewhere. The hard-headed, pragmatic Jew, like Cato the Elder, has gained familiarity with Greek practices—only to mock their fatuous superstition. The Jews have the upper hand not only in spirituality but even in street-smarts.

These diverse and miscellaneous examples share a common theme. In the heterogeneous society of the Hellenistic world, peoples strove to articulate their special qualities with reference to the dominant culture, but without succumbing to it. Indeed, it was precisely the ability to accommodate to that culture that supplied the tools whereby to express a distinct identity.

There is a lesson here for multicultural studies that hardly needs to be spelled out. A secure sense of one’s own cultural identity depends upon engaging seriously with other cultures, gaining close familiarity with them, and perhaps even exploiting them to one’s own advantage. The ancients did so all the time—or whenever they could. Ancient societies defined themselves by reference to “the other,” but did so most effectively by expropriating “the other.” That subject can stimulate some exciting research. And it will also play in the classroom—an extra dividend. Multiculturalism, in short, far from being a menace to the study of antiquity, is integral to it. This is not the periphery of our discipline but stands at the very heart of it. And it offers us as compelling a case as we can make, to administrators and to ourselves, for the enduring importance and the richness of our field.