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978-0-521-51746-1 - Modernity and the Reinvention of Tradition: Backing into the Future

Stephen Prickett

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INTRODUCTION

Ancient & modern: the braid of Cassiodorus

Sometime in the year 580 the late Roman scholar, Cassiodorus, then in his ninety-second year, sat down to write a primer on spelling. During his lifetime he had been a senator, an eminent statesman and diplomat, a scholar, and, finally, a monk. In 535 he had laid plans with the most learned Pope of the age, Agapetus, to create a Christian university in Rome ‘to match the flourishing state of secular studies with a corresponding institution for sacred letters.’¹ Nearly thirty years later, around 562, he still had sufficient hopes for the survival of classical learning to begin his great work, *Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum*, with the aim of accommodating the Greek and Latin classics to an organized programme of Christian education.

A mere eighteen years later, he had to acknowledge that the monks in the monastery he had founded on his estate in southern Italy were functionally illiterate. ‘When I was working on my *Complexiones* of the Apostles, monks suddenly began to clamour, “What use is it to us to know the thoughts of the ancients, or even your own, if we have no idea [*omni-modis ignoremus*] how to write them down? Neither can we read aloud things written in indecipherable script.”’² In the changed circumstances

¹ A scheme which had collapsed with the untimely death of the Pope the following year, and Cassiodorus’s subsequent exile in Byzantium. See R.A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 217–18; James O’Donnell, *Cassiodorus* (University of California Press, 1979); Cassiodorus, *An Introduction to Divine and Human Readings by Cassiodorus Senator*, intro. and trs. L. W. Jones (Octagon 1966); and Stephen Prickett, *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory* (Blackwell, 1991), p. 6.

² Cassiodorus, *De orthographia* 143.1–6. See James O’Donnell:

‘The very need for the textbook clearly shows us something of the state of affairs inside the Vivarium around 580. For comparison, we should first recall that Cassiodorus had already had something to say about the subject of correct spelling, in the *Institutiones*; in the chapter on copying manuscripts, after the careful instructions to observe the idioms of scripture, there follows about a page of orthographic instructions (*Inst.* i.15). The instructions are simple and very much to the point; they enjoin, for example, careful observation of the use of b and v, n and m, and -e and -ae endings. Some of what he advised was exotic as well, as his insistence that *narratio* be spelled with one r out of deference

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

Cassiodorus clearly had to cut his coat to suit the cloth. ‘My purpose,’ he writes in his introduction, ‘is to plait together into one braid what ancient tradition has made available for proper use by modern custom, and to make it quickly and easily accessible. It is right to omit in this enterprise what is of merely antiquarian interest, so as to avoid requiring unnecessary and anachronistic labour, useless in the present age.’³

If before he had been in denial, Cassiodorus had now finally come to terms with the fact that the traditions and learning of the classical age, in which he had been brought up and played such a distinguished part, had finally passed away – and with it all dreams of institutions of scholarship, of higher education or the reading of the literature of the past. All that could now be hoped for was a basic literacy which might preserve the study of the Christian scriptures:

Farewell, brethren, and please remember me in your prayers. I have taught you, among other things, in a summary manner, the importance of correct spelling and punctuation, universally acknowledged to be a precious thing; I have prepared a full course of reading to assist you in the understanding of the holy scripture.⁴

To describe the new world of diminishing expectations and reduced resources in which he found himself at the end of his long life, Cassiodorus coined a new word: ‘modern’ (*modernus*).⁵ Formed from *modo*, meaning ‘just now’, Cassiodorus takes as his analogy the word *hodiernus*, from the word *hodie* (today), meaning ‘that is of today’ (the origin of our English word ‘diurnal’). In his new word we can, perhaps, detect a wistful hope that the conditions ‘just now’ prevailing were an aberration which would prove as temporary as it was regrettable. If so, it was to take between three

to its derivation (and he has his etymology right for once) from *gnarus* – not even the manuscripts of that particular passage obey him on that point. But in general at that stage, Cassiodorus was addressing serious problems faced by the best scribes of the period; his advice reflects not any local weakness of scribes but a general difficulty in the contemporary Latin culture. If we date that state of affairs to around 560, we can see how much things had changed by the time Cassiodorus came to write the *De orthographia*. We see first that the idea for the work came from someone else (as Cassiodorus always claimed except, significantly, for the *Institutiones*). The picture conjured up is striking and sufficiently unflattering to Cassiodorus and his enterprise to make us think there is truth in it. Consider the situation: Cassiodorus, in his tenth decade of life, the most senior and most revered member of the community, even if loved as much for his knowledge as for his sanctity, is approached by his monks to set down on paper a last volume of ideas for their benefit: a spelling book.’

Cassiodorus, Ch. 7.

³ *De orthographia Praef.* (PL 70. 1241 D). Cited by Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, pp. 219–20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Concl.* (*ibid.*, 1270B). Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, p. 220.

⁵ See O’Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, p. 235; Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, p. 219.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-51746-1 - Modernity and the Reinvention of Tradition: Backing into the Future
Stephen Prickett

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Ancient & modern: the braid of Cassiodorus*

3

hundred and a thousand years, depending on where you place the revival of learning, for that ‘temporary’ situation to disappear.⁶ Meanwhile, what he had sadly termed ‘modernity’, has not gone away.

Given the poignancy of the occasion, it is unlikely to have been of great comfort to the elderly monk to realize that the ‘ancient tradition’ that was being so sadly reduced and attenuated by ‘modern custom’ was not quite the thousand-year riches of Greek and Roman literature that it might have seemed, but was itself little more than a century-and-a-half old. As we shall see, like all traditions, it had been created and projected into the past as an act of deliberate cultural appropriation.

What had been at stake from the fourth-century Church onwards was nothing less than its own identity. It had needed to demonstrate in ways both visible and symbolic its continuity with the persecuted Church of earlier centuries. Before the political success of the Catholics under Constantine, the many competing Christian sects had all been persecuted – some, the Donatists in North Africa, or the Nicene opposition under Arianising emperors, even more vigorously and savagely than the Catholics themselves. The Church that had finally emerged victorious had had to wrest the legacy of the persecuted saints and martyrs of the past from other possible claimants.⁷ To this end Eusebius’s great *Ecclesiastical History*, written in the first half of the fourth century, laid the greatest possible stress on the traditions of the Church as constant, enduring and continuous.⁸ The rope or braid of hallowed tradition invoked by Cassiodorus had to be composed of as many separate strands as possible to be strong enough to bear the full weight of that heroic period to which the now-dominant Christians paid tribute and claimed as their heritage.

Thus this was not just a matter of history-writing. What had to be appropriated was nothing less than the Roman Empire itself. In R.A. Markus’s words:

the territory of the Roman Empire was the spatial projection of an ancient culture and alien religions with their own pasts. To appropriate its space, Christians needed to take imaginative possession of it: to annex its space as they had to annex their own past. But whereas that past had been their own, the topography of the Roman Empire was not. Their past they had to make their own like exiles returning to their homeland; the territory of the empire had to be colonised like a foreign land not long conquered. Like so many white settlers in Africa, they

⁶ For many it would come with the twelfth-century rediscovery of Aristotle, and the creation of ‘theology’ as a distinct academic discipline by Abelard, thus allowing a world of secular logic and learning again to flourish in such universities as Paris.

⁷ See Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, p. 85. ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 91–2.

Cambridge University Press

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Stephen Prickett

Excerpt

[More information](#)

had to impose their own religious topography on a territory which they read as a blank surface, ignoring its previous religious landmarks and divisions.⁹

After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 CE, Christians had initially been quick to emphasize that *theirs* was a temple not made with hands. Irenaeus, at the end of the second century, roundly condemned the Ebionites, a surviving Jewish Christian sect, for still continuing to revere Jerusalem ‘as if it were the house of God’. Similarly Augustine had been initially indifferent to the idea that one specific place might be more sacred than another. But increasingly by the fourth century, churches which had just come through persecution were defining what it meant to be a Christian in terms of martyrdom.¹⁰ Church buildings were becoming repositories of the bones of the martyrs – places where saints (especially their local saints) could be venerated. Ambrose’s new church in Milan, the *basilica Ambrosiana*, could not be consecrated without appropriate (and locally discovered) holy relics. The congregation wanted to be the spiritual descendants not merely of martyrs in general, but of their *own* local Milanese martyrs.¹¹

For Ambrose’s younger, North African contemporary, Augustine, the appropriation of the past had to include not merely the territory of the Roman Empire, but its culture as well. It was a world with less and less room for the purely secular,¹² and the justification of all values had to be clearly traceable to biblical roots. Just as the message of Philip to the Ethiopian in Acts 8, that the Jewish Scriptures had found their fulfilment in Christianity, allowed the Christians to appropriate – and re-arrange – the Jewish Scriptures to form their own Bible,¹³ so, by the fourth century they claimed for themselves much of the writings of the former pagan world as well. Augustine’s desire for a Christian culture supported by an educational programme emerged from a direct ideological confrontation with pagan claims of sole rights over a heritage to which Christians could only be seen as alien interlopers. Rejecting this claim, Augustine asserted Christian rights to borrow and to integrate whatever was valuable in the old classical culture into a new synthesis, now firmly based on a scriptural foundation.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church*, Eerdmans, 2005, pp. 34–8.

¹¹ Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity* pp. 143–4. ¹² Ibid., p. 15

¹³ See Stephen Prickett, *Origins of Narrative: the Romantic Appropriation of the Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), Part 1.

¹⁴ Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, p. 221.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-51746-1 - Modernity and the Reinvention of Tradition: Backing into the Future
Stephen Prickett

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Ancient & modern: the braid of Cassiodorus*

5

Indeed, Cassiodorus himself, like his contemporary, Boethius, had joined in just such a programme of cultural appropriation with his *Institutiones* thirty years before. His first book had begun with a syllabus of sacred reading; the second with a course of study in the seven liberal arts, a knowledge of which he believed not merely helpful but essential for a proper understanding of Christian texts. This (to us) somewhat dubious affirmation was only the latest manifestation of the concerted and ongoing attempt to appropriate for Christ the whole of the literature of the pagan world.¹⁵ Though Tertullian (b. c.160?) had famously resisted this melding of classical and Jewish traditions, demanding ‘What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?’,¹⁶ he was swimming against a powerful and strengthening tide. As early as Justin Martyr (d. 165), Socrates had been hailed as ‘a Christian before Christ’ – in the Middle Ages he was sometimes known as ‘Saint Socrates’. Such claims were given greater substance around 200, when Clement of Alexandria helped to establish a school of Christian philosophy (the *Didascalía*) where Platonist theology, Aristotelian logic and Stoic ethics were melded into the biblical tradition with the historical claim that Plato and his fellow-philosophers had themselves studied the works of Moses and the Hebrew prophets. For numerous commentators, Virgil’s Fourth *Eclogue*, with its prophecy of a child born under the sign of the Virgin who will be a great ruler, and bring peace and harmony even to predatory nature, was an unmistakable parallel to Isaiah 44, and a prophecy of the coming of Christ.¹⁷ But what had begun as a series of isolated raids on classical literature had become with Augustine and his successors a full-scale occupation and settlement of once-undisputed pagan terrain. The tradition which Cassiodorus saw as being lost to the narrowness and illiteracy of modernity was one in which Christianity claimed to be the rightful inheritor of a thousand years of Jewish and classical traditions alike but, despite the implication that it was part of the natural order of things, it was, in effect, less than two centuries old.

¹⁵ See the ‘Epilogue’ by P.G. Walsh to G.J. Kenney (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Vol. II, part 5: *The Later Principate* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 107–8.

¹⁶ *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, 7

¹⁷ See, for example, lines 22–5:

*ipsae lacte domum referent distenta capellae
ubera nec magnos metuent armenta leones;
occident et serpens et fallax herba veneni
occident.*

‘The she-goats will bring home of their own accord their udders filled with milk, and the flocks will have no fear of great lions; the snake will be no more, no more too the deceptive poison plant.’ (Translated by Professor Alden Smith, Baylor University, Texas.)

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

Moreover, both the older traditions so appropriated had been themselves, of course, equally retrospective and appropriative in their turn. The Talmudic tradition of interpretation and comment on the Hebrew scriptures, even then one of the oldest continuous traditions in the world, had also provided the ideology behind the arrangement of the actual books of the Hebrew Bible. This had originally been a matter of open choice, since before the invention of the codex, or single bound volume, each ‘book’ was a separate scroll that could be read in any order the reader chose. But though it offered a markedly different arrangement from the no less ideologically driven Christian Old Testament, the codex of the Hebrew Bible represented a ‘tradition’ that was in reality no older than the Christian version, since the work of creating the Hebrew canon only really began after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE – by which time some of the New Testament books (Paul’s letters, for instance) were certainly in existence.¹⁸

This Christian attempt to try and integrate the Jewish and Classical traditions was not the first time it had been attempted. The answer to Tertullian’s question ‘What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?’ has been the subject of some debate. Edward Shils cites A.D. Momigliano to the effect that there was little cross-cultural exchange between the Jews and Greeks in the Hellenistic period.¹⁹ Yet in fact, if we look at the Hellenistic period, Momigliano’s own study shows considerable evidence of repeated attempts from the third century BCE onwards to claim a shared cultural lineage with the Greek world. There was at least a brief period around 300 BCE when Greek authorities were prepared to represent the Jews as philosophers, legislators and wise men.²⁰ More important, from the Jewish side, was the tradition attributed by both Josephus and Eusebius to the otherwise unknown second-century writer, Cleodemus Malchus, that among Abraham’s many children were three sons who joined with Heracles in his war against the Libyan giant Antaeus. After his victory, the Greek hero had supposedly married the daughter of one of these sons of Abraham, whose name, Africa, was then given to the whole continent.²¹ Presumably in reference to this same legend, 1 Maccabees 12. 20–23 has a correspondence between the Jews and Arius I, King of the Spartans, in which the

¹⁸ See Stephen Prickett and Robert Carroll, *Introduction to World’s Classics Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xii.

¹⁹ Edward Shils, *Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 241; A.D. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 97–132.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²¹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trs William Whiston, 4 vols. (Glasgow 1818), Vol. 1, pp. 40–1. Eusebius, *Prophetic Extracts*, 9.20. 2–4.

Cambridge University Press

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Stephen Prickett

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Ancient & modern: the braid of Cassiodorus*

7

latter acknowledge their kinship with the Jews, both being 'of Abraham's blood'. The story is again taken up by Josephus and, however doubtful the original legend, current scholarship seems inclined to think that at least the Spartan response is genuine enough.²²

About 200 BCE, the biographer Hermippus accepted without difficulty the notion that Pythagoras had been a pupil of Jews and Thracians. The first Jewish embassy to Rome under Judas Maccabaeus in 161 BCE appears to have included the historian Eupolemus, whose Greek language history of the Jews had maintained that the Phoenicians, and consequently the Greeks, had learnt the art of writing from Moses.²³ Hermippus also records an exchange of letters between the twelve-year-old Solomon and his client kings Vaphes of Egypt and Suron of Tyre.²⁴ Aristobulus of Paneas allegorized Hebrew tradition in a dialogue in which Ptolemy VI, whose reign, 181–145 BCE, coincides with much of the translation of the Septuagint, asked questions about the Bible.

Commenting on such legends, Erich Gruen dismisses what might look like the obvious idea that these Jewish stories should be interpreted as an attempt at 'a ticket of admission to the Hellenic club'.²⁵ On the contrary, he argues, the naming of Abraham as the common forefather makes it plain that the Jews were trying rather to appropriate the Greeks to their *own* traditions rather than subordinating themselves to Hellenism.²⁶ The logical corollary of Hebrew monotheism was that just as in the Exodus stories, where Yahweh's power over the Egyptians had to be demonstrated, the new dominant Mediterranean force of Hellenism had to be seen also to acknowledge the only true God. In short, the claim was not so much a gesture towards Greek culture as yet another affirmation of the uncompromising nature of Judaism.

So far from being an exception, such examples are actually typical of the formation of the books of Hebrew scripture. Intensive investigation reveals not an Ur-text, but only layer upon layer of appropriation from older and yet older sources. Modern archaeology and comparative scholarship have shown something of the degree to which the Hebrew Bible had absorbed and appropriated earlier stories and beliefs from many surrounding cultures – Aramaic, Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and Egyptian.²⁷ Nor were

²² Ibid., p. 10 (1 Macc. 12. 20–23; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 12.225–227).

²³ 1 Macc. 8.17. ²⁴ Eusebius, *Prophetic Extracts*, 9.31–4.

²⁵ As claimed by E.J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Harvard University Press), 1988. p. 184.

²⁶ Erich S. Green, 'Cultural Fictions and Cultural Identity' (University of California), *Transactions of the American Philological Society*, Vol. 123 (1993), pp. 11–12.

²⁷ Parts of the Book of Daniel were written in Aramaic, the language of the Persian Empire. Resemblances between Genesis stories and the Mesopotamian *Atrahasis Epic* and the *Epic of*

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Stephen Prickett

Excerpt

[More information](#)

these earlier cultures themselves free from retrospectively inventing yet earlier traditions on which to build their own. In the first half of the second millennium BCE priests of the temple of Shamash, in Sippar, in southern Mesopotamia, erected a monument covered with inscriptions on all twelve sides dealing with the temple's renovations and an increase in royal revenue. But instead of dating it to their own time, they carefully attributed it to the reign of King Manishtushu of Akkad (c2276–2261 BCE), thereby *back-dating* their new-found funding to a remote era of the past, and giving them (as they hoped) a head-start in seniority over all other competing temples. The inscriptions conclude with the defiant assertion: 'This is not a lie, it is indeed the truth.'²⁸

Similarly, what by Augustine's time might have looked like a homogenous classical tradition in reality had been created by the Latin appropriation of the Greek world – itself composed of many strands of dramatic, literary, medical, and philosophic schools and texts. Virgil's *Aeneid*, though it purports to show the founding of Rome by Aeneas the Trojan, fleeing from the sack of his native city by the victorious Greeks, is of course similarly legitimated by its appropriation of Homer.²⁹

Gilgamesh have led some critics to argue for the existence of a genre of creation-to-flood epics in the ancient Near East. Many biblical terms for household items, including clothing, furniture, and perfumes, are demonstrably Ugaritic in origin. There are clear parallels in the use of metaphors: where Psalm 137 ('By the waters of Babylon') reads, 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning', an earlier Ugaritic text has 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither.' There are also strong Egyptian influences on parts of the Old Testament. Psalm 104, for example, bears a striking similarity to the 'Hymn to Aten', reputedly written by the heretical monotheistic Pharaoh, Akhenaten, in about 1345 BCE. Similarly the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39) first occurs in an Egyptian story called the 'Tale of Two Brothers' dating from at least 1200 BCE. Some stories seem to bear the marks of at least two external sources. Thus, although the name 'Moses' is an authentic Egyptian one, the story of the baby in a floating reed basket caulked with pitch is also told of King Sargon, who, by the Bible's own dating, lived more than a thousand years earlier than Moses around 2500 BCE. Pitch, moreover, does not occur in Egypt, but was a common material in Sargon's Mesopotamia. See Prickett, *Origins of Narrative*, pp. 53–4.

²⁸ Mark Jones (ed.), *Fake? The Art of Deception* (University of California Press, 1990). Cited by Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (HarperCollins, 1996), p. 180.

²⁹ It enabled Rome to associate itself with the rich and complex fabric of Hellenic tradition, thus to enter that wider cultural world, just as it had entered the wider political world. But at the same time it announced Rome's distinctiveness from the dominant element in that world . . . The celebrated Trojan past lay in remote antiquity, its people no longer extant, the city but a shell of its former self. Troy, unlike Greece, persisted as a symbol, not a current reality. So Rome ran no risk of identification with any contemporary folk whose defects would be all too evident – and all too embarrassing. The Romans could mold the ancient Trojans to suit their own ends. As in so much else, they astutely converted Hellenic traditions to meet their own political and cultural purposes. The Greeks imposed the Trojan legend upon the west as a form of Hellenic cultural imperialism, only to see it appropriated by the westerner as a means to define and convey a Roman cultural identity.

See Gruen, 'Cultural Fictions and Cultural Identity', pp. 11–12; and Prickett, *Origins of Narrative*, pp. 36–9.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-51746-1 - Modernity and the Reinvention of Tradition: Backing into the Future
Stephen Prickett

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Ancient & modern: the braid of Cassiodorus*

9

Nor was classical Greece – so often seen by others as a source of traditional authentication – above seeking similar roots in other, older, traditions. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of this is in Plato's *Timaeus*, where Critias relates the story of Solon, the Athenian poet and philosopher, who goes to Sais in the Nile delta of Egypt and hears the story of Atlantis from an ancient priest of the temple. But before beginning his story, the Egyptian priest berates the Solon and his fellow Athenians for their lack of traditions:

you Hellenes are never anything but children, and there is not an old man among you. Solon in return asked him what he meant. I mean to say, he replied, that in mind you are all young; there is no old opinion handed down among you by ancient tradition, nor any science which is hoary with age . . .

As for those genealogies of yours which you just now recounted to us, Solon, they are no better than the tales of children. In the first place you remember a single deluge only, but there were many previous ones; in the next place, you do not know that there formerly dwelt in your land the fairest and noblest race of men which ever lived, and that you and your whole city are descended from a small seed or remnant of them which survived. And this was unknown to you, because, for many generations, the survivors of that destruction died, leaving no written word. For there was a time, Solon, before the great deluge of all, when the city which now is Athens was first in war and in every way the best governed of all cities, is said to have performed the noblest deeds and to have had the fairest constitution of any of which tradition tells, under the face of heaven.³⁰

Here, then, is a handing down of ancient wisdom that outlasts the written word, and is now used to confound (in the usual Socratic fashion) the conventional assumptions of the assembled company. Whether the story is not a mere legend, but an actual fact, as Socrates says, depends upon one's reading of Socratic irony – not to mention the underlying assumptions of Benjamin Jowett's translation used here – but the point is that 'tradition' in this context is to be taken seriously for itself, whether it is literally true, or a story composed for a symbolic purpose.

But behind this appropriation and re-appropriation of ancient texts there lurks a further irony, for the original, pre-Christian meaning of 'tradition' was concerned not with the legitimation of texts at all, but specifically with oral transmission – and in particular with the kind of debate that challenged conventional thinking. Plato's word for this process, the Greek term *paradosis*, described a kind of knowledge that could *only* be transmitted by word of mouth. It reflects, in short, the form of teaching ideally practised

³⁰ Plato, *Timaeus*, trs. Benjamin Jowett, 2nd edn (Clarendon Press, 1875), Ch.1.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-51746-1 - Modernity and the Reinvention of Tradition: Backing into the Future
Stephen Prickett

Excerpt

[More information](#)

in Plato's Academy: not so much a matter of facts, but of the 'dialectic' – a relationship between teacher and pupil that could only be created by face-to-face contact. *'Paradosis'* was immediate, local, and specific. It was essentially first-hand rather than second-hand. The verb form, like its Latin equivalent, *tradere*, often has to be translated as 'inform' or 'tell' rather than 'hand down'. It meant 'deliver' not so much in the sense of delivering a package but in the sense of 'delivering' an address, homily, or sermon.³¹ As we shall see, its other association of 'betray' conveys the idea that what is handed down is not necessarily beneficial to the recipient.

If, later on, *paradosis* was extended to include the handing down of ideas by means of written texts, it never lost touch with its oral roots. In particular, it was to retain the Platonic flavour of surprise – challenging the obvious, the conventional and the superficial assumptions of society. As James Moffatt puts it:

'tradition' had to be a disturbing force: it was critical because it sought to be progressive . . . The real paradox for us, as we look back into the Hellenistic age immediately prior to Christianity, is that men found it quite natural to use a term like 'tradition' for the method as well as for the content of any philosophy which challenged traditional opinions and practices, including the superstitions of popular religion.³²

Thus, as so often, Christianity's mixed inheritance from Hellenistic and Jewish roots contained an unresolved tension between two radically different attitudes towards the wisdom of the past. The tension was not, however, simply *between* Greek and Jewish modes of thought, but also to some extent *inside* both. It is always difficult to maintain challenging or potentially disruptive ways thinking beyond the first generation. Even before the Christian era the idea of *paradosis* was increasingly nuanced with the authority of the past, and had acquired many of the connotations of 'handing down' associated with the more strictly legal Latin word *tradere*. Moreover, by New Testament times, *paradosis* had passed from its philosophical and Platonic context to become part of the vocabulary of the various mystery cults against whose 'traditions' Paul warns in Colossians.³³

It is perhaps hardly surprising, therefore, that the noun *paradosis* is rarely used in the Jewish Greek of the Septuagint. On the few times when it is used, it invariably comes as a literal term for surrendering a town or delivering a prisoner to punishment, rather than with any Platonic

³¹ See James Moffatt, *The Thrill of Tradition* (Macmillan, 1944), pp. 5–7.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 11. ³³ See, for example, Colossians 2.8ff.