

# The Fall Of Constantinople To The Ottomans In The Eyes Of Edward Gibbon: A Case Study In Orientalist Discourse And Post-Colonial Criticism

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## ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the discursive peculiarities of Edward Gibbons' presentation of the last days of Byzantine Empire and the rise of the Ottoman Turks. This particular topic will be used to address the questions of Enlightenment's construction of the *decadent East* through the decline of the Greek Empire and the emergence of the progressive West, through its colonization of the Hellenic knowledge. Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* presents the paradigm of Orientalist discourse and as such, will be addressed through post-colonial critical theory in our pursuit of the decline trajectory of the Roman Empire which transmogrified from Roman to Greek Empire in its final, decadent phase. The most important question regarding the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Turks will be perception of the Romans, the Greeks and the Ottomans in the age of Enlightenment and the birth of the Orientalist discourse which justified the 'civilizational policy' of the West through its colonization and privatization of the Hellenic culture. Special interest will be put on the issue of *Hellenic paideia* as the crucial aspect of one's cultural progress. In this sense, the Fall of Constantinople did not feature in Gibbon's narrative as the ultimate end of the Greek civilization. Its continuity was preserved by the West and that is what essentially turned 'barbaric' West into a 'civilization'.

**Keywords:** Edward Gibbon, Greeks, Ottoman Turks, Fall of Constantinople, orientalist discourse, post-colonial criticism, Enlightenment, Imperialism

*'At home England is Greek, in the Empire she is Roman'*<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Whose Rome, whose Empire?

*It was at Rome, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the temple of*

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<sup>1</sup> G. Murray, *Greek Studies*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1946, 198

*Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and the fall of the city first started to my mind.*<sup>2</sup>

Rome had been just a dim shadow of once 'fairest part of the Earth, and the most *civilized* portion of mankind'.<sup>3</sup> Since the time of Antonines to the 18th century when Edward Gibbon visited the remnants of once mighty Empire, the Rome had changed and grew old. What had become of this abandoned and neglected Rome after the publication of the *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is our point of departure. Gibbon's story of the rise and fall of the mighty Roman empire provided 'models for future empire-builders', which, in the age of Enlightenment were to be found among his immediate readers and among all future generations of young British gentlemen, the builders of the British colonial empire.

Edward Gibbon's impression of the 'friars singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter' summarizes the argument of his discourse on Rome, whose prosperous (pagan) emperors, were once guided by 'the reflections of the enlightened', and whose age was remembered for the religious toleration that 'produced not only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord'. People from the time of the Antonines were not 'embittered by any mixture of theological rancor', which. ended the time of the 'enlightened emperors'<sup>4</sup> Theological rancor also brought division within the Roman Empire to West and East and later disabled possible reconciliation between the Latins and the Greeks, which ultimately led to the fall of Constantinople and triumph of the *infidels*. For Edward Gibbon, the decline of the Roman Empire had started with the triumph of Christianity in Constantinople. In the same vein, the life of the later Roman Empire was discursively constructed as a triumph of barbarism and religion.

But before we plunge into the layers of Gibbon's Orientalist discourse, we first have to pay due attention to some important aspects of his formative years. Gibbons' guiding principles cannot be understood without taking into consideration his formative years in Lusanne in Switzerland among the Calvinists where he spent nearly five years in learning Latin and Greek.<sup>5</sup> His easiness with French also enabled him to dive into the vast French ecclesiastical and antiquarian scholarship,

<sup>2</sup> E. Gibbon, *Memoirs of my Life*, 1984, (ed. by Betty Radice), Penguin Classics: 1984<sup>2</sup> (Gibbon 1984), 143 (Gibbon 1984<sup>2</sup>)

<sup>3</sup> E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. by J.B. Bury), London: 1923<sup>3</sup>(= Gibbon), Vol. I, 1

<sup>4</sup> Gibbon, Vol. I, 28

<sup>5</sup> Gibbon's formative years have been *unorthodox* to some extent in a way that he was mostly self-taught, but this 'vast private reading' according to Trevor-Roper's words was 'undirected, unsystematic, without method'. Lussane gave him precisely what he needed: 'a new method' and 'a new philosophy'. - H.R. Trevor-Roper, *Gibbon and the Publication of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire 1776-1976*, *The Journal of Law and Economics* 19 (1976), 489-505 (= Trevor-Roper 1976), 493

when he came to Oxford 'with a stock of erudition that might have puzzled a Doctor and a degree of ignorance of which a school boy would have been ashamed'

and his acquaintance with Montesquieu's views on the rise and fall of Rome most clearly influenced his discourse on the Roman Empire. His visit to Paris in 1763 brought him into close proximity of Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond de L'Alembert (1717-1783). Gibbon's first printed work the *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature* was actually a rejoinder to d'Alembert's *Dicourse préliminaire à l'Encyclopédie*, where he confronted the views of the new philosophers who neglected the learning and language of Greece and Rome.<sup>6</sup> According to Pocock, it was Gibbon's 'declaration of allegiance to the old *république des lettres* against the new'.<sup>7</sup> His concept of erudition was confined to the study of ancient literature, and its supreme European guardian was French Academy of inscriptions 'et Belles-Lettres', founded by Louis XIV.<sup>8</sup> However, more than just a cultural appreciation for the 'all things Greek', behind the resurgence of the Byzantine studies in the French monarchy of Louis XIV there was an immediate political interest – plans for the conquest of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>9</sup> This monarch's endeavours were closely connected with the political interest and the ambition to dominate the Mediterranean. The key to this was *translation of the culture*, that is, incorporation (and adaptation) of the Greco-Roman and Byzantine culture into the mainstream French imperial culture. Passage to the Mediterranean lied in the *cultural colonialism*, which preceded and slowly prepared the age of Imperialism.

One of the crucial tenets of the cultural colonialism of the Western Europe was appropriation of the Greco-Roman cultural heritage, which was coupled with the 'orientalization' of the Byzantine Empire, and its subsequent political descendant, the Ottoman empire.<sup>10</sup> This cultural colonialism was conducted through privatization of the classical education by the British imperial elite.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, for all the governing positions within the British colonial empire, knowledge of the classics was essential.<sup>12</sup> Classical studies in Britain were

<sup>6</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764, Vol. 1*, 2001(= Pocock 2001), 137-141  
<sup>7</sup> Pocock 2001, 139

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that cultural endeavours of Louis XIV (1638-1715) were actually focused on the organization of art and learning as manifestations and instruments of royal power. The interests of monarchy and the church enhanced the study of Greco-Roman scholarship simultaneously with Gallo-roman, Carolingian and Capetian periods.- Pocock 2001, 141-142

<sup>9</sup> The idea of *Imperium Romanum* was deeply embedded in the 'political imagination of the Western Europe', and it was 'Rome which provided the ideologies of the colonial systems of Spain, Britain and France with the language and political models they required'. - A. Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500-c.1800*, Yale University Press 1995, 11-28; In the same vein, the revival of classical studies, and interest in Byzantium especially in the Russia of Catherine the Great was closely connected with her ambitious policies regarding the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>10</sup> Inspired by Said's view of modern Orientalism which he considered 'an aspect of both imperialism and colonialism' - E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1979, (= Said 1979), 123

<sup>11</sup> 'The classics were de facto the property of the upper class, and served as a badge of distinction' or as 'a crucial status marker, providing the means to distinction and social exclusion'. - Larson 1999, 195

<sup>12</sup> For example, in the entrance to the Indian Civil Service, which involved examination in several subjects, the English Language and the Classics carried 1500 points each (English language 1500pt, Latin 750 pt and Greek 750pt), while Sanskrit language and literature

considered as creators of a 'supreme man'.<sup>13</sup> With Oxbridge becoming the only two institutions which provided thorough knowledge of Classics that could enable men to pass the entrance exams to the Indian Civil Service, the classics became the constructor of the identity of the British imperial elite.<sup>14</sup> We will see, in the course of this study, how Edward Gibbon created the same argument - classics were key identity marker of the ruling elite, and of the 'civilizational' progress. His judgment of the Greeks, the Turks as well as Latins was governed by this principle. For Gibbon also, Classics were the only knowledge which could elevate someone 'above the vulgar herd'. However, in this process, the 'elevation' of someone was coupled with debasement of the Other, deprived of this supreme knowledge.

Gibbon's work was almost written in French. In a way, this choice would have been much more comprehensible, due to the influence of the French Enlightenment and Montesquieu especially. The reason why he withdraw from this idea was David Hume's estimation that after the defeat of France in the Seven Years' War, English, not French would be the language of the New World.<sup>15</sup> In this interesting remark, we see the ambition of Edward Gibbon (premeditated or not) to build his work within the scope of the discourse of the victor.<sup>16</sup>

Although we cannot speak of Gibbon's work as a preconceived great manifesto of the Western European dominance over Mediterranean, the argument of his *grand narrative* reflects political changes of the tumultuous 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe and its decisive turn toward the Ottoman Empire. It was a construction of the dominant political discourse, which was and still is, a supreme mechanism of political dominance.<sup>17</sup> In the words of Michael Foucault, the manifold relations of power which 'permeate, characterize and constitute the social body' are all established, consolidated and implemented with the production, accumulation,

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carried only 375 points and Arabic language and literature 375 points. As Larson pointed out it is a vivid example of the 'overwhelming superiority of western over oriental culture' - Larson 1999, 201-202

<sup>13</sup> V. Tietze-Larson, *Classics and the Acquisition and Validation of Power in Britain's "Imperial Century" (1815-1914)* (=Larson 1999), 200), a colonial object, with the 'orientalization of the Byzantine Empire' (in Gibbon's History) which will soon be 'liberated' from despotic oppressors, Ottomans by British elite. In this power-play, the crucial identity marker for the British imperial elite was its classical education.

<sup>14</sup> In the words of famous Oxford classics professor Thomas Gaisford (1779-1855) "The study of Greek literature... not only elevates above the vulgar herd, but not infrequently leads to positions of considerable emolument." - Larson 1999, 189; For the Classics and access to the Indian Civil Service see Larson 1999, 197-207

<sup>15</sup> *The Letters of David Hume* (ed. by J.Y.T. Grieg, 1932), Oct. 24, 1767; 170-71

<sup>16</sup> Language register presents one important precondition for an idea to acquire authority, 'normality' and the status of the truth. Cf. Said 1979, 325-326

<sup>17</sup> The institutionalization of the Oriental studies in Europe at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was directly connected with the idea to 'know, understand and control' the Orient. - Ezzaher 2003, 66 The institution of more advanced techniques in philology and of anthropology as a new discipline both 'discovered' and 'created' a whole 'new Orient', which was again controlled by the European discourse. As Said puts it 'the modern Orientalist' was a 'secular creator' who 'made new worlds as God has once made old'. - Said 1979, 121. Also, behind the 'mythic discourse' about the Arab which Orientalist builds lies the power which enables the intellectual, political and cultural domination of the West. - Said 1979, 320-325

circulation and functioning of a discourse.<sup>18</sup> Exercise of power, he continues further, depends on the economy of the discourses of truth. With regard to our topic, the supreme discourse of truth which enabled the exertion of political power of the Western Europe over the Mediterranean was *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. It was the topic first touched and shaped by Montesquieu in his *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*,<sup>19</sup> but further elaborated and concluded by his intellectual successor, Edward Gibbon.

Production and circulation of the discourse on the Roman Empire was supreme tool for the political domination of the Western Europe long before the age of Enlightenment.<sup>20</sup> Those political entities and social bodies, which claimed their *Romanness* and *Roman roots*, very soon took over both political and cultural precedence, as bearers of civilization. In this battle for discourse, France and Britain won the final victory.<sup>21</sup> What Montesquieu defined as decadent and despotic Orient in the age of the Ottoman Empire, Edward Gibbon had stretched to the preceding Byzantine Empire. The praiseworthy tone dedicated to the Byzantine Empire in the age of Louis XIV had lost its positive echo in the time of Edward Gibbon. The *moral geography* which split the world into the progressive West and the decadent East did not offer anything noteworthy in the East even in the time before the Ottomans. As we will see a bit later, the East was presented as almost naturalized placed of an innate decadence.

We have two important aspects from the perspective of post-colonial critique. First and foremost aspect was construction of a grand, universal, homogenizing narrative about the whole East. Second aspect was subjugation of the whole East to the West in terms of history, culture and identity. East was created by the West as a singular symbolic object in a permanent state of bodily and mental insecurity, that is, in the state of symbolic dependence of the West.<sup>22</sup> Pluralism of geographies, ethnicities and temporalities within the 'East' was subsumed into

<sup>18</sup> M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York 1980, p. (= Foucault 1980)

<sup>19</sup> It was first published anonymously in 1734 in Holland, and later revised and published under authority in 1748 -

<sup>20</sup> With the emergence of the new political forces in the West (with Charlemagne and after) who could claim their 'Romaness', there emerged a need to define the *true* Romans. The result of this discursive squabble between the West and the East was the emergence of the two poles of the Roman Empire – the progressive one 'western Roman' and the decadent one, the Greek Empire. Different words were used to denote pretty much the same concept – the Roman Empire. Yet, the Roman Empire, with the rise of Western Europe in 9. century became the concept upon which new identity was built – identity of the cultural hegemony and supremacy of the West. For the cross-cultural encounters and the ideas how Latin West perceived Byzantium see a thought-provoking paper by E. Boeck, *Fantasy, Supremacy, Domes and Dames*, in Byzantium in Dialogue with the Mediterranean. History and Heritage, ed. by D. Sloopjes and Mariette, Verhoeven, 2019, 142-161

<sup>21</sup> British educational system especially in the period 1815-1914, which stressed the importance of the Classics in nurturing the true 'gentleman' a man with 'a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassioned mind' and with 'a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life' - Larson 1999, 196.

<sup>22</sup> cf. P. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, transl. by Richard Nice, p.66

monolithic category of a *decadent Orient*. Most vivid example of this merging of pluralities was in the gradual raise of the Ottomans and progressive decline of the Greeks, which became almost one same category of people with the same mentality. Just like any universalism, this one in particular, was a *discursive violence*, which wrote down history and muted voices of the whole East.<sup>23</sup> Through the production of knowledge on the homogenized East, the Western Europe constructed the truth by which her imperialism was not only legitimized, but also naturalized. The task of this paper is to show in which way Gibbon conducted this cultural subjugation of the East. Gibbon's estimate of the 'Greeks' toward history and knowledge is a telling example: *'The modern Greeks have strangely disfigured the antiquities of Constantinople. We might excuse the errors of the Turkish or Arabian writers; but is somewhat astonishing that the Greeks, who had access to the authentic materials preserved in their own language, should prefer fiction to truth and loose tradition to genuine history.'*<sup>24</sup> It is a clear example of presentation of incapability of the Greeks to respect the laws of history and the legacy of their tradition. The Byzantines *'held in their lifeless hands the riches of their fathers, without inheriting the spirit which had created and improved that sacred patrimony: they read, they praised, they compiled, but their languid souls seemed alike incapable of thought and action. In the revolution of ten centuries, not a single discovery was made to exalt the dignity or promote the happiness of mankind. Not a single idea has been added to the speculative systems of antiquity, and a succession of patient disciples became in their turn the dogmatic teachers of the next servile generation. Not a single composition of history, philosophy, or literature, has been saved from oblivion by the intrinsic beauties of style or sentiment, of original fancy, or even of successful imitation.'*<sup>25</sup> Therefore, we infer, that task had fallen into the hands of the more competent Western writers.

With regard to critical discourse analysis, Gibbon's history presents a proto-imperialist literature *par excellence*.<sup>26</sup> In the age of the high imperialism (and even before), from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards it gave rationale for the political domination of the West. As Victoria Tietze Larson concludes 'classical studies were part of the cultural hegemony of nineteenth-century Britain' and 'were as much as,

<sup>23</sup> cf. S. Parashar, *Feminism and Postcolonialism: (En)gendering Encounters*, Postcolonial Studies 2016, Vol. 19, No. 4, 371-377

<sup>24</sup> And he continues further In a single page of Codinus we may detect twelve unpardonable mistakes; the reconciliation of Severus and Niger, the marriage of their son and daughter, the siege of Byzantium by the Macedonians, the invasion of the Gauls, which recalled Severus to Rome, the sixty years which elapsed from his death to the foundation of Constantinople. etc.'. – Gibbon, Vol. II, 154, n.54

<sup>25</sup> Gibbon, vol. VI, 107

<sup>26</sup> cf. E. Said, *Yeats and Decolonization*, in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, Minnesota 1990, 69-99, 71

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 16

if not more than, any other subject in the curriculum, closely affiliated with both the acquisition and validation of worldly privilege and power'.<sup>27</sup> The paradox of this discursive dominance lies in the fact that its precedence was based on the absorption of the *Eastern*, that is, Greek culture in which the main authorities were Aristotle, Plato and Thucydides.<sup>28</sup> However, with the rise of the European empires, the millennial Greek culture was deprived of its medieval history and its long tradition within the Byzantine empire. From this point of view, Byzantine empire was given credit only as a passive guardian of the ancient knowledge.

Gibbon's monumental history indeed starts with the ancient city of Rome and closes with the Decay of Rome in 15<sup>th</sup> century. Within this grand narrative of Roman history, yet another grand narrative is pegged as an inevitable but nevertheless, contagious, part of the evolution and subsequent (or simultaneous) decline of Rome. It is a story of the *Other* Rome, the New Rome at Bosphorus, and the story of the Greek Empire, which emerged within the Roman Empire.

This emergence of the Greek Empire as an imperialist discursive construct will be discussed in the next chapter. Although it owes its existence to the immediate experience of the Fall of Constantinople in the West, it became part of the *Orient* in the age of Enlightenment. In this epoch, "Greekness" was constructed and measured by western epistemological standards, always counterbalanced to progressive western "Romaness".<sup>29</sup> Through intentional discursive fragmentation of the Roman Empire into the Greek Empire and the *true* Roman Empire, former was pushed to the East, while the latter was confined to the West.<sup>30</sup> In this 'intimate connection between language and power', the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine or the Greek Empire was pushed to the Orient.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Larson 1999, 189

<sup>28</sup> It is paradox of our own time, seen and understood through postcolonial discourse. For the influence of eastern traditions to ancient Greek philosophy see L. Ezzaher, *Writing and Cultural Influence: Studies in Rhetorical History, Orientalist Discourse, and Post-Colonial Criticis*, Peter Lang Publishing: 2003, (= Ezzaher 2003), 21-43. However, for Gibbon and his successors, the studies and understanding of ancient Greek culture was already been considered their vested right.

<sup>29</sup> This was just a sequel of the roman imperialist and colonial discourse promulgated in the works of Virgil, who adapted the story of the Trojan war in that way that Greeks were presented as villains, and Trojans as victims. The Romans built their identity as successors of Troy. – for the discussion see S. Runciman, *Teucri and Turci*, Medieval and Middle Eastern Studies in Honor of Aziz Suryal Atiya, Leiden: 1972, 344-48 (= Runciman 1972). Later on, in the age of Enlightenment, Montesquieu presented The history of the Greek empire in the following manner: 'It is nothing more than a tissue of revolts, seditions and perfidies. Subjects did not have the slightest idea of the loyalty owed to princes. And the succession of emperors was so interrupted that the title porphyrogenitus — that is, born in the rooms where the empresses gave birth — was a distinctive title few princes of the various imperial families could bear. – Montesquieu, *Considerations on the Causes on the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*, (transl. by D. Lowenthal), Paris 1734, XI

<sup>30</sup> The most widely used example of this issue is the case of Charlemagne whose restoration of the Empire in the West was seen twofold – as restoration of the Empire, or division and fragmentation of the Empire.

<sup>31</sup> On the relationship between the language and power, the rhetoric of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and orientalist discourse see Ezzaher 2003, 64-89. Gibbon's infatuation with Orient was twofold – it was both inquisitive, appreciative but nevertheless patronizing and hegemonic. The 'inquisitive and appreciative' attitude toward Orient was nurtured in the circle of the great 18<sup>th</sup>-century Orientalist, Sir William Jones, who equated the India's ancient literatures with the works of the Greeks and the Romans. - Larson 1999, 202, n.69. It

Yet, what is crucial at the very beginning of our inquiry is that there was not any *Byzantine* or *Greek Empire* until its fall, and that distinction between the West and East was bifocal.<sup>32</sup> In one of his personal deliberations Edward Gibbon rendered an interesting remark that: “*The distinction of North and South is real and intelligible; and our pursuit is terminated on either side by the poles of the Earth. But the difference of East and West is arbitrary and shifts round the globe*”.<sup>33</sup> This *arbitrariness* of the East and West presents the epistemological pillar of the Orientalist discourse and it transcends geography being also of moral and cultural value.<sup>34</sup> Gibbon’s definition of the impregnable and immutable distinction of North and South actually served to stress that the ‘*man of the North, not of the West, the legions of Gaul and Germany were superior to the South-Eastern natives of Asia and Egypt. It is the triumph of cold over heat; which may, however, and has been surmounted by moral causes*’.<sup>35</sup> The notions of anthropogeography were tightly connected with the teleology of Gibbon’s whole work, which rendered a narrative of the progressively evolving West and unstopably declining East. This had to be explained through the genuine *ethos* of the people who inhabited these parts of the globe. The difference between the East and West was rhetorical variation of the ancient difference between the Hellenes and barbarians.<sup>36</sup> Whoever was not Hellenized remained barbarian. It was part of the relational discursive construction of Hellenic culture which was opposed to (and defined by) the concept of non-Hellenic barbarians.

We are leaving this theoretical underpinnings behind, setting off with two main Gibbon's arguments of the decline of the Roman Empire. The first was the institutionalization of Christianity “as an alien and divisive element in Roman society which contributed to Rome’s downfall”. Second was the relationship toward

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later influenced the 'romantic orientalist project' in which 'Europe will be regenerated by Asia'. However, as Said explains 'what mattered was not Asia so much as Asia's use to modern Europe'- Said 1979, 115

<sup>32</sup> Bifocal in a way that both East and West simultaneously claimed their Roman legacy and developed their own views on their ancient roots and their political legacy.

<sup>33</sup> J.B. Bury, *Introduction*, in Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, xxxvi

<sup>34</sup> The choice of Orientalist, as Edward Said puts it, was canonical, and it designated Asia or the East, geographically, morally, culturally. –Said 1979, 31

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, xxxvii

<sup>36</sup> The division between West and East can be traced back to ancient Greece where the discursive construction of Hellenic culture was opposed to the non-Hellenic barbarians. In the age of Herodotus and his immediate successors, those unfortunate barbarians were recognized in the Persians. One of the paradigmatic constructions of the otherness in ancient Greek literature is Aeschylus' *Persians* (cf. Said 1979, 56-7). However, when Rome succeeded in overtaking Hellenistic world and the Near east, until the I. century A.D, a different modes of rhetorical style from Hellenistic age were recognized among the sophists of the Second sophistic. One was Atticism with its “purity of diction and simplicity of syntax” in contrast to Asianism which “displays marks of As Ezzaher put it “the debate between the Attic and Asiatic schools of style had political implications. Some important political leaders such as Brutus and Julius Caesar embraced Atticism, the style of the ten Attic Orators”, while Cicero was accused for Asianism amplification and heightened emotion” – Ezzaher 2003, 34-35

antiquities and learning. The only civilizational progress in his history was saved for the 'barbarian tribes from the North' whose acculturation was presented in their acquisition of the Greek and Roman knowledge. For Gibbon, that was the only true measurement of progress.

## 2. The Emergence of the 'Greek Empire' in the Western discourse

The modern concept of the 'Greek Empire' emerged across the Alps not very long after the fall of Constantinople. The weight of the Ottoman presence in the Mediterranean and the issue with papacy had given rise to the interest in the contemporary Ottoman Greece and the Orthodox church among the Lutheran scholars in the first decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> In the center of their interest was *doctrina graeca*, that is, 'the rebirth of eloquence and sound reasoning' which traversed the Alps.<sup>38</sup> The Greek Orthodox church was of pivotal interest for the Lutherans because of its political autonomy and its direct relation with Christian antiquity.<sup>39</sup> However, the idealistic perception of the Greek Orthodox church among the Lutherans was already shattered by the end of the 16. century when they came into closer contact with the Greeks living in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>40</sup> Crucial for this discursive turn was Martin Crusius (d. 1607), whose work *Turco-Graecia (1584)*, Gibbon used for his final chapters. Crusius was interested in *the current state of affairs in Greece, after it had been lamentably oppressed by those barbarians*.<sup>41</sup> Crusius' sympathy for the Greeks notwithstanding, the opening lines of his work shed a different light on the reason behind his choice: '*Helas is thoroughly turkified. Greece is being subjected to Turkish servitude, and moreover, Greece is guilty of a religion contaminated with errors and superstition (which we did not notice at first). It is therefore with good reason that her misfortune should be lamented*'.<sup>42</sup>

Protestants' disappointment over the state of affairs of the Greek Orthodox church under the Ottomans constructed a picture of the cultural decline of the Greeks, which was tightly connected with the Turkish influence.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the term 'turkifikation' was closely connected with the 'barbarisation' of the Orthodox church and its decline, without deeper explanation or understanding of the issue at hand.

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<sup>37</sup> Philipp Melancthon (1497) and Joachim Camerarius (born 1500) were pioneers in the institution of the Greek Studies in the Holy Roman Empire. - Asaph Ben-Tov, *Lutheran Humanists and Greek Antiquity*, Brill 2009 (= Ben-Tov 2009), 35-83

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, 3

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*, 29

<sup>40</sup> Greeks were seen by the Protestants as idealization of the Early Church. - *ibid.*, 119; Also, there was a lively correspondence between Lutherans and the Greek Patriarch in Constantinople in period 1574-1581, which abruptly ended. - *ibid.* 85, 114, 122

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, 115-116

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, 116

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, 117

Lutherans' sudden disappointment in the Greek church was connected with the purity of the faith, which was, according to their observations in the East polluted with superstition and misunderstanding.<sup>44</sup> To this, two more orientalist accusations were added – sleeping with the Jewesses and committing sodomy.<sup>45</sup> It was the Eastern Church which, after the fall of Constantinople became equated with Byzantium: As Gibbon explains, *in the election and the investiture of a patriarch, the ceremonial of the Byzantine court was revived and imitated.*<sup>46</sup> Therefore the life and spirit of the post-Byzantine church created a picture about the whole Byzantine world, and Byzantine society especially.<sup>47</sup> This Lutheran's political interest in the Byzantine church had led to the subsequent far-fetched and generalizing estimates on the whole Byzantine culture both religious and profane. And these estimates had led to conclusion about the superstitious and even retrograde culture and society.

The institution of the orientalist discourse was embedded in the several encoded words – East, church, barbarians, Turks and decline. In this sense, the semiotic merging of the words 'Greeks', 'Eastern Church' and 'Turks' was a natural evolution of the orientalist discourse. Gibbon's attitude toward contemporary state of Greek affairs was in his discourse stretched to the times before the Ottomans. Greeks living in the Ottoman Empire had been assimilated with the Byzantines of the Eastern Roman Empire. While Protestants cherished Greek Empire as protector of divine human wisdom of the Greek antiquity, Gibbon wavered between the two poles - Lutheran perception and Franco-British imperial imagination.<sup>48</sup> In that sense, the Greek Empire was given its due credit for preserving the ancient wisdom, but not being able to resist the spirit of oriental despotism.

In Gibbon's narrative we observe closely in which way the 'superiority' of the Greeks, which, came from their 'profane and religious knowledge' was lost in the course of their millennial history.<sup>49</sup> The people who had 'first received the light of Christianity', 'pronounced the decrees of the seven general councils' and 'alone possessed the language of Scripture and philosophy' gradually fell into superstition

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* 122

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* 123

<sup>46</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, 202

<sup>47</sup> Even nowadays significant part of the academy is oppressed by the image of Byzantine society as devotedly religious, and Byzantines' daily life is constantly reproduced mostly in terms of religion. Byzantines' secular and profane life still presents a topic of secondary importance.

<sup>48</sup> The Lutheran influence on Gibbon is seen in his attitude toward the Christian sees where *the capital of the East had never been polluted by the worship of idols; and the whole body of the people had deeply imbibed the opinions, the virtues, and the passions, which distinguished the Christians of that age from the rest of mankind.* Gibbon, Vol. II, 384.

<sup>49</sup> For Gibbon's somewhat positive attitude toward Church history see D. J. Geanakoplos, *Edward Gibbon and Byzantine Ecclesiastical History*, Church History, Vol. 35, No. 2 (1966), 170-185

and barbarism, in the worlds of Lutherans and Edward Gibbon.<sup>50</sup> The idea of the translation of the superior *doctrina graeca* to the West is deeply embedded in the words of Enea Silvio Piccolomini from the mid-15th century: *No Westerner could pride himself of erudition had he not visited the city [of Constantinople]. While Greece had been conquered before in its long history, its former captors, Persians and Romans waged war against Greek states while cherishing Greek wisdom; under the Turks, who are hostile to learning itself, the very survival of Greek letters is imperilled.*<sup>51</sup>

The production of knowledge about the Byzantine Empire among the Lutherans was essentially analeptic. The main topic of their interest was the Fall of Constantinople and the first publication of the Byzantine sources in Latin was Laonikos Chalcocondyles' *De origine et rebus gestis Turcorum* in March 1556, followed by *editio princeps* of Zonaras and Niketas Choniates in 1557.<sup>52</sup> In the same year, 1556, Melancthon composed oration *De capta Constantinopoli*<sup>53</sup>, in which he summarizes the importance of the capital as 'an abode of learning and an ancient residence of the Church'.<sup>54</sup> Gibbon's positive attitude toward Constantinople had almost identical argument – out of all Church sees, he considered eastern capital 'free of Infidels', 'being born and educated in the bosom of the faith'<sup>55</sup>, and it was considered a depository of Greek learning.

A key feature of Melancthon's exegesis of the importance of Constantinople was connection he made with the city of Athens. Thus, as Ben-Tov observes, he 'set the fall of Constantinople within the context of Greek history, positing it within the framework of the two millennia spanning from Solon, its founder in Melancthon's eyes, to Mehmet II, its devastator.'<sup>56</sup> The concept of Constantinople as the center of all learning will be the crucial element of Gibbon's lament over the city fall. In the description of the rapine of Constantinople after the fall, Gibbon concludes, that a philosopher *will more seriously deplore the loss of the Byzantine libraries, which were destroyed or scattered in the general confusion: one hundred and twenty thousand manuscripts are said to have disappeared; ten volumes might be purchased for a single ducat; and the same ignominious price, too high perhaps for a shelf of theology, included the whole works of Aristotle and Homer, the noblest*

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<sup>50</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VI, 366-67

<sup>51</sup> Ben-Tov 2009, 125

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* 94

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* 94

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* 95

<sup>55</sup> Gibbon, Vol. II, 384

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* 98

*productions of the science and literature of ancient Greece.*<sup>57</sup> Gibbon's disdain toward theological literature is evident in his remark of a high price for the books of theology, compared to the pillars of *hellenic paideia*, Aristotle and Homer, which were for the erudite of the Enlightenment epoch valuable beyond estimation.<sup>58</sup> His praise of the West is rendered in the concluding remark: *'We may reflect with pleasure that an inestimable portion of our classic treasures was safely deposited in Italy; and that the mechanics of a German town had invented an art which derides the havoc of time and barbarism.'*<sup>59</sup> The advent of the Turks in the eyes of Edward Gibbon was shaped in the 'philosopher's' lament for the destruction of the Greek culture. In the accounts of the two falls of Constantinople - in 1204, and in 1453 - Gibbon's greatest sympathy goes to the ancient monuments and ancient wisdom.

The final chapter on the fall of Constantinople to the Latins in 1204 is also followed by long excerpts from Choniates' history on the monuments which were shattered. The closing lines are dedicated to the written legacy of antiquity: *Of the writings of antiquity many that still existed in the 12th century are now lost. But the pilgrims were not solicitous to save or transport the volumes of an unknown tongue; the perishable substance of paper or parchment can only be preserved by the multiplicity of copies; the literature of the Greeks had almost centered in the metropolis; and, without computing the extent of our loss, we may drop a tear over the libraries that have perished in the triple fire of Constantinople.*<sup>60</sup>

### 3. The Fall of the City and the Birth of the Identity

The claim on the legacy of a fallen city was deeply rooted into the Roman cultural identity. The cultural hegemony of Rome was validated through its connection with the heroes of Troy. And the fall of Constantinople had given rise to the legend that the Turks were descendants of Trojans, and avengers of Troy.<sup>61</sup> Cultural hegemony of Constantinople was also built on the ideological foundations of Homeric imagery.

In the story of the building of Constantinople, Gibbon connects the ethos of the new city with the ancient Troy who was *seated on an eminence at the foot of Mount Ida, overlooked the mouth of Hellespont*, emphasizing that Constantine's first ideal spot for the new capital was meant to be the town of Rhoeteum, which celebrated 'the dauntless Ajax', who *had fallen a sacrifice to his disappointed pride*

<sup>57</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, 198

<sup>58</sup> In the subsequent period in Britain, the most influential work was Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. - Larson 1999, 208

<sup>59</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, 198

<sup>60</sup> Gibbon VI, 412

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Runciman 1972, passim.

and to the ingratitude of the Greeks. Therefore, Constantine wanted to erect a new capital on this celebrated spot, from whence the Romans delivered their fabulous origin.<sup>62</sup> In the same way as the fall of Troy produced the legendary story about the founding of the Rome, the fall of Constantinople produced the legendary story about the rise of the new Rome(s) in the West, with the Turks in the role of avengers.

Gibbon's story of the fall of Constantinople closes with the observation that the distress and fall of the last Constantine was more glorious than the long prosperity of the Byzantine Caesars.<sup>63</sup> The fall indeed was most glorious than the whole life of the Empire, since the fall enabled reinstitution of the Roman identity solely in the West.

From the very beginning, Gibbon exclaims, Constantinople only *adopted the follies, though not the virtues of ancient Rome*. He explains the growth of the population of Constantinople due to 'the artificial colony' of 'many opulent senators of Rome' and also introduces the orientalist discourse once again by playing with a notion of obedience of the senatorial elite toward 'master', and their attraction to the riches of the East, that is, palaces, lands and pensions and grand hereditary estates.<sup>64</sup> He added that *these encouragements and obligations soon became superfluous and were gradually abolished*.<sup>65</sup>

What then, changed with the foundation of Constantinople? According to Gibbon, *'the manly pride of the Romans, content with substantial power, had left to the vanity of the east the forms and ceremonies of ostentatious greatness [...] the simplicity of the Roman manners was insensibly corrupted by the stately affectation of the courts of Asia. The distinctions of personal merit and influence, a conspicuous in a republic, so feeble and obscure under a monarchy, were abolished by the despotism of the emperors*.<sup>66</sup> This division between the 'good Romans' and 'distrustful Greeks' was already present in the discourse of Virgil, Tacitus, Cicero and Pliny, but it was fully elaborated with the further colonization of the Roman heritage by the West.<sup>67</sup> One can easily detect a gendered symbolism of the *manly West vs. womanly East*, the *manly pride* situated geographically in the West and the ostentatious effeminate luxury of the geographic East. The antropogeography of this binary division clearly pointed to the predetermined fate - the West will

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<sup>62</sup> Gibbon, Vol. II, 145-146

<sup>63</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, 189

<sup>64</sup> Gibbon, Vol. II, 154

<sup>65</sup> Gibbon, Vol. II, 155

<sup>66</sup> Gibbon, Vol. II, 159

<sup>67</sup> As Steven Runciman noted, Virgil had the most profound influence on the perception of the Greeks, and he warned his readers against the perfidy of the Greeks. For the discussion see S. Runciman, *Gibbon and Byzantium*, *Deadalus*, Vol. 105, No. 3, Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, 1976, 103-110, 106

engender manly pride, while the East will nurture only vanity, despotism and luxury.<sup>68</sup> In this discursive setting one can hardly discern between Byzantines and the Turks. Actually, the Ottoman despotism came as a logical evolution, that is, progressive degradation and further corruption of the East.

In the story of the Fall of Constantinople the Greeks were reproached for their 'native cowardice', being 'indeed pusillanimous and base'.<sup>69</sup> For Edward Gibbon, the only Greek worthy of respect was the emperor Constantine who 'deserves the name of an hero', since he was the only one 'inspired with Roman virtue'.<sup>70</sup> His Roman virtue was supported by the 'honour of the Western chivalry', among the foreign auxiliaries.

As we have already stressed, the 'philosopher' of 18th century mourns only the loss of the Byzantine libraries, which were destroyed or scattered in the general confusion. We see clearly that Gibbon's *philhellenism* was antiquarian and exclusive. He considered Turks and Byzantines similar in their relation to Greek heritage. Regarding Constantinople, he concluded that 'the seat of Turkish jealousy and despotism is erected on the foundations of a Grecian republic' and that Constantine's architects and craftsmans could never attain mastery as was accomplished in the age of Pericles and Alexander.<sup>71</sup> In addition, for Gibbon, Constantine was guilty of negligence with regard to the ancient monuments which were gathered from all Greece and Asia and *exposed without defense to the rapacious vanity of a despot*.<sup>72</sup> One could hardly omit reminiscence of the great endeavors of the British expeditions to their colonies which indeed *despoiled those countries of their most valuable ornaments*.<sup>73</sup> A great ethical debate is still active in the European cultural circles on the Greek heritage dispersed around world. For Gibbon, Constantine's idea to add the glory to his city by collecting the cumulative efforts of the great civilization was just a trait of despotism. For Europe nowadays, it is a trait of huge endeavours to preserve one culture. Finally, Gibbon concludes that the 'souls of Homer and of Demosthenes' should not be sought after in the city of Constantine, nor in the declining period of an empire when the human mind was

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. also Montesquieu 1734, XXII: 'A universal bigotry numbed the spirit and enervated the whole empire. Properly speaking, Constantinople is the only Eastern land where the Christian religion has been dominant. Now the faintheartedness, laziness, and indolence of the nations of Asia blended into religious devotion itself. Among a thousand examples, I need only mention that of Philippicus, Maurice's general, who, on the point of giving battle, began to cry at the thought of the great number of men who were going to be killed.'

<sup>69</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, 177

<sup>70</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, 178

<sup>71</sup> Gibbon, Vol. II, 149, 151

<sup>72</sup> Gibbon, Vol. II, 151

<sup>73</sup> Gibbon, Vol. II, 151

depressed by civil and religious slavery. Where, then, one should seek for the souls of Homer and Demosthenes?

The appreciation of the Greek culture in the end did not have to do with the appreciation of the East as its cradle, but with the glorification of the west as its defender and restorer. In this process, the heritage of the Greek culture was brutally simplified. A huge contribution of the Arabs to the interpretation and dissemination of Aristotle in the Western Europe is constantly put aside, and yet, we are faced with the possibility that medieval Europe had 'Arabic' perception of Aristotle. Edward Gibbon did refer to that peculiarity in his reference to the Latin rule in Constantinople which deserves our due attention. Compared to the Greek and Arabians with *their respective degrees of knowledge, industry and art*, during the era of Crusades, the Latins were holding only *the third rank in the scale of nations*.<sup>74</sup> However, the 'present superiority' of the Latins, that is, of the West, owns its success to *an active and imitative spirit, unknown to their more polished rivals, who at that time were in a stationary or retrograde state*.<sup>75</sup> The intercourse with *the more cultivated regions of the East* had prompted the development of the trade and manufactures, but didn't influence in the same manner *on the intellectual wants of the Latins*.<sup>76</sup> During their reign of 60 years in Constantinople, the Latins did not show curiosity to understand the original text of the gospel, *nor the sense of Plato and beauties of Homer*. Aristotle, as *the oracle of the Western universities* was, according to Gibbon's estimate *a barbarous Aristotle* and, he continues further *instead of ascending to the fountain-head, his Latin votaries humbly accepted a corrupt and remote version from the Jews and Moors of Andalusia*.<sup>77</sup>

### **A Masterwho never forgives – the rise of an Oriental despot**

*The siege of Constantinople by the Turks attracts our first attention to the person and character of the great destroyer*.<sup>78</sup>

The picture of Mahomet II is rendered through the long passage on his education, in which Gibbon delivers digest version of the cultural hierarchy of the languages the sultan new – for the 'orientalist youth' typical were Persian, which could 'contribute to his amusement', Arabic 'to his edification'. His knowledge of Greek was presented as a natural residue of the intercourses between the Greeks and the Turk so that he could 'could converse with people over whom he was

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<sup>74</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VI, 443

<sup>75</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VI, 443

<sup>76</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VI, 444

<sup>77</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VI, 444

<sup>78</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, 159

ambitious to reign'. In addition, Latin poetry and prose were sublime addition 'to the royal ear'. The most controversial outlook was reserved to Mahomet's knowledge of Hebrew, which Gibbon commented in the following words: *what use or merit could recommend to the statesman or the scholar the uncouth dialect of his Hebrew slaves?*<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Gibbon continues his elaboration on Mahomet's education stating that he had knowledge on history and geography of the world, being familiar with the lives of the heroes of the East, perhaps of the West, and that he had skills in astrology 'excused by the folly of the times', and had also shown some 'rudiments in mathematical science', along with a 'profane taste for the arts'. Gibbon concludes that 'the influence of religion and learning were employed without effect on his [Mahomet's] savage and licentious nature'. Quite expectedly, the conqueror could not get away with more positive image. In the tradition of the Persian culture, Alexander the Macedon was considered the destroyer of culture.

The postcolonial criticism enables us to detect crucial discursive markers of the colonial discourse and with regard to picture of Mahomet II which Gibbon rendered, the exquisite culture of the Turkish conqueror was balanced with his 'savage and licentious nature' which concludes, without elaboration, the montesquiean picture of the despotic ruler. However, decolonial critique enables redefining of these discursive markers in a completely different light.

Gibbon's disagreeable display of Mahomet's educational formation actually betrays some astonishing features of the rich eclectic culture in which the Turkish conqueror was born and raised. The 'typical oriental' languages, that is, Persian and Arabic were actually the linguistic markers of the Ottoman political ideology which presented sultans as successors of the Bagdad' caliphs. Political ideology of the 'Abbasid' caliphs', Al-Mansur and Al-Mahdi, was triumphant mostly due to its connection with the Sasanian heritage in which pivotal role was ascribed to Pahlavi, the supreme linguistic register of the ruling elite.<sup>80</sup> With regard to this, astrology was one of the crucial sciences which added weight to political legitimacy of the Baghdad's caliphs. Gibbon was right in estimating the importance of astrology - *The religion of Arabs as well of the Indians, consisted in the worship of the sun, the moon, and the fixed stars*. However, he was wrong in his conclusion that this was just a *primitive and specious mode of supersition*, excusing his misunderstanding of the *blind mythology of the barbarians*.<sup>81</sup> For the Arabs, astrological history

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<sup>79</sup> Gibbon, vol. VII, 160

<sup>80</sup> D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society*, Routledge 1998 (= Gutas 1998), 34-45

<sup>81</sup> Gibbon, Vol. V, 327

enabled continuity of the Zoroastrian imperial ideology of the Sasanians, both within the Arab world and in the subsequent Ottoman.<sup>82</sup> The stars and signs of the Zodiac were commanded by God Almighty to spread knowledge about the cyclical periods of history. In the time of the first Abbasid's astrological history declared the beginning of the new cycle under the dominion of the Abbasid state, and the revival of knowledge and old sciences which was destined to happen in Baghdad.<sup>83</sup> Thus, astrology and mathematics, one of the most important sciences in the lands of Fertile Crescent, were far from 'follies of the times' or just 'rudiments of science'. They had both political and ideological importance for the establishment of the universal empire. The rise of the Ottomans enabled merging of the two great ancient traditions – those of the Christianized Roman Empire and of the Islamized Persian imperial culture. The establishment of the Baghdad near ancient Persian center Ktesiphon marked the beginning of the completely new age of the God chosen rulers. In the same vein, the siege of Constantinople was necessary prerequisite for a person like Mahomet to start his rule of the universal empire of the ancients: *after some fruitless treaty, he declared his resolution of finding either a throne or a grave under the walls of Constantinople.*<sup>84</sup> The decision to take Constantinople was most probably influenced by the unprecedented position of this city as the capital of the Roman Empire, and was thus, the last step in the Romanization of the Ottomans. It was precisely the 'military judgement and astrological knowledge' of Mahomet that advised him to expect the morning, the memorable 29th of May', the day of the 'destruction of the Roman empire.'<sup>85</sup>

*It was thus, after a siege of 53 days that Constantinople, which had defied the power of Chosroes, the Chagan, and the caliphs, was irretrievably subdued by the arms of Mahomet the Second. Her empire only had been subverted by the Latins; her religion was trampled in the dust by the Moslem conquerors.*<sup>86</sup>

Although for the age of Enlightenment the victory of the Turks was elucidated through the Ottoman's technological supremacy and greater army and the fearful despotic master, Gibbon does not refrain from religious causes either: *The primitive Romans would have drawn their swords in the resolution of death or conquest. The primitive Christians might have embraced each other, and awaited in patience and charity the stroke of martyrdom. But the Greeks of Constantinople were animated*

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<sup>82</sup> Gutas 1998, 45-53

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Gibbon, vol. VII, 187

<sup>85</sup> Gibbon, vol. VII, 189. 'Several days were employed by the sultan in the preparations of the assault; and a respite was granted by his favourite science of astrology, which had fixed on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May as the fortunate and fatal hour' – Gibbon, vol. VII, 187

<sup>86</sup> Gibbon, vol. VII, 193

*only by the spirit of religion, and that spirit was productive only of animosity and discord.*<sup>87</sup> As Gibbon further explains *the invisible powers were deaf to his [Constantine's] supplications; and Christendom beheld with indifference the fall of Constantinople.* Also, he considers the breach between the Western and Eastern Christendom even grater than between Christianity and Islam: *The Latins were most odious heretics and infidels; and the first minister of the empire, the great duke, was heard to declare that he had rather behold, in Constantinople, the turban of Mahomet than the pope's tiara or a cardinal's hat.*<sup>88</sup>

Although Gibbon supplied his story with both internal and external causes of the final Fall, he had made his final judgment on the Mahomet II in the episode of his attitude toward antiquities: *The conqueror gazed with satisfaction and wonder on the strange though splendid appearance of the domes and palaces, so dissimilar from the style of Orientalist architecture. In the hippodrome, or atmeidan, his eye was attracted by the twisted column of the three serpents; and, as a trial of his strength, he shattered with his iron mace or battle-axe the under-jaw of one of these monsters.*<sup>89</sup>

This was a symbolic manifestation of Mahomet II's barbarism and his ignorance of the antiquities. This act presents a conclusion of the story which opened with the founding of Constantinople where Gibbon also dwelled on this symbol of Ancient Greece and announced its destruction with the rise of the Mahomet II: *We may still remark a very singular fragment of antiquity; the bodies of three serpents, twisted into one pillar of brass. Their triple heads had once supported the golden tripod which, after the defeat of Xerxes, was consecrated in the temple of Delphi by the victorious Greeks. The beauty of the Hippodrome has been long since defaced by the rude hands of the Turkish conquerors; but under the similar appellation of Atmeidan, it still serves as a place of exercise for their horses.*<sup>90</sup>

In the closing lines of the fall of Constantinople the rise of the oriental despot, is couched in the image of the fearful ruler whose subjects feared him more than their enemies. Gibbon insists on the image of his power based on fear.<sup>91</sup> This is explained through the figurative speech of Mahomet II which Gibbon renders in the following passage: *Fear is the first principle of a despotic government. His*

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<sup>87</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, 174

<sup>88</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, 177

<sup>89</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, 198

<sup>90</sup> Gibbon II, 152-153

<sup>91</sup> This idea of fear as a basis of oriental despotism comes from Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 98: 'not many laws are needed for timid, ignorant, beaten-down people.'

*menaces were explained as **Oriental style**, that the fugitives and deserters, had they the wings of a bird, should not escape from his inexorable justice.*"<sup>92</sup>

### **Concluding remarks - Whose culture, whose knowledge, whose power?**

'Without Montesquieu, we may confidently say', there would have been no Gibbon.<sup>93</sup> He was troubled by the same problem as Montesquieu - the problem of the progress in history.<sup>94</sup> However, the very idea of progress bears the burden of the colonial discourse in a way that once the progress is located and defined, simultaneously its binary opposition is delineated and defined. That is, once we have a clear definition of what civilization is, we have a perfectly clear impression of what a non-civilization (or barbarism) is.<sup>95</sup>

Also, when the source of progress is defined, through inevitable homogenization and generalization, than it gives a single voice to the plurality of experiences and simple excuse to the complexity of causes.<sup>96</sup> In this process, voices of peoples and individuals are lost, identities confounded and subjected to the homogenized category of 'barbarians'. Gibbon gave a 'philosophic solution to this problem'.<sup>97</sup> For him, it was a 'civic humanism', a 'civic spirit' or a 'public virtue' which enabled a 'free circulation of goods and ideas'.<sup>98</sup> However, it is an established truism that this 'civic humanism' was heavily exclusionist.

In this discursive power play through the description of the rise, evolution and decline of the great Roman civilization, the idea of progress was set in the 'cultural identity of the Romans'<sup>99</sup>. This imperial identity *par excellence* was first *shared* between the Old Rome and the New Rome, after the fall of the Old Rome it shifted to the Bosphorus, and after the fall of the New Rome it traversed the Alps to the *Old*

<sup>92</sup> Gibbon, Vol. VII, p. 187;

<sup>93</sup> Trevor-Roper 1976, 494

<sup>94</sup> Trevor-Roper 1976, 495

<sup>95</sup> The perfect example of this is given Trevor-Roper's exegesis of the idea of progress: 'How was it that the great civilization of antiquity had somehow stopped progressing and had foundered in a thousand years of gothic barbarism?'. - Trevor-Roper 1976, 495

<sup>96</sup> It is interesting how Trevor-Roper concludes his reading on Gibbon's whole idea of progress situated in the modern Europe as a 'plural society', and 'the world of free competition', free from 'single repressive central authority' which prevented 'a reversion to barbarism' (Trevor-Roper 1976, 499). However, it is precisely this uniforming discourse of science, that, is of 'classical education' which enabled transnational identification of the imperial elites in the Modern ages.

<sup>97</sup> Trevor-Roper 1976, 495

<sup>98</sup> Trevor-Roper 1976, 496

<sup>99</sup> Gibbon defines this at the beginning of his work in a sense that essential conditions for the progress is seen not in great political systems but in the cultivation of science. I think that the 'word' science necessitates explanation, since, according to Trevor-Roper's interpretation it is a 'useful science, experimental Baconian science directed to the understanding of nature and the improvement of human life' (Trevor-Roper 1976, 497) which is arguably directly confronted to Gibbon's defense of classical education and its importance in the intellectual formation of an individual. Precisely in the account of the Fall of Constantinople, Gibbon's lament is focused on the 'Greek' culture and its afterlife.

Rome, where it stayed.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to be perfectly comprehensible when defining the very core of this progress: what actually turned one civilization into civilization and all the others into barbarians? This discursive thread is unwrapped in the last chapters of Gibbon's history, with the downfall of Constantinople. The very essence of Rome's glory was classical education.<sup>101</sup> And classical education was appropriated and privatized by the ruling *elite* ever since the Rome conquered Greece. The classical education gave a philosophical, ethical and ontological explanation for the imperial domination.<sup>102</sup> In that way, it became a powerful tool in the hands of the modern 'colonial project'. It was the only thing, which enabled civilization to be constantly and perpetually asserted and redefined as a civilization against the newly emerging 'barbarians' from the New World. And it was, ever since the Roman times, the most powerful tool of the Romanization, that is, of the colonization of the subjects and their continuous submission to the imperial power thousands of kilometers away. The most vivid example of this discursive power is set in the case of Byzantium and its fall. When the city of Constantinople was lost, and the 'Greek culture traversed the Alps', the old Romans from Bosphorus became 'superstitious Greeks'.<sup>103</sup> *Romanitas* was a supreme imperial identity, claimed by the West long before the final fall of Constantinople. And a distinctive, 'islamic' *Romanitas*, claimed by the Ottomans was a newly emerging imperial identity in the East. In this clash for the appropriation of the Roman (imperial) identity, many colonial discourses were formed in the West, and especially in the histories which sought to explain the idea of progress of the West, that is, an almost innate right for political and cultural supremacy in the world.

Gibbon's role in the 'Grecization' of the Roman Empire or the 'Byzantinization' of the Eastern Roman Empire was similar to the role of the first modern Orientalists

<sup>100</sup>When I refer to the Old Rome at the end, I refer to the whole West and to the concept of *translatio imperii* inaugurated by the West ever since Charlemagne. Of course, every single state in the West had its own conception and appropriation of the *Romaness* as it is shown in the case of France of Louis XIV and the protestant German-speaking world, or Britain.

<sup>101</sup> My stance is that precisely classical education should be considered a 'science which gave splendour and happiness' to the Roman Empire. Even though Trevor-Roper does not dwell on the very nature of this science which Gibbon cherishes, he remarks that for Gibbon 'even monasticism would be praised when it earned its keep by scholarly or other labour', and that 'Benedictine workshop was never mentioned without genuine veneration'. - Trevor-Roper 1976, 502. Gibbon thus, gave credits to all entities which respected, kept and promoted classical learning.

<sup>102</sup> Of course, it was not that straightforward, and this culture developed for almost two millenia - since V B.C.E to XV C.E., but it developed and nurtured the *idea* of Empire, as well as other political ideas - of democracy and republicanism. In that sense, it gave inspiration and solutions to almost all modern European political theories. Classical education lies in the core of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. However, one cannot discard the gender exclusiveness or cultural supremacy of the 'classical discourse'. Greek superstition was also heavily reproached by Montesquieu 1734, XXII: *The Christian religion degenerated under the Greek empire to the point it had reached in our day among the Moscovites, before Czar Peter I regenerated the nation and introduced more changes in the state he governed than conquerors introduce in those they usurp.*

<sup>103</sup> This process happened in the Lutheran surrounding as already explained, where their attitude toward Byzantine empire changed completely from the romantic eulogies to heavy critique and disappointment in just one century.

in their creation of the modern Orient (the Arab, Indian or Chinese world).<sup>104</sup> His History was a gateway to 'objective knowledge', which provided the only vocabulary and ideas about the Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman Empire which could be 'used impersonally by anyone' who wished to become a historian of the Roman or Byzantine Empire and who wished simultaneously to reassert their cultural and political supremacy.<sup>105</sup>

Knowledge about Byzantium and the Ottomans was produced in Gibbon's grand history, and later only reproduced by the subsequent scholars in their estimates of the civilizational progress of the Southeastern Europe,<sup>106</sup> that is, the lands and nations of the Byzantine Empire, 'Byzantine Commonwealth' and subsequent 'Rumelia' (Lands of the Romans) administered by the Ottoman Empire. Once we locate all colonial discursive markers, we have a task to decolonize both scholarship and the institutions, as well as bodies, mentality, soul and mind of the peoples and nations of Byzantium and the world of the 'Byzantine Commonwealth'.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Said 1979, p. 121-122

<sup>105</sup> cf. Said 1979, 122

<sup>106</sup> I have intentionally chosen Southeastern over 'Balkan', since the former is less burdened with orientalist discourse than the latter. - For discussion of the different concepts which denote the lands of the Balkan Peninsula and the postcolonial critique see M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford 2009; D. Mishkova, *Beyond Balkanism: Scholarly Politics of Region Making*, Routledge 2018

<sup>107</sup> cf. A. S. Runyan (2018) *Decolonizing knowledges in feminist world politics*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 20:1, 3-8,