Peter Burke

A Case of Cultural Hybridity: the European Renaissance

Goody Lecture 2012
Jack Goody

Jack Goody was born near London in 1919. Formative experiences during the Second World War led him to switch from studies of literature to social anthropology. He undertook fieldwork in Northern Ghana during the last decade of British colonial rule and taught anthropology at Cambridge University alongside Meyer Fortes and Edmund Leach. Ghana remained important in Goody’s work for some years after independence but, particularly after succeeding Fortes as William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology in 1972, he began to explore long-term historical contrasts between sub-Saharan African societies and those of Europe and Asia. Goody views the Old World as a unified entity since the urban revolution of the Bronze Age; numerous publications have highlighted developments in East Asia and criticised the eurocentric bias of Western historians and social theorists. His many books engage with productive systems, the transmission of property and class inequality in global history; with kinship, marriage and the “domestic domain”; with technologies of communication, especially writing, the transmission of myth and of knowledge generally; and with various realms of consumption, including cuisine and flowers. These fields are not approached in isolation but in their interconnections. Ethnographic insights are essential, but they are just one component of Goody’s comparative, world-historical agenda. His best known works include *Death, Property and the Ancestors* (1962); *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa* (1971); *Production and Reproduction* (1976); *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977); *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (1983); *The Oriental, The Ancient and the Primitive* (1990); *The East in the West* (1996); *The Theft of History* (2006); *Renaissances: the one or the many?* (2010); *The Eurasian Miracle* (2010).

Goody’s agenda, unique in contemporary anthropology, is one to which the Department ‘Resilience and Transformation in Eurasia’ at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology seeks to contribute. In an annual lecture series, a distinguished scholar addresses pertinent themes for anthropology and related fields:

**Goody Lecture 2011:** Keith Hart, “Jack Goody’s Vision of World History and African Development Today”.

The second Goody Lecture was given by Peter Burke on 16th May 2012.
It is a pleasure and an honour to give the second lecture here in honour of Jack Goody, who is not only a friend and a neighbour in Cambridge – which is still a kind of village – but also a colleague, an anthropologist who has successfully re-invented himself as a historical sociologist or comparative historian (Pallares-Burke 2003: 7–30). Jack’s work has been an inspiration to me, as to many others, over more than forty years.

To a historian of early modern Europe, the Renaissance seemed an obvious choice of theme. Jack has already examined renaissances in the plural in a comparative, sociological manner. In contrast, I shall focus here on what might be called the ‘Big One’, the Western Renaissance, viewed here as a movement for the revival of antiquity rather than more vaguely as a period in European history (Goody 2009; Burke 2009b).

Given the importance of local variations, it might be prudent to think of even the European Renaissance in the plural, in other words as a family of linked movements that allow, indeed require approaches such as comparative history and its younger sibling, histoire croisée or ‘connected history’ (Subrahmanyam 1997; Werner and Zimmermann 2003). At least some of these movements drew ideas, forms or inspiration from cultures outside Europe, whether in Asia, Africa or the Americas, offering striking examples of cultural hybridity.

The current concern with hybridity should be no surprise in an age of particularly intense migration between countries and continents – Indians and West Indians in Britain, Arabs in France, Turks in Germany and so on; a migration not only of individuals and families but of things and ideas as well. Interest in this topic has become particularly intense in a cluster of disciplines, including
anthropology and history, especially the discipline of historical anthropology or anthropological history, itself a hybrid, a form of historical analysis whose practitioners aspire like anthropologists to get down from the verandah and study everyday life at ground level, at the grass-roots.

The idea that cultures are not pure but mixed is not a new one. It was the Belgian classicist Franz Cumont who launched the idea of syncretism in his book *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*. According to Cumont, the religion of Egypt “adapted itself with ease to diverse milieux”. He wrote of “penetration”, “infiltration” and the “mixture of races” (Cumont 1906: 2, 19, 82–83, 184–185). However, the systematic study of this domain goes back to scholars working on Afro-American cultures, especially in the Caribbean and Brazil, among them Gilberto Freyre (1933), Fernando Ortiz (1940), Alejo Carpentier (1946) and Édouard Glissant (1981). The idea of cultural hybridity or métissage, mestizaje or mestiçagem is one of the rare successes of what is sometimes called ‘Southern Theory’, produced on the cultural periphery, in Havana, for instance, or Recife, and later adopted by the centre, in Paris and New York.

As has often happened in the history of historical thought and writing, new trends in the present have encouraged new questions about the past. In this respect, cultural historians owe a debt to the anthropologists who preceded them in the analysis of cultural encounters and their consequences. In return, historians do have, in my opinion, something important to contribute to this interdisciplinary field, focussing as they usually do on processes, especially long-term processes, including hybridization. I shall argue that the concept of hybridization helps us to understand cultural change in Europe as well as elsewhere. As the English historian Christopher Dawson pointed out eighty years ago, European culture itself emerged out of a process of fusion, the fusion of classical traditions, Christianity and what might be called the ‘civilization of the barbarians’, such as the Franks, Goths or Saxons (Dawson 1932). To begin with, it may be useful to distinguish stages in the process of hybridization. Following the moment of cultural encounter comes the appropriation of fragments of another culture. These fragments are often juxtaposed to traditional elements rather than fusing with them (Rosenthal 1978). One might regard this first stage as the equivalent of what linguists call a pidgin, in the sense of a simplified language used as a *lingua franca* between two groups and drawing on the lan-
guages of both. The second stage in the process is one of crystallization, in the sense of the integration of the fragments into a new system. Linguists call this creolization, thinking especially of cases in which a former pidgin turns into a first language and so becomes more complex in both vocabulary and syntax. Anthropologists will note the parallel with the ideas of Marshall Sahlins (1981) on cultural change, in which a cultural order absorbs innovation until a tipping point is reached and the order itself is transformed.

Changing metaphors, this second stage might be described as that of the formation of local ecotypes or ‘oikotypes’, a term I have borrowed from the Swedish folklorist Carl von Sydow (1948) who took it in his turn from botany. Metaphor seems unavoidable in this domain, whether the metaphor comes from botany (‘hybridity’ or ‘ecotype’), metallurgy (‘fusion’ or ‘amalgamation’), craftsmanship (bricolage) or language (‘creolization’ or ‘cultural translation’). Metaphors are surely welcome in academic discourse as long as we are conscious of using them. As the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz puts it, “Whenever one takes an intellectual ride on a metaphor, it is essential that one knows where to get off” (Hannerz 1992: 264; cf. Burke 2009a; Chanson 2011). What follows is an exploration of the place of hybridity in what we call the culture of the Renaissance.

II

The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century movement that has become known as the Renaissance might be described as hybrid by definition in the sense of being an attempt within one culture, that of late medieval Europe, to revive another, the culture of classical antiquity, especially ancient Rome. In the course of the movement, some participants also drew ideas, forms or inspiration from cultures outside Europe, whether in Asia, Africa, or the Americas.

All the same, insufficient attention has been paid to this process of hybridization, which took place in a variety of different situations and locales, from Florence to Arequipa. The process needs to be studied at two levels, a macro-level that examines the movement as a whole but also a micro-level attentive to local and even individual variation.
At the macro-historical level, we see the contact, indeed the collision, between what might be described (in the structuralist language of the 1960s and 1970s), as two ‘systems of signs’, in this case the Gothic and the classical. These systems penetrated many domains, media and materials: stone, wood, metal, glass, textiles, parchment and so on, decorating objects that ranged from large buildings to tiny jewels.

At the micro-historical level, it is possible to observe a variety of individual responses to this collision. I shall draw attention to three. The first took the form of what linguists call ‘code-switching’, an idea that has its uses not only in linguistics but in other domains as well. Take the case of painting: the 15th-century Italian artist Pisanello, for instance, worked in two different styles, Gothic and classical. He did not replace one style by the other but practiced them simultaneously for different patrons (Woods-Marsden 1988).

A second reaction to the collision was self-conscious hybridization or syncretism, a practice that is often described today as ‘cultural translation’. A book by the philosopher Marsilio Ficino, entitled Platonic Theology, makes an appropriate symbol of this kind of syncretism, christening Plato and classicizing Christianity. What allowed Ficino to take this bold step without falling into heresy was his belief that God had granted a special revelation to Plato, who knew about Christianity although he lived before Christ, participating in what Renaissance humanists called ‘the ancient theology’, prisca theologia (Wind 1958; Walker 1972).

Another example comes from Africa. A few individuals with prominent roles in the Renaissance, from Albrecht Dürer to Grand Duke Cosimo de’ Medici, owned objects from Africa such as forks, spoons, salt-cellars and ivory horns made in what is now known as an ‘Afro-Portuguese’ style, the result of local artisans consciously adapting their tradition to what Europeans wanted, thus offering early examples of art made for export (Fagg 1959).

A third possibility, though not conscious this time, depends on what Pierre Bourdieu famously called the ‘habitus’, in other words a set of dispositions (in both mind and body) that are internalized and cease to be conscious, but continue to generate cultural practices. The habitus is learned by imitation but becomes a kind of second nature, whether for boxers, sculptors or indeed for lecturers. Artisans who are asked to work in a new style may well assimilate it
to their traditional habitus. Take the case of a scribe trying to imitate humanist cursive, a new form of handwriting developed in 15th-century Italy and based on ancient Roman models (more exactly, what were believed to be ancient Roman models). In the handwriting of some scribes the traditional gothic forms keep breaking through, in a sort of return of the repressed (Richardson 2009: 164).

(In parenthesis, an intellectual circular tour may be worth noting. Bourdieu borrowed the idea of \textit{habitus} from a historian of art, Erwin Panofsky, more exactly from his famous essay on Gothic architecture and scholasticism. Bourdieu much admired this essay, translated it into French and wrote a \textit{postface} for it (Panofsky 1967). In my turn I am using Bourdieu to understand what used to be called the ‘diffusion’ or ‘reception’ of the Renaissance, including the obstacles to this reception.)

To assess the importance of hybridity in the Renaissance in a thorough manner it would of course be necessary to investigate a diverse range of cultural items – language, literature, painting, sculpture, and even law (the encounter between Roman law and local custom). Such an investigation would be difficult indeed to present in a single lecture. Hence in what follows I shall concentrate on a single art form, architecture.

Architecture is particularly likely to be hybrid for various reasons. In the first place, patrons played a greater role in commissioning buildings than in the case of paintings or statues. These patrons might have practical needs that conflicted with the architect’s plans, so that hybridity was sometimes the outcome of a compromise. In the second place, building is a collective enterprise in which architects collaborate with masons (indeed, a distinction between the two roles was only beginning to emerge in the 15th century). Conflict and compromise can be found here too. In the third place, local conditions such as climate and materials are particularly important in the case of architecture.

Linguists have called attention to combinations of the vocabulary of one language with the syntax of another, as in the case of the so called ‘mixed language’ or \textit{media lengua} of Ecuador, which is Spanish in its lexicon but follows Quechua rules of syntax. A similar phenomenon is apparent in the language of architecture (Muysken 1997; Summerson 1980). The metaphor is actually an ancient one, since Doric and Ionic were the names of Greek dialects before the
terms were applied to different forms of column and capital, while analogies between architecture and language were drawn during the Renaissance, in England and elsewhere (Anderson 2000).

I shall discuss Renaissance architecture in Italy, in the rest of Europe, and beyond Europe, especially in the Americas. I shall begin with the Americas on the grounds that the greater the distance between two cultures, the clearer the process of hybridization becomes.

III

The so-called expansion of Europe in the 16th century, the conquest of parts of Asia, Africa and on a grander scale the Americas, had important cultural consequences as well as economic, social and political ones. These cultural consequences included attempts to convert the local population to Catholicism and also to transport Renaissance and later, baroque art and architecture to the New World. The resulting hybrid style of painting in Mexico has been peremptively discussed by the French historian Serge Gruzinski (1999), inspired in part by an anthropologist of West Africa, Jean-Loup Amselle (1990).

In the case of architecture, the Spaniards made few concessions to local tradition. Indeed, it has been argued that the revived classical style both represented and reinforced the Spanish belief that their culture was superior to that of the Aztecs and Incas (Fraser 1986, 1990). All the same, some churches were built on the site of earlier temples and even used the same stones, as in the case of the cathedral of Cusco, built from 1559 onwards on the ruins of the temple known as Kiswarkancha.

In both Mexico and Peru, the masons and sculptors were mainly indigenous. They probably had their own traditions, their own habitus (although we cannot be sure that they had worked as masons and sculptors before they were trained by the colonizers). As a result, the sculpture on church facades of the 16th and 17th centuries in the New World, especially Peru, may have been classical in its syntax but it was partly indigenous in its lexicon, in other words the converse of the media lengua of Ecuador.
In the sixteenth century the combination of local and imported motifs is already visible. However, it was in the seventeenth century that a distinctive Peruvian style or ecotype emerged, which some art historians have named the *estilo mestizo*, and others ‘hybrid baroque’ (Kubler 1944; Neumeyer 1948; Bailey 2010). This hybrid style includes local items such as pumas on church facades as well as a tendency to decorate surfaces more fully and in a flatter manner than in the European architecture of the time, as if the artisans had translated designs from indigenous textiles into stone. A famous example of the style is the Jesuit church in Arequipa, known as *La Compañía* (fig.1, page 20).

The emergence of this *estilo mestizo* may have been encouraged by the Jesuits, whose missionary strategy in different parts of the world, from China to Peru, was that of ‘accommodating’ Christianity to local tradition. Hybridity is often the result of accommodation, a term that has recently come into use in linguistics, or more exactly come back into use, since ancient Roman rhetoricians already used the term (Mungello 1985; Giles, Coupland and Coupland 1991).

The hybrid style of Peru may also have been encouraged by the interpenetration of Christian and Muslim cultures in medieval Spain, divided as it was into Christian and Muslim kingdoms. In Spain during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, in Toledo, for instance, in Alcalà and elsewhere, some Christian churches were decorated by Arab artisans in the so-called *mudejar* style, with geometrical and calligraphic motifs of the kind to be found in mosques. It might therefore be suggested that Spanish colonial patrons of architecture were prepared by their experience in the peninsula to favour or at least to accept a mixture of European with indigenous artistic traditions (Toussaint 1946).

Traffic in the opposite direction was more limited, but it should not be forgotten. The best-known examples concern cultural borrowings from the Islamic world, notably in Italy in the late Middle Ages as well as the Renaissance. In Venice, for instance, the mosaics on the outside of the church of San Marco followed Islamic precedent. The ogee arches framing the windows of late medieval Venetian palaces were an ‘orientalizing’ touch, while the design of the Doge’s Palace (it has recently been argued) alluded to the architecture of Mamluk Cairo (Howard 2000; Dale 2010).

Again, Indian culture made an impact on Renaissance architecture in Portugal (the so-called ‘Manueline style’), before the Jesuits and others brought Re-
naissance art in their baggage, as it were, to India (Dias 1988; Bailey 1998). Yet again, as European knowledge of the material culture of the New World grew, occasional American motifs can be found in Renaissance art and architecture, from Rome to Liège (Dacos 1969).

IV

References to the *mudejar* style has introduced the theme of Renaissance architecture in Europe. It is not difficult to find examples of Gothic structures combined with classical ornament and also the reverse, classical structures combined with Gothic ornament. We might speak of conflicting pressures, on one side the desire for the fashionably classical, and on the other the need to continue to build castles and churches, building types that had not existed in classical antiquity.

Chambord, for instance (fig.2, page 21), is a hybrid castle-palace, built from 1519 onwards for François I from a design by the Italian Domenico da Cortona, largely medieval but with an Italianate roof. In similar fashion Hampton Court, in the South of England, built for Cardinal Wolsey but soon acquired by Henry VIII, combines a medieval gatehouse with Renaissance roundels made by the Italian Giovanni da Maiano and inspired by ancient Roman coins (fig.3, page 22). A more unusual case is that of St Eustache in Paris, begun in 1532, a church that looks medieval from a distance, especially from outside, while classical details become apparent in close-up. The church has been described as a ‘Gothic structure (…) clothed in Renaissance forms’ (Blunt 1999 [1953]: 30). By contrast, hybridity is more obvious at St Etienne du Mont, another Paris church, rebuilt between the late fifteenth and the early seventeenth centuries (fig.4, page 23).

Similar examples may be found elsewhere. Some Spanish architects and masons worked in both Gothic and classical styles. They have been described as ‘bilingual’ or ‘bimodal’ but they sometimes mix styles as well as switching between them (Marias 1989: 33; cf Kavaler 2012: 17, 70–71, 265). In Prague, in the Vladislav Hall, around the year 1500, Benedikt Ried used both Gothic and Renaissance forms. The Renaissance motifs sometimes “seem to have been
‘infected’ by Gothic movement”, as in the case of the famous twisted pilasters. In Regensburg, the design by Hans Hieber for the Schöne Maria church (1520) was in a ‘mixed style’ (Nussbaum 2000: 220, 223).

The process of hybridization was encouraged by the manner in which the knowledge of the new style spread, often via treatises on the rules of classical architecture that were usually produced in Italy but translated, sometimes rapidly, into other languages (Guillaume 1988; Hart and Hicks 1998; Payne 1999). One imagines patrons with the new treatises in their hands, meeting masons with their local architectural culture, and there is some hard evidence of such encounters. As is often the case in history, misunderstanding probably played a role here, although historians are often reluctant to recognize its importance. In Germany, for instance, classical forms were employed ‘tentatively’ by architects who were concerned “how to get stonemasons trained in the Gothic style to carry them out adequately” (Nussbaum 2000: 219).

The hybridization of architecture was also encouraged by what might be called cultural translation at second or third hand. Although the spread of the new style was assisted by a diaspora of Italian artists and artisans, there were not enough Italians to go round. Hence Italianate motifs were introduced into some places in Scotland by French masons and to Scandinavia (to Rosenborg Slot in Denmark, for instance), by craftsmen from the Netherlands (Campbell 1995).

An extreme case of cultural distance within Europe may be revealing: the case of a chapel at L’viv in the Ukraine, a city variously known as Lwów, Lvov, Lemberg or Leopolis, a multicultural or hybrid city where different ethnic groups had long coexisted and interacted. The Boimi chapel (1609–1615, fig. 5, page 24) was designed by a German from Silesia with the help of artisans from his own region but also Armenians from L’viv itself, where an Armenian community had been established by the late Middle Ages. North Italian artisans had been working not far away at Zamość in Poland. Interaction between these groups led to the development of a local style that has been described by a leading Polish art historian as ‘a richly decorated Netherlandish Mannerism which blended with oriental Armenian motifs and with a Venetian version of the Tuscan and Doric orders’ (Miłobędzki 1996: 835). What may have begun as a visual Babel was turning into a kind of polyphony.
Awareness of the need to adapt the classical or Italian style to local conditions, in Northern Europe in particular, was expressed at the time. In cold climates chimneys were needed and they were sometimes disguised as classical columns, as in the case of Ionic capitals on the chimneys of an Elizabethan country house such as Kirby Hall in Northamptonshire. Failure to adapt might be criticized, as in the case of loggias for English country houses (Henderson 1995). The Netherlander Vredeman de Vries, well-known for his pattern-books, openly declared that classical rules could be broken so as to accommodate art to the situation and the needs of the country “accommoder l’art à la situation et nécessité du pais” (quoted in Mercer 1962: 77). Using the term favoured by the Jesuit missionaries, Vredeman recommended what we now call ‘cultural translation’.

\[\text{\(V\)}\]

It is time to turn to Italy itself, where the new style began, appropriately enough given the number of ancient Roman buildings that had survived there. Imitating these buildings was not as simple as it may seem in retrospect. As pioneers, the Italians reveal that although it was easy to appropriate classical ornaments, it took generations to understand the logic or grammar by which they had been combined in antiquity, for example the use of the ‘orders’, with Doric capitals on the ground floor, Ionic on the next and Corinthian above.

In any case, borrowing from antiquity was not necessarily viewed as incompatible with a taste for Gothic. The Tuscan Bernardo Rossellino, designing a cathedral for pope Pius II in his native city (renamed Pienza in the pope’s honour), drew on the traditions of Gothic hall churches (the plan and even gothic tracery in the windows) combining them with classical columns and round arches. From outside the cathedral looks Renaissance (fig. 6, page 25) while from inside (fig.7, page 26) it looks Gothic (Mack 1987: 83, 93; Tönnesmann 1990: 40–45). What did the patron himself think? Luckily there is some concrete evidence for his tastes. Pius, otherwise known as Enea Silvio Piccolomini, was a humanist as well as a pope, devoted to the classical tradition, but he praised the Gothic churches of Germany, where he had lived as a diplomat,
especially Strasbourg cathedral, the very building praised by Goethe in a text that encouraged the Gothic revival of the 19th century (Gragg and Gabel 1936–1957: 601–602). Today, we may see Gothic and classical as antithetical styles, but some contemporaries appear to have regarded them as equally attractive alternatives and even as allowing bricolage.

In short, the result of the collision between the revived classical style and various local styles was the production of new ecotypes in the Old World as well as the New. To make this statement is actually to enter a minefield, or at least a territory disputed between two groups or schools of art historians. On one side, the ‘centripetal’ scholars, as we might call them, emphasize the common features of Renaissance architecture, speaking of an international style that reached from Florence to Prague, Mexico or Arequipa (Kubler 1944; Kaufmann 1995, 1999). On the other side, the ‘centrifugal’ scholars place their emphasis on local variations, creative peripheries and hybrid styles (Neumeyer 1948; Bialostocki 1976a, 1976b, 1986; Gruzinski 1999; Bailey 2010). An outsider to this debate may perhaps be permitted to remark that the differences between the two schools sometimes appear to be exaggerated. They are matters of degree, or emphasis, rather than differences of kind. Returning to the linguistic analogy that runs through the whole debate on cultural hybridity, a leading centripetal scholar, Thomas Kaufmann, speaks of “dialects of an international language”. How far the dialects diverge from the standard languages is of course an empirical matter, allowing different answers in different cases. For example, the Hungarian ecotype of Renaissance architecture was closer than the Polish to the Florentine model, thanks to the immigration of Florentine artisans (Feuer-Tóth 1990).

It may be added that the term ‘ecotype’ seems particularly useful in this context because it offers a solution to the problem of original purity. As was noted earlier, the idea of cultural hybridity has often been criticized on the grounds that it falsely assumes the purity of cultures before a given encounter occurs. If every culture is hybrid, the concept loses its value. One possible reply to this criticism is to suggest that the process of hybridization is more intense or more rapid at some periods than others. In England, for example, the decades after 1066, with the Norman Conquest, and 1950, when large-scale immigration from the West Indies, India and Pakistan began, might be regarded as periods when this process was particularly important.
Another possible reply is to speak of purity or homogeneity as relative. The second phase of hybridization produces new ecotypes or creoles that remain relatively stable (or even ‘pure’) until the next cultural encounter occurs and the process begins all over again.

VI

This approach to the Renaissance in terms of cultural hybridity is not completely new. The life’s work of the German scholar Aby Warburg, for instance, was a concern with the transformations of the classical tradition, especially during the Renaissance. Like his contemporary Franz Cumont, he emphasized the coexistence and the interaction of different world-views in the same milieu, such as fifteenth-century Florence, and even in the same individual, such as the merchant Francesco Sassetti (Warburg 1932: 213–246). Other students of the Italian Renaissance, particularly in Germany, followed his example (Schmarsow 1921; Weise 1952).

All the same, the place of hybridity in the Renaissance as well as in other cultural movements, surely deserves – and is now beginning to attract – further exploration (Chatenet 2011; Kavaler 2012: 242–257). This approach focuses attention on a range of artefacts that had fallen into neglect precisely because they did not offer sufficiently clear, distinct or pure examples of the art of the period. However, these mixed productions have their place in history, and indeed their own beauty. We should not allow purist prejudices to prevent us from appreciating it.

The study of the Renaissance, or of other cultural movements, from this angle requires, appropriately enough, a combination of two approaches, a microhistory that resembles traditional anthropology and a macrohistory that is closer to sociology. It is surely unnecessary to remind you that Jack Goody is a master of both approaches. For this reason, among others, his work remains an inspiration for historians and anthropologists alike.
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