

Orientalism in 19th-Century Swedish Historiography of Philosophy

Fredrik Bjarkö

Södertörn University*

ABSTRACT | During the 19th century, most Swedish philosophers considered the Orient, rather than ancient Greece, the birthplace of philosophical thought. This article examines the arguments in support of this viewpoint and reconstructs the meaning of the concept “oriental philosophy” used at the time. The aims of this article are therefore twofold. Firstly, it examines and maps out the way in which the history of philosophy was treated by 19th century Swedish philosophers. This question has not been studied in depth, and the article therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of Swedish academic philosophy during this period. Secondly, since the Swedish source material contains many examples of how historians of philosophy described oriental thought, the article also contributes to an understanding of modern European orientalism and oriental studies in general. The conclusion is that, as a concept, oriental philosophy played a key role in 19th-century debates on the origins of philosophical thought; ideas about oriental culture could be, and indeed were, used both to formulate Eurocentric narratives about the history of philosophy and to challenge such narratives. This article suggests that its conclusion could likely be extended to German historiography of philosophy, and that further studies on this issue are needed.

KEYWORDS | Orientalism; Historiography of Philosophy; Swedish Philosophy

* *Correspondence:* Fredrik Bjarkö – Södertörn University, School of Historical and Contemporary Studies, Alfred Nobels allé 7, 141, 89, Huddinge, Sweden. Email: fredrik.bjarko@sh.se



One of the most well-known contemporary Swedish textbooks on the history of philosophy is Svante Nordin's *Filosofins historia*. First published in 1995, it has since been updated and printed in four editions and is still widely used by students of philosophy and intellectual history. Already in the subtitle, Nordin specifies what he includes under the concept of "the history of philosophy": it is defined as *The Adventure of Western Reason from Thales to Postmodernism* (Nordin 2017). For Nordin, therefore, philosophy is synonymous with a particular Western tradition of reason; it starts in Greek antiquity and from there develops as a mainly European project. Nordin does not deny that there is reason outside of the West, but he does claim that, historically, reason assumed the form of philosophy only in the West.

Nordin is not the only one who represents this viewpoint. Rather, when he identifies Thales as the first philosopher, he is following a long historiographical tradition that can be traced back to the 18th century and which is often taken for granted with little critical discussion.¹ I do not refer to Nordin's textbook because it stands out in comparison to other contemporary works on the history of philosophy, but because it demonstrates that Sweden is no exception to this dominant historiographical tradition.

This has not always been the case; in fact, it seems that the conception of philosophy as a fundamentally European enterprise was established considerably later in Sweden than in Germany. During the 19th century, Swedish philosophy teachers generally presented a very different narrative. They viewed "orientalism" as the first epoch in the history of philosophy, followed by Greek thought as a second epoch. Furthermore, they did not describe their own philosophical systems as belonging to a purely Western tradition. In fact, it was more common to claim that the modern era of philosophy represented a systematic *unity* of Western and Eastern thought. Similar conceptions also existed in Germany, particularly among the romantics. In Sweden, however, it was not just represented by romantic philosophers, but also often used as point of departure by the idealists of the highly influential Boströman school.

That said, the inclusion of oriental philosophy in the history of philosophy did not necessarily coincide with a positive view of the Orient or oriental culture. Rather, many Swedish philosophers characterised oriental philosophy as superstitious, despotic and lacking in distinctions. But this was rarely seen as an argument in favour of altogether excluding the Orient from the history of philosophy, and in this regard, 19th century Swedish historiography of philosophy differs from

¹ There are, of course, also many historians of philosophy who have challenged this Eurocentric narrative. For an overview of global histories of philosophy in European languages, see Herzl's contribution in this issue.

developments in Germany during the same period.

My aim in this article is twofold. Firstly, I examine and map out how the history of philosophy was treated by Swedish philosophers in the 19th century. This question has not been studied in depth and the article therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of Swedish academic philosophy during this period.² Secondly, since the Swedish source material contains many examples of how historians of philosophy described oriental thought, the article also contributes to our understanding of modern European orientalism and oriental studies in general. In fact, I argue that the idea of “oriental philosophy” as a distinct tradition was not established until the 19th century, when it replaced the category of “barbaric philosophy” from which previous historians often departed. Formulated more generally, my aim is to examine how the concept of orientalism was used in 19th-century Swedish historiography of philosophy and what philosophical ideas historians associated with this concept.

To make this second aim more concrete, I begin with an overview of Eurocentrism in German 19th-century historiography of philosophy. Following this, I briefly discuss previous research in the field before moving on to an in-depth examination of how the Orient was treated by Swedish philosophers in the 19th century. Finally, I present some theoretical implications and outline possible questions for further study.

1 The German Background

Before the second half of the 18th century, it was uncommon for works on the history of philosophy to begin with ancient Greece. Instead, the most common narrative went all the way back to the creation of the world in the book of Genesis, thereby giving Adam, rather than Thales, the role of the first philosopher. Historians then continued to describe how the original revelation was spread, handed down, and reshaped among a multitude of different peoples: Egyptians, Chaldeans, Persians, and Celts were all afforded an undisputed place in this narrative of the history of philosophy.³ Although the thought of these peoples was generally categorised under the name “barbaric philosophy” it must be kept in mind that this term did not have the clear negative connotations it evokes in contemporary language. For instance, when Christian historians of philosophy referred to Adam, Abraham and Moses as representatives of “barbaric philosophy”, this

² To my knowledge, there is only one previous study on Swedish historiography of philosophy, namely Ers (1970).

³ For general overviews of the historiography of philosophy, see Santinello (1993), Braun (1973), Geldsetzer (1968), Guérault (1983, 1988), Piaia and Santinello (2011a, 2011b) and Schneider (1990).

was not meant in any negative way; rather, the adjective “barbaric” should be understood as a purely descriptive term for peoples who were neither of Greek nor Roman origin.⁴

Only in the 1780s and 90s did challenges to this narrative arise. In 1791, Dietrich Tiedemann started the narrative of his textbook, *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie*, with Thales. It is quite possible that he thereby became the first modern historian to consider Thales the first philosopher (Bernasconi 1997). However, already a few years earlier, the Göttingen-based historian Christoph Meiners had argued against the idea that there were philosophical cultures older than that of the Greeks – a claim which the Kantian Tennemann would reiterate in his monumental twelve-volume work, *Geschichte der Philosophie*. In the 19th century, the idea of philosophy’s Greek origins was also strongly defended by Hegel and his followers.

There are two particularly important reasons for this change in how the history of philosophy was written. First, in German academic philosophy, a distinction between philosophy and religion had become central by the 18th century – above all in the protestant tradition. In this context, philosophy was understood as a science wholly immanent to the sphere of reason and therefore to be clearly separated from faith and revelation. The pre-modern⁵ narrative of the history of philosophy was founded upon the opposite ambition: here, the task of the historian was to show how pagan philosophy had its roots precisely in divine revelation. This could be done only by establishing a continuity between the patriarchs of the Old Testament and the Greeks – a continuity which, in turn, was made possible by the barbarians as mediating middle link. Since German historians of the late 18th century departed from a different conception of the nature of philosophy, they consequently had to reject this narrative.

Second, another conceptual distinction that rose to fundamental importance during this time was between West and East, between Europe and the Orient. Perhaps the most famous examination of this development is Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, in which he aims to show how European self-understanding is conditioned by the creation of the Orient as a negative other (Said 2003).⁶ To the extent that this

⁴ It should be noted that a distinction was usually made between antediluvian and postdiluvian philosophy, thus distinguishing the patriarchs from other barbarian philosophies. There were also some historians who did not classify antediluvian philosophy as part of barbaric philosophy.

⁵ The concepts modern and pre-modern are, of course, complex and difficult to define. In this article, the terms are employed in a sense specific to the historiography of philosophy: I use them solely to describe the move away from the narrative of philosophy’s divine origins – a narrative which was in turn intimately connected to the category of barbarian philosophy.

⁶ As Said himself readily admits, his concept of orientalism is far from unproblematic when applied to the German context. It should also be noted that my ambition in this article is to understand orien-

distinction is expressed by historians of philosophy, it is intimately connected with the distinction between philosophy and religion or between reason and superstition. Thus, the Orient was frequently characterised as a culture in which reason had not yet risen to a state of independence but instead remained entangled in mythico-religious beliefs. Only in Greece, it was argued, had reason been freed from its religious shackles, and only here could the history of philosophy as an independent science therefore be said to have begun.

Here, it is worth noting that pre-modern works on the history of philosophy did not emphasise the distinction between Eastern and Western culture. Rather, the concept of “barbarian philosophy” included a multitude of peoples, both inside and outside of Europe. Sometimes, subdivisions between northern, southern, eastern, and western barbarians were made – but the main organising principle was nonetheless simply a distinction between barbarians in general and Greeks. Furthermore, the concept of “barbarian philosophy” did not indicate a single, unified philosophical culture; there were a multitude of barbarian peoples, and the only thing they had in common was that their philosophical beliefs were all diffusions of divine truth. In contrast, the 19th-century concept of the Orient was intended to describe a highly homogenous cultural sphere defined by the subsumption of reason under superstition and despotic religious rule. This conversely meant that Greece, which had previously been distinguished from both European and non-European barbarians, was now firmly placed in the context of a wider European cultural history.

The distinction between Europe and Orient thus played a crucial role for historians who were intent on writing a history of philosophy with Greek thinkers as the starting point. However, the same distinction could also be used to construct another, wider narrative. Two prominent examples of this are the works of Schelling-influenced historians Friedrich Ast (*Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1807) and Thaddä Anselm Rixner (*Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, first volume, 1822). Ast and Rixner both emphasise that philosophy must be understood as a striving which is immanent to the human spirit. Therefore, they claim, it cannot belong to any single human culture, nor can it be wholly absent in any mythological belief system. Philosophy’s origins must thus be sought in the origins of human culture as such. In practice, this conception meant tracing philosophy back to the Orient and to the oldest preserved writings from India. Therefore, oriental rather than Greek philosophy must be understood as the first epoch in the

talism as a modern phenomenon, established in the 18th and 19th centuries. Said, in contrast, traces orientalism back to Greek antiquity. My understanding of the historical origins of the concept is thus different. That said, I believe that Said’s general characterisation of the dependency of ideas about Europe on ideas about the Orient to be a fruitful theoretical starting point.

history of philosophy.

The arguments for the inclusion of oriental philosophy appear to have been somewhat successful. This is illustrated by the fact that Tennemann, who had initially argued that the history of philosophy begins with Thales, later revised his viewpoint. While he did not accept the inclusion of the Orient as an epoch in its own right, he did concede that it could be regarded as a precursor to the origin of philosophy in Greece. This view led him to include a section on “religious and philosophical opinions of oriental peoples” in his textbook *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Tennemann 1816). A similar solution was also employed by Hegel.



Figure 1: The first epoch of philosophy as named in German-language books on the history of philosophy 1720–1919. The table only includes books which (1) are included in the bibliographic section of the Hildesheim research project “Histories of Philosophy in Global Perspective” (‘Deutschsprachige Philosophiegeschichten’ n.d.) and (2) contain a formal table of contents.

We can therefore summarise developments in the late 18th century as follows. The older distinction between barbaric and Greek philosophy was replaced by a new distinction between Oriental and Western philosophy. While this distinction was sometimes used to counter the notion of an Oriental philosophy, it could, and indeed was, also used to formulate positive conceptions of Oriental philosophical

culture. Both narratives are based on the distinction between East and West, and thereby differ from the previous division of philosophy's history into a barbaric and a Greek period.

Using the extensive bibliography compiled by the research project "Histories of Philosophy in Global Perspective" of the University of Hildesheim, one can get an enlightening overview of this development, as is captured in figure 1 above. A quantitative analysis of these data shows that in the 18th century most German books on the history of philosophy considered "barbaric" or "non-Greek" philosophy to be the first discernible epoch.⁷ From the middle of the 19th century, however, no more books in this category are published at all. Instead, more and more books are published in which the history of philosophy starts with Greek philosophy, so that from 1800 onwards this periodisation is used in the majority of published volumes on the history of philosophy. However, for the entire 19th century, Oriental philosophy is still represented, sometimes as an epoch in its own right, and sometimes as a precursor to classical Greek philosophy.

2 Previous Research

In recent decades, multiple scholars have taken an interest in how philosophy and its history came to be seen as a purely European phenomenon. As for studies in German, these issues are currently the subject of the Reinhart Koselleck Project at the University of Hildesheim⁸ and also represent a central theme in Franz Martin Wimmer's research on intercultural philosophy (Wimmer 1990; 2017). Among the relevant studies published in English, Peter K.J. Park's *Africa, Asia and the History of Philosophy* (2013) deserves particular mention. Park examines Christoph Meiners' Eurocentric historiography of philosophy and the way it was received by contemporary Kantian scholars. His conclusion is that the Kantians were highly influenced by Meiners and often repeated his arguments in favour of philosophy's Greek origins (Park 2013, 149–150). Robert Bernasconi, too, has played a significant role in this field with his series of articles on Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy (Bernasconi 1997, 2000, 2003).

While this article is greatly indebted to the work of these scholars, it attempts to approach the question of Eurocentrism in a somewhat different way. Previous studies have often focused on the questions of how, when, and why the world

⁷ The number of published books in this sample is rather small and the data should therefore be interpreted with caution. For example, in the first period (1720–39) only two books were published, both by the influential historian Johan Jakob Brucker.

⁸ See the project plan ('Histories of Philosophy in Global Perspective' 2019) and the anthology *Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung in globaler Perspektive* (Elberfeld 2017).

outside of Europe was excluded from the history of philosophy. But as mentioned, my focus is rather on a conceptual displacement that is related to this exclusion and which can, to some extent, be understood a precondition for it, namely the displacement of the category “barbaric philosophy” by “Oriental philosophy”.

While this conceptual displacement has been pointed out by Wimmer (2017, 183), he does not claim to have exhaustively described its implications but rather notes that it requires further study. Since this article aims to reconstruct the concept of Oriental philosophy used by a specific group of 19th-century historians of philosophy, it can be understood as such an attempt at further elaboration.

2.1 The Swedish Context

Against this background, Swedish historiography of philosophy serves as an interesting case study. As already mentioned, Swedish historians of philosophy stand out in the sense that the majority of them considered the Orient to have been the birthplace of philosophy – a conception that, in Germany, was always represented by a minority.

An important reason for this difference between Sweden and Germany is the status of Hegelianism. As previous studies have shown, Hegel played a key role in establishing and legitimising the idea of philosophy’s Greek origins. Among Swedish philosophers, however, Hegelianism never managed to gather a large following. Instead, three other main currents can be identified during the 19th century: 1) at the beginning of the century, idealist philosophers inspired by Kant and Fichte slowly gained influence at Swedish universities. 2) In the 1810s, this influence waned in favour of a romantic philosophy above all inspired by Schelling. This was in turn challenged by 3) the idealist system-philosophy of Christopher Jacob Boström which, by the second half of the century, had gained the status of unofficial state philosophy.⁹

This is not to say that there were no Swedish Hegelians. Hegelianism was represented by the Swedish-speaking Finn Johan Vilhelm Snellman as well as Fredrik Georg Afzelius and Johan Jakob Borelius. The Swedish Hegelians were generally interested in the theory of the history of philosophy and produced a number of texts on the subject. In these texts, they tend to follow Hegel in denying the existence of philosophy in the Orient. But the Hegelians never managed to seriously challenge the dominance of the Boströmian school. They remained relatively marginalised in Swedish academic philosophy and exercised a considerably smaller influence than Hegelians in the neighbouring Scandinavian countries. For this reason, the

⁹ For general overviews of Swedish philosophy during this period, see Nordin (1987, 1981) and Lagerlund (2020).

Hegelian view on the beginning of the history of philosophy always remained a minority position in Swedish academic philosophy. Instead, “Oriental thought” retained its status as the first epoch in the history of philosophy until as late as the end of the 19th century.

In what follows, I first describe the status and role of the history of philosophy at Swedish universities during the 19th century. After that, I move on to a discussion of how the concept of Oriental philosophy was understood by Swedish philosophers during this period.

3 The History of Philosophy at Swedish Universities

In the 19th century, there were two main universities in Sweden, namely Uppsala University and Lund University.¹⁰ Characteristic of philosophy in Sweden is that the discipline was split into two subdisciplines: theoretical philosophy (logic and metaphysics) and practical philosophy (politics and ethics).¹¹ Each university had one professorial chair in each of the subdisciplines as well as an adjunct of philosophy and a varying number of (typically unpaid) docents.

The history of philosophy played a central role in 19th-century university education. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the curricula and student handbooks that the universities started to publish in the late 1880s.¹² The 1888 curriculum of Lund University lists three areas of knowledge that students must master in order to obtain a passing grade (*approbatur*) in theoretical philosophy: formal logic, psychology, and “a general overview of the history of philosophy.” In practical philosophy, students were required to follow “a shorter course in the history of philosophy” as well as “shorter courses in ethics and philosophy of state” (Akademiska föreningen 1888). The 1887 student handbook of Uppsala University (published by the student organisation *Verdandi*) lists a similar set of criteria. As at Lund University, knowledge of the history of philosophy was considered a pre-

¹⁰ There were other Swedish universities for parts of the century. For example, the Royal Academy of Turku was Swedish until 1809 when Sweden lost Finland to Russia, and the University of Greifswald was Swedish until 1815. These universities are not included in this analysis since they were not Swedish for the greater part of the period under discussion in this paper.

¹¹ This division still applies to most contemporary Swedish universities. To my knowledge, the only exceptions are Umeå University and Södertörn University where the subject is simply referred to as “philosophy.”

¹² Before that, students did not have access to printed curricula or details on the criteria for graduating. Instead, such information was transmitted orally, either from earlier students or directly from professors. When the student organisation *Verdandi* published the first study manual in 1887, it was their explicit objective to change this. Soon after, universities started publishing official curricula. On this development, see Frängsmyr (2010, 289–294).

requisite for obtaining passing grades in both theoretical and practical philosophy (Verdandi 1887).

It is clear that by the end of the 19th century, the history of philosophy was considered a fundamental part of philosophical studies. This is further confirmed by the fact that courses on the history of philosophy (or specific eras thereof) were generally offered every semester, usually by more than one teacher at each university. In fact, no other topic appears to have been taught with the same frequency.¹³

A 100 years earlier, the situation was rather different. In the lecture catalogues of the 1770s and 80s, mentions of lectures on the history of philosophy are few and far between. Interestingly, the few times the subject was taught, teachers were usually not philosophers by occupation but rather docents of literary history. This suggests that the history of philosophy was not considered part of philosophy per se. But even these lessons by literary historians were infrequent. It seems, then, that philosophy at Swedish universities went through what could be described as a historical turn in the 100 years between the 1780s and 1880s which saw the history of philosophy, formerly an uncommon topic, becoming a central part of the curriculum.

The start of this development can be traced to around 1800, particularly at Uppsala University. Here, Daniel Boëthius (professor of practical philosophy 1783–1810) devoted a series of public lectures to the history of philosophy in 1783–1784, again in spring 1795, autumn 1797 and autumn 1801. While this was only a small part of Boëthius' total lecture output, it greatly exceeds the number of lectures dedicated to the history of philosophy by both his predecessors and contemporaries.

Boëthius marks the start of a trend that would come to define 19th-century

¹³ This claim is based on two complementary sources. The first is the lecture catalogues that universities published at the start of each academic year (Lund University 1770–1865, 1866–1900, Uppsala University 1770–1852, 1853–1899). In these catalogues professors, adjuncts and docents advertised their planned lectures, colloquia and other forms of teaching. The second important source is the handwritten lecture diaries (*föreläsningsdiarier*) which ordinary professors were required to hand in to the university chancellor at the end of every month ('Föreläsningsdiarier Och Studentförteckningar Uppsala Universitet', 1784–1892; 'Föreläsningsdiarier Och Studentförteckningar Lunds Universitet', 1819–1823, 1876–1892). These diaries, which usually consisted of 1–2 pages per professor and month, provided an outline of the subjects the professor had treated in his public lectures. Today, the diaries are kept at the Swedish National Archives. Most of them are still available for Uppsala University, while a large number of those at Lund University seems to have been lost with only the diaries from 1819–1823 and from 1876 onwards remaining. Despite this gap, lecture diaries offer a good general overview of the philosophical lectures. Unlike the lecture catalogues, they allow us to follow in detail the structure and length of each lecture series and, in many cases, even that of individual lectures. However, as the lecture diaries were only written by professors, they do not contain information about the teaching activities of adjuncts and docents.

Swedish university philosophy. This trend would grow even stronger with the work of idealist philosopher Benjamin Höijer, who became professor of theoretical philosophy in 1809.¹⁴ From that point until his death in 1812, Höijer devoted the majority of his public lectures to the history of philosophy.¹⁵ By then, the history of philosophy had become one of the most frequently addressed topics for university lectures in philosophy and would remain so for the rest of the century.

An important reason for this development can be found in the manuscripts of Höijer's lectures in which he argues that the study of the history of philosophy has two great advantages for students. Firstly, it familiarises them with a multitude of different philosophical systems, and secondly, it allows them to discover that these systems do not merely follow one another randomly but rather form a necessarily connected, organic whole. For these reasons, the history of philosophy is "the easiest and quickest introduction to philosophy" (Höijer 1808b, 4). It was in precisely this way the history of philosophy established itself as a dominant form of university education: as a propaedeutic for new students of philosophy.¹⁶

A similar development occurred at the Lund University, albeit considerably later. In the first half of the 19th century, mentions of the history of philosophy remain infrequent in the lecture catalogues. But around 1850, the trend that had developed at Uppsala also reached Lund. Lorentz Fredrik Westman made the history of philosophy the subject of his lectures from 1846/47 to 1855/56, and during the last half of the century, both the Hegelian Johan Jakob Borelius and the Boströmian Per Johan Hermann Leander regularly devoted their lectures to the subject.

This development was not unique to Sweden. In his *Philosophie und Universität*, Ulrich Johannes Schneider demonstrates in great detail how, over the same period, the history of philosophy also became a dominant subject at German universities (Schneider 1999, see also Schneider 2004). In Germany, however, this development was preceded by a rise in the number of books and journals devoted to the history of philosophy. During the 1790s, a series of intense debates about the concept of history of philosophy took place in German scholarly journals,¹⁷

¹⁴ Although Höijer was only formally appointed as ordinary professor at the end of May 1809, he had already started his public lectures in the autumn of the previous year.

¹⁵ Lecture diaries show that Höijer taught the history of philosophy from 1808–1810. Although the diaries from 1811–12 are missing, we know that by December 1810 Höijer had only got as far as Aristotle. It therefore seems likely that he continued the historical lectures during the spring of 1811.

¹⁶ This is confirmed by the curricula from the 1880s and 1890s in which the history of philosophy tends to play a greater role in theoretical philosophy than in practical philosophy. The reason for this is that theoretical philosophy was seen as the more elementary subject. When students moved on to practical philosophy, it was assumed that they already had a general knowledge of the history of philosophy.

¹⁷ Among the most important articles in this debate are those by Reinhold (1791), Goess (1794) and

and multiple ambitious textbooks on the topic were published. The situation was somewhat different in Sweden. By 1850, only two multi-volume textbooks on the subject had been published by Swedish philosophers, neither of which seems to have been commercially successful. Apart from this, Swedish literature on the topic consisted of a few articles and translations of German works.

In the remainder of this article, I partly rely on this sparse collection of printed sources. Just as important, however, are the unpublished lecture manuscripts from the archives at the universities of Uppsala and Lund. Swedish philosophers treated the history of philosophy mainly as a subject of *oral* transmission: it was taught in lecture halls rather than debated in published writings. It was in the lecture halls students were introduced to the history of philosophy, and it was here the professors discussed and spread their conceptions of it. Far more than a learned, philosophical debate between professors, the history of philosophy was a subject of vertical transmission from professor to student. It was seen, above all, as a philosophical propaedeutic.

4 Swedish Historiography of Philosophy from Boëthius to Boström

4.1 Daniel Boëthius

For most of the 18th century, Swedish university philosophy was dominated by an eclectic combination of Scottish moral sense-philosophy and Wolffian metaphysics. In the 1790s, however, Kantianism began to receive the attention of Swedish philosophers. This marks the beginning of a long period during which German-influenced idealism would dominate Swedish academic philosophy.

Daniel Boëthius is often credited with being the first to introduce Kantianism in Sweden (Liljekrantz 1925, 133; Nordin 1987, 41). I have already mentioned that Boëthius also played an important role in promoting the study of the history of philosophy at Uppsala University and in fact, these two achievements are closely related. When Boëthius first presented Kantianism to the Swedish audience, he did so by translating a series of articles on the history of philosophy written by the Kantian scholar Georg Gustav Fülleborn (Boëthius 1794). Kant's philosophy, therefore, made its way to Uppsala University in the form of Kantian historiography of philosophy.

Boëthius had already discussed the latest developments in philosophical historiography before he developed sympathies for Kantianism. In an unpublished

Grohmann (1798) which have been discussed by a number of authors, such as Bondeli (2015), Geldsetzer (1968), Braun (1973) and Guérault (1988).

manuscript of 1791, he provides a general outline of how the subject had been treated, from the work of Diogenes Laërtius down to his own time (Boëthius 1791, n.d.). Like many contemporary German historians, he criticises previous scholars for not being systematic, claiming that they were chronicle-writers and material-gatherers rather than true pragmatic historians. Boëthius complains that philosophy, unlike mathematics, still had no reliable history.

Two historians are nonetheless praised by Boëthius, namely Christoph Meiners and Dietrich Tiedemann. That these two scholars in particular are mentioned is significant because, as Bernasconi, Park and others have shown, they were pioneers in establishing the Eurocentric narrative of the history of philosophy. And this is indeed the achievement for which Boëthius praises them. Meiners, he claims, has proven that the so-called philosophies of Asian peoples are no philosophies at all, and that the starting point for the history of philosophy must therefore have been Greek antiquity.

It seems probable that Boëthius' interest in Kantianism arose, at least in part, from his interest in the history of philosophy. During the 1790s, many Kantians devoted their attention to formulating the principles of a new method and theory on this subject. It is important to bear in mind that Meiners was an outspoken anti-Kantian and that several Kantians, among them Reinhold (1791, 30), criticised his way of writing the history of philosophy. It does not seem that Boëthius seriously reconsidered his earlier praise of Meiners in light of this Kantian criticism. In 1795, the year after his translations of Fülleborn, he held a series of lectures on the history of philosophy in which he repeated his view of philosophy's Greek origins. In his lecture diary he reports that he spoke about "the Greeks as the people from which all known striving for a real philosophy in ancient times originates." The notion that the ancient Chaldeans, Egyptians and Indians possessed any deep wisdom is dismissed as a "prejudice."¹⁸

Boëthius is an interesting example of Park's thesis that Meiners' racial anthropology was not rejected by the Kantians. On the contrary, Park claims that the Kantian historians of philosophy based their view of philosophy's Greek origins on arguments directly imported from Meiners' writings. For Boëthius, this indeed seems to be the case.

The narrative according to which philosophy originated in Greece was also preferred by Boëthius' successor as professor of practical philosophy, Nils Fredrik Biberg. While to my knowledge there are no manuscripts or notes from Biberg's lectures, the lecture diaries he submitted to the university chancellor make no

¹⁸ On this, see Boëthius' lecture diary for March 1795 ('Föreläsningsdiarier och studentförteckningar Uppsala universitet').

mention of ancient non-Greek philosophies.¹⁹ But another view on the origins of philosophy had by this time already begun to gain acceptance at Uppsala University. It was a narrative first introduced by Boëthius' most prominent student, Benjamin Höijer.

4.2 Benjamin Höijer

Höijer enrolled as a student at Uppsala University in 1783. Under the influence of his teacher Boëthius, he became a proponent of critical philosophy and in 1798 travelled to Germany to personally meet many of the prominent philosophers of the time, among them Reinhold, Fichte and Schelling.²⁰ The following year, he published his most important work titled *Avhandling om den filosofiska konstruktionen* (*Dissertation on the Philosophical Construction*, Höijer 2018). The dissertation was translated into German and garnered praise from Schelling who commented that Höijer deserved to be counted among "true thinkers" (quoted in Höijer 2018, 168).²¹

Höijer's first important treatment of the history of philosophy dates back to 1795. In that year, he published the first in a long series of articles titled "Om Anledningen, Hufvudinnehållet och de sednare Framstegen och Förbättringarna af den Critiska Philosophien" ("About the Cause, Main Contents and Latest Progresses and Improvements of Critical Philosophy").²² The explicit intention of the article is to defend critical philosophy and to establish the achievements of Kant as a clear progress for philosophy as science. In order to do this, Höijer offers a general overview of the history of philosophy and sketches out a theory of the laws according to which philosophy must develop. Since this is the first in-depth discussion on the origins of philosophy by a Swedish philosopher, it deserves to be examined in some detail.

Much like German idealist historians of philosophy at the time, Höijer considers philosophy to be an expression of universal human reason. The ultimate striving of reason is to realise a flawless philosophical system. Such a system must also be an organic whole, grounded in a single fundamental principle, which, once dis-

¹⁹ Rather than relying on contemporary historians, Biberg seems to have based his lectures mainly on writings by Cicero, to whom he frequently refers in the lecture diaries.

²⁰ Höijer describes these encounters in his travel diaries, which has been transcribed by Birger Liljekrantz. (Höijer 1798). Liljekrantz also offers a detailed description of Höijer's travels in the monography *Benjamin Höijer* (Liljekrantz 1912).

²¹ For recent studies on Höijer's philosophy, see Mats Dahllöv's dissertation *Det absoluta och det gemensamma* (Dahllöv 2022) and the anthology *Benjamin Höijer: metafysik, estetik, historia* (A. Burman and Wallenstein 2021).

²² References are to the 1825 edition of Höijer's collected works. Translations are my own.

covered, would end all philosophical quarrels. Although Höijer does not believe that such a system already exists (or, indeed, that it can ever be fully realised), he claims that Kant's critical philosophy must be considered a decisive step towards it.

Since philosophy is a product of universal human reason, its roots must be sought in the beginning of human history as such. Here, Höijer offers what could be described as an anthropological account of the history of philosophy. As long as the human being lives in a state of sensual pleasure in which its desires are "satisfied in the order they arise," it does not occupy itself with the causes and reasons of the world around it. It is only once it encounters some kind of outer resistance that hinders the satisfaction of these desires that "the first question about the reasons for the events and the connection of the things arises. Through this, the first, crude beginning of the use of reason is revealed" (Höijer 1825, 13).

The kind of examination undertaken by this uncultivated reason is one that looks for an intelligent agent behind events in the world. As a result, the humans invent supernatural beings who are actually just alienated representations of the human being itself, "reflections of its ego" (Höijer 1825, 14). It is in this animistic worship of nature that Höijer identifies the beginning of philosophical inquiry: "In superstition lies the first seed of all philosophy" (Höijer 1825, 13).

Höijer then continues by tracing the development of this superstition through what he calls "the first civic societies." The founders of these societies, he claims, used religion and superstition to make their subjects obedient. "Worship of the Gods" thus became an "art of governing" and led to the development of more complex systems of religion. These systems were created in the interest of despotism, not truth: "Anything in the examinations that could lessen the blind submission of the people and their faith in their leaders was carefully hidden away." (Höijer 1825, 16). The systematisation of religion nonetheless still marked a progress in the development of reason for, as Höijer (1825, 16) puts it, "to the extent the assumed superstitions could be brought into a connected whole, a philosophical building was also approached." Where superstitions formed systematic wholes, they were transformed into *pantheism* which Höijer therefore considers "the first metaphysics" (Höijer 1825, 18).

Even though Höijer does not mention any specific regions, peoples or systems of faith, it is likely that his discussion refers to the Orient. All the central concepts he invokes – superstition, despotism, and pantheism – were at the time strongly associated with oriental culture and thought.²³

²³ In an unpublished manuscript (Höijer 1794) the thesis of philosophy's first seeds in superstition is more clearly connected to the philosophies of Asian peoples.

The oriental nature of philosophy's first stages finally becomes explicit when Höijer's exposition reaches the era of classical Greek philosophy. He describes the beginning of this era as follows:

Through the migrations of the Orient, the known sciences were finally moved to Greece, and with them this system. Civic freedom and disorder, perhaps both an effect of the climate and the location, had always made out main features in the character of the Greeks. These features snatched philosophy from the hands of the priests, where it had previously always been a hereditary secret of a particular guild. Thus, it was in Greece this system could be developed in all its consequences and brought to a level of perfection through which its flaws could be discovered. [...] Philosophy had hardly stopped being a stranger in Greece before the system of superstition was contested. (Höijer 1825, 18)

Höijer's conclusion is in line with the theory usually presented by contemporary German historians of philosophy, namely that in the beginning philosophy and religion were one and the same but that reason subsequently rose to the state of science in the era of classical Greek thought. Tennemann would later argue that the history of philosophy proper only begins at the point of this separation (Tennemann 1816, 9) and that the original conflation of reason and superstition, science and myth, should be understood as philosophy's pre-history.

Even though Tennemann had not yet presented this argument in 1795, Höijer was, of course, aware of Boëthius' arguments in support of the same conclusion. It would not have been surprising if Höijer had followed in the footsteps of his teacher and identified the beginning of philosophy in Greece. But he ends up reaching a different conclusion. He emphasises that superstition already at its first stage contained the seed of philosophy and that it should therefore be considered the starting point of philosophy's history. Philosophy may have been freed from superstition only in Greece – but it nonetheless arrived in Greece as an immigrant from the East.

In Sweden, Kantianism and idealism soon got the reputation as a revolutionary philosophy that was harmful to society. As Nordin writes, both Kant's and Fichte's thought were often equated with Jacobinism (Nordin 1987, 64). This initially made it difficult for Höijer to get an academic post. However, when the professor of theoretical philosophy, Per Högmark, died in 1808, the political climate in Sweden had become somewhat more tolerant and Höijer was appointed Högmark's replacement as ordinary professor.

As already mentioned, from this point on Höijer dedicated a large part of his public lectures to the history of philosophy. Regrettably, the lecture manuscripts are difficult to interpret; Höijer wrote in what could best be described as a form of cipher, frequently deploying unorthodox abbreviations and leaving many words out.²⁴ That said, the manuscript does appear to include sections on the history of Egyptian, Indian, Persian and Chinese philosophy (Höijer 1808a). Interestingly, Höijer also includes a discussion of the results of earlier historians such as Buhle, Tiedemann, Meiners and Tennemann. Of these, he claims that Tiedemann is the most reliable source; because Tiedemann does not belong to any particular school, he manages to give an impartial account of the history of philosophy. Nonetheless, Höijer does not seem to share Tiedemann's view on the beginning of the history of philosophy.

Höijer held his lectures at roughly the time that the idea of philosophy's oriental origins began to be defended by romantic and Schellingian historians in Germany such as Friedrich Ast. Ast's *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie* is not mentioned by Höijer, which could be interpreted to mean that his view on philosophy's origin was formulated relatively independently of German romantic thinkers – an interpretation which is strengthened by the fact that Höijer already discussed oriental philosophy in his 1795 article.²⁵

4.3 The First History of Philosophy in Swedish

Even though Höijer is rightly considered one of the most prominent Swedish philosophers of the 19th century, his idealist system never managed to generate a large number of followers in Uppsala. His narrative on the history of philosophy, on the other hand, appears to have been relatively influential. That much is evident from the first ever Swedish-language textbook on the history of philosophy, *Grunddragen af philosophiens historia* (*Outlines of the History of Philosophy*), by his former student, Lorenzo Hammar-sköld.

The structure of Hammar-sköld's book bears a close resemblance to German idealist histories of philosophy. It begins with a general definition of philoso-

²⁴ Parts of the lectures have been transcribed by Birger Liljekrantz (Höijer 1808b) but these do not include the sections in which Höijer discusses oriental philosophy. Since I have not been able to read the full manuscript, my discussion of it is preliminary.

²⁵ After the death of Höijer's brother Joseph Otto, a list of the two brothers' book collection was compiled for an estate auction (*Förteckning öfver professorerna Benj. C. H. och J. O. Höijers efterlemnade boksamling* 1833). This list shows that Höijer owned a large collection of histories of philosophy, among which were Adelung's *Geschichte der Philosophie für Liebhaber*, Buhle's *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Tiedemann's *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie*, Meiners' *Geschichte der Weltweisheit* and Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie*. Ast's *Grundriß* is not included in the list.

phy as pure, aprioristic science of reason after which it continues to deduce the conditions for philosophy's temporal development. Much like the German idealists (and Höijer) Hammarsköld identifies the root of philosophy in human nature. Therefore, he argues, any complete history of philosophy must take the origin of man as starting point.

In contrast with Höijer's anthropological understanding of this origin, Hammarsköld offers a sort of mythological-religious account which begins with a description of divine creation and then goes on to describe how man's reason was obscured after the original sin. Following the fall, philosophy is to be understood as recollection of an original revelation. "Philosophising is thus nothing else than a striving to remember the time when man saw the highest one in the way he is." (Hammarsköld 1825, 19, my translation).

At first, the method of this recollection was mythological. Every myth, Hammarsköld claims, is "a symbolically produced, sensual philosopheme" and therefore,

each mythology, or system of myths, must deserve attention from the genealogists of philosophy – for mythology is the most ancient attempt a people makes to explain the basis of existence, and thus also the basis of knowledge. (Hammarsköld 1825, 20)

Following this, Hammarsköld discusses the origins of human culture. Even though he concedes that we cannot know for sure where and when the birth of mankind is to be found, he suggests that Ethiopia is the most likely candidate. After discussing Ethiopian mythology, he goes on to describe the philosophy of the Egyptians, Hindus, Persians, Jews, Phoenicians, the first Greeks and finally the ancient Scandinavians.

Like Höijer in his 1795 article, Hammarsköld considers Greek philosophy to mark an immensely important moment in the development of philosophy. He discusses the question of whether the Greeks had received their education from the Orient but remains undecided. However, even if the inspiration did lie in oriental culture, the Greeks developed it into "altogether new works": "The sombre superstition of the East never took root in a joyful people directed towards practical life and living in a more smiling than sublime nature" (Hammarsköld 1825, 38). With this, Hammarsköld seems to identify an essential difference between the Greeks and oriental peoples – but this does not stop him from identifying the origins of philosophy in the Orient.

4.4 Romanticism

Hammaršköld wrote his textbook at a time when romanticism had become a strong tendency in Swedish philosophy. In fact, Hammaršköld is to some extent a transitional figure between idealism and romanticism. Despite his continued conviction of Höijer's philosophy, he was also a part of the romantic movement known as the "phosphorists" – a name referring to the journal *Phosphoros* which was published between 1810 and 1813 by Per Daniel Amadeus Atterbom and Vilhelm Fredrik Palmblad. A central aspect of the phosphorists' philosophical project was the sense that idealism had gone too far in its separation of philosophy and religion, or reason and mythology. Thus, the Kantian or idealist narrative of the history of philosophy is here radically reinterpreted. While, for the Kantians, philosophy could only realise itself once it established its independence from religion, the phosphorists understood this independence in terms of a loss. According to them, a new unity was needed. We have already seen how this idea was expressed in Hammaršköld's history of philosophy, which considered all philosophy a recollection of the original intuition of the divine, of the first revelation that had become obscured through man's separation from God.²⁶ To find the template for this unity of faith and reason, the phosphorists often turned to oriental religion. As noted, the conception of oriental thought as mixture of mythology and science was already well-established at the time. The phosphorists did not challenge this conception, but rather reinterpreted its consequences: for them, the Orient offered a vital clue about how philosophy and religion could be reconciled again.

The phosphorists were not mainly a movement of academic philosophers. Rather, they were active in the intersection of philosophy, literature and poetry.²⁷ But even though the phosphorists themselves did not play a great role in academic philosophy, a form of Schelling-inspired romanticism would for a long time dominate the philosophical climate at Uppsala. Until 1849, both professorial chairs were occupied by representatives of this tradition, namely Samuel Grubbe and Eric August Schröder. The former succeeded Höijer as professor of logic and metaphysics and like Höijer devoted many of his lectures to the history of philosophy. His extensive manuscripts offer a detailed discussion of the concept, method and aim of studying this subject and reveal a thorough understanding of contemporary German debates.²⁸ In his own work, Grubbe defines the history of philosophy as

²⁶ It is worth noting that this conception recalls pre-modern narratives of antediluvian philosophy. In Hammaršköld's version, however, the Orient assumes the place of postdiluvian barbarians.

²⁷ In academic philosophy, the phosphorists were for a time represented by Atterbom, who occupied the professorial chair of theoretical philosophy in Uppsala from 1828 to 1835. During this period, he held lectures on both the history of philosophy and "the history of theism."

²⁸ In 1827, Grubbe moved from the chair of theoretical philosophy to the chair of practical philoso-

reason's striving to realise the idea of philosophy. This conception clearly resembles that of Tennemann, who was perhaps Grubbe's main influence. That Grubbe was no orthodox follower of Tennemann is clear, however, for unlike Tennemann he does not locate the origin of philosophy in ancient Greece. He makes it clear that he is aware of Tennemann's position as well as the arguments in favour of it and refers to the contemporary debate on the origin of philosophy, noting that "many of the most famous authors" have argued for Greece as the birthplace of philosophical thinking (Grubbe 1876, 29, my translation). Grubbe concedes that this position is reasonable if we understand philosophy in a strict sense: as "separated from religion and fully undressed the mythical clothing in which it at the start was covered." However, he continues, even with this strict definition there can be no doubt that Greek philosophers were inspired by oriental teachings. There is no Greek knowledge or science, he claims, that cannot be traced to a predecessor in the Orient and therefore "[e]ven with such a strict concept, these oriental philosophemes would [...] deserve a place in the history of philosophy, at least as a preparation for philosophy proper" (Grubbe 1876, 29–30). Unlike Hammaršköld, Grubbe unambiguously argues for Greek thought's dependence on oriental sources. In fact, he goes even further than this. Ultimately, he considers the strict definition of philosophy as "speculation in a scientific form" to be unsatisfactory. He instead proposes that our attempts to understand the concept of "philosophy" would be more productive if we focussed less on its form and more on its "content and object" (Grubbe 1876, 30). What really defines philosophy is therefore not the way in which it is practiced, but rather the *aim* or *idea* which regulates the practice.

With this understanding oriental teachings have an undeniable place in the history of philosophy. While, unlike their western counterpart, oriental teachings are presented in a mythological-religious form, they are still concerned with the most fundamental questions of philosophy. In fact, according to Grubbe, "in terms of profundity, many of the mythical philosophemes of the Orient surpass many of the Greek systems which generally are considered philosophical" (Grubbe 1876, 30). Compared to Höljer and Hammaršköld, Grubbe therefore clearly assumes a more positive stance towards oriental philosophy. Not only does he consider it the source of Greek thought – he also contends that it rivals Greek thought in terms of philosophical quality.

phy. His lectures on the history of practical philosophy were published posthumously in his collected works (Grubbe 1876). The sections in which he discusses oriental philosophy are however based on his lectures on the history of philosophy he already delivered in the 1810s and 20s (Grubbe n.d.). When sections quoted in this article are included in both versions, I refer to the page number of the printed edition.

On the basis of this viewpoint Grubbe presents his general periodisation of the history of philosophy. Given the understanding of philosophy as closely tied to the human spirit as such, the epochs of philosophy cannot be fundamentally different to the epochs of world history in general, he claims. These are the Asian, classical, medieval and modern epochs, and while all of them have their unique, distinct characteristics, they must be understood as moments in one continuous, organic development regulated by the same striving. "The research of all periods makes out a coherent whole, and no epoch in the history of philosophy must therefore be regarded as separate from the others" (Grubbe n.d., my translation). In this way, Asian philosophy is systematically included in the narrative of the history of philosophy.

This is also the case for Eric August Schröder, Grubbe's colleague at Uppsala from 1836 onwards. Schröder was perhaps the most prolific Swedish historian of philosophy of his time. He lectured on the subject in a continuous series of lectures from autumn 1840 to spring 1844, and also published the second extensive Swedish textbook on the topic, *Handbok i filosofiens historia* (*Handbook of the History of Philosophy*; Schröder 1846).²⁹ In it, we find the by now familiar arguments previously presented by Hammarsköld and Grubbe, notably that oriental thought should be understood as a mixture of reason and mythology, an "immediate Nature-wisdom" founded on religious contemplation. As such it does not "express an all-encompassing unity of reason" and "bear[s] traces of a lack of spiritual freedom." Nonetheless, it is precisely in this mixture of reason and religious contemplation that the origins of philosophy must be identified. The Orient is therefore to be understood, not simply as the birthplace of philosophy, but of culture in general (Schröder 1846, 15).

For Schröder there can be no question that Greek culture was deeply influenced by the Orient. Although Greek polytheism might differ greatly from the oriental worship of nature and even though the "cheerful, bold humour" of the Greeks stand in sharp contrast to "the feeling of lack of freedom, of fearfulness, that more or less prevails in oriental religious systems and forms of culture" (Schröder 1846, 79–80), Greek culture is "permeated with fundamental conceptions which, although they were independently developed by the Greek spirit, undeniably have an oriental origin" (Schröder 1846, 13).

Given Grubbe's and Schröder's lectures and Hammarsköld's and Schröder's textbooks on the topic, it is clear that by the mid-19th century, the idea of philosophy's oriental origins had come to dominate Swedish philosophy.

²⁹ Schröder was still working on the last volume at the time of his death.

4.5 Hegelianism

Around the middle of the 19th century, the dominance of romanticism at Swedish universities had increasingly come to be challenged by Hegelianism. This was above all the case at Lund University where romanticism and phosphorism had been less influential than at Uppsala. Even so, the presence of Hegelianism was also felt at Uppsala where one of its most prominent champions, Fredrik Georg Afzelius, was an adjunct. Even though Afzelius frequently presented lectures on the history of philosophy, in what follows I look closely at one particular manuscript, dated 1866–79,³⁰ which offers a particularly detailed discussion of the topic of philosophy's origins.³¹

The manuscript presents a devout and orthodox Hegelianism. It starts with an account of previous works on the history of philosophy and concludes that Hegel and Aristotle are the only two thinkers who properly understood the concept of this subject. Before Hegel, Afzelius claims, most historians were mere material-gatherers – a task which, though important, should only be regarded as a *preparation* for the true history of philosophy. This true history consists in creating a continuous, organic whole from the given material. Apart from Aristotle and Hegel, no historian of philosophy has managed to grasp this goal, and Hegel therefore “has a fully justified claim as the developer and perfecter of the *scientific foundation* of the treatment of the history of philosophy” (Afzelius 1866–1879).³²

In his discussion of the work of earlier historians of philosophy, Afzelius strongly criticises the notion of an oriental philosophy. He traces its history back to the tradition of *prisca theologia*, which sought the roots of philosophy in divine revelation. This, he argues, led “historical research further astray from the real domains of history” as it gave rise to both “the discovery of so-called oriental philosophy” and to ideas of a “thitherto fully unknown ‘philosophia antediluviana,’ in which one of course expected to find the philosopher’s stone” (Afzelius 1866–1879, 6–7, my translation). Afzelius leaves no room for doubt about his opinion on this view of the history of philosophy: “What has been called oriental philosophy is, in fact, no philosophy at all – and the orient with its so-called philosophy must be *completely excluded from the history of philosophy*” (Afzelius 1866–1879, 190, emphasis by Afzelius).

³⁰ The cover sheet added by the archivist states that the manuscript could possibly date back to 1844/45. In the context of this article, however, the exact date is not of central importance.

³¹ Afzelius also treated the history of philosophy in a number of other writings, both published and unpublished. See, for instance, Afzelius (1846).

³² Afzelius’ judgment of earlier historians is somewhat unfair. Before Hegel, a number of German idealists had already argued for the need of a systematic and organic history of philosophy in contrast to “mere compilations.” On this, see Reinhold (1791, 32) and Tennemann (1798, lxi).

His standpoint is supported by an argument that unfolds in two steps. Firstly, he presents a Hegelian theory on the condition of possibility for philosophy according to which philosophy only occurs when and where world Spirit returns to itself from its state of otherness. To be able to philosophise, “Spirit must be *free*, detached from its immediate naturality, its state of being-determined by nature in general” (Afzelius 1866–1879, 189). But since this freedom is only reached *after* the state of immediate naturality, determinedness, or otherness, the history of philosophy cannot begin at the same point as world history in general.

Secondly, Afzelius attempts to prove that oriental culture must be understood precisely as the stage in which Spirit finds itself determined by another. Thus, oriental culture is described in terms of despotic political rule in which only the patriarchal ruler is free. All other individuality, freedom and subjectivity is subsumed under this ruler so that the principle of oriental culture is therefore one of absolutism, or of “the One substance.” Oriental individuals therefore do not possess the power of self-determination, or indeed self-consciousness:

Oriental consciousness is thus not self-consciousness, but consciousness of another that is alien to self-consciousness and rules over it.

This other is the One substance, which constitutes the absolute, the all-in-all, the infinite. (Afzelius 1866–1879, 190)

With this argument, Afzelius does not only aim to show that there is no oriental philosophy but to prove that the very concept of oriental philosophy is a contradiction in terms. It is worth noting, though, that Afzelius’ highly negative description of the Orient is not in itself new to Swedish historiography of philosophy. On the contrary, the view of the Orient as despotic and absolutist is rather similar to Höijer’s and Schröder’s. In addition, his formal description of the Orient as a state of otherness resembles Höijer’s description of how uncultivated reason finds the foundation of being in a supernatural subject beyond itself. The resulting difference therefore does not lie in the description of the Orient as much as in the philosophical and historiographical conclusions drawn from that characterisation. Unlike earlier Swedish idealists, Afzelius does not consider philosophy to be as old as humanity itself.

Also worth noting is that Afzelius does not claim the independence of Greek philosophy from its oriental predecessors. While there may not be any room for oriental philosophy in Afzelius narrative, in world history, the Orient nonetheless paves the way for the birth of philosophy in Greece. Afzelius could well have agreed with Höijer, Grubbe and Schröder that the root of philosophy lies in superstition and mythology – only with the Hegelian addition that philosophy must be understood as the *negation* of this root.

One may want to question whether Afzelius' arguments and conclusions are consistent with Hegel's historiography, but there can be no doubt that Afzelius himself considers his argument to be fully and consistently Hegelian and that Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy was his main source of inspiration.³³ Afzelius was not the only Swedish philosopher to argue in support of this Hegelian conception of the history of philosophy. At Lund University it gained an even stronger position through the work of Johan Jakob Borelius, professor of theoretical philosophy, 1866–1898. In his more than 30 years as professor, Borelius frequently lectured on the history of philosophy and like Afzelius, claimed that “a philosophical development is absent in the Orient.”³⁴ This standpoint had also been presented by another Lund Hegelian, namely the docent Johan Ernst Rietz (Rietz 1838).³⁵

It is clear that Swedish Hegelians were convinced by Hegel's arguments against the notion of an “oriental philosophy,” and that they made some effort to also convince their compatriots of them. Had the Hegelians managed to rise to dominance in Swedish academic philosophy, the exclusion of the Orient from the history of philosophy would most likely have established itself as the norm. The reason that this did not occur is because the Hegelians were quickly outmanoeuvred by another school of thought, the Boströmians.

4.6 Boströmianism

Christopher Jacob Boström studied philosophy at Uppsala University under Biberg and Grubbe before he became professor of practical philosophy there in 1842.³⁶ Boström's predecessors had generally advocated a rather eclectic form of romantic philosophy with influences from both Schelling and Jacobi. But Boström clearly had a different approach and formulated his own rationalist-idealist philosophical system. With Boström, then, Swedish philosophy developed in a direction

³³ Compare Hegel's discussion on the “Commencement of philosophy and its history” (Hegel 1995, 94–99) and oriental philosophy (Hegel 1995, 117–147). See also the chapter on “The Oriental world” in Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (Hegel 2007, 111–224).

³⁴ See Borelius' lecture diary for October 1883 ('Föreläsningsdiarier och studentförteckningar Lunds universitet', n.d.).

³⁵ One of Borelius' former students, the docent Sven Wägner, would also publish a Swedish textbook on the history of philosophy titled *Filosofiens historia i sammandrag*. Though not a Hegelian himself, Wägner appears to have been influenced by the narrative presented by his former teacher. He does discuss ancient Chinese, Indian, Persian and Egyptian teachings, but concludes that neither of them “develop[ed] into philosophy in the real sense” (Wägner 1914, 7). Borelius clearly appreciated the work of Wägner. In the curriculum of 1888, it is listed as literature for Borelius' course on the history of philosophy (Akademiska föreningen 1888, 35).

³⁶ Boström occupied the professorial chair as deputy professor from the autumn of 1840 onwards.

which was somewhat independent from Germany. Although there can be no doubt that Boström was inspired by German idealist philosophy – perhaps above all by Schelling's philosophy of identity³⁷ – Boström believed that his own system went beyond all previous philosophies.³⁸

Central to Boström's thought is the concept of *personality*. For Boström, the highest personality is God or the Absolute, of which all other beings are limited expressions. Personalities therefore form a hierarchical system, but are at the same time all included in the highest personality. This highest personality is above the world of phenomena, and therefore independent of both time and space.³⁹

Boström's philosophy was highly influential at Swedish universities. From Sigurd Ribbing's appointment in 1849 to the end of the century, both professorial chairs in philosophy at Uppsala University were occupied by his followers. The dominance at Lund was less decisive, mainly because of Borelius' appointment in 1866. This meant that the Hegelian narrative about the history of philosophy exercised a more significant influence there. That said, Lund, too, had a number of prominent Boströmian professors and despite Borelius' criticism of the Boströmian system, neither he nor the other Hegelians managed to fundamentally challenge the dominance of Boströmianism at Swedish universities.⁴⁰

Compared to earlier professors at Uppsala, Boström did not devote many of his lectures to the history of philosophy. He taught the subject in 1840–41 but after that focused more on his own systems of ethics, philosophy of religion and philosophy of right. But this does not mean that the history of philosophy had become less important in academic philosophy. Rather, it indicates that the Boströmiens, being a distinct school with a large number of followers, could also develop a certain division of labour. For instance, the history of philosophy was frequently named as topic in the lectures of Ribbing, Boström's colleague and devout follower in the chair of theoretical philosophy. Private lessons on the history of philosophy were also offered every semester by docent Pontus Wikner, and from time to time by Erik Olof Burman. At Lund, the subject was often taught by the Boströmian Johan Herman Leander.

This means that the Boströmiens' teachings on the history of philosophy are not necessarily identical with the lectures Boström himself presented on the topic.

³⁷ Other influences that Boström and his followers tended to emphasise were Plato and Leibniz.

³⁸ The idea of Boström as the culmination of idealism was also presented by his follower Axel Nyblaeus in his overview of Swedish philosophy (Nyblaeus 1886).

³⁹ For more substantial introductions to Boström's philosophical system, see Nordin (1981) and Liedman (1991).

⁴⁰ A rather infamous confrontation between Borelius and Boström which occurred before Borelius gained his professorial chair is described by Nordin (1981).

In fact, the standardised text on which the Boströmiens based their lectures was not written by Boström, but by Ribbing. That text is the compendium *Grundlinier till filosofiens historia* (*Outline of the History of Philosophy*, Ribbing 1864), which is listed as course literature in the curricula at both Uppsala and Lund.⁴¹ It is clear that this compendium also formed the basis of the lessons by Wikner, Burman and Leander; the available manuscripts based on their respective lectures all follow the same structure and contain only small differences in content. The following overview is based mainly on these sources, but also on manuscripts of the lectures by Boström himself (Boström 1883, n.d.).

The lecture manuscripts generally begin by offering a definition of philosophy as the science of the Absolute and the dependence of the relative thereupon (Ribbing 1864, 5; Leander n.d.; E. O. Burman 1884, 219). This is followed by a brief discussion of the nature of philosophy's history and a summary of the main historical forms of philosophy presented as a series of dual oppositions (realism and idealism, empiricism and rationalism et cetera). Finally, the main epochs of the history of philosophy are enumerated before the manuscripts continue to the actual historical exposition.

Regarding the structure and logic of the history of philosophy, the Boströmiens are critical of Hegel. In his posthumously published lectures, Hegel had claimed that the historical development of philosophy follows the same basic structure as the logical development of thought.⁴² The Boströmiens rejected this claim. For Pontus Wikner, for example, history belongs to the sphere of freedom and thus does not follow general rules that can be identified in advance (Wikner 1869, 12). Despite this stance, the Boströmiens nonetheless ended up with a highly schematic description of how philosophy develops historically. Wikner and Leander both identify a pattern of progress, culmination, and regress, each epoch belonging to one of these movements (Wikner 1869; Leander n.d.). The tripartite structure is thus the main organising principle for their historiography.⁴³

Additionally, all Boströmiens follow the same periodisation. As a first division, they distinguish between pagan and Christian thought. The first is further divided into three sub-periods: eastern thought or orientalism, Greek thought (sometimes referred to as "western thought"), and Alexandrine thought.⁴⁴ Following from the

⁴¹ The student manuals emphasise, however, that this text is not suited for individual study but should rather be used in combination with oral lessons. The more extensive *Kollegium i filosofiens historia* by Wikner as well as an unprinted manuscript by Burman of which students circulated transcriptions, are also mentioned in Uppsala's student handbook of 1887.

⁴² Hegel's statement has been discussed by multiple scholars such as Fulda (2007) and Nuzzo (2003).

⁴³ Wikner and Leander further elaborate on the structure proposed by Ribbing, who distinguishes between progress and regress but does not present a third concept of culmination (Ribbing 1864, 9–10).

⁴⁴ I have only found one exception to the inclusion of oriental philosophy as a distinct epoch, namely

development scheme, orientalism is then characterised as a period of progress, classical Greek thought as the culmination, and Alexandrine thought as a regress. But despite Greek philosophy being referred to as a culmination, in practice it was often characterised as a *negation* of orientalism. Wikner writes:

Eastern and Western education (*bildning*) differ in that a) the Eastern is *purely naturalistic*, whereas the Western admittedly is naturalistic to a certain degree, but not purely: it is *anthropomorphic*. b) the Eastern is *directed towards unity*, so that diversity is suppressed, whereas the Western is *directed towards diversity*, so that unity is suppressed. From this it follows that Eastern education is more monotheistic, Western is more *polytheistic*. Furthermore, it follows that Eastern education is almost purely pantheistic, whereas Western education has the virtue of being able to grasp the divine in a more concrete manner. c) Eastern education is, at its peak, *religious doctrine*, whereas Western education rises to speculation. (Wikner 1869, my translation)

Implicitly, this opposition points towards the need for a higher unity. In fact, earlier in the manuscript Wikner defines system as “unity in difference” – in other words, unity of the tendencies of oriental and western thought.

This is indeed the way the Boströmiens understood their own epoch. Boström himself, in the notes from his lectures written by Gustaf Wilhelm Gellerstedt, describes the current age as “[t]he period of universality,” whose character consists in “harmonious unity of the previous opposites [i.e. the eastern and western epochs]” (Boström n.d., my translation).⁴⁵ Thus, the history of philosophy ends up following a type of dialectical development culminating in the unity of oriental and European philosophy. In this regard, the Boströmian schema of the history of philosophy bears a close resemblance to the narrative proposed by Ast and Rixner, as well as the Swedish romantics.

Despite this systematic inclusion of the Orient in the narrative, Boström remains rather ambiguous on the question of the philosophical value of oriental thought. In the short manuscript *Schema af philosophiens historia* (*Scheme of the History of Philosophy*),⁴⁶ he refers to “oriental thought” but to “Greek philosophy”,

Wikner (1867, 26). However, Wikner here describes neo-Platonism as an attempt to unite Greek philosophy and “oriental (natural, mystical) elements”.

⁴⁵ The manuscript, which predates Ribbing’s *Grundlinier*, follows a somewhat different periodisation than the one the Boströmiens would later use. Three main periods are mentioned: the period of unity (or the period of oriental, Asian and ancient European [*forneuropeisk*] education), the period of particularity (or of European education) and the period of universality.

⁴⁶ The manuscript exists in several handwritten transcripts and is also included in Boström’s collected

thereby implying that the oriental period did not reach the stage of true philosophy (Boström 1883, my translation and emphasis).⁴⁷ And on the question of how the Orientals influenced Greek culture and education, his standpoint is closely related to that of Meiners and Boëthius. Discussing the “reason for the emergence [of classical Greek philosophy]”, he writes: “Perhaps from the Orient? No, for it has a wholly different tendency. Whereas orientalism is supported by divine authority and is more symbolic-allegorical, the doctrine of the Greeks is more humane and atheist” (Boström n.d.).

Nonetheless, this independency of Greek thought from oriental influence does not lead Boström to exclude the oriental epoch from his general narrative. On this issue, his position differs from German historians on both sides of the orientalism-debate in the historiography of philosophy. While the Boströmiens do not without reservation share the romantics’ positive view of the Orient, they follow the romantics in systematically including the Orient in the general narrative.

5 Discussion

Among German historians of philosophy, the idea of philosophy’s Greek origins was relatively widespread in the 19th century, but it was not unanimously accepted. Rather, it was repeatedly challenged and criticised from a multitude of perspectives. However, as I argued in the introduction to this article, German 19th-century historians broke away from earlier narratives in another important respect, namely they rejected the concept of barbarian philosophy and replaced it with the concept of oriental or eastern philosophy. This conceptual displacement appears to have occurred quickly and with little or no debate. Nonetheless, it would fundamentally reshape the view of the history of philosophy in both Germany and in Sweden.

Swedish philosophers of the 19th century were without doubt much influenced by their German counterparts. Philosophical debates in Sweden frequently refer to the latest developments in Germany and it was therefore crucial for Swedish professors to follow German publications closely.

The same is true of the historiography of philosophy from Boëthius onwards.

works. However, the form of this manuscript indicates that it was in fact written down by Ribbing. As the intellectual historian Sven-Eric Liedman has shown, Ribbing attended most of Boström’s lectures during the 1840s and edited them into manuscripts with a distinct structure. This structure, which Liedman describes as a taxonomy or catechism, was then circulated among and transcribed by students (Liedman, 165–166).

⁴⁷ Similarly, Wikner refers to “Oriental religious opinions” but to “Greek religious-philosophical education” (Wikner 1896).

Boëthius raised interest in this field precisely by introducing a German debate to the Swedish audience and after that, all Swedish historians of philosophy show a high degree of familiarity with the state of their subject in German-speaking Europe. They read Fülleborn, Tiedemann, Tennemann, Ast and Hegel and imported the methodological and theoretical concepts of these thinkers.

Swedish philosophers were also aware of the German debates on the origins of philosophy. These debates are explicitly discussed in a number of Swedish manuscripts, and implicit references are made to them in an even greater number of writings. But Swedish philosophers did not regard the question as already decided. Rather, the idea of philosophy's Greek origin was considered only one of multiple possible explanations. As I have demonstrated, Swedish philosophers generally ended up rejecting this narrative so that after Boëthius, only devout Hegelians continued to defend it.

What is universally accepted by Swedish philosophers is, instead, the distinction between oriental and occidental philosophy. Unlike the question of philosophy's origins, the distinction between Orient and Occident is never questioned or discussed; it is taken for granted and marks an analytical premise rather than a subject of examination. By way of conclusion, I briefly turn to the meaning of this distinction and summarise the ways in which it was deployed as a principle of historical periodisation.

5.1 The Concept of Oriental Philosophy

The general understanding of oriental philosophy displays remarkable stability throughout the 19th century Swedish historiography of philosophy. Characterisations by Höijer in 1795 are repeated with no notable revisions by Ribbing and Wikner a hundred years later. The most important aspects of this understanding can be summarised as follows. Firstly, oriental thought is not characterised by the free use of reason but rather by a reason subsumed under mythology and superstition. In the Orient, there is thus no clear distinction between philosophy and religion. We have already seen, for example, how Höijer considers superstition "the first seed of all philosophy". Secondly and as a consequence, philosophy is not considered a *public* matter in the Orient but is practiced only by a minority of priests and rulers, firmly kept away from the wider body of citizens. Thus, Schröder considers a certain "lack of freedom" as characteristic of oriental thought – a lack of freedom frequently also contrasted with Greek culture by philosophers such as Höijer and Hammarsköld. Thirdly, all oriental thought has a pantheistic tendency. In the Orient, there is a lack of distinctions, be it between matter and spirit, God and world, or the temporal and eternal

It should be noted that all three main characteristics of oriental philosophy can be evaluated in a number of different ways. On the one hand, the fundamental unity of oriental thought is often praised since such unity is, after all, also the goal of idealist system philosophy. On the other hand, the same unity can be criticised for lacking inner distinctions, for being undeveloped; it is not yet the “unity-in-difference” that according to the Boströmians characterises the true philosophical system.

When it comes to the relation between philosophy and religion in the Orient, interpretations follow a clear line of conflict between idealism and romanticism. For the idealist Höijer, philosophy must free itself from its religious chains – only through the distinction between philosophy and religion can reason start to examine its own laws and principles. For the romantics, on the other hand, the unity between philosophy and religion is instead a lost ideal that the contemporary era must strive to re-establish. Boströmians took a somewhat more ambiguous stance, but generally repeated the romantic idea of the need for a unity of western and eastern thought.

An additional debate concerned the influence of Orientals on the Greeks. Here, the line of conflict is somewhat more difficult to discern. Höijer describes the Greeks as clearly influenced by the Orientals; it was from the east that they received the material for their own thought. Grubbe argues the same position in even stronger terms. Boström, on the other hand, shared Meiners' view that the Greeks developed their thinking independently of any external influence. As we have seen, however, this does not lead Boström to exclude the Orient from his historical periodisation. On the other side of the spectrum, we find Afzelius, who does indeed exclude the Orient from the history of philosophy but without denying its influence on ancient Greek culture. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there was also the debate about whether or not oriental thought is to be considered true philosophy. Boëthius was the first Swedish philosopher to take a clear stance in this debate: without reservations, he supported Meiners' rejection of the concept of an oriental philosophy. Afzelius reached the same conclusion with reference to Hegel rather than Meiners.

Grubbe is of a different opinion. He concedes that in a strict sense philosophy can only refer to reason independent of religion. However, he argues, even when we use such a definition must oriental thought be considered an important part of the development of philosophy. Furthermore, he prefers a wider concept of philosophy which does not emphasise the distinction from religion. If we use such a definition, oriental thought has an obvious and natural place in the history of philosophy. Finally, he argues, regardless of which definition we choose, oriental myths and stories have an unquestionable philosophical value.

Among 19th-century Swedish philosophers Grubbe stands out as the one most sympathetic to oriental philosophy. Boström and his followers have a more ambiguous stance regarding the question of whether oriental culture is truly philosophical. In their manuscripts, they generally refer to the epoch of “oriental forms of education” rather than oriental philosophy. At first glance, this stance may seem closely related to that of Tennemann and Hegel. The important difference is that, unlike the Boströmiens, neither Tennemann nor Hegel raised oriental thought to the status of epoch in the history of philosophy.

5.2 Conclusion

In this article, I attempted to offer a general overview of how the category of oriental philosophy was treated in Swedish histories of philosophy during the 19th century. It is clear that opinions on the Orient and the philosophical value of oriental cultures greatly varied among Swedish academic philosophers. But for all their differences, Swedish philosophers generally agreed on the usefulness of “orientalism” as a concept of periodisation in the history of philosophy. I would argue that this concept is crucial for understanding the development of historiography of philosophy during this period. Furthermore, I believe that this usefulness likely extends beyond the Swedish context and may, for example, also be fruitfully applied to analyses of developments in Germany.

This article mainly examined *how* Swedish historians of philosophy defined and discussed oriental thought. A further question which deserves attention is *where* they acquired their understanding of the Orient *from*. While this question cannot be exhaustively answered here, it can be noted that oriental studies was an expanding field of research during the 19th century. The works of oriental philologists, anthropologists and general historians were a main source of knowledge for historians of philosophy. However, further empirical studies on transfers of knowledge between orientalist and historians of philosophy are needed.

Regardless of its sources, however, the concept of “oriental thought” appears as a new category of periodisation in the 19th century. As I argued here, the idea about oriental philosophy marks a conceptual shift: it gained ground at the expense of the older concept of barbarian philosophy and ultimately replaced that concept altogether. What is at stake in 19th-century historiography of philosophy is therefore a geographical reorganisation of philosophy's past, and this reorganisation fundamentally altered the conditions under which the origins of philosophy were discussed. As we proceed to rethink philosophy's history in global perspectives, it is of crucial importance that we historicise and critically re-examine these conditions.

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