

READING HERODOTUS' EGYPTIANS AND PERSIANS WITH AN OPEN CONCEPT OF RELIGION

SCHWAB (A.) *Fremde Religion in Herodots Historien. Religiöse Mehrdimensionalität bei Persern und Ägyptern. (Hermes Einzelschriften 118.)*
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S.'s monograph unites recent methodological and theoretical advances in religious studies with a narratologically sophisticated close reading of the *Histories* to illustrate the full extent, variety and complexity of religious material that populates Herodotus' work and particularly the Egyptian *logos*.

In an introductory chapter S. elucidates problems with previous studies of Greek religion and of religion in Herodotus. S. evinces a keen awareness both of the constructedness of scientific frameworks for understanding what constitutes 'religion' and the inevitable consequences of imposing one's own definitions onto materials that do not offer any explicit, emic definition of religion. S.'s own 'open' definition (p. 28) programmatically avoids these difficulties. Following the framework of K. Hock, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* (2002), S. identifies several *dimensions* of religious experience and, in keeping with the open definition, acknowledges the mutual interaction and overlap as well as the extendability of this list. S.'s dimensions, reorganised from Hock's categories, include social, spatial, temporal, sensory and interactive aspects of religion (p. 31).

S.'s working method is to study these dimensions as they appear in passages of the Herodotean text in which a 'religiöses Feld' (p. 30) is discernible. This method opens up the possibility to broaden the usual suspects for a religious *index locorum* considerably and, in particular, beyond the confines of ethnographic descriptions of a given people's νόμοι. This thesis of S. – that religious material exists both within and outside of the νόμοι-passages – seems to me not only unobjectionable but indeed necessary.

The problem that emerges is that, while the open definition of religion is rigorously defended, S.'s stated methodology merely defers the task of determining what precisely constitutes religious material onto the religious field. For S., a religious field can be identified by recourse to 'einem nicht angefochtenen Konsens über einen bestimmten Sprachgebrauch' (p. 30); over the course of S.'s study such linguistic usages include the textual presence of, for example, temples and altars (pp. 127–8 on 2.4.2), priests (p. 162 on 2.142.1), oaths (pp. 242–3 on 3.8.1), death and burial (p. 49 on 2.129–30.1, p. 116 on 2.86.1) and customs (p. 131 on 2.18.2–3; p. 90 n. 12 on 2.37.1). S. concedes that the act of defining the religious field of a passage according to these common-sense themes and usages constitutes 'ein bestimmtes Verständnis von "Religion"' (p. 30) and reasonably asserts that the consensus principle does at least offer *some* starting point, amid the terminological and theoretical difficulties, for studying religion in the *Histories*. At the same time, the demarcation of the 'religious field / religiöses Feld' in a given passage sometimes appears arbitrary in presenting certain topics or objects as self-evidently religious in nature, whereas some accounting for the consensus by which individual items (e.g. burial) can safely be asserted to encode 'religious' material would be useful.

The methodological introduction gives way to the analysis, in the second chapter, of two paradigmatic passages in the *Histories* that illustrate the presence of religious material, in all its multidimensionality, within and outside of formal discussions of νόμοι. S.'s selection of keywords and key concepts from the two passages (pp. 45–52) immediately illustrates

the problem highlighted above: namely, the identification, without explicit justification, of the markers that constitute the passage's religious field and the religious dimension(s) to which these markers individually correspond. Such reticence is admittedly part of S.'s announced principle (p. 30) that 'ein bestimmter Sprachgebrauch ... nicht weiter erklärt wird und nur zur Bestimmung des religiösen Feldes dient' (p. 30), and the method does not prevent readers from appreciating the wide range of experiential aspects of religion activated in Herodotus' multifaceted descriptions; but it raises early on the question of the author's unspoken, necessarily subjective criteria.

After this demonstration of the variety of religious dimensions at work in the passages studied, the following chapters each comment on textual evidence for one specific dimension of religion. Occasionally S.'s operation strays into analytical paraphrase of the Herodotean text, with certain subsections of the *Histories* treated apparently for the sake of completeness rather than for their relevance to the religious dimension under consideration. The analysis would have been more pointed if some of the interstitial or intervening material between key 'religious' passages had been treated more swiftly, if not excised entirely. On the other hand, the sheer breadth of coverage, spanning the Egyptian *logos* and the Cambyses *logos*, marks an ambitious scope and an impressive achievement.

The procedure of sequential reading-*cum*-commentary also allows S. to display his greatest strength, which consists in philological and narratological expertise. S. demonstrates constant sensitivity to Herodotus' narratorial stance vis-à-vis his informants' reports and interprets the historian's treatment of religious materials through this ever-changing lens. The result is that S. does justice to the complexity of Herodotus' exposition even while focusing on individual categories of religious experience, where the risk of over-schematisation is high.

Chapter 3 analyses several aspects of Egyptian religious culture as *faits sociaux*. S. convincingly demonstrates the inextricability of religious material from social material in the ancient world and particularly in Egypt. In fresh analyses of specific Egyptian practices, rituals and festivals, S. makes the case for Herodotus' awareness of social and economic aspects of religious customs alongside their sacred character. Here, as elsewhere, S.'s analysis is not limited to literary study of the Herodotean text, but rightly takes into account the Egyptological evidence for religious processes and events treated by Herodotus.

Chapter 4 focuses on spatial aspects of Egyptian religion, with a capacious understanding of 'space' ranging from the Egyptian natural environment to the political and sacred geography of Egypt. The familiar question of geographical determinism in Herodotus receives a balanced treatment, with emphasis on the 'Wechselwirkung' (p. 152) of environment and religion upon each other as well as on internal, place-specific differentiations flagged within the complex system of Egyptian religion.

Chapter 5 interprets the temporal dimension of Egyptian religion as its history, with attention to the multiple vantages on Egyptian (and Greek) religious history evidenced in Herodotus' work. S. explores the Egyptian self-conception of temporal priority as well as religious change in Egypt over time. This analysis accommodates thought-provoking reflections on the relationship of Herodotus' priestly informants to the version of the past that they authorise, as well as Herodotus' critical attitude towards this tradition, given the contradiction between the priests' ideological insistence on the unchanging character of Egyptian religion and their own narration of moments of diachronic change.

Chapter 6 turns to the sensory dimension, embracing aesthetic and psychological experiences of religion. The former subcategory leads to an analysis of Herodotean iconicity and *enargeia* (p. 203) in textual depictions of sacred spaces, while the latter provides another opportunity for S. to draw attention to Herodotus' authorial self-distancing from the materials he reports, in this case from stories of divinely sent dreams and their interpretation (p. 225).

Chapter 7 examines interactions between religions. The Cambyses-*logos* serves as the major case study and provides another illustration of multiformity even within a relatively compressed textual space: Cambyses' interactions with Arabian, Phoenician and Egyptian religion range from strategic cooperation and tolerance to misunderstanding and punitive sacrilege. Here again, S. highlights Herodotus' construction of the narrative out of multiple regional versions and perspectives.

The narratological through-line of the analysis, along with the constant revelation of Herodotean nuance, ultimately yields the most valuable insight afforded by S.'s study, namely, that Herodotus' narrative technique and polyphonic blending of voices and perspectives consciously and skilfully reproduces the complex process of engaging with a religion or religious system – in all its symbolic, sensory, spatial, temporal and interactive dimensions – that is foreign to one's own culture (pp. 271–7). This result, and the cumulative case made for it, amounts to a profitable and compelling combination of the legacy of the narratological turn in Herodotean studies with productive insights from religious studies.

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HERODOTUS' ANCIENT RECEPTION

KIRKLAND (N.B.) *Herodotus and Imperial Greek Literature. Criticism, Imitation, Reception.* Pp. xii + 377. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. Cased, £64, US\$99. ISBN: 978-0-19-758351-7. doi:10.1017/S0009840X23001671

I have seen editions of *The Histories* with a sculpted portrait on the cover. Some statue found in a French museum. But I never imagine Herodotus this way. I see him more as one of those spare men of the desert who travel from oasis to oasis, trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything without suspicion, piecing together a mirage. (*The English Patient*, p. 118)

Taken from Michael Ondaatje's 1992 novel, the above quotation underscores how the widely divergent evaluations of Herodotus remain even in modern times a central feature of his reception. If Herodotus continued to be read in antiquity thanks to the beauty of his style and his account of the past, he was also harshly criticised for overindulging in the fabulous and the improbable. In *Herodotus and Imperial Greek Literature* K. homes in on how Greeks of the imperial era approached the historian from Halicarnassus as a possible literary model. While K. joins a growing number of scholars, this reviewer included, interested in how later Greeks understood and repurposed their literary heritage, efforts thus far have been largely limited to the reception of poets (e.g. L. Kim, *Homer Between History and Fiction* [2010]; R. Hunter, *Hesiodic Voices* [2014]; T. Hawkins, *Iambic Poetics in the Roman Empire* [2014]). In taking up Herodotus' imperial afterlife, K.'s excellent study is a welcome addition to the scholarly discussion. Rather than chronicle moments of allusion or quotation, it instead wrestles with the complicated question of the historian's reputation and in the process offers a sophisticated methodology that readers will likely find of use well beyond the specific example of Herodotus' afterlife.