

**A Great Political Institution in a Religious Festival:
reception of Greece in Gilbert West's (1749) *Olympick Games*¹**

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Recent commentary has established the significance of Gilbert West (1703-56), the eighteenth-century religious writer, translator, and poet: he has found a place in Olympic history, the history of Pindaric translations, and contemporary politics. West's most enduring contribution to scholarship was the *Dissertation on the Olympick Games* (1749) with its attached translations of Pindar and other scattered Greek and Roman authors. West's *Odes* and *Dissertation* were the major translations of Pindar for nearly a century and continued to be well-respected in scholarship into the nineteenth century: he is now commonly referenced in histories of Pindar, like that of Stoneman (2013: 380-3). More recently, West's contribution to Olympic history has been recognised through work done in connection with the 2012 London Olympic celebrations, in Goff and Simpson's (2011) work, and especially Lee's contributions (109-121; 2003: 167-171). As part of this revival of interest, West's model for statesmanship in the eighteenth century has been recognised: his political motives have been adeptly assessed by Martha Zebrowski (2012), arguing for the primacy of political 'utility' of the Olympics. But the work has not yet been viewed through the lens of a distinct Classical reception. It is not yet clear how West used the Classics, how he deployed them, what he gained from them, how his presentation influenced readers, and what were the most distinctive aspects of his reception of the Classics.

Using the important work already done on West as a foundation, this paper examines West's *Dissertation* and translations as an act of classical reception. I will explore the ways that West's translations might have influenced the public reception of Pindar and the ancient world in eighteenth-century Britain, and how the classics was deployed on behalf of West's purpose and interests. Some themes will include his broader readership and engagement with the contemporary, his political agenda, how he is influenced by his place in history and scholarship, and how this informs the way he deploys the ancient material. It will be argued that West believed not only that the Olympics had utility to the reader, as explored by Zebrowski, but that the Classics themselves had great utility in demonstrating a model for statesmanship and for living a good life. This paper argues that one key aspect of West's 'good life', and the most distinctive aspect of his presentation of the classics, is in his (largely unexplored) religious presentation, achieved through a hybridisation of Christianity and Greek polytheism. The distinctive influence of West's religious reading was neatly captured by James Barry, in his *Crowning the Victors at Olympia*, which was based on West's work.

GILBERT WEST AND HIS *DISSERTATION ON THE OLYMPICK GAMES*

Gilbert West was particularly well known for his poetry, interest in the ancient world, and dedication to his Christian beliefs. Gilbert's father Richard had been a fellow of Magdalen College Oxford, prebendary of Winchester from 1706, and archdeacon of Berkshire from 1710; and he intended his son to join the church.² To achieve this, the younger West was sent to Eton and then Oxford but motivated by religious scepticism he resisted a church position and instead dedicated himself to writing. West attended Oxford alongside Sir George Lyttelton, the patron of the arts and prominent British statesman, MP from 1741, Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1755, and later a peer. In their studies Lyttelton and West reportedly aimed to exhaustively prove two key points of Christianity incorrect: for Lyttelton that Saul of Tarsus ever converted and for West that Jesus rose from the dead. In the process each concluded that Christianity was true.³ After West graduated from Christ Church Oxford in 1725, he again defied his father and joined the army. On his return West became a civil servant, first employed by Lord Townshend, the secretary of state, and then as a clerk extraordinary of the privy council. For the rest of his life West 'devoted himself to learning and to piety', as Samuel Johnson (1821: 262) remarked in his famous *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*: planning but never completing what was meant to be his legacy work on 'the Evidences of the Truth of the New Testament'.

West's most important published work in terms of length, comprehensiveness, and influence was the *Odes of Pindar, With several other Pieces in Prose and Verse, Translated from the Greek, To which is*

prefixed a *Dissertation on the Olympick Games* (1749). After a lengthy preface, the *Dissertation* covers a variety of topics including the origin of the games, the religious ceremonies, the nature of the dating system, and the organisation of the games. This is followed by an examination of each sport in turn, and the nature of the honours bestowed on victors for each; the work closes with a discourse on the 'Utility' of the games and the translation of Lucian's *Gymnastic Exercises*. West's work is a complex reception of a Greco-Roman reception of the Olympics; his initial point of contact is through Roman or Roman-period interpretations of the evidence. He quotes liberally from Pausanias (e.g. 1749: xii; which he observes at xx), throughout the *Dissertation*, and frequently consults Strabo (e.g. at 1749: xviii), Polybius (xix), Quintilian (xix), Lucian (cxlv), and Plutarch (cxxxv).

Of earlier authors he relies heavily on Herodotus while largely ignoring Thucydides, leaving analysis of him to those 'who may think it worth the while to engage in it' (West 1749 xxvi after ref. in xxv). In West, as was typical for authors of the period, the Greek gods are known by Latinised names – Neptune, Jupiter or Jove, Hercules, or Proserpina – while the heroes of the Iliad are known as 'Diomedes and Ulysses'. The *Dissertation* alone is 206 pages long and the translations number 315 pages. They of a selection of Pindaric Olympian (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 12th, 14th), Pythian (1st), Nemean (1st, 11th), and Isthmian (2nd) odes, Horace's 4th Ode, Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Lucian's *Triumph of Gout*, Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* and *Story of Phineus*, the *Hymn of Cleanthes*, and Plato's *Menexenus*. As a whole it is a lengthy book and the *Dissertation* in particular is a formidable piece.

THE POPULARITY AND AUDIENCE OF THE DISSERTATION

West's *Dissertation* was intended to be an entertaining work for a wide readership, a type of work that was fashionable in the first part of the eighteenth century. By the time that West published the *Dissertation* there were various popular and generally accessible works in English, including Pope's translations of Homer and Littlebury's *Herodotus*.⁴ There were also a number of overseas equivalents, some of which West was aware. He was particularly well-versed in French works, having read the French translation of Pausanias by Nicolas Gedoyn with remarks by Follart (1731, ref. in West 1749: 18), studied Brumoy's *Euripides* (1730, ref. in West 1749: 178), and other relevant literature like Petrus Faber (1595, ref. in West 1749: cl).⁵ The consequences of West's appeal to a broad readership are clear when compared with Pierre-Jean Burette, of whose work West maintained a detailed knowledge (e.g. West 1749: cli), and whose work, according to Waller (1982: 106, 112-3), was intended as a learned discussion for a small group of experts.⁶ Both Burette and West demonstrated a serious concern for the sources and scholarly literature, though Burette quoted more and a greater variety of literature.⁷ As Waller (1982: 111) has argued, Burette was more concerned with the specific and detailed medical aspects, which receive much less coverage in West; and with the military, which West substitutes for the focus on unification and peace that were more useful to his political project and offered better lessons for the contemporary state and reader. West's *Dissertation* is more well-rounded than Burette's: West offered translations, considered broader themes, and commented on all the games, unlike his French contemporary. One key difference is that West considers in detail the religious aspects of the ceremonies which Burette almost completely ignores: in this we can see West's desire to engage with and reply to the popular crisis in religion that arose during the English enlightenment.⁸

The readability and general appeal of the *Odes* made them 'remarkably popular' (Griffin 2005: 65). The first edition of West's work was printed in 750 copies, a large print run for the period when compared to the large school book runs of the period of around three to four thousand; and there were three initial prints.⁹ It is uncertain how many other copies were printed beyond the first edition, or the prices of these, because records of eighteenth-century print runs are almost entirely absent, but there were at least five more, the last nearly 100 years later, including published translations in French and German.¹⁰ West's work was of enduring popularity. In the century following its initial publication, there were numerous works that reprinted West's translations with supplementary ones of their own covering the odes he neglected, like that of Lee (1810). Indeed, of the major translations of West in the fifty years following his publication, only two (Dodd in 1767 and Rev. Tasker in 1790) chose *not* to use West's translations alongside their own, instead translating Pindar afresh.¹¹ West's work was, and still is, prized by collectors: several hundred copies of original print runs still survive in libraries today, across the globe.¹² The desire for large print runs and broader readership among West and his contemporaries is especially noteworthy considering the traditional aims of the English publishing industry, which restricted readership through inflated book prices using stringent copyright laws.¹³ This, perhaps, is what led

Demetriou (1996: 281) to argue that '[d]uring the eighteenth century the history of ancient Greece had no appeal to the interest of the general public'. But the abundance of translations of Greek works and the striking and enduring widespread popularity of West's Pindar attests to a fascination with the Greek world in the eighteenth century among the reading public, and a resistance to the class war pursued by the publishers.

West's work so dominated the field of translations of Pindar that we find reference to it and scholarly contention about its value well into the nineteenth century.¹⁴ For instance, after a heavily critical comment about West by Girdlestone (1810: 99-100), an anonymous reviewer for *The British Critic* felt obligated to defend him:¹⁵

West deservedly retains the highest reputation, not only for the merit of the work itself, considered as a translation, but for the various and profound learning displayed in the notes and illustrations by which it is accompanied... This publication was pre-eminently superior to all of the kind which preceded.

[Anon] 1810: 505.

In reviews, West's *Dissertation* and translations were admired for their neat versification, adaption for English and modern audiences, as well as for their grasp of the ancient world.¹⁶ But the critical reception also reveals the tension in West's work between its entertaining generalist aspects and its academic pretensions. The utility of West's approach was generally acknowledged but he was sometimes criticised for his academic imprecision. Knight (1858: 651), for instance, remarks that '[i]t has little merit, except some elegance or smoothness of versification'; while Horace Walpole observed that West's 'poetry' was stiff, but 'prefixed to it there is a very entertaining account of the Olympic Games' (Walpole 1861: 2.163). In his review, Gibbon (1814: 238, 585) comments that West's *Dissertation* is entertaining and inspiring, and in his translations he 'has learning, good sense, and a tolerable style of versification; but Gray and Dryden alone should have translated the Odes of Pindar'. In the changing fashions of the mid-nineteenth century, which saw increasing specialisation, West's work was increasingly considered generalist and its scholarly aspirations diminished.¹⁷ But in the eighteenth century, part of the appeal of West's *Dissertation* and translations was surely in his engagement with contemporary scholarship.

West's academic engagement in the *Dissertation* has generally been undervalued: the *Dissertation* and his notes on translations commonly addressed key academic debates in Classics, which is not surprising as he rubbed shoulders with several prominent Hellenists of the period.¹⁸ One of West's key intentions with the work was to rehabilitate Pindar in intellectual circles. West laments the views of previous 'imitators' of Pindar who perceived a nervous incoherence in the ancient poet (West 1749: preface). West had in mind men like Abraham Cowley, the prominent seventeenth-century Pindaric commentator, who had declared that '[i]f a man should undertake to translate Pindar word for word, it would be thought that one Mad man had translated another' (Cowley 1668: preface). As Fairer (2011: 156) has argued, in his attempt to disprove the claim of incoherence, West emphasises the regularity of style and structure of odes, even changing one of the Pindaric odes to fit his schema better; he postulates spurious connections between disparate material; and explicitly (in his preface) excuses Pindar on the basis of poor translation or lost references.¹⁹ In fact, Pindar's style was common to archaic poets rather than the sign of a misfiring poet, but West would not live to see this discovered.²⁰

In emphasising the power and importance of Athens and the Athenians, whom he considered 'unquestionably the first and greatest People of Greece' (West 1749: 284), West anticipated some aspects of the famous historian George Grote's picture of the ancient polis.²¹ Grote is usually taken to mark the turning point away from the characteristic eighteenth and early nineteenth century hatred of Athenian democracy, and the belief that Sparta was superior to Athens, usually, as Murray (2004: 5, 21) has observed, 'by a large margin'.²² West was certainly influenced by the veneration of what Paul Cartledge (2014: 257) called 'austere, virtuous 'Lycurgan' Sparta': his Sparta was noble, well organised, patriotic, and focussed on civic duty (West 1749: esp. lxii-lxiii, clxxxvi, cxlix-cl). But West's Sparta was more often selfish, ideologically deficient, and corrupt, especially in respect of her monarchy (West 1749: cxlviii-cxlix). West's focus on the Athenian panhellenic feeling closely resembled that of Grote: he argues that while the Spartans only took the command against the Persians because of their pride, the Athenians were genuinely concerned with Greek liberty (West 1749: cxcix).²³ Likewise, in his veneration of democracy: in a stirring speech, West argues that the '[t]he Genius of the Greeks was

turned entirely to *Democracies*' (West 1749: cxvii); Athenian democracy was the pinnacle of Greek achievement in offering the foundations of justice, freedom, and liberty. West's Atheno-centric panhellenic vision is clearly influenced by his own ideals for a democratic, libertarian British Empire. It is in West's aim to address the general reader with some points of contemporary relevance that he is most academically pioneering; an approach that afforded West insight that might have slipped past the less politically involved.

KEY THEMES IN THE *DISSERTATION* AND *ODES*

A holistic understanding of West's agenda and some of the key aspects and themes of *Dissertation* and *Odes* is crucial for understanding his distinctive use of the Classics. For West, the use of Pindar was threefold: he could offer 'many wise Reflections, and many moral Sentences, together with a due Regard to Religion' (West 1749: preface). Accordingly, West's key concerns in his analysis of the Olympics are politics, particularly the utility of the Olympics (on which the reader is directed to Zebrowski 2012), especially in the positive results of exercise, peace, morality and religion. Religion has been explored the least in scholarship, partly because it is a less explicit concern of West than politics, but it is also the most distinctive aspect of his reception of the Classics.

West wrote about the Olympics because they were politically useful – they had utility – which was a common motivation for writing on the classics in the eighteenth century (and equally motivated West's choices of translations):²⁴

[T]he Gymnastick Exercises were for many Ages considered as beneficial to the Publick in which Point of View all political Institutions, Systems of Religion and Government, and the prevailing Customs and Manners of any People, ought principally to be considered by every one.

West 1749: clxxxvi-clxxxvii.

West's work was intended to be a political manifesto; a model for contemporary statesmanship. West certainly had an active role in politics. As a civil servant, he mixed with various political groups, and those of his friends Pitt and Lyttelton, as well as Phillip Doddridge and Alexander Pope; he was even offered the opportunity to educate Prince George.²⁵ As a result, the *Dissertation* was concerned with political practicalities, such as the selection of competitors and audience overcrowding (xlvi-ix). West modernised the Greek model, at least in part, by providing direct modern and ancient comparisons, of exercise, theatre, poetry, and even eulogies, which helped his readers to follow.²⁶ By pairing the loftier but more opaque 'lessons' generally offered in the *Dissertation* with practical demonstrations of how the Olympics could be modernised, West largely succeeded in demonstrating the utility of the classics in his own day.

The utility of the Olympics, and indeed the Classics, for West, lay partly in the emphasis on exercise and health. The early-seventeenth century, with Dover's 1612 Cotswold Olympics, marked the beginning of a trend of holding 'Olimpick' games in a local annual context, which in turn spawned a variety of analytical works on the benefits of exercise, including West's (1749) *Dissertation*, Petrus Faber's (1592) *Agonisticon*, and M. Burette's *Gymnastick Exercises*.²⁷ As Batchelor (2012: 185, 188) argues, West's *Dissertation* represents part of a reaction against the Cartesian models which had dominated the approaches of many of his predecessors like Burette.²⁸ With the Enlightenment came a strong reaction against dualist approaches that devalued bodily health, championed in the English tradition by figures like Thomas Sydenham (1682), Francis Fuller (1705), Joseph Addison (1711), George Cheyne (1724: 98-9, 107): from the 1680s on, these intellectuals advocated a variety of Greek style sports (including *skiomachia*, shadow-boxing, which Addison himself had learned from a book) as part of a healthy regime.²⁹ This campaign for the benefits of exercise fed back into works on the Classics, too. For instance, in the anonymous *Lives of the Ancient Philosophers* (1702: 150) Plato is as proficient a wrestler as he is a philosopher; and in Boileau's (1694: 237-40) translation of the stoic Epictetus, training for the Olympics is comparable with learning philosophy.³⁰ Likewise, the Olympics were ultimately useful for West because they toughened up young men and made them ambitious for honour (West 1749: xlix, clxxxii-clxxxii): the physical benefits were also moral ones. The Olympics are only part of West's new healthy regime based on Classical models: for instance, he suggests the establishment of *gymnasia* as public-funded prophylactic 'Hospitals' (West 1749: clxxxvii-clxxxix).

A key benefit of the Olympics, and an aspect of their utility, was in cultivating peaceful relations with other states. The Olympics brought the feudal Greek states together to acknowledge each other's strength and spread news of any danger posed to the normally disparate Greek community as a whole (West 1749: cciii). In one key passage, West describes how the Olympics facilitated mutually beneficial peaceful commerce and cultural exchange rather than military competition:

And as the several Parts of this great Institution drew to *Olympia* an infinite Multitude of people from all Parts, so did that numerous Assembly invite thither the Men of the greatest Eminency in all the Arts of Peace; such as Historians, Orators, Philosophers, Poets, and Painters; who perceiving that the most compendious Way to Fame lay through *Olympia*, were there induced to exhibit their best Performances, at the Time of the Celebration of the *Olympick Games*. To this Assembly *Herodotus* read his History [according to *Lucian*, *Herodotus* 1], to this Assembly *Aeion*, a celebrated Painter, shewed his famous Picture of the Marriage of *Alexander* and *Roxana*; and for this Assembly *Hippias* the *Elean*, a *Sophist*, *Prodicus* the *Cean*, *Anaximenes*, the *Chian*, *Polus* of *Agrigentum*, and many other *Sophists*, *Historians*, and *Orators*, composed Discourses and Harangues; and thither *Dionysius*, the Tyrant of *Sicily*, sent a Poem of his own writing to be recited publicly, by Persons hired for that Purpose. From whence, says *Lucian*, they reaped the Advantage of gaining at once the general Suffrages of all *Greece*; every State having its Representative, as it were, in that numerous and solemn Convention, and all who assisted on these Occasions carrying with them to their respective Countries the Name and Reputation of that Person, to whose Glory the Common Seal of *Greece*, if I may so speak, had already been set at *Olympia*. By the Pleasure arising from these Works of Peace, and the Applauses bestowed upon them, the Minds of Men were insensibly softened and diverted from the Thoughts of War.

West 1749: cci-ccii.

For West, the 'Arts of Peace' could only thrive in peaceful contexts, and the Olympics could enable and encourage peace: he is not just discussing 'Grecians' now, but 'Mankind'. In his own day, West saw the need to reconcile multiple interests across numerous territories, with several partly independent political entities amid the growing British Empire, increasing tensions in North America, and resentment between the Dutch and the English (eventually leading to the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war in 1784). He wanted to prevent the British from making the same mistake as the Greeks: for West (1749: cxcii, cxcviii), the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Greece represented decline due to the lack of unity; a decline that was more the result of internal Greek fracturing than Roman superiority.³¹

In offering his alternative Classical model, West hoped to help the British avoid a Greek-style decline, which he viewed as moral as well as military. Throughout the *Dissertation* West (1749: esp. clxxxiii-clxxxix) makes allusions to the corrupting role of luxury and wealth inequality, and the importance of founding a state based on virtue and against corruption; which was all surely influenced by his reliance on *Herodotus*.³² West argued that exercise, particularly through an Olympics with purely honorific prizes and limited professionalism, helped to avoid decadence, encouraging a 'civil nature' (West 1749: cliii, clxxxiii-clxxxv), instilling temperance, fortitude, patience, and continence, and inspiring a love of glory (cxcii-cc, cxc, clxxxvii) and support of concord and union in Greece.³³ This is reflected in West's final advice at the end of his *Dissertation*:

[A] wise and prudent Governor of a State may dispose the People to such Sports and Diversions, as may render them more serviceable to the Publick; and that by impartially bestowing a few honorary Prizes upon those, who should be found to excel in any Contest he shall think proper to appoint, he may excite in the Husbandman, the Manufacturer, and the Mechanick, as well as in the Soldier, and the Sailor, and Men of superior Orders and Professions, such an Emulation, as may tend to promote Industry, encourage Trade, improve the Knowledge and Wisdom of Mankind, and consequently make his Country victorious in War, and in Peace opulent, virtuous, and happy.

West 1749: ccvi.

This was a solution for all men of all social classes and professions; West's model was as broad as his intended readership.

THE UTILITY OF RELIGION

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of West's reception of the Classics was in his treatment of religion. From the outset, West shows that he considers religion to be a crucial component of the Olympics; which was, of course, a religious festival.³⁴ In the *Dissertation*, West repeatedly highlights religion alongside politics as the two fundamental elements in the ancient Olympics: it was a 'Great Political Institution' and 'Religious Festival' (West 1749: clii-cliii). This theme runs throughout the *Dissertation*: West's first section concerns the religious ceremonies of the Olympics and in the rest of the work religious themes are constantly raised (West 1749: xii). This is especially striking when we consider that West's key Greek source was Herodotus, who arguably systematically ignores religion.³⁵ West emphasises the importance of religion (West 1749: cix, cxcii), in oaths (cix), processions (cxlvi), and the *tetractris* (xxviii; the four-year cycle used in religious festivals), but most importantly, he argues that the peaceful basis of the games was grounded in a trust based on religion (cci).

Inevitably, though, West is confronted with the incompatibility of ancient Greek religion and his Christianity. This is not surprising, since the details of Greek polytheism might well have appeared as 'desperately alien' to the ordinary eighteenth-century Christian reader.³⁶ West attempts to reconcile Christianity and Hellenic religion in his *Dissertation* by presenting the ancients through a Christianising filter. For him, the Greeks had multiple 'religions', but were unified in their sacrifice to 'one and the same Deity' (West 1749: xxviii, cxviii).³⁷ The religious structures of the ancient Games are Christianised: Greeks are given typical Christian values, like 'pious Respect and Veneration' for the 'August Solemnity' of the Olympic festival (West 1749: 32). West positions Jupiter – the 'King and Father of Gods and Men' (cc) – as the host for his own Christian God. The ambiguity of the language and positioning of Jupiter is designed to bridge the substantial gap between Hellenic and Christian belief and worship, though it does not do so comfortably. His translations are equally notable for their pious fervour directed towards Jupiter, adorned with Christian mythology, and for their confused sense of 'ecstatic rococo' holiness. Though some aspects of West's approach in his translations were normal for the time (such as using terms like 'heaven'), the overall picture was distinctively Christianising even for its time and served to reinforce West's presentation in the preceding *Dissertation*.³⁸

In a particularly striking passage (xxv-xxviii), West compares Elis with the papal state. The paraphernalia and organisation of the Olympics and Greek religion are presented as a kind of proto-Vatican. West names the Delphic Oracle 'Head of Religion' (xxv-xxviii; 30) and talks of Olympic 'Ministers' (Hellanodikai) as 'Servants of the Altar' (xxiv), so it is natural, I suppose, that he considered those who refused to admit the Elean censures as 'Excommunicated' (xxxvii, xl, xxxvii). West explains that the Eleans benefitted from the 'Protection of the King and Father of Gods and Men' (cc), with the consent of Greece; just like the Vatican in Rome, Elis was the kingdom of Jupiter on earth, entirely lacking in 'Discord and Injustice' (xxvii-xxviii). This is more than just a Vatican analogue, though: West presents the Eleans as an example of a peaceful, virtuous, godly life. Emblematic of the Arcadian Ideal, the Eleans were a 'Holy People' (cc): simple, reclusive, agricultural men, with a prosperous country life of 'great Simplicity and Innocence of Manners' (xxviii), living in a perpetual peace that allowed for contemplation of the 'King and Father of Gods and Men' (West 1749: cc, xxvii-xxviii).³⁹ Indeed, the Elean state ultimately failed, West argues, because they had 'broken down the fences of Religion' (xxvii): a sage warning, perhaps, to the potential Enlightenment sceptic.

In general, West avoids giving too much detail about belief, relying largely on Pausanias' descriptions of the temples and mechanisms of religion (e.g. West 1749: xii-xxi), but when he is unable to give them a Christian analogue and cannot avoid commenting on Greek beliefs and myths, he is dismissive. In the opening of the *Dissertation* (1749: vi), he argues that the substantial aspects of Greek religion are essentially fable, in which 'Truth', he says, appears 'lost and confounded, with the rest of the Antiquities of Greece, in the Clouds of Mythology and Superstition'.⁴⁰ Here we find that all of the Olympic founding beliefs, such as that the first Games were held in celebration of Jupiter and Saturn's wrestling match for the Empire of the world, are simply self-aggrandising 'pretensions' (West 1749: preface, v-vi). Elsewhere, we are told that the Greeks are 'credulous and superstitious even to Stupidity' (xcv) and most people come to Olympia 'more out of Curiosity than Devotion' (xli). Local deities and demi-gods

are 'pretended' (xciv), 'imaginary' (xcv), or simply invented 'superstition' (cli-clii). Throughout the *Dissertation*, West rapidly switches modes between pious Christianising about Greek worship and condemnation of Greek belief, presenting beliefs simply in order to dismiss or demean them (if he mentions them at all). Ultimately, West's aim to present the Greeks not as 'desperately alien', nor as impious, might be more confusing than helpful to the modern classicist, and as we will observe, among contemporary readers it was only partially successful in sanitising the Greeks.

JAMES BARRY'S CROWNING THE VICTORS AT OLYMPIA

One direct example of West's dominant influence is in James Barry's *Crowning the Victors at Olympia*, which bears 'such a striking similarity' (Pressly 1981: 100) to West's work because it used it as a source.⁴¹ Reading Barry's painting as a reception of the *Odes* and *Dissertation* allows us the unique opportunity of seeing how West's work influenced the views of his contemporaries about the Classics. As we have observed, Gilbert West's *Dissertation on the Olympic Games* and attached translations of Pindar held a dominant place in academic and general translations and discussions of Pindar in eighteenth-century Britain. James Barry's painting is a surviving example of West's reception in practice: it is a neat encomium of West's *Dissertation* as a whole, demonstrating how West's work was interpreted by and influenced contemporaries. The painting is the central work of 6 murals on the 'Progress of Human Knowledge', commissioned from 1773 for the Great Room of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce.⁴² Several of the paintings were on Greek subjects: on Orpheus, the victors at Olympia, and the Greek harvest-home, with another called 'Elysium and Tartarus', on Barry's vision of heaven and hell.⁴³ According to Pressly (1981: 99-101), all have dominant religious themes, though he misses some key religious iconography and themes in *Olympia*.

In his painting, Barry adopts and reinforces many of the themes we have argued are central to West's *Dissertation*. It is Athenocentric, without excluding the Spartans: the Parthenon occupies a central place in the background, despite its location in Olympia; and the thrones of the judges depict the lawgivers Solon and Lycurgus, trophies of Salamis, Marathon (traditionally Athenian victories) and Thermopylae (Spartan). The overall message is of unity in the Greek world. Pindar leads the Chorus but looks revealingly frustrated and marginalised: the participants and viewers are the real subjects, not the poet, just as West was interested in the content and not the form of Pindar. There are equally clear contemporary lessons and allusions. The figure of Pericles was modelled on the then-late Lord Chatham (William Pitt, to whom the *Dissertation* was addressed), as Barry believed there was 'a striking resemblance in the character and fortunes of these two great men' (Fryer 1809: 330). The one-eyed man demonstrates West's point that the contest is for glory, 'not rancour', as Barry put it, as does the pillar to the left that reads *aristeue*, commanding the competitors and the viewers to 'excel!' (a ref to West 1749: cci). The statue of Herakles on the left is treading on Envy, showing the 'two great objects of Grecian education', of strength of body and mind, in a vivid anti-Cartesian sentiment. There are many famous faces that represent the wealth and diversity of culture that the Olympics attracted; alongside philosophers, politicians, and artists, Timanthes the painter (modelled after Barry)



Fig. 1. James Barry, *Crowning the Victors at Olympia*, 1777-83, complete image: panels 1, 2, & 3. Public Domain.

features, as does Herodotus, prominently holding his *Histories*, while Thucydides is nowhere to be seen, just as in West. These figures are generally identifiable by their features rather than requiring a knowledge of any Greek lettering: Barry's depiction is not exclusionary; he does not expect his viewers to read Greek. From these details it is clear that Barry's *Olympia* is based on an authentic and close reading of West's work and shows us the influence of the latter's particular reception of Pindar and the Classics.

Barry's depiction confirms the importance of religion in West's *Dissertation* but also vividly displays how confused was West's reception of the religious. The scene is literally framed by the gods: statues of Minerva and Herakles occupy key positions on the edges of the image, reflecting the real statues of Venus and Mars that were placed in the corners of the Great room, as Croft-Murray (1970: 68) observed. There are other Hellenic religious elements, like the contest between Poseidon and Athene depicted on the chariot of the Hiero of Syracuse. This jars with Christianising elements, which were not simply religious background noise appropriate to a painting of the period. There are olive branches and sometimes palms being waved in the air.⁴⁴ The depiction of Diagoras of Rhodes (of Pindar's 7th Olympian) is particularly striking: seated on his sons as if on a throne and raised above the crowd, with drapery across the knees, a stern visage, and a distinctly forked beard, is again very reminiscent of contemporary and earlier religious iconography, particularly depictions of God the Father.⁴⁵ The overall effect is of a mishmash of key figures that represent the different desirable facets of progress and advancement of Greece timelessly unified in and enhanced by their support of the Olympic contest, and framed by an overt and prominent religious symbolism.

The prominence of religion in Barry's painting confirms the potent and distinctive religious colouring of West's discussion of the Olympics. Barry's (and West's) deliberate attempt to sanitise and Christianise Hellenic religion, in a package that glorified Christianity, was obvious to viewers, but neither the symbolism nor the specific message is particularly coherent. In fact, it obscures West's larger message about ideal statesmanship and the good life. William Pressly (1981: 99-100) has argued that Barry's painting represents a 'deliberately concealed attempt to glorify the Roman Catholic Church'. Pressly (1981) argued that Barry took inspiration from West's *Dissertation*, thanks to their shared piety, in his repurposing of 'pagan' raw materials to venerate the church through West's comparison between Elis and the papal state, which Barry would later discuss at length in his own writings (in Fryer 1809: 328-331). However, Pressly (1981: 100) somewhat reductively argued that West presented an 'image of the Roman Catholic Church as the inheritor of the traditions of Ancient Greece and as that contemporary power which could best stimulate virtue and progress through enlightened rule'. In this, Pressly misses the nuance of West's presentation. His *Dissertation* certainly does venerate the Church and the virtues of Christian religion in general, but it was aimed at the contemporary English statesman. The *Dissertation* offers a practical blueprint for English statesmanship, and a model for the good life, not a geo-political statement about the political superiority of the Catholic Church. West's confused but overtly pious overtones, reproduced faithfully in Barry, clearly distracted from this message.

CONCLUSION

Gilbert West's reception of the Classics, which we have partly examined as it was interpreted by James Barry, was liberally anachronistic. West offered a highly idealised understanding of the past. But this is not to say West's understanding of the ancient world was false; he consistently demonstrated a keen grasp of the key intellectual issues of his day. The Classics were important to West because of their utility in his political situation in Britain, and less as a fixed object of historical study: they allowed West a model and a platform for peaceful cooperation, healthy living, cultural development, moral fortitude, and religious observance.

West, who took it upon himself to maintain the piety of the more sceptically minded Pitt and Lyttelton through weekly sermons, embraced the opportunity to offer another sermon to his readers through his discourse on the Olympics.⁴⁶ As an anonymous reviewer (*Lon. Mon. Rev.* 1749, i. 121) remarked, in West 'this admired *ancient* never before appeared to so *great advantage* in an *English* dress'. But as a man of God in his own way, West was faced with the problem of Hellenic religion: how to deal with its numerous and sinful gods and heroes, barbaric beliefs about sacrifice, and self-aggrandising mythology; yet its self-evident power as a foundational aspect of Olympic and panhellenic identity. West was far from the first Hellenist to encounter the problem of Greek religion. A major academic influence

for him was Petrus Faber, whose solution to the immorality of Greek religion in his *Agonisticon* (1592) was to intersperse details on Greek polytheism with 'fervent Christian pronouncements' (Lee 2011: 112-3). West attempted to sanitise Greek religion, to help teach his readers that the Olympic society allowed for a peaceful and prosperous state of meditation and contemplation of God. To achieve this West did indeed have to present the ancients in English dress: specifically, the modest garb of the English clergyman. West's only partially successful project of reconciliation of the Hellenic and Christian gods and mythologies is the key aspect of his reception of the Classics and coloured the views of his not inconsiderable readership.

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² Biographical details are largely taken from the *Dictionary of National Biography* [DNB] and Johnson (1821: 261-5).

³ Lyttelton addressed his (1747) *Observations on the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul* to West, and West his *Observations on the Resurrection* (1748) to Lyttelton.

⁴ E.g. Pope's *Iliad* (1715-20) and *Odyssey* (1725-6), Littlebury's *Herodotus* (1709), Stanyan's *Grecian History* (1707), Thomson's *Liberty* (1734), and Glover's *Leonidas* (1737). The fashion began to change toward works with a more limited and educated readership in the later eighteenth century, with the first *Principles of Translation* by Tytler (1790); on audiences of translations see Demetriou (1996: 281), Martindale (2005), and Zebrowski (2012: 240).

⁵ West was also very familiar with the Italian Mercuriali's (1569) *De Arte Gymnastica*; there is less evidence of familiarity with German scholarship in the dissertation.

⁶ Burette gave a number of lectures between 1705 and 1715, partially printed in the *Mémoires*, including some on the subject of athletics. These have been very sensitively treated by R. Waller (1982).

⁷ The practice should not be seen as representative of similar works at the time. West's and Burette both ignored important artistic evidence and pottery, even in the context of the Academy which was concerned with artefacts 'des Inscriptions et des Médailles', according to Waller (1982: 109) and Radford (2012: 174).

⁸ See Budge (2007: 159) & Moore (2008: 137) on the anti-Christian elements of the Enlightenment; Tsigakou (1981: 14) on the secular ethics of it; Crook (1972: 61-2) on the role of the Dilettanti society in this; and Waller (1982: 108, 112) on Burette's (non-)treatment of the religious elements of the games.

⁹ First in 1749, second in 1753, and again in 1766: from the *English Short Title Catalogue* (ESTC) record. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Aesop in Latin received respective print runs of 3000 and 4000 in 1711; the 2nd edition of Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* in 1713 was only printed in 711 copies. The first and second volumes of Pope's *Iliad* in 1715 and 1716 were printed in 2000 and 1250 copies respectively, while Hume's *History of Britain* only saw 2000 copies even when out of copyright in Scotland in 1754. On print runs and the nature of readership in the 18th century see St. Clair (2004: 467-74) and Raven (2007).

¹⁰ Editions from 1767, 1785, 1807, 1824, and 1841 survive. From the DNB.

¹¹ These two were the translations of Mr Dodd (1767) and the Rev. Tasker (1790). F. & C. Rivington (1810: 505-06) records the most prominent translations over this period.

¹² There remain at least 60 copies of the first edition of West's Odes of Pindar in accessible libraries today, as well as more than 60 others of the second and third editions, located across the globe, in the British Isles, the rest of Europe, and the United States, according to the ESTC.

¹³ The monopolies of the English booksellers after 1600 had inflated many book prices beyond the reach of the poor as a result of English laws allowing perpetual copyright. West's wrote during a period of heightened tensions between the English and the flourishing Scottish book industry with its 14-year copyright limit (introduced in 1710), which allowed Scottish booksellers to undercut the English. This resulted in a kind of class war in the courts: 'the more the London booksellers were

tempted to exaggerate the value of their portfolio, the more' the English poor were restricted from reading many works by their high prices due to monopoly, and 'the more they proclaimed the benefits of abolition'. See further St Clair (2004: 66-80, 107-21).

¹⁴ References were recorded in Chambers (1879: 192).

¹⁵ Similarly, as assessed by Dr Clarke (1806: 183), the work was 'admirable and will not be easily surpassed'.

¹⁶ Allibone (1871: 2651) collects a number of quotations from contemporary reviews. The anonymous writer of the 'Review: Odes of Pindar' (1749), remarked on 'this ingenious and learned writer... The above extracts [from West's preface and translations of Pindar] may possibly be sufficient to shew how far Mr. West's poetical talents are equal to the spirit of *Pindar*. And this we may venture to say, that as this admired *ancient* never before appeared to so great advantage in an *English* dress, so perhaps he never may appear with *greater*. The whole of Mr. West's book is indeed a treasure for which the republic of letters will be no less indebted to him, than Christianity already is for his excellent observations on the history and evidence of the resurrection'. Original emphasis.

¹⁷ On increasing specialisation in the nineteenth century see Stray (1988: 85-90).

¹⁸ West had deep academic connections: as Zebrowski (2007: 115) has observed, West attended Oxford alongside James Harris, John Upton, Floyer Sydenham, and Edward Bentham.

¹⁹ The later find at Oxyrhynchus demonstrated not that Pindar, as West argued, was in fact coherent, but instead that the bewildering style of Pindar was a characteristic stylistic feature of archaic poetry, on which see Barnstone & McCulloh (2010: xxvii). It is not impossible that West contemplated this possibility (e.g. in the preface), excusing the poet due to the simplicity of the age in which he lived, and praising Pindar for managing such beautiful poems in such a deficient context.

²⁰ The accusation of incoherence in Pindar was, in fact, a very old one, referenced by Eupolis (F366 Kock, 398 K/A, from Athenaeus 3a), and not resolved until a number of archaic poems were found at Oxyrhynchus, notably those of Bacchylides and Alcman in 1896 (the year, fittingly enough, of the first revived Olympic games). These finds proved that Pindar's style was typical of the period.

²¹ Murray (2004: 12-13, 15) has shown the roots of the change in attitude through the French revolution in the works of John Stuart Mill, Macaulay, and other earlier authors, and to Bulwer Lytton, before Grote. In the rediscovery of Lytton's lost incomplete manuscript of the third Volume of the 'Fall of Athens', Murray (2004: 16) has explained how 'Bulwer Lytton had anticipated by a decade most of the radical views on Athenian history hitherto attributed to George Grote'.

²² There was a particular hatred of Athenian democracy in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century works like Mitford e.g. in his article on Mitford in the *Westminster Review* (1826: 280-5), as explored by Murray (2004: 12) and Cartledge (2014: 255), who records that Grote was 'an admired and adherent not just of ancient Athens but more particularly and specifically of the ancient Athenian democracy of the fifth and fourth centuries BC; and in making a case for that hitherto much reviled polity, he both reoriented the trajectory of ancient history-writing and set the agenda for what is taken to be the 'core' of ancient Greek history ever since, that is to say, a history of democracy with Athens front and centre'. On the role of Sparta in 18th century Classics and its influence on ideas of Utopia, see Rawson (1991: 170-85), Demetriou (1996: 285), Morris (2004: 348), Saxonhouse (1993: 488), and Ataç (2006: 643).

²³ 'Such unshaken fidelity on the part of the Athenians to the general cause of Greece... was the just admiration of their descendants and the frequent theme of applause by their orators' Grote 2.257, in

Cartledge (2014: 265). See also Mill (1847), who says that the Athenians were 'the true hero of the epopee of Greek history, the most gifted community of human being which the world has yet seen'. Murray (2004: 32) cautiously traces a lot of this history, in respect of the erasure of Bulwer-Lytton's contribution to the argument for Athenian pre-eminence.

²⁴ A utilitarian approach also motivated West's choices of translations: West (1749: xlvi-ix) observed this himself. West includes each translation because it makes a point he can adapt: e.g. in Lucian (West 1749: clvi, clxi), Anacharsis wants to learn Greek customs, laws, and forms of government; the *Menexenus*, in West's commentary (1749: 281, 283), is a commemoration of the war dead. Evans (1943: 105) observes the contemporary interest that spurred West's inclusion of the *Menexenus*. Ataç (2006: 643) argued that the utilitarian nature of neo-classical works was the major driving force behind eighteenth-century neo-classicism, and this is certainly borne out here.

²⁵ West dedicating his *Pindar* to his friends Pitt and Lyttelton, the latter of whom even hung a picture of the poet on his wall (NPG D11479, published in 1824). Levine (2002: 85-6) discusses the collection of politicians who surrounded West, particularly William Pitt. See the DNB on Pope and Doddridge. On West's civil service career and Prince George see Nichols (1782: 209). The list of extraordinary Clerks in Sainty (2004) includes West, in an appointment on 15th May and as an ordinary Clerk in 1752, on 21st of April, a fact confirmed by Nichols (1782: 209).

²⁶ Contra Zebrowski (2012: 240) who argued that West 'worked without regard to contemporary sports'. Exercise: wrestling (West 1749: lii), horse racing (lxxxiii), and discus and the 'Quoit' (lx). West compares the 'State of Maturity and Perfection' of simply composed (but more expensively adorned) British theatre with inferior ancient drama (132-3, 137); the 'absurdities' of contemporary Italian opera with (similarly absurd) ancient Greek drama (133-4); soliloquy in Euripides (*Iphigenia in Tauris*) with that in Milton (*Agonistes* 1671; West 1749: 136); Greek with English versification (208-9); *consolation: a poem to the Memory of a Lady lately deceased* (1747), is 'infinitely superior to any made use of by Plato in the ensuing Oration, and indeed to any that mere Philosophy is capable of producing'; West (1749: 284).

²⁷ On the early Olympic tradition (including West) see Lee (2011: 109-10) and Radford (2012: 161). On a poster erected in 1851: 'It is now Two Hundred and Thirty-nine years since that noble generous and heroic Gentleman, MR.ROBERT DOVER, instituted the highly celebrated and renowned Olympic Games...' See Burns (1985: 235) for discussion of Dover's Olympics.

²⁸ On Burette's Cartesian influences, see Waller (1982: 110). These approaches were premised on the separation of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* – the body and the mind – in a kind of Roman stoic idea of restraint from physical exercise as epitomised by Seneca's eightieth epistle, as opposed to West's attitude, which was more of an Aristotelian-Galenic approach, that bodily health is necessary for a healthy mind (and vice versa).

²⁹ The English tradition was strongly influenced by Girolamo Mercuriali (1569). As Batchelor (2012: 186-9) argues, the impact of the new emphasis on physical exercise can even be felt in Jonathan Swift: the model of gymnastic training at the heart of his Houyhnhnm society, which is used to differentiate the temperate Houyhnhnm from the barbarous Yahoos, bears a remarkable resemblance to the Greek version, in Swift (1726: 130).

³⁰ For an excellent discussion of the use of Greek gymnastic ideals in the eighteenth century, see Batchelor (2012: 189). The rejection of Cartesian and neo-stoic models lasted only as long as the British Enlightenment; by the time of Cornélius de Pauw's *Recherches* (1787), a treatise arguing that the ancients were in fact deformed by physical exercise, the trend was largely spent, and gave way to

a tendency for the sort of strict dualist work exhibited by de Pauw. Waller (1982: 109-13) also offers a good discussion.

³¹ It is now unfashionable to think of Greek 'decline' in this sort of way, but the theory of Greek disunity as an explanation for the conquest of Greece by Rome has a long history and has often been seen in broader terms of decline of empires and contemporary allusions: e.g. Walbank (1944: 10-20), Gibson & Harrison (2013: 1-36, esp. 7).

³² The same themes appear in West's *Canto of the Fairy Queen* (1739: 1), where he criticised wealth inequality and luxury, and extolls the virtues of Lycurgus, the semi-mythical ancient Spartan Lawgiver of the eighth century BC. On Lycurgus see Plutarch *Lycurgus*, [Xenophon] *Lacedaemonion Politeia* but also Herodotus 1.65 for the earliest reference, and Plato's remark in *Laws*, 691e-2a is reflective of the mythical-historical aspects, while Polybius' in *History* 6.10 is also a good summary of the distilled Lycurgus myth in later periods. On the Greek attitudes towards luxury see Brown (1982: 396).

³³ This is largely based on Galen, *Thrasylbulus*.

³⁴ The religious aspect of West's work has been particularly neglected in scholarship on West, but it is central to his work as a whole, and appears in his *Canto* and various added translations, as in his notes on *Iphigenia in Tauris*, where the vast majority of his remarks are on religious curiosities, like the appearance of Athena in West (1749: 225).

³⁵ Herodotus' methodology on religion is laid out in 2.3.2, 37.1, 44.5, and especially 2.65.2; the best discussion is in Harrison 2000: 221.

³⁶ Far more so than for the more globalised modern. The idea of the Greeks as 'desperately alien' Greeks seems to originate in Fustel de Coulanges' *cit  antique* (USA 1991 [Paris 1864]: 4): 'Thus observed, Greece and Rome appear to us in a character absolutely inimitable; nothing in modern times resembles them; nothing in the future will ever resemble them.' On Greek religion as alien see Versnel (2011: 11). Some examples include Zaidman and Schmitt-Pantel (1992: 231) & Price (1984: 10), but examples spread across the 'ritual school' of scholars of Greek religion.

³⁷ In part this presentation is influenced by his reliance on Petrus Faber, whose (1592) *Agonisticon* collected references to the Greek Olympics interspersed with what Lee (2011: 112-3) has described as 'fervent Christian pronouncements'.

³⁸ He translates 'Heav'n-built' for *t n theodm t n* (god-built; Sophocles *Electra* 705-10, in West 1749: xcvi). He uses the term 'Hymn' synonymously with 'Ode', and favours a hymnal structure for these, much like Akenside (1745) and Mason (1756), two contemporary poets of Pindaric-style odes; see Jung (2004: 176-7) for a comparison of West, Akenside, and Mason's approaches. West's (1749: 55) translation of Pindar's 7th Ode, 32-38, is particularly powerful in this respect. On West's translations as 'rococo d cor', see Stoneman (2013: 380-2).

³⁹ The Arcadian Ideal is exemplified by Virgil's *Eclogues* 5.42, and William Livingstone's *Philosophic Solitude* (1747: 43-56) is illustrative of the eighteenth-century version, of a land steeped in the sublime; on this see Crook (1972: 96) and Dixon (2006: 47). Virgil's *Eclogues* 5.42; for a good discussion of contemporary American examples see Afinogenov (2009: 582-96).

⁴⁰ In the case of the olive crowns he cynically relates that the Eleians wished to make these valuable for the games, so they invented a story in which they 'pretended' the correct tree in the sanctuary of Jupiter for creating olive crowns had been indicated to them by the Oracle (1749: cxxix-cxxx). Likewise, the story that the games were to be celebrated every 5 years because of the 5 Idaeii Dactyli is rejected as unhistorical, and their 'Pretensions' as potential founders are discarded. Likewise in the

Menexenus West ridicules Plato's account of the Athenian origins claiming it was 'far-fetched, unphilosophical, and absurd' (59, 283).

⁴¹ Barry's explanation can be found in his account, reprinted in J. Barry (1783), *An Account of the Series of Pictures in the Great Room of the Society of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce at the Adelphi*, reprinted in Fryer (1809: 328-331), and he refers the reader to West in his final comment at the bottom of page 331.

⁴² For discussion of the details and context of the painting see Lee (2011: 110-11). On James Barry's Olympic composition see Pressly (2011: 123-40).

⁴³ The other two are 'The Triumph of the Thames' and 'The Distribution of Premiums'. This account comes mainly from Barry's own explanation in Fryer (1809: 328-331).

⁴⁴ Celebrating Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, in Mark 11:1-11, Matt. 21:1-11, Luke 19:28-44, John 12:12-19.

⁴⁵ Barry in Fryer (1809: 328) records the figure as Diagoras. On God the father, compare for instance *Holy Trinity*, painted in 1738-39, by Luca Rossetti da Orta, a fresco in St. Gaudenzio Church at Ivrea (Torino/Turin).

⁴⁶ Stephen (1881: 248) records that 'he frequently received the visits of Pitt and Lyttelton. These statesmen, we are told, had listened to 'the blandish-ments of infidelity', and their restoration to the true faith was in some measure due to West's arguments'.