Nicholas Biddle, Anacharsis, and the Grand Tour

When Nicholas Biddle (1786-1844) traveled in Europe in the years 1804 to 1807, he kept a series of notebooks in which he recorded both his movements and his thoughts on the sights he saw and the people he met. The recovery of these notebooks in 1976 and the recent publication of two of them enable us to get a better picture of his early character and to place him within the context of the history of American travelers. Why did he go to the Aegean of all places?

To answer this question, I begin by way of a fictional detour. In E. M. Forster's novel *A Room with a View*, the Reverend Mr. Beebe, speaking of the Miss Alans' proposed visit to Athens and Constantinople, says:

I haven't been to Greece myself, and I don't mean to go, and I can't imagine any of my friends going. It is altogether too big for our little lot. Don't you think so? Italy is just about as much as we can manage. Italy is heroic, but Greece is godlike or devilish—I am not sure which, and in either case absolutely out of our suburban focus. . . . I was saying, if our poor little Cockney lives must have a background, let it be Italian. Big enough in all conscience. The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel for me. There the contrast is just as much as I can realize. But not the Parthenon, not the frieze of Phidias at any price. . . .

1 For a summary of Biddle's early years, see Thomas P. Govan, *Nicholas Biddle, Nationalist and Banker, 1786-1844* (Chicago, 1959), and Thomas P. Govan, "Nicholas Biddle at Princeton," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 9 (1948), 49-61. The former is still the standard biography, but it concentrates on Biddle's later years and on the fortunes of the second Bank of the United States. For a quick summary of Biddle's European trip, based on the recovered journals, see Anne Felicity Woodhouse, "Nicholas Biddle in Europe, 1804-1807," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 103 (1979), 3-33. For a detailed analysis of the itinerary of his Greek trip, see R. A. McNeal, ed., *Nicholas Biddle in Greece: The Journals and Letters of 1806* (University Park, Pa., 1993), 1 ff.

2 Chap. 18.
Forster caught a fundamental truth about travel in the Aegean. Right down to the 1960s Greece was out of the ordinary path of the tourist: a truly exotic locale whither one simply did not go without some special reason. Although by the beginning of this century the elderly Miss Alans could be assured of finding comfortable pensions in Athens and Constantinople, there was still a prejudice against travel in the Aegean. Whatever their views of the godlike or devilish character of ancient Greece, Europeans considered Greece a decaying backwater in the Balkans, a place still tainted by its barbarous Ottoman past. The perceived dangers and discomforts of travel there were enough to cloud even the prospect of seeing the relics of Greek antiquity on their home ground. Better to remain on the more familiar soil of Italy, where one's suburban sensibilities would not be so rudely shocked.

This separation of Europe from the Levant was even more keenly felt in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the Turks still inspired a measure of terror in European minds. If travel in Europe itself was then inconvenient, uncomfortable, dangerous, and grossly expensive, it was even more so in the Levant. Only a minute wealthy elite, one that was young and healthy, ventured to go there; and the men of this class (with the rare exception of a Lady Mary Wortley Montague, they were exclusively men) all shared not only youth and wealth but also a serious interest in scientific or classical learning. This was the era of gentlemen travelers, of the milordi, as they were called even in the Aegean.

The milordi were travelers of a particular kind, following a long tradition. By discussing travel as a general phenomenon, modern anthropologists and sociologists have helped us to understand how the grand tourists were different from us. Most modern tourism is unabashedly recreational and escapist. People head for the sunny south, "the pleasure periphery," to flee the routine of work in a cold, dark climate. The object is rest and relaxation, and cultural improvement is a distinctly minor concern. A more energetic—and also more upmarket—type of traveler is concerned with the environment. The object in this case is to scale a mountain, or probe the depths of a tropical rain forest, or photograph wild game on an African savanna. But this modern type of tourist is apt to share with his recreational cousin an indifference to local culture. The natives are supposed to bring the drinks

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and swat the flies, and nobody cares much to understand their quaint and exotic ways. Some people, however, mostly scholars intent on researching their next books, are interested in local culture; and it is only fair to set off cultural tourism as a distinct type. Allied to it, but with a different object, is historical tourism. This kind of traveler is interested not so much in the present as in the past; and indeed the present may be a barrier to that past.4

Recreational and environmental tourism played almost no part in the plans of the milordi. They came in quest of culture, specifically Greek and Roman history; and theirs was a philosophical tourism. They embarked upon a kind of secular pilgrimage; and they worked hard at fulfilling what they considered a duty to themselves and to their society. Their travel was far more akin to toil than play. They came to explore the past and in so doing to look only incidentally at the present. As heirs of the Renaissance, they did not look inward for salvation, but outward to the world around them, to the remnants of antiquity, where, they thought, truth really lay. This orientation was the reason for their scientific and historical curiosity. Instruction in history and some acquaintance with foreign ways came to be considered an essential part of a true gentleman’s education and a means of preparing for a future role as a leader of society back home.5

The milordi who set out to discover the roots of their past in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean, though they might indulge in whoring and drinking in a society more tolerant of this behavior than their own (I do not for a moment want to depreciate the carnal attractions of the journey), nonetheless undertook a kind of heroic work. Getting the required education from their travels involved some necessary suffering, and the milordi expected to be tested. This kind of travel had already had a long tradition, one that stretched back to Gilgamesh and Odysseus and that had taken on a special character in the Middle Ages. As both Gilgamesh and Odysseus had gained wisdom through experience, so the medieval knight went on his chivalrous journey to discover himself. The grand tourist was an updated and secular version of the medieval knight errant. His object was, like that of his predecessors, to gain recognition and power—to collect the experience that

would make him famous on his triumphant return. One did not go to lose one's own culture, and certainly not to stay abroad so as to become an expatriate. One had a duty to return.

The journals that were the product of this curiosity are themselves an index of the educational purpose of the grand tour. A man was supposed to work hard at making observations and putting them on paper. Even the modern guidebooks that were the ultimate outgrowth of this journal-keeping habit show the same concern for amassing concrete and correct detail and for the need on the part of the traveler to go the appointed rounds. Murray's old *Handbook to Greece*, for example, says that the country's attraction lies in its sights, or, perhaps we might say more accurately, sites. It was not a place for "the mere idler or man of pleasure." The serious traveler undertook his journey in the spirit of "a penitential cult of erudition," dutifully seeing galleries, museums, monuments, churches, and ruins. To know what to see, one had to prepare beforehand by an extensive course of reading. The journals and the subsequent guidebooks are full of references to the appropriate books, most of them learned tomes.

How was Biddle a philosophical traveler in the tradition of the milordi? The avowed purpose of his travel was knowledge and moral improvement. Although he entered the Levant ostensibly to pursue the ancient Greeks, his autopsy of the current scene tended to focus on the men he met along the road rather than on the antiquities. As he himself confesses, he preferred living people to dead rocks; and his description of the sites, often perfunctory, are far less interesting than his observations on manners and morals. Travel for him, whether or not he would have admitted the fact, was a means of making friends of the right sort; and the really useful knowledge he acquired was the savoir faire of polite society. His pursuit of the ancient Greeks was genuine enough and was aimed at developing that taste for the antique that any gentleman of his day was expected to have. But it was also a kind of cover for the larger and more practical aim of polishing his social

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8 Ibid., 68. The quote from Murray is Pemble's.
skills, and in this regard too he resembled the other milordi.

One of the most striking features of his character was his willingness, even his eagerness, to travel alone. He did not need the constant society of others, particularly that of people of his own age. He seems to have been one of those individuals who is born middle-aged, and he liked to assume a gravity of demeanor beyond his years. When he did associate himself with others, his companions tended to be his elders, from whom he thought he might learn something. His own contemporaries, particularly women, he was apt to scorn as mental lightweights. His Greek journal gives us plenty of evidence of the philosophic earnestness that governed his taste in traveling companions:

To travel alone connects itself in the minds of most men with many an image of listlessness & ennui. But habit and a love of being alone have fortified me against any such sentiments, which if I have ever felt them, have approached me rather in the moments of society than of solitude. Society & travel must to be useful, be very delicately composed. The lessons & the experience of an old & a judicious man will be doubly [effective], because practically unprepared, on the mind of a young & willing companion, and such a man is always desirable. With females you can never see the whole of anything. The courtesies of society distract attention, & tho' many objects are seen more agreeably when seen with females, yet all are seen less profoundly & perhaps less usefully. But the most useless & unprofitable of all society in travelling is that with persons of your own age & standing in point of improvement. Rarely [do] such persons ever agree because they have rarely the same objects mutually interesting. They therefore spoil each other. They form a society between themselves which saves at once the trouble & the great advantage of cultivating that of the country where you travel. I have therefore always found the tone of my mind relax the most when accident threw me into the society of my young countrymen.9

The appropriate way to get a reputation for knowledge was, he thought, to do the unusual. Hence his trip to Greece. Anybody could see Italy, so there was nothing new there. He preferred exclusive knowledge, as he called it, because this was the source of real reputation among men.10 One can detect in this attitude a fair measure of pomposity, a characteristic not altogether lovable in one so young. But Biddle was clearly an ambitious man

9 McNeal, Nicholas Biddle in Greece, 50.
10 Ibid., 50-51.
who wanted his friends to be useful, and he chose them accordingly. When, in Boeotia, Attica, and the Peloponnesus, he ran across four traveling Englishmen, he had little good to say of them. The eldest of them, one Williams, who had lived some time out of England, fared better in Biddle’s estimation. But Palmer, Walpole, and Mackenzie are the butt of a number of acid comments. They might be honest, well-intentioned, and good Greek scholars, but they were insufferably arrogant and traveled merely to be able to say that they had seen some ancient relic and not because they were really interested in the present state of the country. “There is a sort of brutal coldness about them which forbids them from mingling with, or deriving information from foreigners. Every man is estimated by the distance of his birthplace from Hyde Park.”

Biddle may have avoided his own contemporaries, but it would be a mistake to conclude that he was antisocial. Just the contrary. Later in his career he was a social lion who knew everyone of importance. His trip to Greece shows us the incipient development of this side of his character. So far from avoiding company, the young Biddle actively sought it, whatever he might say about the joys of solitude. His journal is proof enough of this need for company—and for the approval that this company might give him. When he reached Malta, he immediately fell into the company of the officers of the USS Constitution, which happened to be in port at the time. Having letters of introduction to Alexander Ball, the governor of the island, he found his way into the governor’s house and dinner parties. We get a vivid picture of the irascible John Rogers, captain of the Constitution, indignant that he had been thwarted in his wish to finish off the Tripolitan War properly by giving the enemy a real taste of American fighting prowess. When Biddle arrived in Athens, he sought out both Fauvel and Lusieri, the reigning ciceroni, and profited from their guidance. Though he clearly preferred Fauvel as the more

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11 I have been able to identify only two of these four men: Alexander Mackenzie (1781-1809) matriculated at Christ Church College, Oxford, in 1800, graduating B.A. in 1804 and M.A. in 1807. The classical scholar and clergyman Robert Walpole (1781-1856) toured Greece shortly after his graduation in 1803. He was the author of Memoirs Relating to European and Asiatic Turkey (2d ed., London, 1818) and Travels in Various Countries of the East (London, 1820). In both books, which are compilations from the works of earlier travelers, there is very little about Walpole himself. Williams, whoever he was, was Walpole’s painter. Palmer was, according to Biddle, a clergyman.

12 McNeal, Nicholas Biddle in Greece, 169-70, 186-87. On the other hand, Biddle respected a Venetian companion by the name of Savy, with whom he traveled from Naples to Messina and whom he later found in Athens.
able man, "an amiable Frenchman of the old school of manners . . . , able and willing to convey all instruction," he delighted in describing the amusing rivalry of the two men, who abused each another grossly.

The social side of Biddle’s character is well illustrated by his dealings with Robert Semple (1766-1816). Though born in America, Semple was educated in England and was a determined Anglophile. A traveler and, from 1815, a governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, he left London in June 1805 for a business trip to Spain and Italy. He met Biddle in Naples, and together they traveled from Naples to Sicily and then Malta. In the second volume of Semple’s account of this trip is the tale of his meeting with Biddle and of their voyage together from Naples to Sicily and then Malta. Biddle was himself traveling then in the company of Joseph Barnes, U. S. consul at Palermo from 1802 to 1806; and on the boat to Sicily, Semple gravitated to their company. Biddle mentions Semple briefly but respectfully. Unable to decide whether the man was an Englishman or an American, he concludes that the distinction did not really matter because education is a more decisive criterion of a person’s character than birth. Semple for his part gives a more detailed account than Biddle of their trip to Messina and then to Malta. In Malta they parted, Semple taking ship for Constantinople while Biddle looked for a boat to Zante. Semple gives only two glimpses of Biddle as a person. In one, Biddle, with Barnes, gets seasick and spends a stormy night in the cramped hold of the ship carrying them to Sicily. In the other, Semple and Biddle have a friendly argument over the precise nature of some fossils they found on Cape Passero in Sicily.

If the philosophic travel of the milordi was in part a search for the right mentors, it was also an occasion for learning to deal with the difficulties posed by the behavior of other people, particularly foreigners. That Biddle had a lot to learn—and that he recognized as much—emerges from two incidents on his boat trip from Naples to Sicily. He found on board the brig Themistocles when it left Naples a Greek priest:

13 Ibid., 137-38.
15 McNeal, Nicholas Biddle in Greece, 51. See also 57, 64, and 124 for the passage, with Semple, from Messina to Malta on a spirenaro, a small coastal sailing vessel, lateen rigged and provided with oars.
I had made myself intimate on board with a Greek priest who had been smuggled away from Naples. With him I began some lessons in his language. . . . I did a very foolish thing. Religious prejudices should rarely be contradicted, & never except with the hope of correction. With my priest I discoursed today on a variety of subjects & among others, on his religious [beliefs]. With regard to the necessity of fasts & mortifications I stated my doubts with tolerable skepticism, but when he grew warm, declared to have a piece of the true cross which would resist the flame, & secure him from ten thousand bullets, & above all when he related a miracle worked by a Patriarch of Constantinople who in an instant lighted with a touch of his beard a room full of lamps which Satan had extinguished, I could not resist a loud & strong expression of my incredulity. I perceived he never will forgive me. I take from it a lesson for the future. Whatever may be our sentiments of religions we should avoid expression of them except to those who are liberal enough to pardon or to profit from them.16

The Greek ship that sailed from Naples was, at least officially, supposed to be going to Zante in the Ionian islands; this was the reason Biddle chose it. The French, who occupied Naples, were suspicious of ships headed in the direction of British-occupied Sicily, and so everyone on board made a great show of being bound for Zante. Whether the captain ever actually intended to go there at all is a question. In any case when the ship arrived at Messina, the captain changed his plans, leaving Biddle and others to fend for themselves. Biddle says that the captain took on a new cargo and therefore changed his mind.17 Biddle had expected to go immediately from Messina to Zante, but instead had to bide his time. The captain continually delayed his departure for one reason or another, and his passengers could do nothing but fume at the delay:

Fifteen anxious days of discontent of ennui & of oeconomy were not spent, but melted at Messina. When I growled at the dreadful idea of 5 days detention at Nice and lamented the sad delay of a Genoese felucca, I did not anticipate that I should one day linger in Sicily while reposing confidence in the honor of a Grecian. But who could suppose that a descendant of Socrates could have been treacherous.18

16 Ibid., 55-56.
17 Ibid., 57.
18 Ibid., 56. Semple, Observations, 2:100, had earlier come to much the same conclusion about the captain's character. He, like most Greeks whom Semple met, was full of falsehood and duplicity.
The captain kept putting off the day of departure “dopo domani” (“the day after tomorrow”). Then the holy week came on, then the Greek fast days. What was he actually doing? Perhaps he was motivated by a mixture of religious scruple and Levantine opportunism. Biddle himself could not fathom his capricious actions and could only watch in disgust as the ship finally sailed off without him.

The philosophic travel of the milordi was very much a literary phenomenon. There are two senses in which this statement is true. The grand tourists, first, were inspired by texts that they either read in advance or that they took with them. In either case the books determined where they went and what they chose to see. This side of the literary equation I will raise in the next section of this paper. For the moment, however, I am concerned with texts of another kind—specifically, with those books that the grand tourists produced themselves. For the fact is that these tourists seemed compelled to amass information, to reflect on its significance, and then to write down the results. Hence the plethora of travel narratives that marked the eighteenth century and that grew into a veritable tidal wave in the nineteenth, when a rapidly growing middle class assumed for itself the hitherto aristocratic pastime of travel. In conformity with this custom, Biddle too produced a text. Although it is true that he chose not to publish it himself, we can, when we look at it even in its present rough form, see that it emerged from a well-established literary tradition to which it is intimately tied not only by its content but by its form.¹⁹

The story of Biddle’s Greek trip is contained in two small notebooks, one of which continues the other, and in four surviving letters.²⁰ There were once other letters, but these have been lost or remain undiscovered. The four letters are mostly composed of material written earlier in the journals. The special value of these documents lies in their having been composed on the scene as Biddle traveled. They are the author’s contemporary thoughts, just as he jotted them down. They were never intended to be made public, but were directed either to himself or to his family. He says expressly that they were not to escape beyond the boundary of the family because they were in no condition to travel.²¹ Biddle’s father had urged him to keep a journal,

¹⁹ McNeal, Nicholas Biddle in Greece, 24 ff., discusses this question in detail.
²⁰ See ibid., 38 ff., for the provenance of these documents, as well as their history.
²¹ Ibid., 235.
perhaps as a means of paying the costs of the trip through publication in some form, but Biddle never edited his European journals. When he returned to America, he became involved in editing the journals of Lewis and Clark; his own exactly contemporary writings he put aside. In view of his masterful handling of the Lewis and Clark papers, it is unfortunate that he never returned to the job of putting his European trip before the public. If he thought that he did not have the talent to be a writer of travel narrative, he underestimated his abilities. But perhaps he concluded that there was no market for such a book or that a travel book, savoring too much of journalism and hence of trade, was not a fit project for a gentleman. In any case his growing interest in politics and finance probably drove all notion of such a book out of his head.

The Greek journal takes the form of a series of letters to his brother Thomas, dated from various stops along his road. Inserted into these "letters" is a long essay on the antiquities of Athens, written in part at least while Biddle idled away his time in quarantine in Trieste in the latter half of July 1806. The epistolary form was a device typical of eighteenth-century travel narrative. Whether narratives written in this form were factual or fictional, the form was supposed to add an element of authorial presence, to make the information in the text sound authentic, and thereby to reinforce the author's position as a firsthand authority.

The classical idea upon which the form was founded was the notion that the author should give both instruction and pleasure and should talk about himself only enough to convince the reader of the truth of his narrative. In the nineteenth century this ideal unity broke down, and books were written either for pleasure or for use. The ultimate development of the latter category was the tourist guidebook, the Murray or Baedeker, and their modern incarnation, the Blue Guide. But Biddle still wrote in the old tradition, conveying facts and his observations to give the reader the necessary information and putting this information into the pleasing form of letters. But since Biddle never prepared his text for a critical public audience, he never indulged in another feature of eighteenth-century travel writing: the use of others' scholarship. Many published books of his time were larded with superfluous information, a dizzying array of quotations and citations from classical authors to illustrate the known ancient history of a site or an artifact. But in conveying their learning in this way, much of it acquired in a library long after the journey in question, the authors produced books that are, or seem to our generation, almost unreadable. Typical examples are the
ponderous products of an Edward Dodwell or a William Martin Leake, books from which all spontaneity has vanished and in which a person's own observations and character are submerged in a sea of geographical or chronological speculation. As useful as this kind of scholarship doubtless was in its day, when the existing sites and artifacts needed to be correlated with ancient literary evidence, it obscured precisely the element of the personal, or subjective, that a modern audience would prefer. Since Biddle never got around to burning the midnight oil to create a book in the taste current in his time, his narrative is refreshingly personal and reflective. As a philosophic traveler, he compiled the expected information, but that information was his own and not somebody else's. He focused his attention on what he actually saw, and hence he shows us how his attention was actively engaged by the real world through which he was moving.

It is this heightened element of the subjective that separates Biddle's work from the more conventional travel writing of his time. But this tendency to display private feelings was not confined to a private and unpublished work like Biddle's. We can see it even more clearly in a work of conscious literary artifice like Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire* of 1811. The old neoclassical interest in society as a whole is beginning to yield to the romantic insistence upon the self. Insofar as travel literature in English is concerned, the logical development of this trend is Alexander Kinglake's *Eothen*. By the time of its appearance in 1844, the guidebook had its own separate identity; and an author could dispense with vital statistics as such and concentrate on the psychological significance, for himself, of the events of his journey. Kinglake's sole concern was his own monumental ego, not any sympathetic observation of the people on his journey. In his case the observer has become the poseur.

Implicit in the romantic exaltation of the self is the traveler's wish to separate himself from the herd, to make of his own journey and his own

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22 One way in which the mania for amassing information manifested itself—and an index, too, of the textual orientation of the grand tourist—was the systematic collection of ancient inscriptions. Most travel books are full of their authors' copies of these artifacts. Biddle himself succumbed to this habit, but only fitfully. He seems not to have had the patience for this sort of activity. His Greek journal contains only one short inscription, a stone that was shown to every traveler passing through the village of Kastri, the site of ancient Delphi. Cf. McNeal, *Nicholas Biddle in Greece*, 98. A. Boeckh published an articulated text as No. 1716 of *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*. A correct translation of this complete text is as follows: "A[ulus] Marius Nepos, the father, from Corinth, and Julia Aigiale, a Delphian, [dedicate] to Pythian Apollo [this statue of] their son, Marius Nepos Aigialeinos, honored by the council of the Corinthians with the offices of counselor and magistrate."
experience something special. The term "anti-tourist" has been recently coined to define this phenomenon and has been applied in particular to Henry James.  

Although no one would claim that Biddle’s simple journal is in any way comparable to the sophistication of, say, James’s *Italian Hours*, still there is in it something of the same self-congratulatory tone. Biddle claims exclusive knowledge. This, he says, is what he has gained by leaving heavily traveled Italy for Greece. He, like James, means to distance himself from the herd of other travelers, and the written account is a means of establishing this exclusiveness. The man who writes has a special status. He has a better knowledge of the people and places he has seen by virtue of his having described them. By writing down his own reactions he proves his independence of the beaten path. But the act of writing down one’s reactions is not only an act of romantic independence but an affirmation of cultural belonging. The traveler participates in an act that others have performed, since the production of a text is an expected part of travel. This is the reason why travel literature proliferated in post-Napoleonic Europe. “Writers and readers alike saw themselves moving through a domain of texts, seeking the complex satisfaction of participating in a process of cultural accreditation while also standing aloof from such participation as a form of imitation.”

All I am suggesting here is that the anti-touristic tendencies so evident later in the nineteenth century can be found in embryonic form in a journal such as Biddle’s, which, although it was the product of a neoclassical mind, was a spontaneous work and as such reveals despite itself something of the emerging romantic preference for the writer’s response to his journey over the amassing of simple factual description.

A sample of Biddle’s subjectivism, a mood piece heavy with sentiment and even a measure of poetry, occurs just after his arrival at Glarentza and his kind reception by the local Turkish customs official. While dinner was being prepared, he says:

I went out to see the country &c walked about a quarter of a mile to a little rising ground, which offered the remains of a Venetian fortress. It was a beautiful situation. The sun was just going down. Around me was a melancholy picture

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24 Ibid., 159.
of desolation. Over the ruins of the fortress where vegetation was contending against the fragments a groupe of cows & sheep were feeding. The shepherd leaning upon his staff stood wondering at the curiosity of this stranger. At a little distance the sea was calm, & the numerous islands which covered its surface gave it a beautiful variety. The eye rested upon Ithaca that little spot which is immortalized by the song of the first of poets & by the residence of the man who like myself was a wanderer. I now felt that I was in Greece. I felt that I was alone in a foreign country distant from all that was dear to me, surrounded by barbarians who yet occupied a soil interesting from its former virtues & its present ruin. I thought of my country my friends and of you. Not wishing to remain too long, I returned to the House.25

Though quoted to show the traveler's subjective state of mind, this passage is instructive as well because of its literary reference. Homer enters the picture, and Biddle defines himself in relation to the epic and its hero. This passage may reveal Biddle's subjectivism, but it also tells us his real interest in travel—the world of antiquity. It is not the everyday world around him that will absorb his attention. As his reference to barbarians and desolation shows, he came to commune with the spirits of antiquity. He even says as much with his reference to the former virtues of the place. This, he says, used to be Greece. The Ottoman present escapes his attention, at least temporarily, when his true feelings emerge. Insofar as he too disregards daily life, Biddle joins the crowd of visitors for whom only antiquity mattered. The milordi were as a group interested in Culture, not culture; and the former was to be found in books.26 One purpose of travel was to find the remaining traces of antiquity, and books were the traveler's vade mecum. Dodwell expresses this point of view perfectly: "Almost every rock, every promontory, every view, is haunted by the shadows of the mighty dead. Every portion of the soil appears to teem with historical recollections; or it borrows some potent but invisible charm from the inspiration of poetry, the effects of genius, or the energies of liberty or patriotism."27

Biddle's journey resulted not only in the production of a text; it was itself occasioned and conditioned by texts. One such text is vitally important in

25 McNeal, Nicholas Biddle in Greece, 89-90.
26 Buzard, Beaten Path, 174-75.
27 Edward Dodwell, A Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece during the Years 1801, 1805 and 1806 (2 vols., London, 1819), 1:iv.
assessing Biddle's attitude toward Greece, both ancient and modern, and in establishing his motives for travel and the results of his trip. That book is Jean-Jacques Barthélemy's *Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis en Grèce dans le Milieu du Quatrième Siècle avant l'Ère Vulgaire* (Paris, 1788). Biddle carried with him into Greece an Italian translation of this work, probably *Viaggio d'Anacarsi* (12 vols., Venice, 1791-93). Even before leaving home he had acquired the third French edition of 1790, the seven volumes of which, with Biddle's autograph of June 1, 1802, are still in the library at Andalusia. Apart from the political writings of Junius and a volume of Cicero's speeches, *Anacharsis* was his companion throughout his trip; this book had a tremendous influence on his thinking. It would not be too much to say that Biddle can be seen as a kind of reincarnation of the hero of that picaresque novel. Biddle himself may not have felt the connection, but we, who have both his autobiographical journal and the novel, can see the striking parallels. Anacharsis and Biddle were both young men who traveled to learn. Their object was Bildung, and their texts are Bildungsromane. Biddle himself claims that the trip to Greece was a turning point in his life, one that provided him with a fund of ideas for his subsequent career as a politician and a financier. Many of these ideas are prefigured in his reactions to the Greek scene and resemble what he read in *Anacharsis*.28

This book is a hybrid, being both a novel and a history. Ostensibly it recounts the fictional story of one Anacharsis, a Scythian, who sojourned in Greece from 363 to 337 B.C. The book details his trips to various places in the Aegean and his observations on the people, most of them famous, whom he meets. But it is also a regular history, both retrospective and current. In its outward form it is a journal, seemingly Anacharsis's own written record as he traveled about and observed the country; but it contains a number of letters and independent essays.

*Anacharsis* is not now widely known, let alone widely read. The problem is that it is a period piece that responded to the neoclassical tastes of the Enlightenment and is more French than Greek.29 Not only is its scholarship antiquated (though not so much so as some might think), but its perspective has no resonance with a modern audience. And yet in its day it was wildly

28 My references to this book will be to the four-volume English translation published in Philadelphia in 1804.
popular. From the time of its first publication right through the first half of the nineteenth century it went through edition after edition, and it was translated into many languages. Its author, a Jesuit-educated scholar (1716-95), was a numismatist, epigraphist, and Hellenist, a member of the French learned establishment, who traveled in Italy in 1755-57 but never got nearer to Greece than Naples and Paestum. With the publication of Anacharsis, he achieved instant celebrity, since his book seemed to offer his contemporaries just what they wanted in a panoramic view of Greek civilization. His book was, in fact, a kind of encyclopedia, based on thirty years of meticulous research; and as a work of scholarship, it is still impressive, with its 20,000 citations and its complete coverage of Greek culture. It is a gigantic mosaic, a repertoire of European learning and humanism from the Renaissance to about 1780.\textsuperscript{30}

Anacharsis is flawed, in our view, by its anachronistic notion of a past golden age. Barthélemy’s Greece is a civilized and urbane society in which there is little that is offensive or brutal. His antiquity is harmonious and noble, functioning in an orderly and measured way. Apart from the occasional mad despot like Dionysius of Syracuse or a wandering band of raving Bacchic maenads, we see a society whose smooth surface is rarely disturbed by strong emotion. The shepherds herd their flocks in pastoral bliss, and the city dwellers enjoy the best of art and philosophy. Barthélemy’s view of Greek society rests, somewhat paradoxically, on the idea of the noble primitive popularized by Rousseau. Barthélemy sees man as a natural innocent who is actually corrupted by civilization. For this reason his Greeks are the relatively uncontaminated children of a better place and time. Why study the antique? Because in this way one can get closer to nature, to the simple virtuous customs of an earlier era, when natural man was not yet ruined by too much history. This partiality for the simple, the natural, and the primitive helps to explain the craze for Doric architecture that was contemporary with Barthélemy; and it is the reason why Barthélemy himself pictures Anacharsis as a Scythe, a natural man naturally good.

A corollary of this belief in primitive goodness is an obsession with Sparta and a tendency to depreciate Athens. This complete reversal of current fashion may seem peculiar, but it has its roots in the thinking of the

\textsuperscript{30} Maurice Badolle, L’Abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy (1716-1795) et L’Hellénisme en France dans la Second Moitié du XVIIIe Siècle (Paris, 1926?), 255.
Enlightenment. The conscious improvement of society by way of legislative reform was an idée fixe at the time. Hence Barthélemy valued Solon and Lycurgus precisely because they fulfilled the current idea of the wise legislator. Since the eighteenth century did not value democracy but rather good government rationally conceived, the cultural heroes of Sparta and Athens were Barthélemy's models of the ideal wise man. And once good government is rationally imposed, it ought not to be allowed to degenerate through unguided change or development. Lycurgus early on put Sparta on the track of good government, and his plan was carefully followed over time. Thus the Spartans of a later age preserved their original goodness. The Athenians, however, fell into all sorts of excess, led by demagogues who perverted the good aristocratic constitution imposed by Solon. Their civilization in the fifth and fourth centuries might have much to recommend it; but their intellectual and artistic accomplishments were made in spite of, and not because of, the change toward greater democracy. To the degree that they were more sophisticated, more civilized, than the Spartans, to this degree they were also demoralized and inclined to corruption. His thumbnail sketch of them as "violent, unjust, gentle, compassionate, vainglorious, crouching, haughty, and timid" is not especially flattering.31

As if there were not already a contradiction in looking at the Greeks as at once virtuously simple and yet civilized by their lawgivers, Barthélemy adds to the problem by conceiving of them as a secular and rational society in which there is little in the way of emotional enthusiasm. The gods are honored with the appropriate rites, but there is no sense that these gods were real or that anyone took them very seriously. They function mainly as the inspiration for a colorful and playful mythology to be manipulated for literary ends. These gods seem no more real for the Greeks than they appeared to Ovid. In the place of religious enthusiasm, or as a sublimation for it, there was philosophy. Barthélemy is not quite sure what to make of Plato, commonly regarded as a charlatan by Barthélemy's contemporaries; but he glorifies Socrates and Aristotle as models of proper philosophic man. Just as the neoclassical Frenchman had no great interest in the deeper questions of metaphysics, so Barthélemy's treatment of Greek philosophy centers on morality. How is reason a guide to appropriate behavior? This was the eight-

31 Barthélemy, Anacharsis, 1:316. Cf. also 332-33.
eenth century’s view of the proper role of philosophy, and Barthélemy foists it on the Greeks.

Implicit in this preoccupation with morality is an educational theory and a view of the role of history. The goal of an education ought to be the reasoned cultivation of the mind through liberal studies and also the training of the body through appropriate manly exercises. This was of course a Renaissance ideal that was drawn from Roman practice, or at any rate Ciceronian theory, and had little relevance to classical Greece; but Barthélemy seems not to have realized the discrepancy. Thus he could confuse his historical Athenian with the current fashion: “An Athenian who had had such an education would be a perfect example of the honnête homme, and undoubtedly many a Frenchman who read Anacharsis liked to see himself mirrored in this picture.” An important part of this training in morality was the instructional use of history, which was to function as a source of exempla. One looked at the great men of the past for the lessons they could teach. For this reason Anacharsis is a kaleidoscopic record of the doings of prominent men. Barthélemy passes in review one after another of the great men of the fourth century and also manages a retrospective look at the worthies of an earlier age. That the careers of great men could teach the lessons of history was a favorite assumption of the neoclassical age and goes far to explain the rage for Plutarch and his biographies. This view of history as a tool for teaching morality is now out of favor and is another reason why Anacharsis seems so dated to us.

What should bring a fourth-century Scythian into the Aegean? Barthélemy attributes to Anacharsis the motivations typical of the later milordi. One travels for cultural and historical enlightenment. Filled with disgust for his own barbarian land, the inhabitants of which had mistreated his grandfather, another Anacharsis who had sojourned in Greece, the hero admires the virtue of the Greeks, all the more so when he purchases a Greek slave, one Timagenes, who becomes his first mentor and traveling companion. Like the later milordi, Anacharsis must have his traveling tutor. Intrigued by Timagenes’s conversation, Anacharsis resolved to quit Scythia, “a nation whose only virtue seemed ... to consist in its ignorance of vice,” and then spent the best years of his life principally in Greece but also in

32 Augustinos, French Odysseys, 42.
33 Herodotus 4.76.
34 Barthélemy, Anacharsis, 1:189-90.
Egypt and Persia. The course of his education involves three things: contemplating great works of art; becoming familiar with the entire range of Greek literature, history, and philosophy; and, perhaps most importantly, associating with great men. The result of this program is a training in virtue. Anacharsis aims to spread the benefit of what he has learned by writing down his reflections. So a massive, multivolume work takes the form of a journal, into which are inserted his conversations and his reactions to people and ideas. His is not just a recital of monuments and fables, but a compendium of the taste, the knowledge, and the ignorance of an age for the purpose of example and instruction.  

But if Anacharsis goes abroad to learn the arts of civilization, it is significant that he finds them in the Aegean and, apparently, not elsewhere. He does spend some ten years (!) in Egypt and Persia; but this part of the trip is summarized in a few letters written to him about affairs in Greece. The best that Anacharsis himself can do is to praise the conduct of another of his mentors, the Persian Arsames. He does so, however, on the basis of a host of references to Greek sources, mostly to Xenophon. Anacharsis may adopt the prevalent eighteenth-century view that Greek civilization originated in Egypt and Mesopotamia, which was, after all the Greeks' own view; but his very treatment of these civilizations shows his dependence on the Greeks themselves, who knew very little about them. In the eighteenth century there was no modern knowledge of these areas and no sense of any cultural dependence on them. Whatever had been of value in them had been absorbed, transmuted, and handed on by the Greeks. Anacharsis's book therefore mirrors the knowledge of Egypt and Mesopotamia that was accessible to Barthélemy.  

This brief summary of the educational aim of the Greek connection hardly does justice to Barthélemy's monumentally complex treatment of it. Poor Anacharsis has to sit through endless lectures, to model his behavior on one worthy after another, and to read the entire corpus of Greek literature, and much Roman as well; and the reader of his soi-disant journal has to follow him every step of the way. Here is an educational program that would break the spirit of any adolescent, no matter how intelligent. But we have to remember that the book is the story of Barthélemy's own intellectual odyssey and is only the ideal formulation of an educational goal that in practice very
few people ever attained completely. Its key idea, however, that the study of
the Greeks was the way to Culture, the means of transcending barbarism,
was a common assumption that few at the time would have questioned.

We might well ask what was the ultimate end of this course of training.
Barthélemy has an answer to this question, and it is not one that we might
expect. Neither knowledge itself nor even properly virtuous behavior is the
goal. The true cosmopolite goes home and rests content among his own
people. Travel is a means of intellectual tranquillity. The traveler does not
stay abroad, but returns, presumably to be, by his very presence, a kind of
beacon of civilizing light.36

No traveler, when he sets out for foreign parts, is a tabula rasa. Whatever
may be the formative influences of new sights and new knowledge,
something of one’s old thinking will remain. Indeed, it will be necessary
groundwork for new perceptions. I only make the obvious point that no
judgment can be totally unconditioned, but must rest on prior conviction.
Thus Anacharsis carried with him a frame of reference for judging the
Greeks. But it had nothing to do with Scythia of the fourth century B.C. and
everything to do with eighteenth-century France. As Barthélemy’s creature,
Anacharsis echoes his creator’s beliefs. Ostensibly maturing in his long
journey, in reality he does no such thing. He leaves the Aegean the same
man as he entered it. Despite the fiction of Bildung, despite the presumed
formative influence of Greek culture, Anacharsis is throughout a typical
rationalist of the Enlightenment; and his rationalism is not the result of a
gradually growing knowledge of things Greek, but a preexisting frame of
reference for making sense of the new sights and new knowledge.

Biddle’s affinity with Anacharsis is evident on the very first page of his
journal. Why the urge to visit Greece? His education had been founded on
a study of Greek history and culture. “The soil of Greece is sacred to Genius
& to letters. . . . Shall I be insensible to the pleasure of treading on the
ground which had felt the footsteps of Epaminondas of Plato of Demo-
thenes?”37 And yet there is a major difference. Greece in Biddle’s day was no
longer the cynosure of all barbarian eyes. Rather Greece was itself a barba-
rous land under the heel of Turkish despots. Athens lay desolate, its monu-
ments in ruins. The land was inhabited by a rude and uncivilized people.

36 Ibid., 4:294.
37 McNeal, Nicholas Biddle in Greece, 49.
This train of thought, common to all eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travelers, runs through Biddle's journal. In these circumstances his excuse for visiting the region is the pleasure and the instruction of memory. The recollection of past greatness is instruction in itself:

There is a sanctity around the monuments of [Athenian] glory which inspires us at once with awe & wonder; nor can we approach without veneration the soil of a people whose religion amused our infancy, whose history has furnished the brightest models of virtue & of heroism, whose writings have led us to science & whose works tho' mutilated we have not dared to rival.  

This recollection becomes all the more poignant because of the contrast between past prosperity and present ruin and is a lesson in humility and “the transient grandeur of man.” The Greeks passed on their lessons to the Romans, who in turn handed them on to the modern age. We can find instruction in Greece’s subsequent misfortunes and in “the melancholy but pleasing philosophy of ruins.”

Despite the present ruin of Greece, Biddle too claims that there is instructional benefit in personal autopsy of the Greek scene. The past becomes more fully alive when one goes to the actual sites of great events. History then takes on an added dimension that no mass of written commentary can attain. The present scene, moreover, populated as it is by two different peoples with different customs and religions, is a source of enlightenment. Biddle claims that his short trip, even though it did not extend to Constantinople, was enough to lead him to a perfect knowledge of the Turks. A presumptuous statement perhaps, but we have to admire the man’s willingness to go among these people even for a time. Biddle justifies the shortness of the visit by the ultimate object of his travels. He does not intend to be a scholar, and he does not have the luxury of living permanently in Europe. He must acquire all available information he can in the time available to him so as to be able to carry it back home and put it to practical use in his chosen profession.

If the trip to Greece was to have the practical purpose of expanding his own intellectual horizons, another of his objects, which he regrets was not

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38 Ibid., 218-19.
39 Ibid., 194.
40 Ibid., 194.
fulfilled, was to acquire such information about the state of Aegean commerce as might be useful back home in Philadelphia. He originally intended going on to Constantinople and Smyrna, probably knowing that his countrymen were already probing the markets of the Levant. But the approaching heats of summer, which brought with them the increased threat of disease, helped to change his plans. "The season is unpropitious for traveling over the parched & burning countries of Asia, & a prudent man should not neglect his health as much for his family as for himself." In any event he thought that there was nothing really worth looking at north of Thermopylae, nothing that is, of classical interest.

What emerges from the journal is that Biddle rather quickly grew tired of indigenous company, particularly Greek company. Much of what he saw did not amuse him, and the rigors of travel began to wear him down. Significantly, I think, his journal is bracketed by two different reactions to the Greek scene. At his entry into the Peloponnesus at Glarentza, he tells us the charming story of his reception by the local Turkish customs official. In this piece Biddle is all smiles, emphasizing his cosmopolitan ability to mix with strange company. But the end of his tour is marked by an altogether different tone. Sailing up the coast of the Adriatic in a small Greek boat, he is nearly beside himself with rage and frustration at the antics of his Greek conductors. By this time his cosmopolitanism had worn pretty thin, and he had come to the conclusion that one could learn only so much by living among a crude people. Just because he never edited his journal, we are allowed to see the picture of the man's attitude as it changed over a short time. He has not tided up the picture to make it conform to later reflections, and so what we see is not altogether pretty. But the picture has the merit of mirroring its author's actual contemporary thoughts.

There is, however, a more important reason why Biddle felt little compunction in getting back to the comforts of Europe. His motivation, like that of Anacharsis, was overwhelmingly literary. But the books from which he proposed to learn were ancient, not modern; and they were to be found in Europe, not in Greece. The really valuable lessons to be learned from the Greeks were already incorporated in the texts that had been passed down from antiquity. In the contemporary Aegean there were few books of any kind, as Biddle was at pains to discover; and in any event he could not read

\[41\] Ibid., 194.
much modern Greek, let alone anything in Turkish or Arabic. He assumed a much greater level of ignorance than there was because he had no interest in Byzantine history or in Islamic culture. All that mattered were the ancient texts, and to get the benefit of them one did not have to set foot in the Aegean. There was no prospect of getting lessons in virtue from the contemporary inhabitants either. Biddle makes it clear that only the odd resident Frank, like Fauvel in Athens, had anything useful to impart. Living among a rude people was not the route to knowledge, to acquire which an American should spend time where the books were and also consort with truly civilized company. For all these reasons Biddle thought that his short sojourn in Greece had more than fulfilled his expectations.

Although Biddle left Greece more quickly than Anacharsis, he left in the end for exactly the same reason: to be happy at home. Seeing how other people live only makes a person more firmly attached to his own cultural values and institutions. Having examined Europe and the Levant, Biddle can look with confidence on a renewal of his profession of lawyer, or better yet, on the prospect of a career in politics. In satisfying his curiosity, his travel has prepared him for an active life. He had a duty to be more than an observer. Both his country and his family can rightly claim to profit from the instruction that his travel brought him. He misses, furthermore, the delights of home, his family, his friends, his usual haunts, and his accustomed round of activities.\(^4\) In short, Biddle, like Anacharsis, must go home to be a beacon of light for his fellow citizens. Both returned from the grander, more cosmopolitan world of Culture to his own rude backwoods, and both did so out of an ingrained sense of duty. How different is the modern tourist, who goes south to sun himself on a beach without any thought of having to return to improve the physical condition or the moral tone of his countrymen. It is because of this earnestness, which we are disinclined to take seriously, that Anacharsis and Biddle now seem quaint and even hopelessly priggish.

At first sight Anacharsis and Biddle might appear to differ from each other in their assessment of the Greeks. The former, despite the occasional stricture, magnifies their accomplishments. Indeed, his whole book is a paean to Greek cultural superiority. Biddle, on the other hand, dislikes what he sees and has no qualms about expressing his scorn and contempt. The

\(^4\) Ibid., 222-23, 233-34.
difference, of course, arises from the fact that Anacharsis and Biddle are not seeing the same Greeks. Anacharsis treats only the ancient Greeks, whom he perceives through the golden haze of memory. Biddle traveled among real Greeks living in a very different time. Armed as he was with Barthélemy's splendid re-creation of antiquity and traveling to acquaint himself with ancient ghosts, he could not but be struck by the differences between antiquity and his own time and, consequently, be profoundly disillusioned. Barthélemy's picture of the past simply failed to accord with contemporary reality. Both Anacharsis and Biddle were looking for what was. Barthélemy never saw the modern reality. Biddle did; and, like most travelers to the Aegean, he was only too ready to be disappointed. In the depths of his disappointment he resembles any number of other milordi who ventured into Greece. But we do well to remember that this attitude was based squarely on a political world view that was pervasive in the eighteenth century and that actually forms another bond between Barthélemy and Biddle.

To gauge the strength of this bond, we need to take a more detailed look at the foreign perception not only of the Greeks, but of the Turks as well. Robert Semple, Biddle's sometime traveling companion, speaks forthrightly on this issue; and his long discussion reflects what we find in specific anecdotes and scattered comments in Biddle's own journal. What struck Semple was the multiethnic character of the Ottoman Empire and the fact that this character was willingly, even stubbornly, maintained by all concerned. The Greeks and the Turks kept their separate identities, divided as they were by religion above all, but also by language. There were of course other groups as well: the Albanians, Wallachians, Bulgarians, and the Jews. And the differences among them were linguistic, religious, and cultural. But the fact of greatest importance was the nature of the Turkish empire: it was a conquest state in which the Turks ruled by right of the sword. The whole purpose of their state was to benefit themselves, and there was no thought of the rights of the governed. This arrangement had continued unchanged for some centuries; and the Turks still assumed a military air, arming themselves and extorting the maximum of tribute. But their power was now more apparent than real, since it tended to be based on arrogance rather than real military ability. As Semple observes, the Turk liked to dream that he

43 The whole issue of colonialist imaging, which is implicit in this discussion, needs extended treatment. I do not pretend to do justice to this topic in this paper.
was a soldier. Though he could be ferocious enough in a sudden spurt of anger, he was actually indolent and utterly incapable either of sustained effort or of education in modern methods of warfare. In short, he was undisciplined, lazy, and ignorant. Turkish defensive works were a joke, and a total want of industry left the landscape barren and unproductive.44

But the Turks could still cow the native population, and herein lay their real menace. By oppressing these people, they turned them into slaves who exhibited all the defects of slavery. Whatever may have been the virtues of the Greeks of antiquity, their modern descendants were despicable for their cowardice, their deceit, their venality, and their cunning. That these were the qualities by which they survived did not make them any more admirable. The Greeks had degenerated into a kind of second childhood:

> On longer and closer intimacy, [one] finds the modern Greek smooth but deceitful; boasting but cowardly; vain yet abject, and cringing under the most insulting tyranny; light and capricious without invention; talkative without information, and equally bigoted with the Spaniard or Italian, but without the same real warmth of devotion to excuse it.45

The source of this moral decay was not just Turkish oppression. The race, Semple says, had grown old. It had begun its descent back in antiquity in Roman times when it had lost its liberty. Even then the Greeks were all talk and no action.46

The appropriate remedy for this situation was intervention from outside. The Greeks were not likely to restore themselves to their ancient grandeur. Rather, England ought to intervene and, as a gesture of thanks for the benefits that had been borrowed from antiquity, restore freedom and prosperity. What was needed was a government versed in the principles of political economy and having some sense of feeling for humanity. At present the Turkish state was buried in sensuality and ignorance. It was necessary for an old and corrupt establishment like this one to give way for something more perfect so that peace, liberty, and knowledge might be more generally diffused in the world.47

46 Ibid., 2:224-25.
Although Biddle shares with Semple this basic orientation, he has, at least on occasion, kinder things to say about the Turks. When their honor or authority were not questioned, they could be civil and even genuinely hospitable and obliging. Especially was this the case with the Turks of Athens and places commonly frequented by western tourists. But it was the foreigner who was apt to see this side of the Turkish character, either because he was recognized as a source of profit that needed careful handling or because he was outside the usual hierarchical social structure. The Turks' very superiority gave them a manly quality worthy of admiration.

The best illustration of this better side of the Turkish character is Biddle's story of his reception by the customs official at Glarentza. Perhaps seeing the stranger's arrival as a providential source of alleviation of his own boredom and certainly as an occasion to demonstrate through hospitality his own social position, this official, one Mehmet Selim Bey, took Biddle in for the night and fed him a substantial dinner. Since Mehmet spoke and wrote Greek, he and Biddle chatted happily together, aided, we must suppose, by Biddle's servant, who doubtless acted as interpreter. This official was solicitous enough of Biddle's welfare to ask him to write to him of his safe arrival in Patras, and he went so far as to write his name and address in Biddle's journal.

That the Turks, however, could be nasty enough there is evidence aplenty in Biddle's journal. They were not wont to direct this nastiness at visiting foreigners, with whom they usually had only limited contact. Differences of custom, language, and religion tended to keep them aloof, so that whatever intercourse they had with travelers was restricted to such bureaucratic formalities as providing the necessary traveling documents. Foreigners might be received at a sort of levée and engaged in conversation, but one suspects that Turkish officials used such occasions mainly to keep a suspicious eye on passing tourists and to monitor their movements. The ugly side of Turkish behavior was directed toward the locals, who, as cattle (the Turks' own term), were regularly milked by a system of taxation both arbitrary and oppressive.\(^48\)

The Turks exercised their tyranny not only by taxation but also by arbitrary acts of brutality. Most travelers witnessed acts of this kind, and Biddle was no exception. The administration of justice might take

\(^{48}\) McNeal, Nicholas Biddle in Greece, 161.
particularly horrific forms. In Tripolizza a man was found stealing out of a shop. The local pasha ordered a bed of nails constructed. Over this the felon was suspended and then thrown down upon the nails. He languished for two days as a public exhibition, and then his throat was cut.\(^49\)

Such sudden acts of terror were only the result of the Turks’ deep-seated contempt for a conquered population. Any action that was perceived to threaten a Turk’s honor or status might bring sudden violence. Biddle was visiting Livadia at the time when the new pasha of Negropont was passing through town on the way to his seat of government. Because of his rank, he superseded any official of lesser standing and could levy unlimited tribute on the towns along his route. He had already lopped heads in Smyrna because of some delay in getting what he wanted. Arriving in Livadia, he assembled the local notables and announced that they would have to feed and house his escort, some two or three hundred in number, and also pay him a contribution more than triple the usual sum. To the citizens’ anguished pleas of their inability to raise such a sum, he threatened to cut off heads and burn the town. He got his money.\(^50\)

Biddle’s reaction to the behavior of the Greeks is characteristic of western indignation. Slavery made the Greeks contemptible. They were intelligent but had little education, and therefore their intelligence degenerated into mere cunning. Although amiable and hospitable, they lived in constant fear of the Turks. Depending on the situation, they could be abject or haughty and cruel. Even their religion, with its dogmas, its ceremonies, and its fasts, helped to keep them in a state of superstition. They too secluded their women, though not so tightly as the Turks, with the result that there was little social intercourse between the sexes even among themselves, let alone with foreigners. The most learned Greeks were to be found in Constantinople, but as a rule anyone wishing to attain some real level of competence emigrated to Italy and Germany. Hence there was little original learning, and the few books to be found were usually devotional works on the lives of the saints and a few translations of popular French and Italian stories. Yet there were signs of increasing intellectual activity, and these presaged a freedom of spirit that might yet lift the country out of its desolated state. The higher classes knew something of their ancient history, and even the

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 186.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 102-3.
humblest were aware of their origin as an independent people. Fretting under this oppression, they nursed their animosity against the Turks and longed for revenge. Unhappily deliverance was not apt to come from their own unaided efforts because of internal jealousy and lack of a leader. They wanted foreign help, and such help was likely to come. Because the French had extended their control over Dalmatia, Greece lay open and would be a natural road to Egypt and India. Such a conquest would not only rescue Christianity from its enemies but would incite a crusade in favor of human nature. Greece had so many natural advantages (its climate, its soil, and its people) that it was a shame to see them blighted by the hand of tyranny.  

Running all through this assessment of the relative merits of Greeks and Turks is the theme of liberty and despotism, a binary opposition that goes far to explain Biddle’s attitude. Even before setting out on his travels, he had equipped himself with a frame of reference that would color his views of the relationship between these two peoples. But Biddle was not alone. Indeed, his view was the accepted wisdom of the day, and it appears full blown in Anacharsis. The Scythian enters Greece in the heyday of the city-state, and the reader is led to believe that the source of the Greeks’ cultural brilliance is the freedom they enjoy. The novel is a book about the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. But Anacharsis leaves the country after the battle of Chaeronea in 336, the decisive action by which Philip of Macedon effectively defeated the city-states. All through his account of Greece Anacharsis utters negative comments on tyrants; and Philip, who “was born to enslave Greece” is the latest and best example of the type. With Greek liberty gone, Greek history loses its interest; and the book comes to a sudden end. Somehow the later history of this people, even its ancient history, let alone its medieval Byzantine period, is not worth discussing. Case closed!  

Why does Biddle echo this binary opposition of liberty and tyranny? Not only has he read his Barthélemy carefully, but the lessons of Anacharsis were reinforced, or rather undergirded, by a previous reading of Montesquieu. His Spirit of the Laws is the proximate source of the political world view of both Biddle and Barthélemy. America’s revolutionary generation formed its opinions of a proper republican government largely from this book (Jefferson copied extensive extracts from it), and it was standard reading in the

51 Ibid., 225-29, passim.
52 Barthélemy, Anacharsis, 3:237.
curriculum developed by Witherspoon at the College of New Jersey. It was British despotism, in particular the arbitrary rule of George III and his ministers, that so enraged the Americans. But despotism was understood as a universal phenomenon in time and space; and Montesquieu's book treats it as symptomatic of the East, where it was the characteristic form of government in a hot climate. Its effects were not just political—the creation of a social hierarchy based on fear of punishment and confiscation of property—but economic and geographical as well. Despotic government produced a regular landscape of despotism, one characterized by lifeless uniformity and empty of activity. The despot might seclude himself amid fantastic wealth, but his subjects had no interest in producing anything for themselves, since whatever they produced they might so easily lose. Hence "in these states nothing is repaired, nothing improved. Houses are built only for a lifetime; men dig no ditches, plant no trees. They draw all from the land and return nothing to it. Everything is fallow, all deserted." To minds already predisposed to see the blighting social and economic effects of tyranny, a visit to the Aegean was a confirmation of deeply held beliefs.

Montesquieu was only the proximate source of this view. The philosophical discussion of tyranny goes back to Plato and took canonical form in Aristotle. As we might expect, Barthelemy devotes a long discussion to Aristotle's views on government. In his typology the overriding emphasis is upon the law and the wisdom of the lawgiver. The thinkers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, taking their cue from Aristotle, firmly believed that human society could be consciously improved by the application of laws rationally framed; and so they virtually deified the lawgiver. He became for them the embodiment of political, or civic, virtue.

This ideal of the republican lawgiver, conservative and aristocratic as it was, is fully consistent with the prevailing tone of Barthelemy's book; it explains why he and Biddle assessed the states of antiquity as they did. A modern audience is apt to find this assessment strangely skewed. Since George Grote's revaluation of Greek democracy in the light of nineteenth-century liberalism and beneficent imperialism (History of Greece [1846-56]), we have grown accustomed to praise the Athens of Pericles as the pinnacle of Greek political development. But the Enlightenment was

54 Barthelemy, Anacharsis, 3:297 ff.
deeply suspicious of radical democracy and preferred to see greater virtue in the Solonian constitution, which gradually degenerated over time through the influence of crafty demagogues like Pericles. Throughout Barthélemy's long historical introduction and in the body of the narrative itself, there is an undisguised antidemocratic, anti-Periclean bias. Athens is an increasingly aggressive pirate state that loses its own virtue to the extent that it comes to rule over others. Its whole fifth-century history after Marathon and Salamis, whatever one might say of the splendor of its art and literature, was one long descent into licentiousness. The higher classes were enfeebled by losses in military service, and the government fell into the hands of the inferior orders, who came to dominate an assembly led by men working in their own self-interest. In the good old days the Solonian Areopagus, a body of wise ex-magistrates of the highest property class, had supervised laws and morals; but Pericles reduced the power of this body so that morals received a fatal blow and Athens experienced the vices of absolute democracy.\textsuperscript{55}

This denigration of Athens is fully consistent with Anacharsis's praise of Sparta and of a writer like Xenophon. In the case of Sparta too the basis for civic virtue was a legal system, the constitution supposedly put in place by Lycurgus. Deftly curbing nature by law, the lawgiver established a society that was wisely preserved over time.\textsuperscript{56} To say that Barthélemy was obsessed by Sparta would be putting the case too mildly. He, like many of his time, and probably under the influence of Rousseau, idealizes this state because it imposed on its whole people (the citizens at least) an education, the purpose of which was the prosperity of the state. The individual counted for little in Sparta—and a good thing too, thought Barthélemy. But even Sparta declined, and Barthélemy sadly comments on the change for the worse in Spartan manners in the fourth century. And yet the spirit of Sparta is ably transmitted to us by Xenophon, in whose books the virtue of this people is shown to rest on their rejection of tyranny, their prohibition of commerce and, hence, of foreign influence, and on their maintenance of political unity in the face of outside pressure.\textsuperscript{57}

Arrived at the site of ancient Sparta, Biddle spent several days roaming over a most unpromising ground. About all that was left to see were some piles of Roman brickwork; but he went to some pains to identify the location

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 1:350 ff.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 3:1-2.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 4:128 ff.
of the various villages mentioned in Barthélemy, even drawing two sketch maps. Why this interest?

I am at Sparta. Let me respect the venerable style of conciseness which became its greatness, whilst I describe its calamities. Sparta is no more. Its freedom has fled; the monuments of its glory have all returned to the earth which covers its children; the very spot which it occupied is deserted by an unworthy posterity. . . . Over the ruins of Sparta a republican has a melancholy pleasure. My own country offers an interesting analogy of which I have thought much.58

The revolutionary society into which Biddle was born was intensely interested in politics. We might even say that the only real intellectual culture in the new republic was political discussion. Growing up in the Philadelphia of the 1790s, Biddle absorbed this passionate addiction; and his observations on the condition of Greece, ancient and modern, reflect this republican bias. This is the reason for his celebration of Sparta’s past. Biddle himself had some legal training before he left for Europe, and the idea of law as a conscious creation was never far from his thought. The man who roamed the valley of the Eurotas in search of the ghost of Lycurgus was the same who wrote into his journal a detailed account of the constitution of the Septinsular Republic.

If Biddle and Anacharsis resemble each other in their belief in the primacy of law and the lawgiver in the formation of political virtue and of viable states, they resemble each other no less in their rationalist critique of religion. Barthélemy disdained religious enthusiasm and the superstition to which he says it led. The reader of Biddle’s journal will be struck by his nasty attack on Catholicism, both Roman and Orthodox. He regarded both as gross impostures that no decently educated man should abide. Listening to an Anglican service in Malta for the first time since leaving America, Biddle is moved to comment that “there is a wonderfully attractive decency in our religion, something very different from the prostrated meanness of Catholicism. The Protestants ask favors of God with a decent but submissive firmness. A Catholic upon his knees and striking his bosom is unworthy from his meanness of the very blessings he solicits.”59 Biddle’s condemnation of convents, of elaborate religious processions, and of religious art is all of a

58 McNeal, Nicholas Biddle in Greece, 182, 186.
59 Ibid., 76.
piece. When he finds himself inconvenienced by other people’s fasts, as he was on his final boat trip up the Adriatic to Trieste, he can become almost apoplectic with disgust. The cosmopolitan mask slips away, and we see not a man who looks with a bemused eye on the foibles of humankind, but a self-righteous partisan who thinks that reason lies solely on his side. I once thought that this anti-clericalism was born of the secular side of the Enlightenment, with its tendency to dismiss the Christian God and emphasize the ability of people to solve their own problems. But perhaps it is closer to the truth to say that Biddle was conventionally pious and that behind his scorn for others’ supposed obscurantism lies America’s deeply entrenched Protestant heritage. In religion as in politics, Americans have always been wont to see themselves as embarked on a mission into the wilderness. Seen from this perspective, the Old World has been the haunt of evil, and Catholicism merely the most obvious manifestation of the Devil’s work. It is in this light that Biddle regarded it.

In tracing the intellectual roots of Biddle’s view of Greece, I have stressed his debt to French writers of a neoclassical bent, and especially to the summation of French Enlightenment thought that appeared in Barthelemy’s Anacharsis. That Biddle’s point of view should be derivative is not surprising if we consider his youth and his recent departure from the hands of his mentors at the College of New Jersey. Where he differs from his fellow travelers is in his crusty republicanism, but even in this regard he shares the sentiments of his fellow Americans. Biddle could not but absorb the revolutionary fervor current in his day. An integral part of that fervor was a sense of national self-righteousness and virtue in the face of assumed European vice. Biddle may have wanted to think of himself as cosmopolitan; and insofar as he shared European values, we might grant his claim. But he, like most of his American contemporaries, adopted the assertive national tone that grew out of the Revolution and was the product of a provincial society that needed to justify itself before the great states of Europe and even the lesser states of the Levant.

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