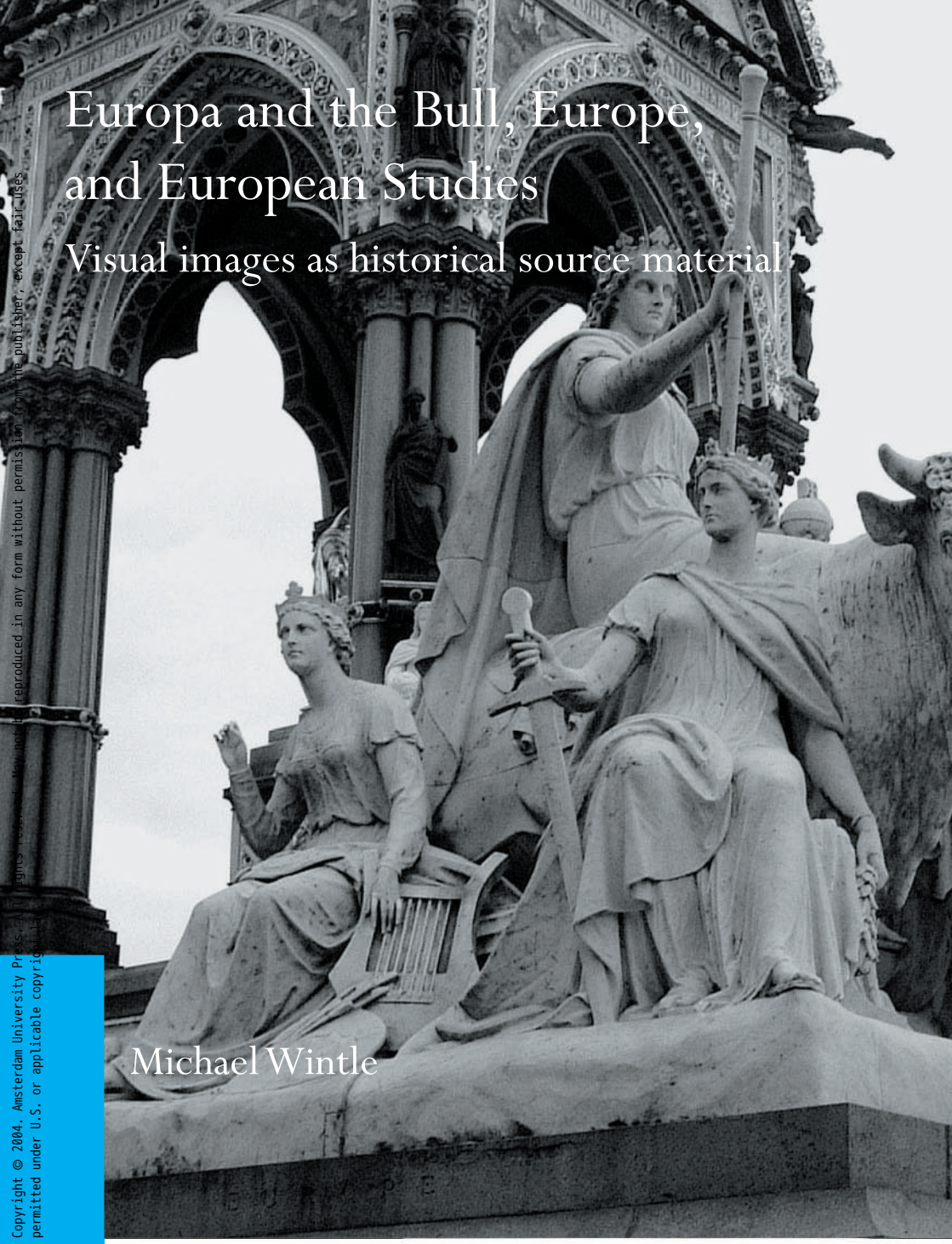
# Europa and the Bull, Europe, and European Studies

## Visual images as historical source material



Michael Wintle

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# Europa and the Bull, Europe, and European Studies

*Visual images as historical source material*

*Inaugural lecture*

delivered on appointment to the
Chair in Modern European History
at the Universiteit van Amsterdam
on Wednesday 10 December 2003
by

Michael Wintle

Vossiuspers UvA

*Rector Magnificus and Members of the Board,*
*Colleagues and friends,*
*Ladies and gentlemen,*

## European Studies

My chair at this University is in Modern European History, and I am a historian of modern Europe. Much of my work, however, is concerned with European Studies, and therefore not exclusively with history. European Studies is an Area Studies discipline, which examines a geographical area – Europe – from many different viewpoints. It is multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary. In my own chair group, we have economists and lawyers, as well as historians. In the other chair groups which deliver the European Studies programmes, we have specialists in literature, culture, language, history and society, some with an expertise in one particular country, like Spain or Russia, but all with an interest in the continent of Europe, whatever their discipline or national speciality. That is also the case in other departments of European Studies with which I am familiar, here in the Netherlands, in Great Britain, and elsewhere.

It follows that a central question around which such a motley crew of teachers and researchers can unite is, 'What is Europe?' Indeed, that was the very title of the published version of the inaugural lecture delivered by my immediate predecessor in this chair, Wim Roobol (whose shoes, incidentally, are extremely hard to fill).[1] The Professor of European Cultural History in this University, Pim den Boer, also focussed on that question in his inaugural lecture in 1989.[2] I shall pay homage to that tradition, for a number of reasons. As well as being right at the centre of the discipline, it permits me to show how my research using new and different source materials in history can contribute to that central question of European Studies. And it further enables me to demonstrate how quite an obscure – if attractive – subject

like the myth of Europa and the Bull can feed into the core matter of the discipline of European Studies. Although it is highly focussed, European Studies is anything but narrow, and is concerned with building bridges between the disciplines, by addressing common or related research questions.

My own recent research has concentrated on the visual aspects of answering that central question: what have people through the ages thought Europe has looked like, and how has that changed? What has been the interaction between visual images of Europe, and ideas of Europe in a more conventional sense, such as European culture, European civilization, or European politics: in a word, European identity? What can visual sources tell us about the past which we cannot get from the usual written documents? Is it possible to be a 'visual historian'? I started out with maps: how have maps of Europe and the world reflected what people thought about Europe? And even more interestingly, how have maps actually determined what people have thought about Europe? I learned from cartographic historians like the late Brian Harley that maps have a certain power, that they influence people, that they have an agenda, that there is no such thing as a purely objective map.[3] Soon I went beyond maps, to look at other visual representations of Europe, like personifications in statues and paintings, iconography and cartoons. These things are all around us, and have been for hundreds of years, not least here in Amsterdam. One can find them on the Palace on the Dam, on Central Station, on numerous houses and bridges, but also on comparable buildings in every city in Europe. There are images of Europe in every major collection of Western art in the world. Over the last few years I have collected thousands of them, in all shapes and forms. It is not so much the case that I am obsessed with Europe, but more that I am fascinated by the interaction between images and people's feelings about what they are, who they are, what they represent, and what they are not. Visual images and feelings of identity, those are my subjects, and to investigate how they interact I have focussed on the continent of Europe.

I have established that, at least since the Renaissance, the picture of Europe has been a very assertive one, projecting Europe as the best of the continents in a kind of Eurocentrism.[4] The fact that these images are all around us, as an integral part of our visual culture over hundreds of years, means that they encourage and strengthen such Euro-assertion in a very powerful way. One of the most famous and enduring of this kind of visual representation of the continent of Europe has been the legend of Europa and the Bull, or the Rape of Europa, the subject of my lecture

today. I shall explore the ways in which the portrayal of this ancient myth, about love between a god in animal form and a princess, has been linked to ideas of Europe.[5] For an inaugural lecture in European Studies, I might have chosen a more straightforward theme for my lecture, like the current or future state of the European Union. I have chosen the Europa myth, however, partly because it allows me to show a good number of interesting slides, which is highly appropriate for a general audience like this one, especially my children. But it also allows to me to demonstrate to you how, within a framework of European Studies, I have been trying to extend the boundaries of my own discipline of history, by examining new kinds of sources – pictures and myths – and working out the complexities of how they react with our ideas about what we are in Europe, and where we are going.

Not everyone thinks that Europa and the Bull has very much relevance to ideas of Europe. I have some daunting opponents in the field, not least in this University. Pim den Boer, who has been an inspiration in using this kind of cultural and visual evidence to explore European history, has stated quite flatly that the legend of Europa and the Bull was simply a pleasant and engaging subject for artists, and 'not the allegorical portrayal of a continent' at all.[6] The other Amsterdam heavyweight in the field, Wim Roobol, simply brushed aside the subject of 'the girl who was abducted by a bull', as not worthy of consideration.[7] But I intend to demonstrate here that, in intricate and subtle ways, the story of Europa has indeed affected the history of the idea of Europe, and powerfully so.

The figure of the bull, or of the demi-goddess – or of both – has been used for centuries to signify a manifestation of the continent of Europe. For example, in countless political cartoons in our daily newspapers and magazines the bull is an instantly recognizable sign for Europe. However, this is a very complex matter. There are many questions which hover over the connection between the continent and the myth. If the Europa myth acts as a badge for Europe, how does the signification function? The myth is often portrayed without any continental significance at all:[8] how do those *non*-continental representations of Europa affect the occasions when the myth does indeed signal the continent? The myth is about rape, seduction and sex: are those, then, characteristics of the continent? Is Europa the myth used simply to indicate a geographical notion of Europe the continent? Or is it more selective, for example limited to just Western Europe, or (latterly) the European Union (EU)? Does the connection between Europa the lady and Europe the continent carry any

value judgements? What qualities, if any, does Europa bring to Europe, and vice-versa?

After outlining the gestation of the myth itself, I shall move to answer these questions by examining examples of its visual portrayal through the ages, to see how it has changed over time, and what artists have tried to say with it – how they have 'used' the myth. I shall then document the association between the myth of Europa and the continent of Europe. Finally and most importantly, I shall ask whether and how the qualities and attributes which are portrayed in the Europa myth have been transferred at various times to the concept of Europe the continent. In this way I shall tease out the subtleties of the relationship between Europa and Europe, and determine how one has affected the other. There is no shortage of source material for this rather delicate exercise. There have been several exhibitions and art-historical treatises on the subject of Europa and the Bull, which bring together many of the images in question.[9] I have myself collected details of several hundred pictorial representations of the myth from the earliest times to the present day, which I have entered into a relational database program. Without pretending to truly comprehensive coverage, then, I can claim to be basing this investigation in a systematic manner on an acceptably broad and representative collection of primary sources.

## The legend

The surviving literature of the Greeks and Romans refers constantly to the myth of the Rape of Europa. From Herodotus onwards, she and her bull are regular reference points. The story runs as follows. Europa was a princess with demi-god status, daughter of King Agenor of Tyre in Phoenicia (where the Lebanon now lies), who was himself a son of the sea-god Poseidon. Zeus, the King of the Gods, became enamoured of the princess. He took the outer form of a superb white bull, and, having told Hermes to drive a herd of bullocks towards the sea, he came ashore where Europa and her ladies in waiting were whiling away their hours. She was fascinated by the handsome creature; he was an incarnation of male sexuality, and despite the warnings of her companions she overcame her fear and clambered onto his back. He immediately swam off with her across the sea (away from Asia) to the island of Crete, where he changed back into his anthropomorphic form and sired at least three children by her, including Minos (who built the labyrinth there on Crete), and

Figure 1 Mosaic of Europa and the Bull, from a Roman villa at Palestrina near Rome, first century AD. Location: Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

Rhadamanthus and Aeacus (who guarded the gates of Hades). Meanwhile King Agenor sent his sons out in search of their abducted sister, and they in turn did great deeds. There was of course endless scope for embroidering the tale; one version, for instance, involved Zeus taking the form of an eagle rather than a bull, with Europa waiting for him under or even in the branches of a tree.

The Syracusian poet Moschus, of the second century BC, was apparently the first to associate Europa the myth with Europe the continent.[10] It reached its apogee with the Latin poets of the Augustan age at the start of the Roman Empire: it was Ovid and Horace who gave the legend of Europa and the Bull its definitive treatment. Ovid provided sensuous details of the bull, and his mention of her 'fluttering garments float[ing] in the breeze' gave rise to the portrayal of Europa with a scarf or drape billowing over her head, which became so familiar from Ovid's time on-

wards.[11] Figure 1 shows a mosaic of Europa and the Bull from a Roman villa at Palestrina near Rome constructed in the first century AD; it is clear how the silk scarf billowing in an arc above the head of the demi-goddess gives an elegant, circular coherence to the composition.

## The portrayal of the Europa myth through the ages

The oldest surviving pictorial representation of the myth of Europa and the Bull dates from the seventh century BC; from then on the employment of the image in decoration became widespread and pan-Hellenic. It was popular in early Etruscan art, and especially in Crete, while on the back of the conquests of Alexander the Great it found its way as far east as Babylon. It is found in all forms of ancient art, and was later spread by the Romans all over their empire as well.[12] Its principal use was decorative, but the eroticism of the story was also of interest. For example, the Roman versions under Augustus were relatively chaste; the ones under the more relaxed moral regime of Nero were more overtly sexual in their content. In the Middle Ages, the myth was much less popular, for medieval art was dominated by the Christian churches, which had little time for such pagan romps. However, it did crop up sporadically, and was often bowdlerized and Christianized to fit the tone of the artistic patrons of the day. It was more popular in Byzantine Eastern Europe than in the Latin West during the Middle Ages.

With the arrival of the Renaissance, the texts of the Greek and Latin poets were circulated more frequently, and the myth of Europa and the Bull became more popular than it had been for nearly a millennium. The Christianized treatment of the Middle Ages was cast aside, and the handling of the subject was less formal and often eroticized. As the Renaissance progressed, numerous artists including Dürer (1495), Titian (c.1560), and Veronese (c.1580) were free to exploit the subject for all its dramatic potential, with its beauty, passion, romance, and eroticism. The myth retained its popularity as an artistic subject from that point onwards, and in the nineteenth century especially, romanticism and mysticism found plenty of scope in the story of Europa, encouraged by the classical revival. Since the later nineteenth century, the myth has found an additional outlet, in political cartoons in mass-distributed printed publications. The story of Europa and the Bull has been used increasingly as a peg on which to hang political comment, often humorous, some-

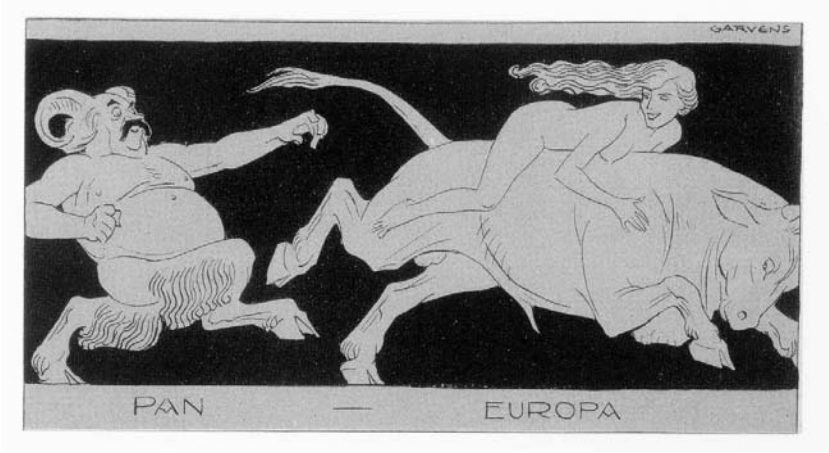


Figure 2 Oskar Garvens, cartoon of *Pan-Europa*. Source: *Kladderadatsch,* 29 September 1929

times tragic, always signalling the continent of Europe in one shape or other. Paintings, sculpture and other forms of 'fine art' have continued to employ the subject, as have the applied arts, but it is newsprint which has taken it over in the last hundred years. Since the Renaissance, the employment of the image of Europa and the Bull has, like everything else, been popularized and democratized: it started with the royal courts and ended with the printed mass-media. Towards the end of that process it has become increasingly politicized. Finally, as the myth has become part and parcel of the iconography of our political cartoons, the treatment has become regularly more and more humorous, and so another quality of the story is revealed and exploited: its capacity to evoke laughter!

Humour was rare in the portrayal of the myth before the twentieth century, and had to wait for the mass-circulation political cartoon. German publications in particular worked this rich vein: the cartoonist Oskar Garvens was especially adept at using the Europa myth to deliver political comment. In Figure 2, his September 1929 picture of Aristide Briand chasing Europe and the Bull, who runs laughingly away, refers to the publication of Briand's famous plan for European unity and co-operation. Here Europa and the Bull are a clear badge to signify the continent in the 1920s, referring to all the states of Europe, though with the emphasis mainly on the powerful

ones in the west of the continent. Briand himself is shown as a ageing Pan, a bacchanalian satyr, in pursuit of Europa, who herself is young, nubile, naked and coquettish; there is debauchery and sex in the cartoon, but it is not essential to the political statement, which is that Europe is too fickle to be bound by the constraints of a grandiose plan devised by a corpulent old Frenchman who wants to 'possess' or at least tame Europe. The caption 'Pan-Europa' is another reference to the grandiose nature of the plan, in the form of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi's scheme for a *Paneuropa* union of states (incidentally excluding Britain), which he was promoting throughout the 1920s.[13]

Ever since the forerunners of the present European Union began to take shape in the 1950s, the 'E-institutions' of an integrating Europe (the ECSC, the EDF, the EC and the EU) have also been the subject of the cartoonists' barbs and of the iconography of the myth of Europa and the Bull, appearing almost daily in the media. Figure 3 shows a particularly witty example by Horst Haitzinger on a poster entitled *Wählen gehen*, or *Get out and vote*, an exhortation to Germans to exercise their democratic rights in the European Parliamentary elections of 12 June 1994. Europe is shown as a busty girl in (classical) Greek sandals and little else, full of brash sex-appeal and an ample degree of self-parody. She sits side-saddle on a charging white bull, who is leaping through a hoop formed by the gold stars of the EU flag, with a garland of the EU member-states' national flags over his horns. He is lithe and powerful, surging forward towards his destiny; Europa on his back is glamorous and superficially beautiful, holding a set of reins in one hand, and a EU polling card in the other. The message is clear, and delivered with no little humour in the form of self-deprecation: Europe is rushing forward with unstoppable force, which is noble, beautiful, attractive and sexy; make sure you are on board and helping to steer by casting your vote!

Thus from its origins in Ancient times, the legend of Europa and the Bull has been a commonplace subject of fine and applied art, with a relatively low profile in the Middle Ages, but increasingly popular from the Renaissance onwards. Alongside its power as a myth, and its potential for humour, the principal qualities of the story which have been so appreciated by artists over the centuries have been the following: its 'suitability' as a subject for decorative purposes, its potential for portraying aesthetic beauty, its dramatic qualities and sense of kinetic energy, and its treatment of romance and sensuality. We shall examine each of these qualities in turn.

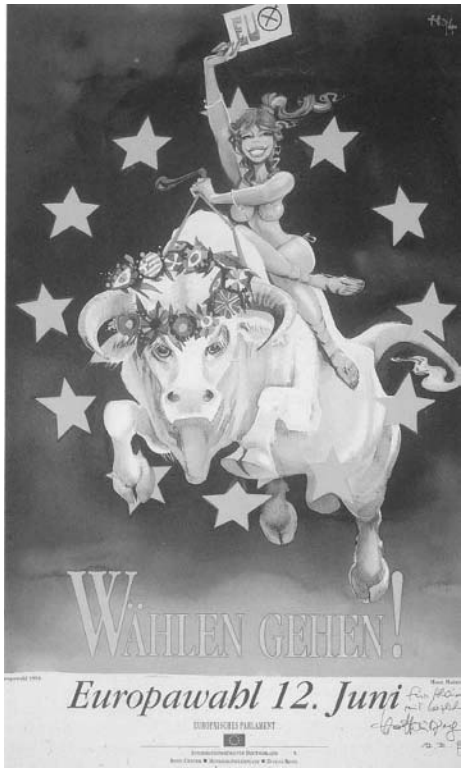


Figure 3 Horst Haitzinger, *Wählen gehen!*, poster published by the European Parliament office in Germany for the EP elections of 12 June 1994

## Europa: a suitable subject

First and foremost, from the earliest times right down to the twenty-first century, the myth has been popular amongst artists quite simply because of its potential for diversion and attractive decoration. It is 'a good subject', like many of the myths of ancient times, and so has been popular for decorating pots for more than 2700 years. It allows artists to show scantily clad or naked young women, muscular animals, rural scenes and seascapes, and as a result the subject of Europa and the Bull has proved one of the most perennially popular illustrated tales of all time.

For example, in the eighteenth century the latest medium was porcelain, and the major museums of the West all have their decorative figures of Europa and the Bull in Meissen, or Derby, in which the myth serves primarily as an 'appropriate' subject for decoration.[14] In the industrialized nineteenth century, with its mass production techniques, the subject adorned many a European drawing-room table as a centrepiece, made for the Victorian mass middle-class market: a classical story with pretty figures and whiff of titillation.[15] In the twentieth century, it remained popular as a decorative motif, particularly in the 1930s.[16] Thus many representations of Europa have little or nothing do with the portrayal of a continent, for the myth was a 'stock' subject, and continues to be used by artists to this day for that purpose.

## Europa: natural beauty

The second principal attraction for artists was the potential of the myth for portraying natural beauty, in the form of the female figure, the animal, the landscape or seascape, and the entire ensemble. Examples are legion; just one will suffice here, to remind us of the level of aesthetic quality which the myth has delivered over the millennia.

Paolo Veronese's paintings of the abduction have always been singled out for special wonder. When Henry James saw the one in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice (Figure 4)[17] in the late nineteenth century, he was transfixed: '… the happiest picture in the world … never did inclination and opportunity combine to express such enjoyment … the brightest vision that ever descended upon the soul of a painter'.[18] It dates from about 1580, and Veronese takes his story from Ovid. The dramatic presentation uses the storyboard technique: there are three separate scenes which follow each other chronologically, all in the same painting. The main picture, in the left foreground, shows the breathlessly passionate Europa being assisted in mounting the bull by her ladies in waiting, all of whom are dressed as Venetian noblewomen of the sixteenth century. Europa is distracted and has her breast uncovered; her left foot is being lasciviously licked by the garlanded bull. Two further episodes on the right of the picture show Europa being carried down to the shore, her ladies still in attendance, and then a final view is of her waving to her friends as she is carried out to sea by the energetic bull. The beauty lies in the composition and the vista through to the sea, and in the sumptuous landscape adorned with finery both natural and man-

Figure 4 Paolo Veronese, *The Rape of Europa*, c.1580. Location: Palazzo Ducale, Venice

made. The subject would continue to attract all manner of artists because of the opportunities it offers to explore beauty through art.

## Europa: drama and energy

Another of the attractions for artists in the Europa myth is its dramatic potential: so much seems to be happening on the canvases, with movement being the key. Alongside romance and natural beauty, the sheer drama of the abduction, and even its violence, has drawn some artists to the kinetic energy involved in the bull's race across the waters with his prize on his back. Etruscan potters liked to portray the flight in the same way that they used battle and athletics as subjects for their applied art, but it was the early modern period which took the dramatic aspect of the story and drew it out. Rembrandt's version of 1632, now in the Paul Getty Museum, gives the

myth a highly dramatic rendition, but perhaps the best example of this sense of drama and violent movement is the version by Titian, painted in about 1560, and now in the Isabella Steward Gardner Museum in Boston. Titian has the bull tearing across the foreground, surging through the water, while in the distance there is a dramatic landscape of vigorous mountains and vivid skies, with Europa's attendants jumping up and down in distress on the shoreline. The princess herself, with minimal drapes and a billowing scarf, is entirely disoriented by the shock and physical impact of her abduction, and lies sprawled across the bull's back, hanging onto his horns for dear life with one hand, and all but losing her balance as she is dragged violently away from her home. The excitement of the scene was such that Rubens painted an almost exact copy of Titian's work some seventy years later in 1629. This extreme dynamism and sense of kinetic energy is something which has transferred itself from the Europa legend to the portrayal of the continent itself, as will become clear.

## Europa: love and sex

Then there is the attraction for graphic artists in portraying the image of Europa and the Bull because of its rich use of romantic sentiments: of passion, sensuality, and – on occasion – raw sex. From time to time artists have used the subject to portray romantic love; many more have been more interested in the erotic potential of the subject, rather than its scope for portraying non-physical romance: for example, the Greek and especially the Roman versions of the story could be highly suggestive.

In an intriguing study entitled *Europe in Love, Love in Europe*, Luisa Passerini has argued that that the 1930s and 1940s formed one of those periods when the myth of Europa and the idea of Europe converged at a time when the continent was squeezed between the Soviets and the Americans, and threatened by fascism. Her study concerns the identification in the minds of many Europeans in the Interbellum of courtly or chivalric love as developed in the Provençal troubadour tradition, with the essence of European civilization.[19] The eroticism of love was certainly popular in contemporary treatments of the story of Europa and the Bull in the interwar period, but it was by no means limited to the unrequited or non-physical side of chivalric love. Sex was just as interesting as pining from afar, if not more so.

Figure 5 Charles Sykes, bronze figure of Europa, c.1930. Location: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. no. 1953.73.1

The example in Figure 5 is taken from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. It is a small bronze figure on a wooden plinth by Charles Sykes, who was – more famously and only slightly less sensually – the creator of the Rolls Royce emblem *The Spirit of Ecstasy*, or in Dutch, *de vliegende juf*, of 1911. His Europa probably dates from the 1920s, and is a very erotic portrayal indeed. The bull's head is bent right back so that his tongue can lick Europa's neck; meanwhile his horns pin her around the waist, one in her buttocks and the other in her crotch. She is naked of course, and actually mounted backwards on the animal, but twisted around to face his muzzle. Her right hand is wound in his phallic tail, and she appears mesmerized in a frenzied ecstasy. This sultry image is an example of the Europa legend being employed by an artist to enable him to sculpt an extremely voluptuous nude. This is all about eroticism, or, not to put such a fine point on it, raw sex.

The myth had always been used – and still is – for artistic expressions of passion and eroticism. It is remarkable that there was such a concentration of this kind of eroticism between the wars, when, as Passerini has shown, certain literary intellectuals tried to define Europe at least partly in terms of relations between the sexes. But it did not last, in the sense that nowadays, the symbolism of Europa and the Bull

carries no cultural content at all linking Europe with a particular form of gender relations. There certainly exist some ideas of difference between Western and – for example – Islamic forms of inter-gender relationships, but they are not related to or even referred to any more by use of the myth of Europa and the Bull. Rather it is the case that love, passion and sex have always been among the themes which attracted artists to the myth; in the 1930s in certain circles these ideas drifted towards a conception of Europe, but it was not to be an enduring one.

These, then, are the principal themes which have drawn artists to the subject of Europa and the Bull: its ritual, its 'appropriateness', its decorative qualities, its humour, and its scope for portraying natural beauty, drama, romance, passion and sex. How much of this, and how many of these qualities, have rubbed off on Europe the continent? To answer this question, it is first necessary to establish the degree of association which has occurred between the myth of Europa and the continent of Europe.

## The association between Europa and Europe

In its original form, the Europa myth probably expressed the rivalry between Greece and Troy, between the opposite sides of the Aegean, later between the Greeks and Persians, and by implication between Europe and Asia. It may also record an early Hellenic invasion of Crete, or even a raid on Phoenicia by Hellenes from Crete.[20] Abduction of the enemy's princesses was almost a commonplace: Io, Medea, and Helen are just a few of the more famous of Europa's companion victims in this international and intercontinental rivalry.[21]

In the Middle Ages there was occasionally a link made in art between the myth of the bull and the continent; in the Renaissance the association was renewed and reinforced. One of the most famous paintings of Europa and the Bull is *The Allegory of the League of Cambrai* by Jacopo Palma il Giovane, dating from about 1590 (Figure 6). It hangs high on the wall of the Senato in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, over the door to the Collegio, and is a rich allegory using both human and animal figures simultaneously to personify (or animalify) various political concepts and units. Venice is represented by the Doge Leonardo Loredan, and by the lion of St Mark; its warlike qualities are shown in the crowned and sword-wielding female figure of the Republic. Laurels of victory are being prepared for the lion. The enemy is on the right, and

Figure 6 Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *Allegory of the League of Cambrai*, c.1590. Location: Palazzo Ducale, Venice

consists of the League of Cambrai, which was an alliance formed in December 1508 between the Holy Roman Emperor (Germany), France, and the Papacy, in order to check the landward expansion of the Venetian Republic. Spain, England, Hungary, Savoy, Ferrara, Mantua and Fiume all came to support the alliance. The arms of most of these allies appear on the shield held by Europa, who is personifying the continent here, and indeed the Cambrai League must at times have seemed liked the entire continent to the beleaguered Venetians, who were brought to the edge of destruction by their enemies on this occasion. However, within a few years the Serenissima was back in the saddle, with virtually all its losses regained, which is the subject of celebration in Palma's picture. (It is interesting to note that, as is often the case in Venetian art, Venice is not automatically associated with Europe, but with Byzantium and the Levant).[22] This is a crucial painting in the evolution of the imagery of Europe, for many things come together here. Europe is personified as a warrior maid (as is Venice), with helmet, armour and shield. She is identified with a majority of European states, enumerated on the shield. And for identification with

the continent as a whole, she is placed upon Europa's bull, and is shown rising up out of the sea: there can be no doubt that the Europa legend is invoked. The bull of Europe is the counterpart of the lion of Venice. The association of the lion is with the Christian saint, Mark, who clearly outranks in power (in the eyes of the artist and of all Venetians) the bull and his association with the old king of the gods, Zeus. It is a complex as well as a beautiful painting, and because it was seen by so many influential people and artists, it was very important for the image of Europe.

From this point on there was an easily recognizable association between the myth and the continent, with the bull often utilized to indicate the geographical unit. It was of course quite possible to portray the legend without referring to the continent, but if there was any geographical association to be made, then it was immediately obvious, accepted, and understood. The bull became one of the iconographical accompaniments of the female personification of the continent of Europe, along with her other accoutrements like the true church, books, palettes, arms, and the like. A bull becomes one of the badges or signifiers for Europe the continent.

For example, one of the most celebrated portrayals of Europe in the eighteenth century was by Giambattista Tiepolo in his frescoes above the grand staircase in the Residence of the Prince-Bishop of Würzburg, painted in 1753. They represent Apollo and the Four Parts of the World, and in the frieze devoted to Europe she is shown under a canopy, seated, richly clothed, stroking a garlanded bull, and worshipped by a personification of the arts who is marking out the globe. All around her are scenes of music, war, riches, Roman antiquity, scholarship and science, and the universal religion. These were by that time her standard iconographical attributes, but at the centre of them all is the bull, with which Europa/e is intimate, in this case leaning languidly on his flank and stroking his forehead with her sceptre. (The transferred phallic symbolism is a typical Tiepolo irony.) Here the painting has without question a geographical subject, that is the continent of Europe; at the same time the myth of the Princess Europa and her bull is also invoked, and linked with the geographical concept.

Perhaps the most monumental and public representation of the continents ever constructed is to be found at the Albert Memorial in London, completed in 1876. This vast cathedral to Victorian self-worship and arrogance is covered in statuary, including many famous contemporaries. The main groups of sculpture represent industry, agriculture, and the like. Outlying at the four corners of the massive plinth are four white campanella marble groups of the continents, given the full heroic

Figure 7 Patrick MacDowell, sculpture group representing Europe, Albert Memorial, London, 1876. Author's photograph

treatment. The groups are all by different sculptors, but in very similar style: there is ample evidence of the control of the subject matter by a committee, which indicates that the symbolism had been thought about carefully.

The group representing Europe is shown in Figure 7. It is made up of a group of five noble young women around a huge standing bull, sculpted by Patrick MacDowell. Europe herself is mounted on the bull; she has long hair and a crown, and is holding an orb and sceptre. On the left to the front is France as martial prowess, holding a two-handed sword and laurels. On the left at the rear sits the newly unified Italy, as a personification of the Arts, with a lyre and palette, holding one hand aloft like a musician. On the right at the front is Britain as maritime trade, clearly recalling statues of Britannia, with a trident, shield, crown, and the stone turned to waves at her feet. She is gazing back at the gilded figure of Albert in the centre of the monument. On the right to the rear (not visible in Figure 7) is Albert's own Germany (also recently unified), personified as Knowledge or Science, with a

book and a pensive expression. They are all crowned.[23] The point to be noted here is the centrality of the bull to the portrayal, and the very close identification of the continent with the mythical figure. The nineteenth century was an age which, perhaps above all others, knew its classics and its myths, and used them as references in its everyday life, in its politics, and particularly in its imperialism.

As we have seen, in the twentieth century the cartoonists adopted *en masse* the shorthand connection between the myth and the continent, also applying the imagery to the institutions of Europe. Outside the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels, which houses the EU Council of Ministers, stands a satirical sculpture by Léon de Pas, entitled *Europe en avant*. It is a modern version of Europa and the Bull, and the associations are mixed: on the one hand we witness the soaring of the human spirit as Europe charges away to its destiny; on the other hand in the artist's portrayal there is something of the innocent peoples of Europe being taken for a long ruinous ride by a crazed animal. Whatever the case, the association between the legend and this form of Europe is immediate. It has become a convenient shorthand.

## Characteristics transferred to Europe through Europa

Now we come, finally, to the crux of the matter. Having surveyed the changing nuances of the portrayal of the legend of Europa and the Bull down through the ages, and having established that there is a very large degree of association between the legend and the continent – certainly from the time of the Renaissance onwards – we can now move to determine the qualities and characteristics which have been imputed to the continent of Europe by means of its association with the legend of the Rape of Europa. Certain qualities are indeed conveyed by the visual representation of the Europa story, and they fall under the following three principal headings: nobility and queenliness, travel and speed, and prowess in war.

## Europe: nobility

Princess Europa was a king's daughter, a bride of Zeus, and a demigoddess in her own right: these badges of rank gave the continental manifestation of Europa a certain eminence to start with. She was often portrayed as deceived, beside herself,

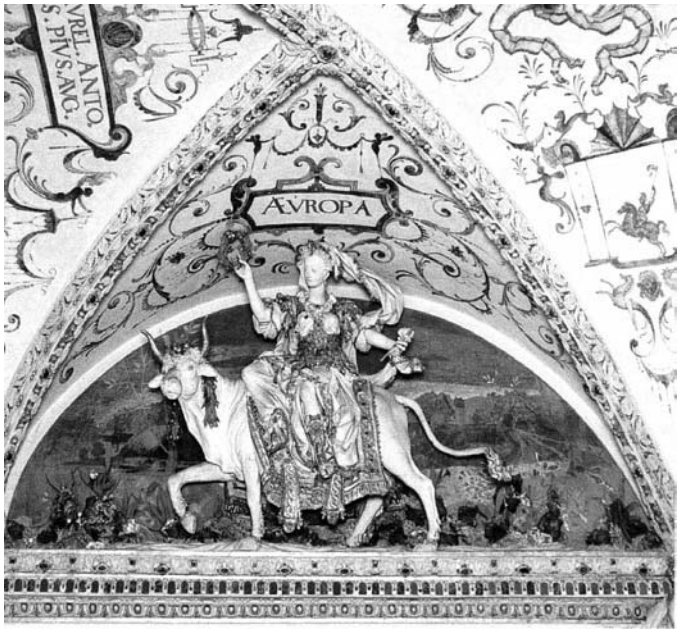


Figure 8 Hans Mont, *Europe*, fresco from the Imperial Hall in the Moravian Castle of Bucovice, later sixteenth century. Source: Polisensky, 1991, plate 1

distraught, even obsessed, but these were always passions, as in all Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, which were all the greater when experienced by noble people, and Europa was always noble. On the other hand, the fact of the matter was that she was being abducted and then subjected to sexual intercourse with a stranger, even if he was king of the gods. Many of the versions showed some kind of compliance and even enjoyment on Europa's part. So it is one thing to assert that Europa lends Europe a quality of nobility, but quite another to suggest that the myth gives the personification of the continent an air of queenliness, sovereignty and superiority over others. This transformation of the tragic but noble rape victim to triumphant queen took place mainly in the Renaissance period, and an illustration from that time can indicate the subtlety of the metamorphosis which would enable the myth to add dignity and superiority to the continent of Europe.

This transition from distressed damsel to destiny-fulfilling queen took place over a long period of time. A good example of a transitional piece is shown in Figure

8: a fresco by the Austrian Hans Mont, executed to decorate the Imperial Hall at a Moravian castle in the 1580s. The lady portrayed is clearly Europa of the legend, complete with bull, but from her setting and triumphal attitude, she is equally clearly representing the continent as well.[24] The identification of the geographical continent, the royal and celestial destiny of the myth, and the sophisticated and superior queenliness of the female figure all combine here in a way which was to characterize the portrayal of the continent for several hundred years. We cannot know precisely how influential this particular piece of stucco was (though it must have been seen by many powerful people, given its location), but it is an excellent example of a coming together of a number of different traditions and a launching of something new in conceptual visual art in the later Renaissance.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these images were further developed, and by the time we get to the nineteenth century and the portrayal of Europe in the Albert Memorial of 1876 (see Figure 7 above), the convergence of the different traditions was complete. Europa and the Bull were now fully representative of the continent of Europe. She was a crowned queen, riding in triumph to her glorious destiny, her handmaidens transformed from simpering court ladies to personifications of Victory, the Arts, Knowledge and Trade. This 'metamorphosis' of the legend, from Ovid to George Gilbert Scott (the overall designer of the Albert Memorial), increasingly allowed the legend to be used to portray the nobility of the continent.

## Europe: kinetic energy

Moving to a second quality or characteristic which the legend has lent the continent, the idea of drama, energy, and speed which we noticed as one of the features of the legend portrayed by artists through the ages has resulted in some of those qualities being transferred to the graphic portrayal of the continent of Europe as well. This has occurred by investing the portrayal of the continent, through the myth of Europa and the Bull, with a sense of kinetic energy, speed, and travel: it is a continent in which travel is frequent and easy, which is quick to act, and which – in modern manifestations – represents rapid advance in transport and other technology. The association began with the maps of Abraham Ortelius, and especially with his map of the continent of Europe in his pioneering atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, published in Antwerp in 1570. In this important map in the history of images of

Figure 9 *The Rape of Europa*, c.1920, bas-relief on the front of P&O House, Cockspur Street, West London. Author's photograph

Europe, the cartouche at the top left of the map shows a plinth with the name 'Europae' on it, and on top of that, a rendering of the white bull with Europa on his back. She has a billowing scarf (Ovid's 'fluttering garments'), and the bull's tail is erect. This was perhaps the first time that a cartographer used the legend of Europa and the Bull to grace a map of the continent, and thereby associated the mapped continent directly with the legend. Many associations of the legend with the continent predate Ortelius's work, so it was not his original idea, but he was probably the first to put it on a map. In this context the association suggests travel, and the inter-accessibility of the continent on the map.[25] In maps from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, the myth is linked with the continent, and the primary characteristic involved is that of the rapid and energetic travel which Europeans could and did enjoy around their continent and the whole world.

Away from maps, the twentieth century has also seen regular use of the Europa story to indicate speed, travel, and kinetic energy. The London headquarters of the Peninsular and Oriental (P&O) shipping line used to be located at the corner of Cockspur Street and Pall Mall, just off Trafalgar Square. This custom-built flagship for the world-dominating company still stands, and is covered in nautical, naval and trade emblems in celebration of P&O's role in world transport. Centrally placed on the outside of the building, between carvings of boys on surging dolphins with putti and seabirds in attendance, is a bas-relief of Europa and the Bull (Figure 9). She is naked, and lies comfortably on his broad back, with the usual sash billowing in their

slipstream. This is a symbol of travel; of great powerful engines surging through the waves of the world's oceans; of sleek, European liners, and of fast, European transport opening up the commerce of the world. This is very much more than just a pretty picture for decorative purposes: there is a definite message about the properties and virtues of Europe.

And it is not alone: similar emblems adorn many transport-related buildings of the early twentieth century. There is a carving of Europa and the Bull by Jakob Prost on the front elevation of the Cornavin railway station in Geneva. It dates from 1930, and is paired with a bas-relief of the flying horse Pegasus, both of them sending the clear message that this building is the centre of a lightning-swift, up-to-date transport system, connecting Geneva with the rest of Switzerland, Europe and the world. The Europa carving is horizontally stretched, emphasizing the kinetic drama; the bull has his forefeet outstretched and his back ones trailing out behind, giving a sensation of great speed. Europa is naked astride him, and thrown back by the force of his forward impetus, just as in the Titian painting of c.1560. This image of Europe is suggesting that Swiss railways will take you anywhere in Europe or elsewhere at breathtaking speed!

## Europe: war and disillusion

A third characteristic associated with Europe the continent which is supported by some of the representations of Europa and the Bull is strength in arms. The link here is a tenuous one, for there were many other forms of representing Europe which were more powerful in this respect; after all, Europa the Princess was involved in love, not war. However, because of the use the Nazis were to make of the emblem of Europa and the Bull, and of the reactions it evoked, it is important to tease out the historical support for war (or peace) afforded by the legend.

The representation of the continent has usually made reference (amongst other things) to martial prowess, from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, but only a few of these images were associated directly with the legend of Europa and the Bull. We have already taken stock of Palma's important 1590s painting of the League of Cambrai (see Figure 6), which links Europa and the Bull with Europe the continent at war, showing her dressed in armour, helmet and shield. A decade or so earlier, another example is a geography of costume by Abraham de Bruyn, which


Figure 10 Inside cover of *Signal*, 12 (June 1943). Author's photograph[27]

was published in Antwerp in 1581.[26] Personifications of the four continents adorn the title page; Europe is found at the bottom right of the page (for once not wearing a crown). The engraving is interesting for two features: firstly the highly military nature of the portrayal of Europe, who is dressed as a legionary in armour and laurels, with a charger at her right hand; she is the only continent to have a military aspect, unless one counts America, who holds a simple bow and arrow. Secondly, Europe is seated firmly on a great bull, linking her directly with the legend of Europa (the other emblematic animals are an elephant for Africa, a camel for Asia, and some sort of wild dog for America). Africa and America are naked. Here we have Europa and the Bull, and the chance to compare her with other continents: she comes off as both sophisticated and warlike. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Habsburg pretensions to controlling much of Europe and defending it against the onslaught of the Turks encouraged much imagery involving Europe and the arts of war; occasionally they also involved Europa and the Bull.

This rather slender connection between Europa and the Bull and martial glory became significant in the period around the Second World War. There is no escaping the uncomfortable fact that the Nazi Party in Germany seems to have harboured a particular affection for the myth of Europa and the Bull and its depiction in the visual arts. The image figured large in the epic-scale decorations for the 'Tag der Deutschen Kunst' exhibition in Munich in 1937, and on the medallions and other props at the European Youth Congress held under the Nazi regime in Vienna in September 1942.[28] It was a favourite subject of Nazi painters, and was the emblem on *Signal* (Figure 10), the fortnightly magazine published by the Nazis in various languages in

Figure 11 Emil Scheibe, *Europa and her Bull*, 1952, private collection. Source: Salzmann, 1988, p. 90

occupied Europe, mainly for the troops under their control but also for civilians. An image of Europa and the Bull was used to convey the sense of a mighty European continent, united, reinvigorated and re-strengthened by its unification under Nazi Germany. This was not one of Europe's finer moments, but nonetheless it is an essential and unfortunately characteristic one, demonstrating how important the myth of Europa has been to the projection of the concept of the continent.

Not even the Nazis could not entirely contaminate and destroy such a powerful and universal symbol of Europe. For not all artists fell in with the fascists in their use of the myth for ideological purposes. Max Beckman hit back in 1933 with an image of a Nazi bull having killed Europa/e, and the banned Paul Klee used images of Europa to challenge the Nazi regime, as at various times did Leo von Koenig, Jacques Lipschitz, Ossip Zadkine, and Pablo Picasso.[29]

The impact of the European wars of the twentieth century has been profound. While the myth continued to be used by some artists for decorative purposes, and to illustrate emotions in the traditional ways, the use of the image by the fascists, the events of the Second World War, and the subsequent splitting of Europe by the Cold

War all wrought a sea change in the way the myth of Europa speaks of Europe the continent. As a consequence, the use of the myth as a signifier for the continent of Europe is now very often tainted with notions of tragedy and violent destruction.[30]

This takes two forms. One is an almost viscerally painful projection of the tragedy of twentieth-century Europe usurped by war, Holocaust, and Cold War. Figure 11, a painting of 1952 by Emil Scheibe entitled 'Europa and her Bull', shows Europa as a near-naked prostitute in a dingy bedsit, with a view through the window of a butcher splitting the bull's carcass from anus to throat.[31] Despair, disgust and resignation at the depths to which European 'civilization' has fallen are the themes. Another iconic example is Johannes Grützke's famous pastel drawing of 1976 entitled *Europa and the Bull, balancing on the Berlin Wall: forwards or backwards?* It was entered for (and won) a competition run by the Checkpoint Charlie Museum in Berlin in the late 1970s, and is filled with the gloom and bitterness of the later stages of the Cold War. It shows a naked and helpless Europa/e, emaciated and exhausted, toppling off the back of her bull, which itself is balancing precariously on top of a wall. Thus the continent is teetering on the Berlin Wall, which has divided it down the middle, and exhausted it.[32] This mode of the use of the myth to signify the continent is overwhelmed with bitterness and tragedy, rejecting any pretensions of European nobility or even civilization.

The other way the tragic effects of the twentieth century took effect was through sceptical humour, usually through the political cartoons of which several examples have already been given here. Figure 12 shows a final, recent one, by Wolgang Ammer, from a Dutch broadsheet in December 2003. Printed above an article by Euro-magnate Jean-Luc Dehaene on the position the Commission should take in the new European Constitution (which has since been shelved), the drawing shows multiple Europas on lots of bulls, with various important commentators dressed as gauchos, deciding which steer to select (Giscard d'Estaing and Kohl are prominent). The various models (!) for Europe flaunt themselves at the politicians, hoping to be cut out of the herd for implementation. Using satire rather than tragedy as a technique, the effect is the same: to deflate overbearing claims about statements of Euro-assertion, and to puncture the pretensions of Europe and the EU by using the absurd side of the image of the girl and the bull to place matters in a cynical perspective. While much of the official imagery or propaganda of Europe, especially that of the EU, is extremely self-assertive and even bombastic,[33] many artists and especially the cartoonists use the image of the princess and the bull to hold in check such preten-

Figure 12 Wolgang Ammer, cartoon on the theme of Europa and the Bull. Source: *NRC Handelsblad* (2 December 2003)

sions. The story appears to serve all these purposes extremely well. It has that great mythic quality of polyvalency, which allows diametrically opposed ideologies to harness part of its force.[34] It has been, and remains, one of the most potent images in Western art.

## Conclusion

The connection between Europa the demi-goddess and Europe the continent is a complex and subtle one. In order to try and define the way in which the association has operated, I have examined here the visual portrayal of the myth from ancient times to the modern period. It was a subject popular with artists of all kinds for its power as a myth, its decorative qualities, its potential for depicting various forms of beauty, its drama and energy, its treatment of romance and sex, and (especially in recent centuries) for its humorous side. While many artists' renditions of the myth continued to have little or nothing to do with the continent, there was an increasingly strong association between Princess Europa and the continent of Europe, especially from the 1590s onwards. Finally, I have shown that cultural content or characteristics have been transferred from Europa to Europe by means of the constant

and intensifying association between the two concepts. Not all the qualities explored by artists over the centuries have been transferred: those which have been are nobility and queenliness, kinetic energy and the technology of travel, and associations with war, whether martial prowess, opposition to conflict, or despair at its outcome. The effect of the European disgraces of the twentieth century has been to lead some artists and most cartoonists, either through pathos or satire, to challenge Euro-assertion and pride, although official propaganda continues to use the myth to promote European civilization and achievements. The myth of Europa and the Bull has indeed helped to shape mankind's impressions of the continent, modestly until the figure of Europa metamorphosed into Europe the Queen in the later Renaissance, but by the twentieth century, universally.

Colleagues and friends, by showing you this series of images about a long-lived myth, I have been trying to demonstrate to a general audience the way in which research in European Studies – however esoteric – has given me scope to extend the boundaries of my own academic discipline of history, but at the same time to link up with other scholars in many other disciplines. It has allowed me to deploy unusual visual source materials, and to move towards defining a subset of the discipline, which one might call 'visual history' (for what I have attempted is certainly not conventional art history). It has allowed me to examine a subject over a huge timescale, which is also unusual amongst historians. It has allowed me to borrow a number of ideas and concepts from other disciplines, like semiotics, anthropology, and cultural studies, and employ some of their insights in the study of history. And I have done this in the course of exploring the way people have thought about themselves and their identity, and about that central question of European Studies: What is Europe?

Finally it is my pleasure to name in gratitude a few of those who have meant a great deal to me, on my route to the University of Amsterdam. First I thank the *College van Bestuur* and the former Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, for appointing me to this chair. They knew very little about me, and so displayed a touchingly naïve and blind trust in the recommendation of the search committee which interviewed me: that committee was composed of colleagues from the Faculty, who have no such excuse for their mistakes. I thank them too.

Many of those who are concerned with European Studies and History in this University I have known for years as colleagues and friends, long before I came to

work here. They have been immensely welcoming, opening their academic arms to me in a truly generous way. My predecessor Wim Roobol has been an inspiration for decades, because of his combination of erudite historical study of Europe with a withering cynicism about the slightest pretensions on behalf of any spirit or identity of Europe. Joep Leerssen is an intellectual power in the land and indeed abroad, and his leadership of imagological studies has set many of the recent parameters in literary studies; he is also very funny, and excellent, zany company. Before I came here I had been exchanging students with Amsterdam from Hull University in the United Kingdom for twenty years, and I met many of my current colleagues along the way: Menno Spiering and his family deserve a special mention as really close friends over a sustained period. They and others have been particularly helpful in supporting us during the sometimes stressful experience of moving from Great Britain to the Netherlands and settling in here. Since arriving I have got to know many more colleagues in the Faculty, especially in the European Studies chair groups – my own, in Modern European History, and the others in East European Studies, and Modern European Literature. I have found the intellectual engagement extremely stimulating, and the open welcome very touching.

There are students here today as well: it has always been a source of wonderment to me, here and in the UK and elsewhere, that I could earn my living by interesting enough students in my hobby of studying European history. Thank you all.

I also am delighted to be able to stand up in public and thank my family and friends for their support. I am sorry my parents could not be here to today: they would have enjoyed the occasion. For obvious logistical reasons, few of my friends and colleagues from England are here, but I would like to thank them too for their inspiration, good humour and trust over the years. Finally of course I must pay tribute to my immediate family for their scarcely credible tolerance of my obsession with history and with European Studies, even to the point of following me here across the English Channel. I will not embarrass them by mentioning what they think of my image-collecting, everywhere we go, except to thank them for their indulgence. Their witty, fond scepticism about the life of a professional historian has been my constant inspiration.

It is a great honour to stand here, as a scholar and a teacher, and I thank you all.

Ik heb gezegd.

# References


1. Roobol, 1988.
2. Den Boer, 1989.
3. See for example Harley, 1989. His most important articles have been collected in Harley, 2001.
4. See Wintle, 1999.
5. In English, unlike Dutch, Europa and Europe are two different words and concepts: 'Europe' refers to the continent, and 'Europa' to the lady with the bull.
6. Den Boer, et al., 1995, p. 48.
7. Roobol, 1988, p. 187.
8. The myth and the continent have 'led separate lives, converging only at times' (Passerini, 1999, p. 6).
9. One of the most sumptuous is Salzmann, 1988. See also Hanke, 1963, on the iconography; and Passerini, 2002.
10. Bussière, et al., 2001, p. 1f.
11. Ovid, 1955, p. 72-73.
12. Wattel-de Croizant, 2001. The following section draws gratefully on this excellent account, and its illustrations.
13. See Roobol, 2002. Garvens published his image in *Kladderadatsch* magazine, where he was to produce a brilliant set of satirical cartoons, many of them on the Europa theme, over the next generation.
14. E.g. a porcelain figure of Europa and the Bull, Wiener Porzellan Staatsmanufaktur (1744 -1784) in the Museum for Applied Art (MAK) in Vienna; and a figurine of Europa and the Bull, soft-paste porcelain, enamelled and gilt, Derby, c.1765, in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, C.1-1935.
15. E.g. a Parian ware statue of Europa and the Bull, after J.B.J. Klagmann, 1868, in the Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.
16. E.g. a repeated textile pattern of Europa and the Bull, 1938, by the sculptor Frank Dobson. Now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and illustrated at Passerini, 1999, plate 4.
17. There is a similar but earlier version in the National Gallery in London.
18. James, 1986, p. 23-24.
19. Passerini, 1999, passim, especially p. 6.
20. Graves, 1998, p. 188. According to the early Christian theologian Lactantius, who promoted this version of the myth, the bull was actually a bull-shaped raiding boat from Crete (Pagden, 2002, p. 34).
21. Duroselle, 1990, p. 19. See also Herodotus, 1972, Book 1, p. 42, who explains the Europa myth in the context of woman-stealing being quite a normal practice at the time.

22. On Venice and the Orient, see Howard, 2000; and Brown, 1997, p. 75-76.
23. Cunningham, 2000, p. 242-244.
24. Hale, 1994, p. 11-12.
25. Wattel-de Croizant, 2001, p. 52.
26. *Omnium pene* (Antwerp, 1581). There is a copy in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Prints and Drawings, inv. no. 64.682.250).
27. My thanks to Jane Fairfax for bringing this image to my attention.
28. Both pictured in Salzmann, 1988, p. 115 & 443 respectively.
29. Wattel-de Croizant, 2001, p. 266-269; Passerini, 1999, p. 260-267.
30. See Passerini, 2002, chapter 8.
31. In a private collection, illustrated in Salzmann, ed., 1988, p. 90.
32. See Guthmüller, 1992, p. 5-8. The same goes for Grützke's 1984 pastel of *Europa and the Bull* (in a private collection in Munich, illustrated at Salzmann, 1988, p. 311), which shows the distraught nations of Europe as ugly and misshapen nudes falling off the back of a submerging bull.
33. See Wintle, 2002 on the recovery of official European imagery after the buffetings of the twentieth century.
34. Passerini, 1999, p. 7.

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