

Professor Gouguenheim's falsification of history

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In March 2008, the prestigious Paris publisher Éditions du Seuil brought out a book by Sylvain Gouguenheim (henceforth SG) entitled *Aristote au Mont Saint-Michel. Les racines grecques de l'Europe chrétienne* (henceforth AMM). The now 49-year old SG has impressive credentials: he is professor of medieval history at the École Normale Supérieure of Lyon and the author of several books. His next book, we are told, will be about the crusades. The present review is directed at AMM, which has provoked an unusual amount of publicity. It was vigorously promoted by the media, in particular the newspapers *Le Monde* and the *Herald Tribune*, and has accordingly won wide acclaim and popularity, while at the same time provoking fierce controversies, especially on the internet, where a veritable hype has developed over the past couple of years—unusual for books written by historians.

In this review I will take SG to task for his falsification of history and for his doing so for morally objectionable purposes. This is an angry review and I apologise for that. Yet it has to be angry because the book in question is not a scholarly exercise produced by a professional, but rather a piece of political propaganda intended to provide those politicians and politically active citizens who promote anti-Islam and anti-Arabic racism with 'scholarly' authority. In my judgement, this is scandalous and dangerous, not only because it violates the professional ethics of academia but also, and mostly, because it promotes hatred rather than harmony and conflict rather than peace, in a public area where harmony and peace are the only possible guarantee for a livable future for ourselves and for our children.

The main thesis of the book is quickly summarised. SG tries to persuade his readers (a) that there is a "filière grecque", a 'Greek lead', from the classical Greek city democracies to our modern democratic states and from Aristotle to modern Western culture, with Christianity popping in as a *Deus ex machina*, (b) that this specific Greek lead, dipped in a Christian sauce, is the only determinant of modern European culture, and (c) that Arabic (Muslim) culture contributed nothing. It couldn't, because it had nothing original to contribute as whatever it could offer was of Indian or Persian, but above all of Greek origin. But even that foreign heritage was not passed on to Europe by the Arabs, because Europe already had it directly from the Greeks. What happened to the Indian and Persian heritage (such as the invention of the zero as an arithmetical position indicator)

is either left obscure or dismissed in an off-hand way.

This thesis is so blatantly biased and so patently wrong that a stern and loud rebuke is called for. The more so because the reactions that have appeared so far have not revealed the full malice of AMM. There have, of course, been critical reactions. A book has appeared in the meantime, intended to counteract the internet hype and put together by renowned specialists in the fields covered by SG. The book, edited by Philippe Büttgen, Alain de Libera, Marwan Rashed and Irène Rosier-Catach, is entitled *Les Grecs, les Arabes et nous. Enquête sur l'islamophobie savante*, published by Fayard, Paris, in 2009—henceforth GAN. (For some idea of the internet hype around SG's book, see Irène Rosier-Catach, 'Qui connaît Jacques de Venise?', GAN: 22–47.) Various other publications, some of which are referred to below, have seen the light, mostly by conscientious professional historians who became indignant at SG's falsifications of historical truth. Special mention must be made of an article published on the internet by prof. Charles Burnett of the renowned Warburg Institute in London, entitled 'Mont Saint-Michel or Toledo: Greek or Arabic Sources for medieval European Culture?' It is found at the following site:

<http://www.muslimheritage.com/topics/default.cfm?ArticleID=1083>.

This lengthy and extremely well-researched and scholarly article, by a top specialist in the field of Muslim and Arabic heritage in Europe, shows up many inaccuracies, blunders and falsifications in AMM and is thus refreshing reading after the degrading experience of having to work one's way through AMM.

Even so, all the critical reactions I have seen fall short, it seems to me, in that they fail to reveal what I would like to call the *garden path strategy* of SG. It consists in taking his readers up a small and totally unrepresentative sidepath through history while making them believe that this narrow sidepath is the highway of history. The enormous contributions made by Muslim mathematicians in the context of Arabic culture, in particular by the great ninth-century Beyruth mathematician and scientist, Mohamed Ibn-Mū sa al-Khuā rizmi, who invented the notion of algorithm (named after him)—the basis of modern computer science—and who wrote the first book on algebra, the word *algebra* being taken from the title of his book *Kitab al-Jabr*, are not even mentioned, let alone elaborated. The role of Rome in the modification and augmentation of Greek culture and its transmission to the Christian West has been totally written out of the script of history—clearly because the Roman contribution only complicates SG's simplistic picture of a Europe that owes everything to the Greeks, or, more precisely, to Aristotle, and nothing to the Arabs.

A man who writes such a book does not deserve the title of historian, despite his academic title. His book, AMM, would not be worth mentioning were it not for the fact that it has received so much undeserved publicity. In reality, SG is an extreme right-wing political activist grandstanding as an authoritative historian but in fact abusing history for the purpose of political agitation against Islam and anything Arabic. His reasons have

nothing to do with a serious assessment of the historical past but everything with present-day politics and the widespread attempts by right-wing politicians across Europe and America to depict Islam as culturally and intellectually inferior and to put the Arab world down as a hotbed of terrorism. He seems to consider it his task to provide a historical legitimation for this culturally arrogant but in fact totally ignorant attitude and he does so not only by sly distortions, by suppressing essential facts and by persistently formulating ‘conclusions’ that do not follow from his premisses, but also by straightforward falsification of the available evidence.

As I have said, SG claims that European culture owes nothing to Arabic civilisation. In fact, he claims (AMM: 198–199):

Il est fort probable que ... l'Europe aurait suivi un chemin identique même en l'absence de tout lien avec le monde islamique.

And why should this be so? Because medieval Europe acquired adequate knowledge of Aristotle's texts (note the garden path strategy) not via the Arab world but directly from the Greek sources—whereby he conveniently forgets to mention (a) that Aristotle is only one of many determinants of Western culture as a whole and (b) that modern Western civilisation would be unthinkable without the contributions made by Muslim mathematicians and scientists. Oh yes, he does mention mathematics, the physical sciences and medicine every now and then, but in a miserably inadequate and distorted manner and sometimes even just untruthfully. Not a word, for example, on the absolutely crucial role of Al-Khuā rizmi, mentioned above. Hardly a word on the twelfth-century European, mostly English, Arabists who translated his works, visited the Near East and Spain, and laid the foundations for modern Western mathematics. Not to mention SG's underplaying of Arabic and his inordinate eulogising of Greek medicine.

Throughout, the reader is drowned in bibliographical references intended to create the impression of serious scholarship, but no references are given where it counts. Throughout also, everything Islamic is debunked, while medieval Europe and its Christian tradition are glorified and presented in the idyllic terms of an ideal and absolutely peaceful philhellenic Eden where justice reigned supreme and everybody was happy and eager to study Aristotle under the benign aegis of the Catholic Church. Graeco-Judaeo-Christian culture is civilisation, while Muslim culture is barbarism, or so SG wants to make us believe.

Let us have a closer look. SG starts out by trying to convince his readers that present-day historical studies are dominated by the urge to put forward Arabo-Muslim civilisation as the one and only link between the ancient Greek world and modern western Europe. To support this thesis, which is in itself a serious falsification of modern historiography, he adds an Annex, at the end of the book (AMM: 203–6), about the Nazi ‘historian’ Sigrid Hunke (1913–1999), a rabid but irrelevant champion of the view that everything Jewish and Christian is bad and everything Arabic is good. SG calls her “a

friend of Himmler's" and admonishes his readers that "en matière de science historique" it is "les faits et les sources" that count and not "les opinions politiques" (AMM: 204). Quite so, of course, but how about SG himself?

He also gets excited over the fact that, in 2002, the Council of Europe published a report by Luís María de Puig, socialist and then member of the Culture, Science and Education Committee of the Council of Europe, advising the schools to pay adequate attention to the Arabo-Muslim influences in European civilisation and warning against caricature versions of Islam (such as presented in AMM). One should note that the Council of Europe has no powers in respect of what is taught in the schools and can only invite those concerned to reflect on its advice. Here SG comments (AMM: 261):

Bizarrement, après que le monde occidental a été la cible d'un acte de guerre, il devient urgent d'enseigner que ceux qui l'ont commis sont les tenants d'une religion pacifique, et de rappeler que l'Occident lui-même fut violent. Qui cherche-t-on ainsi à dissuader?

It is ironical, to say the least, to see a man who is himself guilty of the crudest possible political bias defend the standards of good independent scholarship. One would say that, in view of SG's extremist attitudes, an admonition to remain level-headed and to retain a proper balance in one's judgements should be heeded by all.

In actual fact, the importance of the Greek and Roman heritage in the sciences and the arts had been exaggerated for so long that it was refreshing to see, during the last few decades of the 20th century, the reaction of those who brought the enormous contributions due to Arabo-Muslim civilisation to the attention of the general public and did so without any political bias. But SG will have none of that. For him, everything alleged to have been contributed by Arabo-Muslim culture was (a) of bad quality, (b) not Arabo-Muslim but taken over from the Greeks, the Persians or the Hindus, and (c) not important. He derides the view that between, say, 750 and 1100 places like Baghdad, Cordoba or Cairo were flourishing centres of culture and science: they couldn't be because Islam is repressive by definition and the Arabic language is unfit for the expression of refined, abstract ideas.

I will say more in a moment about SG's idiotic views on language. Right now I will focus on the alleged repressive nature of Islam. It is important to realise that, both in the East and in the West, it was common for rulers to demand religious and ideological submission. In fact, early Islam was comparatively liberal in this respect, as Christians and Jews were not forced to convert and liberal philosophers such as Al-Farabi (ca 872–950), Al-Razi (d. 925) or Averroës (Ibn Rushd, 1126–1198), who advocated the superiority of reason over faith, were still allowed to write and publish, though not without peril and harrassment. Thus, Averroës' books were later burnt by both Arabs and Christians. But then, on the other side of the fence, sometimes horrible crimes against freedom of thought and speech, committed by both secular and ecclesiastical authorities, were the order of the day. One only has to think of the 'holy' Inquisition. In this context, one

medieval example stands out. The Frenchman Abelard (1079–1142), who pressed for a rational investigation of the nature of God and thus tried to make rational sense of the Trinity ('one nature, three persons'), was immediately thwarted by the Holy Church, which excommunicated him twice, deprived him of a livelihood and tried its level best to erase his intellectual legacy. He died a miserable death at Cluny, where his last remaining friend, the abbot Peter the Venerable, had given him shelter and a place to die.

Absolutist wrongs, even atrocities, were committed on both sides, by popes, kings, emperors, caliphs and emirs alike, and not only during the Middle Ages but way beyond (see, in particular, the short but brilliant piece "Deux poids, deux mesures" by Luca Bianchi, GAN: 48–51).

As from 1100, and perhaps earlier, both the Eastern and the Western intellectual worlds laboured under the dilemma of free thought versus forcibly imposed dogmatism. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that the free-thought movement started in the Arabo-Muslim world, which came into contact with the free thinkers of Ancient Greece, in particular Aristotle, well before the West did. But be that as it may, it is clear beyond doubt, and also generally recognised, that by the beginning of the twelfth century the issue was in the forefront of debate in both East and West. During the first half of the twelfth century, Abelard was defeated by the obscurantist Bernard of Clairvaux, who colluded with the Pope and managed to have rational investigation of the nature of God declared anathema. By that time, the prevailing attitude among Islamic religious authorities was the same: rational questions about the Almighty were unworthy of Him and thus, in principle, blasphemous. (The difference with the Catholic Church was that tolerance of deviant opinions was much greater in Islam than in Rome.) By the late thirteenth century, the Church of Rome, until then mainly guided by the mystic theology of St. Augustine, gradually changed its position, forced by an unstoppable rationalism that was strongly supported, first by Abelard, who was defeated, and then by St. Thomas Aquinas, who, one hundred and fifty years later, came out as a winner. In the end, the Church did allow for rational theology in Abelard's spirit, though Abelard was never rehabilitated. By contrast, official Islam theology persevered in its mystic, antirational stance and has continued to do so till the present day.

Although this might somehow play into SG's hand, he fumbles the issue. First we read (AMM: 68):

La théologie connaît notamment un profond bouleversement. Elle quitte le monde des cloîtres, de cette méditation raisonnée à partir des données de l'Écriture, pour s'épanouir dans une théologie spéculative.

This statement is enigmatic, not only because it is unclear what is meant by "theology leaving the world of the cloisters" but also, notably, because what happened was precisely the opposite: theology (still safely ensconced within the cloister walls) turned from being speculative to being more rational, as SG himself acknowledges in the immediately

following text (AMM: 68):

Une forme de pensée originale se développe: une théologie rationaliste, très éloignée de celle pratiquée à Byzance et dans tout l'Orient chrétien. On cherche à donner à la raison humaine les moyens de s'élever jusqu'aux mystères de la foi. Si elle n'est pas une science, la théologie est une pensée et elle représente un effort d'investigation rationnelle des mystères de la foi et de la divinité; en cela, d'ailleurs, elle semble être propre au monde chrétien.

But apart from the question of the touchability or untouchability of God through rational thought, it is well known that intellectual life flourished under early Islam. The caliphs of Baghdad, Cairo and Cordoba provided their cities with the richest libraries in the world. By the year 900, Baghdad boasted 100 public libraries and the central Cairo library possessed about 1,600,000 volumes—incredible numbers given the relatively small population. Islamic scholars were expected to be associated with the central Mosque. In the West, scholars had to be clerics. On both sides, they had to be seen to practise religion. Those Islamic scholars who dealt with grammar and language were closely observed and enjoyed little freedom, as their discipline touched directly on the Holy Book and the purity of its text. This is why the study of Arabic grammar lagged behind that of Latin grammar in the West—though the great impetus in the West came late, put into motion by the 16th-century Spaniard Sanctius, a Jew forcibly converted to the Christian faith and steeped as much in the European as in the Arab ways of studying grammar.

But despite the religious cloud hanging over all intellectual work in both East and West, the Muslim mathematicians, scientists and doctors enjoyed greater freedom, no doubt because their work did not pose an immediate ideological threat and was obviously of great practical use. Since, moreover, the Arabs had immediate access to the rich and ancient Oriental tradition in mathematics and the practical sciences and could even, with some justification, regard themselves as forming part of it, it is not surprising that their achievements in these fields were outstanding and far exceeded those of the not very mathematically or scientifically minded Greeks. (One should not forget that Greek progress in these fields started in North Africa and Sicily during the Hellenistic period, after Greek culture had been exposed to powerful influences from India and Persia.) It is, therefore, easily understandable that medieval scholars in the West were especially allured by the Arabo-Muslim achievements in these fields of study.

This is, however, not the picture sketched by SG, who insists that the West was as enlightened as could be, always anxious to learn from the Greeks, especially Aristotle, and able to pursue the quest for knowledge and wisdom in complete freedom, stimulated by a benign ecclesiastical power structure whose only aim was to promote culture, science and civilisation. For SG, the Christian West was the guarantor of free thought, while Islam was its suppressor (AMM: 200):

Durant le Moyen Âge, deux civilisations se firent donc face. L'une combinait l'héritage grec et le message des Évangiles, l'esprit scientifique et l'enracinement dans une tradition religieuse dont l'Église se voulait garante. L'autre était fille du Livre de Dieu, du Livre incréé. Elle était fondamentalement amarrée à son axe central, le Coran: tout ce qui se déroule dans le temps reconduit à la matrice originelle des sourates éternelles.

How wrong can one be! Even a superficial inspection of Western history reveals the systematic suppression by the Church of learning and urbanisation, the necessary prerequisite to culture and emancipation. One only has to think of the Papal State, which, at its dissolution in 1870, had chalked up 98 per cent illiteracy (as against just over 70 per cent in the whole of Italy), according to a nationwide census held in the early 1870s (Tullio de Mauro, *Storia Linguistica dell'Italia Unita*, 1963).

Let me mention one example of how SG goes about biasing historical evidence. On p. 37, SG quotes from a letter written in the year 1000 by the German king and Holy Roman emperor Otto III, then 20 years old (he would die two years later) and son of Otto II and the Byzantine princess Theophanō, to Pope Sylvester II (Gerbert of Aurillac), his former tutor and installed by him on the papal throne in 999, as part of his effort to submit the papacy to his own authority. SG does not mention these details: all he says is that “L’impulsion [to the acquisition of Greek culture] est venue des élites princières, comme le montre la lettre adressée à Gerbert [identity unexplained] par Otton III—fils d’une princesse byzantine.” This is the text in question:

Aussi nous vous prions humblement de bien vouloir approcher de notre modeste foyer la flamme de votre intelligence et de cultiver en nous le vivace génie des Grecs, de nous enseigner le livre de l’arithmétique, afin qu’instruits par ces enseignements nous puissions comprendre quelque chose de la subtilité des anciens.

An uncluttered reading of this passage shows something quite different from what SG wants us to read in it. For SG, this passage shows the urge felt by the young Otto to absorb Greek culture, but, in fact, Otto asks for two things, (a) that Gerbert cultivates “en nous le vivace génie des Grecs” and (b) that he teaches “le livre de l’arithmétique.” Both forms of teaching should then enable Otto to “comprendre quelque chose de la subtilité des anciens,” whereby “les anciens” is to be read as referring to the great thinkers of the past, whether Greek or Arabic or whatever. Otto’s reference to “le livre de l’arithmétique” makes no sense in the context of ancient Greek culture: it would be like praising France for the beauty of Venice! What Otto meant was most probably the famous book *Kitab al Jabr* by Al-Khuārizmi, though it is also possible that the boy’s reference was erratic and that he merely referred to arithmetic as the great achievement of Arabo-Muslim culture.

Moreover, nothing shows that Otto III’s court did indeed give the “impulse” attributed to it. And SG silently passes over the fact that what Otto called “Greek” had little to do with Greek culture as it existed in the classical democratic city-states and

everything to do with what Otto perceived as ‘Greek’, namely Byzantine culture (a heady mixture of ancient Greek, Persiana, hellenistic, Roman and Christian culture) and the Byzantine power structure where the emperor dominated religion much more than in the Western world. It is not necessary at all to see Otto’s plea for a cultivation of the “vivace génie des Grecs” as the expression of a desire to absorb ancient Greek culture. It is much more likely that he made a general reference to the vast amount of scholarly texts written in Greek from the beginning to his own day, juxtaposing that to the mathematical achievements borrowed from Arabo-Muslim culture. Needless to say, such finesse is lost on SG.

Time and again, closer examination shows that SG writes without sufficient knowledge. Thus, SG maintains that the Arabic language is, as a language, unfit for the expression of abstract ideas and philosophical subtleties—in itself a remarkable statement coming from a man who knows neither Arabic nor philosophy, nor indeed any linguistics and perhaps only a little Greek (see below). SG’s ‘argument’ is worth quoting in full, as it shows better than anything else the gaping void behind his writing. It is found in a special section called “Systèmes linguistiques et méthodes de pensée: la barrière de la langue.” So here goes (AMM: 136–7):

Dans le cas du transfert du grec à l’arabe, l’une des plus grandes difficultés pour les traducteurs résidait dans le passage d’une langue sémitique à une langue indo-européenne et réciproquement. L’obstacle était plus redoutable que celui de l’absence d’un vocabulaire approprié dans l’une des langues car il oblige à se heurter à la syntaxe et à la morphologie des systèmes linguistiques en présence, eux-mêmes constitutifs de certains schémas mentaux d’expression et de représentation, comme l’a récemment souligné D. Urvoy.^[note] Notamment, dans une langue sémitique, le sens jaillit de l’intérieur des mots, de leurs assonances et de leurs résonances, alors que dans une langue indo-européenne, il viendra d’abord de l’agencement de la phrase, de sa structure grammaticale. Cette distinction s’avérera essentielle pour la philosophie. Ce n’est pas un hasard si, à l’époque précédant l’Islam, la péninsule arabe fut une terre de poètes et de poétesses. Par sa structure, la langue arabe se prête en effet magnifiquement à la poésie: chaque mot y est composé à partir d’une racine de trois consonnes, que l’on peut compléter à l’aide d’autres consonnes et de trois voyelles. Ce système facilite les répétitions de sons, procure des effets d’harmonique, amplifiés par le rythme que produit un système consonantique de fortes et de faibles. La langue arabe est une langue de religion, au sens étymologique du terme: elle relie, et ce d’autant plus que, au système des temps indo-européens (passé/présent/futur), elle oppose celui des aspects (accompli/inaccompli), qui facilite l’arrimage aux origines. En somme, les différences entre les deux systèmes linguistiques sont telles qu’ elle défie presque toute traduction, tant le signifié risque de changer de sens en passant d’une langue à l’autre.

The note attached mentions a book by Dominique Urvoy, who specialises in the

intellectual history of Muslim Spain but not at all in linguistics and who may or may not have produced similar nonsensical statements. The reference to the book is followed by the enigmatic statement: “La grammaire arabe n’a pas été construite à partir de la logique grecque”—as if the grammar of any natural language could possibly be based on any logical system thought up by some philosopher. Of course, the *description* of a grammatical system can be and sometimes is, but clearly, what, if anything, SG’s ‘argument’ is based on is the *system inherent in the language*, not its description in terms of some theory, logical or otherwise. But even that distinction seems to have escaped our moonlighting linguist. (For an article dissecting the linguistic nonsense peddled by SG, see “Langues sémitiques et traduction” by Djamel Eddine Kouloughli, research director at the Paris-based CNRS Laboratoire d’histoire des théories linguistiques, published in GAN: 79–118.)

But that is not all. The text quoted above continues as follows (AMM: 137):

Les contemporains étaient conscients de cette difficulté, comme le montre l’anecdote de la célèbre controverse amicale qui opposa, en 1026, l’évêque de Nisibe et le vizir Abu-l-Qâsim au sujet du statut respectif des sciences, dans l’islam et dans le christianisme. Le prélat argumentait en faisant état de l’insuffisance de la langue arabe pour exprimer des notions abstraites. Certes, son intention était apologétique, il défendait sa culture et son droit à l’existence mais l’argument n’avait pas été choisi au hasard. En faisant porter le débat sur la langue, donc sur les structures mentales qu’elle sous-tend, l’évêque de Nisibe avait mis le doigt sur l’une des différences les plus importantes entre les deux civilisations.

Apart from the inherent nonsense of the argument, Djamel Kouloughli, in the article mentioned above, points out (on p. 94) that this “célèbre controverse” had nothing to do with the opposition between Greek and Semitic languages but everything with that between the two Semitic languages Syriac and Arabic. Syriac had no case endings to mark subject or direct object, whereas classical Arabic had. The bishop maintains that word order is as good a means as case morphology to mark such functions; the vizier maintains that case morphology is superior. Whatever the answer, Greek did have case morphology! So much for “une des différences les plus importantes entre les deux civilisations”. In any case, one sees that SG, once again, makes himself ridiculous by pretending to have specialised knowledge whereas, in fact, all he has is brazen-faced bluff, dangerous bluff, of the kind meant to back up right-wing political agitators with ‘scholarly’ authority.

In a paroxysm of disdain towards Islam, SG, enigmatically, denies the text of the Qur’an the syntactic concatenation processes necessarily and inalienably proper to all texts spoken or written in any language, allowing only for “homophonie, résonance auditive et affective”, which would deprive the Qur’an of its status as a linguistic document (AMM: 193–4):

Une chaîne équivalente, soutenue par la structure de la langue arabe, associe les mots au sein du Coran, non par enchaînement syntaxique, mais par homophonie, résonance auditive et affective.

In short, the accumulation of fantasies, non-sequiturs, misconceptions, equivocations and confusions, combined with the abyss of ignorance regarding matters of language, meaning and thought, and the absence of any reference to a serious treatment of the matters at hand, shows up the intellectually irresponsible and dilettante attitude of this author with regard to his subject matter. Any historian worth his salt, when writing about topics he has insufficient knowledge of, should consult competent colleagues or relevant literature, or both. But SG is not worth his salt as a historian, only, perhaps, as a political agitator, and for those, reliable scholarship is the last thing to worry about.

Further bizarre statements on the translation history of Greek texts into Syriac, from Syriac into Arabic and from Arabic into Latin are legion. Let me quote just one more example, found in AMM: 97–8:

Les Syriaques étaient moins encombrés par ce problème [of word-by-word translation] car leur langue était proche de l'arabe, et ils avaient déjà l'expérience du passage du grec au syriaque. Passer de celui-ci à l'arabe offrait peu de réelles difficultés.

So the passage from Greek to Syriac and from there to Arabic was, apparently, unproblematic but the passage from Greek to Arabic was not, even though Syriac and Arabic are both Semitic languages and very similar. But then, of course, the translators from Greek into Syriac were Christians who, by divine grace, are exempt from the linguistic restrictions imposed by the structure of the Semitic languages. At least we read (AMM: 86): “L'œuvre de traduction fut d'autant plus aisée à conduire que les chrétiens avaient été obligés de s'arabiser.”

Of course, like any cheat, SG slips up often enough for him to be exposed. In his propagandistic assessment of Charlemagne's Carolingian Renaissance, he writes (AMM: 56):

La part de l'élite politique est certaine dans ce processus qui participe de la volonté générale de *renovatio* affirmée par Charlemagne, déterminé à retrouver la gloire passée de l'Empire romain chrétien.

No reference is given to substantiate this “volonté générale”, but apart from that, I seem to remember that by the time the Roman empire had become Christian it had become Byzantine and that the Byzantine Empire was in full glory during Charlemagne's day. So how could Charlemagne go in search for “la gloire passée” of this empire?

Then, one would expect a historian tackling a topic of this breadth and depth to have a good knowledge of Greek, but here too SG falls through. On p. 79 he misspells the Byzantine word *hý patos* for what the Romans called ‘consul’ (literally ‘the highest’) as *hypathos*—a revealing mistake because it can only be made by an upstart dilettante who thinks that *th* is more ‘Greek’ than simple *t*. And on page 241, in note 81, he misspells the

Greek word *poiótē ta* (quality) as *poiōtita*, which partly reflects the Byzantine and modern pronunciation *piōtita*.

On pp. 120–2, he treats his readers to a discussion of nine manuscripts in the municipal library of Avranches, which contains Latin translations of thirty-one works by Aristotle. Some of these manuscripts also contain a wealth of marginal glosses—a well-known feature of manuscripts since late Antiquity. On p. 122, SG then writes:

Ces gloses, parfois d'une écriture très soignée, représentent la plus ancienne exégèse latine des ouvrages d'Aristote; elles mériteraient d'être éditées et traduites.

But Boethius did the same in the early sixth century, at least as regards the logical works by Aristotle, as SG knows well (AMM: 110). And then, of course, we have the little gem *Peri Hermē néias*, a translation and commentary of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, written in the second century CE, in Latin despite its Greek title, by Apuleius (best-known for his *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass*).

Worse and more importantly, just as he does with regard to language, SG gaily moonlights away when talking about the history of logic. On p. 142 and on pp. 164–5, SG makes his readers believe that Aristotelian logic was widely accepted and practised in the Muslim world (AMM: 165: “l'influence d'Aristote fut [...] forte dans le domaine de la logique”). Yet everything suggests that, during the Middle Ages, the Arabs couldn't make head or tail of Aristotle's logical texts, especially his *On Interpretation*, which contains his predicate logic. For them, logic came closest to a form of kabbalism. In fact, the Arab word for logic is *mantik*, from the Greek *mantikē* (soothsaying, clairvoyance). Accordingly, no contribution was made by the Arabs to the noble art of logic (the mathematical background of logical systems was still centuries beyond the horizon) and no Western medieval philosopher or logician borrowed anything logical from the Muslim world.

Things were different in the West, where Abelard, in his *Dialectic*, was able to reconstruct Aristotle's original predicate logic, which had been streamlined, and thereby crippled, by his later commentators including Boethius (it was, in all likelihood, Boethius's Latin translation of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* that served Abelard as a source text). Had SG consulted his colleagues at the Paris-based CNRS research group UMR 7597 (Histoire des Théories Linguistiques) or at the Société d'Histoire et d'Épistémologie des Sciences du Langage, which brings out the international journal *Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage*, he would have been properly informed on these matters and thus been able to present a more adequate historical assessment.

But not only is SG ignorant where he pretends not to be, he is, above all, biassed in favour of his beloved but largely fictitious Graeco-Christian Europe and against the Arab world. All I can do is take a few examples from the massive heaps found all over the pages of this pathetic book. On p. 59, SG writes in lyrical terms about the design of the Carolingian minuscule letter type by Picardian monks around the year 800:

Nos propres caractères d'imprimerie en descendent directement car elle fut choisie comme modèle de lettres par les imprimeurs du XV^e siècle. L'invention des moines picards survit ainsi de nos jours partout où l'on use de l'alphabet latin...

Fantastic indeed! But how about the Arabic numerals, whose importance for the development of Western culture far exceeds that of the Carolingian minuscule? Of course, no such eulogy is found, in fact, no eulogy at all. It is said repeatedly that their origin is not Arabic but Indian (as if that mattered) and their influence is belittled. Yet modern Western society could very well survive without the Carolingian minuscule script (think of Russia), but it would collapse if it were deprived of the Arabic numerals.

Rowing upstream, SG extols the virtues of "Gerbert" (the same we have met before: Gerbert of Aurillac, made pope by Otto III in 999), who (AMM: 64):

construit un abaque permettant multiplications et divisions, qui utilisait neuf chiffres et le système de numération de position à base décimale. G. Beaujouan souligne que cet abaque ne se trouve dans aucun texte arabe et qu'il s'agit donc bien d'une invention de Gerbert combinant les chiffres *indiens* [italics mine] et le boulier romain.

Absurdly, SG fails to mention that there is one very good reason why "cet abaque ne se trouve dans aucun texte arabe": for a century and a half, the Arabs had already had their own far superior algorithms for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, developed by the great Al-Khuā rizmi, who, for some suspicious reason, must be kept under wraps.

Another obvious general bias is found in SG's treatment of East and West when it comes to appreciating the desire to learn. SG never tires of praising the West for its urge to learn about the Greeks. But never does one find a word of praise for the Muslim rulers who, as has been said, set up enormous libraries and hired armies of translators to bring Greek culture to the Muslim world. The European Christians were keen to learn but the fact that they didn't go so far as to learn Greek only meant that Latin had to do: no big deal. Now look at what SG says about the Arabs, who didn't learn Greek either but for whom this meant that they had to remain strangers to the thought and science of the Greeks (AMM: 128):

Demeurant étrangers à la langue, les élites musulmanes n'avaient qu'un accès indirect à la pensée et à la science grecques.

See also the following blatant passage (AMM: 127-8):

D'une manière générale, les musulmans ne s'intéressèrent pas aux langues des peuples conquis. À cela plusieurs raisons logiques. D'une part, l'arabe était la langue sacrée par excellence, celle de la révélation. C'était donc aux autres peuples de se tourner vers elle et non aux Arabes d'apprendre les idiomes des païens ou des "gens du livre". Ensuite, la langue grecque était le support de conceptions chrétiennes, voire païennes si l'on remontait aux philosophes de l'Antiquité. [...] S'ils n'apprenaient pas le grec, les califes ou les émirs étaient entourés de traducteurs d'origine hellène, copte ou syriaque.

But what other conquering military power in or before the Middle Ages has ever bothered to learn the languages of the peoples submitted? No recourse is needed to the holy nature of the Qur'an to explain this fact. Then, if Western monarchs were so keen to learn, as SG never tires of claiming, why did they not surround themselves with armies of “traducteurs d'origine hellène, copte ou syriaque”? Perhaps they were not so very keen!

And if the West is praised so highly for its drive to collect knowledge from abroad, why is the East debunked for doing the same? In a twisted argument, SG first expatiates for pages on end (pp. 85–100) on the influences upon Arabic science from India, Persia and (Christian) Greece, in an effort to show that Arab science had nothing of its own to contribute. Yet, though always highlighting the role of Greek and Syriac Christians, even SG is unable to deny, and grudgingly admits to, the many influences that originated in Persia, India or any other Oriental civilisation, of which there were quite a few. Original Muslim contributions to science are, of course, entirely out of the question: whenever any such horror threatens to rear its head, it is simply not mentioned (as in the case of Al-Khuā rizmi). Moreover, not all that was brought to the Muslim world was accepted. Thus, the fact that a work by Soranus of Ephesus on gynaecology was, as far as is known, not translated into Arabic, is explained by saying (AMM: 89) that “la gynécologie ne semble pas avoir intéressé le monde musulman.” One should know, in this context, that Soranus, a great physician who practised in Rome for about four decades in the early second century CE, was born in Ephesus in Asia Minor and had studied medicine in Alexandria in Egypt. It is thus quite possible, if not probable, not only that he himself had benefited from Eastern medical knowledge, but also, more importantly, that medical knowledge in the Arabic world of the seventh century and later was superior to what Soranus had to offer in his book *Gynaikeĩa* (Gynaecology).

Anyway, in a preliminary conclusion, SG writes (AMM: 88): “Des chrétiens ont ainsi forgé, de A à Z, le vocabulaire scientifique arabe.” He does not bother to look for counterexamples, such as the words *alcohol*, *alkali*, *azimuth*, *cipher*, *zenith* or *zero*, to pick a few from both ends of the alphabet. But then, in a final surge to reach his conclusion, SG writes (AMM: 101):

Pendant plus de trois siècles, du VII^e au X^e siècle, la “science arabo-musulmane” du *Dar al-Islam* fut *donc* [sic; italics mine] en réalité une science grecque par son contenu et son inspiration, syriaque puis arabe par sa langue. La conclusion est claire: l'Orient musulman doit presque tout à l'Orient chrétien.

This is, of course, how propaganda works: drown your readers in frequent use of those key terms (“Greek”, “Christian”) you wish to promote and keep your language bleak and terse where these terms do not apply; then drop your ‘conclusion’ as a matter of course.

It is now time to point at the most colossal, and most scandalous, omission in AMM, the total neglect of the towering figure of the ninth-century Beyruth science professor Al-Khuā rizmi (full name: Mohamed Ibn-Mū sa al-Khuā rizmi, the ‘Khuarese’, as he

originated from Turkestan/Uzbekistan, then called Chorasnia or Khuā rezm). Here is one who has no connection with “l’Orient chrétien” and whose achievements are largely his own, not derived from Persia or India. Does SG place him in the narrow margin left by his “presque tout” in the preceding quote? If so, he had better explain himself; if not, he is revealed as a crook.

To sum up his most important achievements in arithmetic and algebra (leaving his contributions to other fields unmentioned), Al-Khuā rizmi adapted the Indian numeral notation, now known as the ‘Arabic numerals’, without which our modern society would fall apart. He invented the classic ‘algorithms’ (originally ‘algorisms’; the word derived from his name) of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division—a notion now generalised to all computer programmes: Al-Khuā rizmi counts as the founding father of computer science. And he laid the basis for modern algebra (the word stems from the title of his book *Kitab al-ḥabr ‘the book of positions’*). In his wake, the letter x was used for a numerical variable, the first letter of the Arabic word *shay* (‘thing’). In short, the significance of Al-Khuā rizmi for modern culture is at least equal to, but more probably exceeds, that of Aristotle, though, of course, in a different area of intellectual life. Yet Al-Khuā rizmi is mentioned only twice, on p. 132:

On n’adopte d’ailleurs pas en Al-Andalus la classification distinguant sciences traditionnelles—ou religieuses—et sciences rationnelles—ou étrangères—qui existe en Orient, chez Al-Khwarizmi par exemple.

and on p. 144:

L’influence de l’astronomie persane est ainsi sensible chez Al-Khwarizmi dont la *Table du Sindbind*, rédigée vers 830, reprend le modèle indien du calcul de la position des planètes.

That is all! It is like reading a history of English literature where no mention is made of Shakespeare.

Nor is anything said about the still only vaguely known but highly colourful European scholars who actually learned Arabic and went to the Middle East, fascinated by what they had heard about Muslim science. A typical example is the adventurous Englishman Adelard of Bath (contemporary and almost namesake of the Frenchman Peter Abelard). He is mentioned a couple of times (for example, on p. 105), but not in connection with the fact that he was among the first to introduce the Arabic numerals plus the zero as position indicator, that he studied medicine in Salerno and Sicily, translated Euclid from Arabic into Latin and translated Al-Khuā rizmi’s astronomical tables with the help of the Spanish Jew Moses Sepharadi, who converted to Christianity and renamed himself Petrus Alphonsi.

Or take that other Englishman, the Arabist Robert of Chester (ca 1110–ca 1160), perhaps identical with the man known as Robert of Ketton, who translated Al-Khuā rizmi’s algebra book into Latin in 1145. Peter the Venerable, the abbot of Cluny mentioned earlier, was curious about Islam and asked Robert of Chester/Ketton and his

friend, the Arabist Herman of Dalmatia, to translate the Qur'an into Latin, which they did in 1143. The appearance of such figures around the mid-twelfth century shows up a climate in which Western Europe was drawn towards the mysteriously alluring world of Islam despite the fierce anti-Islam propaganda emanating from the Vatican in support of the Crusaders' wars. SG does say something, on p. 105, about the twelfth-century Western quest for Muslim knowledge but he reduces everything to the "culture grecque" (AMM: 105):

Antioche, Tripoli, Jérusalem furent des centres de culture grecque en contact direct avec le monde latin dès le début du XII^e siècle. Ils jouèrent un rôle aussi important que Tolède ou Palerme et viennent s'ajouter à la liste des centres de renaissance culturelle de l'Europe au début du XII^e siècle.

By sudden sleight-of-hand, the Arabo-Muslim factor has disappeared from the equation!

A perhaps less adventurous but in any case more influential and much better known figure was Leonardo of Pisa (ca 1170–ca 1250), better known by his posthumous nickname Fibonacci ('figlio di Bonacci'), son of a trader and diplomat from Pisa who ran a business in Algeria and represented his city there as a consul. It was there, in Algeria, that the young Fibonacci came into contact with the Indo-Arabic numeral system. As he became a mathematician of note, his use of the Arabic numerals and of Al-Khuā rizmi's algorithms was influential enough to ensure their spread in large areas of Europe. Yet all SG has to say about Fibonacci is the following (AMM: 198):

... on n'arrive toujours pas à déterminer si Fibonacci réalisa au XIII^e siècle ses découvertes arithmétiques de manière autonome ou s'il utilisa des traités venus du monde islamique.

How disingenuous! First, Fibonacci himself writes, in the preface to the second edition of his *Liber Abaci*, of 1228, that first his father and then other, Arab, teachers initiated him into the secrets of Indo-Arabic arithmetical calculus (Hélène Ballosta, GAN: 70). But even if it were unknown whether Fibonacci developed his mathematics "de manière autonome" or "utilisa des traités venus du monde islamique", SG should have realised that Fibonacci is widely known to have been in intimate cultural contact with Islamic science. He was a personal friend and frequent guest of the Emperor Frederic II, enemy of the Pope and great promotor of independent, rational enquiry into the secrets of nature, who resided in Sicily and whose court in Palermo was a renowned and highly influential centre of cultural enlightenment and interchange, where Arabic, Hebrew, Greek and Latin were spoken side by side. Against this background it is preposterous even to suggest that Fibonacci might not have been a crucial bridge between the Muslim and the European worlds of science.

The general picture is clear. As from the middle of the twelfth century, there was an enormous curiosity in Europe as regards the Arabo-Muslim world, including its religion, but largely focussed on its mathematical and scientific achievements. It is historical

nonsense to declare, as SG does (AMM: 197):

En dehors de la circulation de textes antiques traduits, les échanges culturels entre l'Islam et la chrétienté furent minimes. À l'islam en tant que religion, la civilisation européenne n'a rien emprunté, ni référence textuelle, ni argument théologique. Il en est de même dans le domaine politique ou juridique, l'Europe demeurant fidèle à son droit ou à ses cadres institutionnels.

How can a serious historian deny the lively cultural exchanges that took place in Frederic II's Sicilian court, in the Muslim centres of Spain and the Middle East? And, of course, how can a serious historian be struck with such total blindness as regards the mathematical achievements wrought by Muslims in the context of their own culture and transferred to the West to the latter's enormous benefit?

When the 'West' really did make an autonomous contribution to the recovering and spreading of Greek—that is, at least for SG, Aristotelian—culture, the importance of this effort is grossly misrepresented and grossly overstated. In SG's eyes, the abbey of Mont Saint-Michel on the Normandy coast played a key role, as from the 1120s, in providing the whole of Europe with state-of-the-art direct translations of Aristotle from the Greek original into Latin—so much so that Mont Saint-Michel was made part of the title of the book. The key figure in this alleged translation industry was, in SG's eyes, the largely mysterious figure James of Venice (Jacques de Venise), who is said to have been “le premier à traduire <les œuvres d'Aristote> directement du grec en latin avant 1127” (AMM:67) (apparently, Apuleius and Boethius never existed) and whom SG actually places at Mont Saint-Michel during the second quarter of the twelfth century (AMM: 107):

On ne sait presque rien de Jacques de Venise, sinon que, originaire de la cité des Doges, il résida une partie de sa vie au Mont Saint-Michel, sans doute à la fin des années 1120, où il vécut longtemps et où il élaborait toutes ses traductions.

This man (AMM:106) “mériterait de figurer en lettres capitales dans les manuels d'histoire culturelle.” In fact, however, his biography is almost totally mysterious, even more so than SG admits, since there is no evidence at all that he ever set foot in Mont Saint-Michel. In his sober but extremely well-informed “Notes de lecture” (*Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 92 (2008): 329–334), the recently deceased Dominican priest Louis-Jacques Bataillon shows that the alleged existence of a team of translators at work at Mont Saint-Michel is a total fabrication: “il n'y a aucune raison de postuler une équipe de traducteurs travaillant au Mont” (Bataillon: 333). This in itself makes it highly improbable that James of Venice worked at the abbey. There is, in any case, no evidence that he ever did.

And this is only one of the numerous inaccuracies and distortions found in SG's rendering of the Mont Saint-Michel fable. Bataillon shows up a plethora of false statements made by SG regarding the manuscripts themselves, their translators and who

perused them at the time. In other words, according to one of the foremost specialists regarding the matter at issue, the entire Mont Saint-Michel story is an inexpert fabrication. Wishing to maintain a strict impartiality, Bataillon says nothing about SG's possible motives, but his irritation at SG's incompetence is unmistakable.

During the twelfth century, the number of people with knowledge of Greek increased slightly but still remained restricted to isolated individuals, not at all what it was to be in Erasmus' day and later, when the Church had had to loosen somewhat its grip on the schools. Aristotle's texts were indeed translated on a grand scale directly from the Greek original into Latin. But they were also translated, on an equally grand scale, from Arabic into Latin, especially in Toledo, which shows that there was enough of a market for them. That some direct translations of Aristotle may have preceded the school of Toledo by a few decades, as SG triumphantly points out (AMM: 105), is of much less concern than the fact that, apparently, there was a big market for translations of both kinds.

A further important question is: why does SG silently identify Aristotle with the Greek roots of Christian Europe, as he does in the very title of his book? If one goes by this title, one has no way of knowing whether the book is about Aristotle or about "les racines grecques de l'Europe chrétienne." Why does SG mislead his readers by surreptitiously taking them on to this garden path? The answer is simple: it is because the case of Aristotle suits his purpose best. In focussing on Aristotle he draws heavily on the cultural snobbery, still current in his country, according to which 'culture' is defined by the arts and not by the sciences. Of course, SG does not say so openly. The sciences are referred to (hopelessly inadequately) at regular intervals but time and again one sees oneself being steered away from the sciences and before one knows what is happening one is back with, of course, Aristotle again.

Yet even within SG's restricted and culturally snobbish frame of reference, one wonders why such exclusive significance is attributed to Aristotle, with the exclusion of other schools of philosophy, such as the immensely influential Stoa—a school that dominated Greek and Roman philosophy for the best part of ten centuries and deeply influenced both Roman and modern society—or Neoplatonism, which grafted itself onto early Christian theology, providing the higher 'metaphysical' support the new faith was badly in need of, in the form of hierarchies of angels, devils and whatever.

It was the Stoic and Neoplatonist philosophies (plus the many religious rituals, practices and beliefs taken over from the followers of Mithras and from Indian sects) that shaped early Christianity. Aristotle had no influence at all on the Christian world until the thirteenth century, and then only at a fairly abstract, intellectual level. It was then that rebel rationalist Christian philosophers, in particular Thomas Aquinas, felt free enough to revive Aristotelian philosophy, which they had access to mainly through equally rebellious rationalist Arabic philosophers such as, notably, the twelfth-century Averroës who was born and lived in Cordoba and produced, at the request of the caliph of Cordoba, a series of summaries and commentaries on Aristotle's works. And, while the

influence of Neoplatonism waned after the Middle Ages, that of Stoicism only increased and still makes itself felt nowadays, not only in religion but also, and even more, in the canon of standards of morality and decency accepted throughout the Western world.

Yet the Stoa is never mentioned in AMM and Neoplatonism is given a short and largely irrelevant spell of attention on p. 149. And, crucially, the fact that Aristotelian philosophy had to wait in the wings till the thirteenth century before it could make its appearance in Europe, through Arabic philosophers and after fierce battles in both the Vatican and the intellectual centres of Europe between the conservative followers of St. Augustine on the one hand and the Thomist modernists who turned to Aristotle for enlightenment on the other, is too embarrassing for SG to even hint at. In fact, St. Augustine plays no role at all in SG's garden-path tale. It's Aristotle all the way down.

Why is there no mention at all, in SG's book, of these facts and influences? The answer is as embarrassing as it is inescapable. The Stoa and Neoplatonism don't pay when what you want is bash the Islam. Stoicism had been transmitted to medieval Western Europe by the Romans (Cicero, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, you name it) and had become part and parcel of Western ways of thinking. If there is one solid direct link between Greek (Hellenistic) and medieval Western culture it is the Stoa. (St. Augustine was strongly influenced by the Stoa.) But the Arabs hardly knew about the Stoa because the original Greek texts were already lost by the year 800 (our modern knowledge of the Greek Stoa is based on a careful piecing together of papyri fragments, references in other texts and later résumés) and the well-preserved Latin texts remained outside the Arabic sphere of interest. And as regards Neoplatonism, although early Islam did incorporate many of its mystical and speculative ideas, these were not transmitted into Europe because the West already had its Neoplatonic universe of God, angels, devils and mortal souls, its heaven, hell and limbo. Only for Aristotle is there a question of the role of the 'Arabs' in the transmission of his philosophy. And, as we have seen, this philosophy did not break through until the thirteenth century, triggered to a large extent by Arabic experts on Aristotle. Nothing much is thus left of SG's celebrated "filière grecque", not even if one restricts oneself to the culturally speaking narrow path of philosophy in the wider perspective of culture in general. Clearly, fabrication is what is needed when the Arabs are to be beaten out of European history.

When one speaks of cultural influence, a distinction must be made between *popular* and *'higher'* culture. Popular culture is a broad, general and imprecise concept encompassing the ways of life, the socially shared norm systems of the population at large, traditional esthetic norms in literature, the representational arts and architecture, perhaps also systems of education, and similar aspects of everyday life. 'Higher' culture is the privilege of the happy few who are primarily, often professionally, concerned with innovation and the advancement of insight, knowledge, science, technology, and of artistic achievement. At this level, influence from one culture to another is much more a process of conscious decisions and of individual preferences and contacts. Philosophy

clearly belongs to this latter level of 'higher' culture. In most societies, the two forms of culture are not entirely dissociated from each other. On the contrary, it is normal for there to be all kinds of interaction and osmosis between the two levels.

SG does not make this distinction. Yet for our assessment it is useful. The influence of *popular* Greek culture, in the broad and general sense described above, is due in the first instance to the Romans, who first came into contact with Greek civilisation through the (dictatorial) Greek city-colonies in southern Italy and Sicily. The Romans integrated much of Greek culture, in this vague and imprecise sense, incorporating it into their own strongly felt set of norms and values and their own cultural heritage in a process of attraction and repulsion drawn out over centuries. It was in this mix of Greco-Roman views, ways of life and norm systems that the Church started life as an organisation based in Rome. The Church, in turn, integrated this heritage, along with other, mostly oriental, elements, into its teachings, its practices and its moral rules, which were spread over western Europe (with Ireland as an unexpected early base) during the second half of the first millennium.

But the influence of *higher* Greek culture, in particular of Greek philosophy, and more in particular of Aristotle's philosophy, is a very different story where individuals play a much more prominent role than the broad stream of social reality. At this level there is much less continuity and much greater selectivity. There were many things the Romans took over from the Hellenistic Greeks, such as their literary and historiographical forms and standards, which were badly underdeveloped in Rome, and also forms of art and architecture, which they developed further and with superior technological means. But many other things were not imported, such as Greek vase painting or Greek law (here, the Romans were vastly superior). Greek philosophy met with stiff resistance, except for Stoic philosophy, whose stern ethics strongly appealed to the Roman sense of rights and duties. Plato and Aristotle were known, of course, but their influence was minimal. As regards those aspects of Greek 'higher' culture that were not or hardly incorporated into Roman culture but have nevertheless had a strong effect on our modern civilisation, their history is one of leaps and discontinuities, largely determined, especially during the Middle Ages, by what leeway was left by the great power structures of the day.

SG confuses these two levels of cultural heritage, the popular and the more sophisticated 'higher' academic and artistic. Following his garden path strategy, SG has chosen to let Aristotle stand model for the whole of Western culture—a pathetic disfiguring of history. As a result, we are left with a curiously impoverished and factually incorrect view of what in effect is an extremely rich and multifaceted historical reality. But an adequate picture of that reality would take away all propagandistic force from SG's tale.

This brings us to SG's conjuring trick by which the role of Rome in the passing on of ancient Greek culture to medieval western Europe is juggled away. As has been said, SG claims that, from the very beginnings of the Middle Ages, western Europe was subject to

a permanent and urgent desire to gain knowledge of the cultural achievements of the ancient Greeks. See, for example, AMM: 20:

D'abord, la permanence en Occident d'une curiosité pour le savoir grec, [...] c'est ce que j'ai appelé 'la filière grecque'. Cette tradition attachée au souvenir de la Grèce antique explique en partie la formation de 'renaissances' successives en Occident, des temps carolingiens au XII^e siècle.

Similar quotes can be found all over. Meanwhile, the role of *Roman* civilisation and the search for *Roman* culture are curiously played down throughout the book—a further major historical falsification. It doesn't take much to know that what many call the 'renaissances' of the early Middle Ages were predominantly inspired by the wish to revive *Roman* culture. Crucially, *Greek* culture, in the specific sense of 'higher' culture, began to play a role only during and above all after the twelfth century—that is, when Arabic influence began to make itself felt throughout Europe.

The only tribute SG is prepared to pay to Rome and its civilisation is in the area of civil law. Here SG has little choice, because the ancient Greek city-states had no civil law to speak of. When, in the eighth and ninth centuries, the Carolingian rulers looked eastward, it was the Roman, not any nonexistent Greek, civil-law system which the Byzantine Empire had inherited from its Roman origins, that they took as their model. Beyond civil law and the totalitarian structure of the state, everything Greek (read: Byzantine) or oriental was either anathema or under a cloud of suspicion, owing to the very undemocratic Western Church which feared the many Eastern sects and schisms of the time, especially the great schism of 1054 that gave rise to the Orthodox Church. What was taught in the schools was not Greek but Latin, the language of the Church. One may safely assume that the teaching of Greek was actively discouraged at all levels and contacts with the Greek-speaking world and its oriental hinterland were thwarted as much as possible. It was *despite* the Church and, to a large extent, *thanks to* the advances of Arabic culture in Spain, Sicily and southern Italy that later medieval scholars sought contact, often at their peril, with the mysteriously attractive East and thus with its partly Greek roots.

But this aspect of history does not suit SG, because Islamic culture took little or nothing from Rome but a great deal from Greece, which makes Rome unfit as an instrument to bash the Arabs. Rome is just an inconvenient obstacle in SG's programme, which is why, in his twisted logic, our great historian simply writes Rome out of his script.

On p. 173, SG wonders again:

Le Moyen Âge européen peut-il à bon droit être considéré comme l'héritier de la Grèce antique et cette notion d'héritage, de racine, correspond-elle à une réalité historique ou n'est-elle que fiction?

But instead of answering this question by discussing the role of Rome or, indeed, any

other culture in this respect, SG creates a false opposition, on the seven pages that follow, between his thesis and those wayward anthropological theories in which all cultural phenomena are seen as spontaneous, independent innovations, without any room for cultural roots, influences or continuity. And here SG takes sides with traditional historians who, of course, do see roots, influences and continuity. But so do I, and yet I do not accept SG's thesis, one reason being that the role of Rome cannot be suppressed.

In further support, SG quotes the (serious) French historian Braudel (AMM: 173):

Il est de sens commun que la Grèce demeure la terre natale de l'Occident et des valeurs que défendent avec la même vigueur les conservateurs du monde entier.

Yet he does not mention that what Braudel calls "l'Occident" includes Rome, which was the first Western power to embrace and integrate Greek values.

When discussing the Carolingian renaissance (AMM: 55–62), SG speaks of the Roman sources Charlemagne could build on as "ce modeste héritage" (p. 56) and describes Charlemagne's efforts as "un authentique projet de 'retour aux sources' assorti d'une véritable politique" (ib.), but the fact that these "sources" were Roman, not Greek, is left in limbo, while the reader is lulled into the vague impression that what is at issue is, in fact, to do with Greek, not Roman, history.

One particular gem, found on p. 198, I cannot withhold from the reader:

Au-delà des profonds changements, religieux, politiques, techniques à l'œuvre au cours des siècles, un fil directeur part des cités grecques et unit les Européens à travers les âges. Cela n'exclut pas les modifications et les innovations. On a pu ainsi avancer que l'Occident devait une partie de son développement à la pratique de la confession qui favorisa l'introspection, les examens de conscience et donc les progrès psychologiques et cognitifs dans les domaines du rapport à soi et aux autres.

Apart from the first sentence, which is historical nonsense, SG reveals himself as an authority in the history of pastoral care, attributing an alleged Western psychological and cognitive superiority to the holy sacrament of the Confession and passing over the fact that Islam, too, has its ritualised moments of reflection and personal conscience searching.

Why is the first sentence historical nonsense? The answer is simple. From a political point of view, the Roman *Res Publica* is about as old as the Greek city-democracies and was never influenced by them. By the middle of the first century BCE, this *Res Publica* degenerated into the Roman Empire, which again, a few centuries later, spawned the Byzantine Empire whose power structure stood model for the Church of Rome and the kings and emperors of the Middle Ages.

It was the old Roman *Res Publica* that appealed to the hearts and minds of European 'democrats' from the late Middle Ages onward. It was this *Res Publica*, not the Greek city-state, that stood model for the notion of European democracy, which was promoted on the one hand by political philosophers from the Middle Ages on to the

Enlightenment of the 18th century (not least in France) and, on the other, by the increasingly wealthy European bourgeoisie ready to take political matters in their own hands. Early, hesitant, attempts at democracy were made during the Renaissance, as in Venice or the Republic of Florence in the 1520s, or the Netherlands, on and off from the late sixteenth till the late eighteenth centuries (all of them states with a flourishing and wealthy bourgeoisie). Later, after the French Revolution of 1789, democracy began to be practised on a large scale all over and outside Europe, always in the face of violent resistance from the Pope and other absolute rulers. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* writes (s.v. *Democracy*):

Greek democracy was a brief historical episode that had little direct influence on the theory and practice of modern states; from the fall of the Greek city-state to the rise of modern constitutionalism, there was a gap of 2000 years.

The terminology of modern states reminds us of the Roman origins of European democracy. In 1800, Napoleon, still posing as a democrat, made himself ‘first consul’, and certainly not ‘first archō n’. We know a ‘senate’ but not a ‘gerousia’ or an ‘areopagos’ or a ‘boulē’. True, the word *democracy* entered the European languages around 1550 directly from the works of humanist political philosophers who knew Greek (Latin does not have the word). But that is a far cry from the uninterrupted ‘filière grecque’ claimed by SG to have existed. After 1550, the term democracy was used for a philosophy, not for political institutions. Both the French Revolution of 1789 and the American Constitution of 1788 used the word *republic*, not *democracy*. The general public did not make the connection with the political institutions of the ancient Greek city-states until well into the 19th century, when a classical education, and with it the study of Greek, temporarily (and beneficially) became a dominant factor in European intellectual life.

But if one prefers to take SG’s “filière grecque” in a wider, more generally cultural, sense, it is still nonsensical. During most of the Middle Ages, what we now see as classical Greek culture, with its rich literature, architecture and sculpture, its temples, its tragedies and comedies, its superb vases and its timeless, noble statuary, was, if not totally forgotten, a remote myth. The Western intelligentsia of the twelfth century knew its Latin authors but not the authors of ancient Greece. The latter did not come to the fore again until well into the sixteenth century, as a result of the then vastly increased knowledge of classical Greek and the emergence of the new profession of classical scholars. Greek archeology did not start until well after 1800, in the wake of Romanticism. Speaking of an uninterrupted “filière grecque” has about as much justification as speaking of a “filière égyptienne”, as both ancient Greece and ancient Egypt were rediscovered after many centuries through the work of scholars and artists.

The overall pattern is clear: SG piles falsification on shifty analysis and in the end there are so many of them that one is left with nothing but disgust. Disgust, not so much because of the historical fabrications and falsifications, which we will easily live down,

but on moral grounds, because it is SG's purpose to spread hatred by debunking a world religion and an important culture and civilisation in the context of widespread immigration of Muslims into Europe and of the efforts of both Western societies and Muslim immigrants to come to a process of peaceful integration based on mutual respect. Disgust also because SG's book falls in the middle of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and thus of the greatest political and moral scandal worldwide since the end of the second World War, the beastly suppression of the Palestinian people, who were, though totally innocent, made to pay for the crimes wrought upon the Jews during that terrible war.