PARALLELS – HOW THE ANCIENTS COMPARED THEIR RELIGIONS[*]

§ 1. PARALLELA: TOPIC AND FOCUS

§ 1. 1. Pseudo-Plutarch, *Parallela Minora*, prooemium

Among the numerous writings of Plutarch, there is a small work – probably falsely ascribed to him – entitled "Greek and Roman Parallels";[1] its objective is to prove the truth of myths by adducing 'similar' events from Roman times. Its introduction reads as follows:[2]

> The greater part of mankind think that tales of ancient events (τῆς ἀρχαίας ἱστορίας) are inventions (πλάσματα) and myths (μύθους) because of the incredible elements (τὰ παράδοξα τῆς πράξεως) which they contain. But since I have discovered that similar events (ὅμοια) have happened in this modern era (ἐν τοῖς νῦν χρόνοις), I have singled out crises of Roman history; and to each ancient happening, I have subjoined a more modern similar story (νεωτέραν ὁμοίαν διήγησιν). I have also recorded my authorities.

These words sound rather presumptuous: The author displays a philosophical claim, namely to prove the truth, and a method, namely comparison; to put it in a more technical way, he intends to make the inference from events historically known and vouched for by historiographers to stories of unknown origin alleged to be inventions. There is evidence, in these few words, of a historical consciousness capable of distinguishing epochs and different levels of historical probability as well as of a certain ability of

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[1] Ps.-Plut. *Parallela minora* (συναγωγὴ ἱστοριῶν παραλλήλων Ῥωμαϊκῶν καὶ Ἑλληνικῶν), in: *Plutarchi Moralia* II, rec. et emend. W. Nachstädt, W. Sieveking, J. B. Titchener (Leipzig [Teubner] 1935; reprint 1971) Nr. 19 (pp. 1–42); LCL: Plutarch's Moralia IV, transl. F. C. Babbitt, 1936 (Cambridge, Mass. – London 1962) 256–317.

(a) For the manuscript tradition of the title cf. Nachstädt's edition, vol. II, appendix to the introduction of nr. 19; the ancient catalogue of Lamprias has, as nr. 129, a title: Διηγήσεις Παράλληλοι Ῥωμαϊκαὶ καὶ Ἑλληνικαί.

(b) Discussions on Plutarch's authorship: Joseph Schlereth, *De Plutarchi quae feruntur Parallelis Minoribus* (Diss. Freiburg 1931); reviewed by W. Schmid, *Philol. Wochenschr.* 1932, 625–634; but cf. F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* III a, p. 367.

[2] Translation by F. C. Babbitt, with modifications.

handling the logical operations of concluding and applying them to empirical material – in short: the author claims his place within the tradition of Greek historiography and science.

§ 1. 2. Comparison in Greco-Roman culture

§ 1. 2. 1. Fields and terminology

1. Ethnography: Our earliest sources of information on the Greeks show them living at a cross-roads of civilisations. The rise of ethnography appears to be an almost natural consequence of their travelling, trading and exploring. Yet, it overcame soon the practical needs and concrete purposes which may have engendered it, and it was by no means a matter of course: the Egyptians had been, from Hecataeus and Herodotus onward, a favourite subject of Greek inquisitiveness, but they never developed a similar interest in Greek culture.

The ethnographical material turned out to be dangerous in the Greek enlightenment, the so-called sophistic movement. The sophists compared Greek customs and traditions with non-Greek ones – behaviour, morals, religious rites – in order to prove that all of them were arbitrary. Nothing in human culture is what it is 'by nature', but by definition and convention. Greek ethnographers and historiographers – this is noteworthy – consciously included themselves in their comparative investigations. Though being deeply involved, since auto- and heterostereotypes are closely entwined, they achieved a certain distance towards themselves, an important precondition of objectivity and tolerance. When describing the Egyptians, Herodotus emphasizes their difference: their customs are alien, strange, opposite to the Greek way of life.[3] But this otherness does not produce anxiety nor defence mechanisms but inquisitiveness and interest which exceed by far the thrill of curiosity and a taste for exoticism. There is no arrogance in his descriptions of other peoples' religions; observation and comparison made him conclude that the Greeks had learned from the Egyptians and conceive of a history of Greek religion.[4] These obvious achievements of

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[3] Hdt. 2. 35. Note the frequency of terms denoting 'otherness' in the introductory passages: ἄλλος, ἑτεροῖος, ἀλλοῖος, ἔμπαλιν, θαυμάσιος, λόγου μεῖζον.

[4] Hdt. 2. 49. 3: a comparative history of the cults of Heracles in Phoenicia, Egypt and Greece: 2. 44 und 145 f. An indispensable evaluation of ancient and modern judgments on Herodotus: A. Momigliano, "Herodot und die moderne Geschichtsschreibung" (1957), in: Id., *Ausgewählte Schriften zur Geschichte und Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. G. Most et al., II (Stuttgart 1999) 102–113. – Cf. also H. Cancik, H. Cancik-Lindemaier, "Moralische *tolerantia* – wissenschaftliche Wahrnehmung des Fremden – religiöse Freiheit und Repression. Bemerkungen zum "Kulturthema Toleranz" in der griechischen und römischen Antike", in:

ancient ethnography, however, did not prevent it from serving totally different purposes, as we shall see.

2. Science and logical theory: Since comparing is a fundamental operation in empirical research as well as in everyday experiences it is not surprising to find Greek scientists trying hard to elucidate their methods by analyzing the logical procedures based on observation and comparison. To mention but one representative name for many: In the corpus of Aristotle's writings – as is well known – we have special disquisitions on logic, entitled *Analytica*, besides his and his school's numerous treatises on physics, biology, medicine and, not to forget, the all-embracing systematics of the *Metaphysica*.[5] In the course of the fourth century BCE a set of tools – terminology and operation rules – was established which is still in use today; notions like sameness / identity (τό αὐτό) – similarity (ὁμοῖον, ὁμοιότης) – otherness (ἄλλον, ἕτερον, ἑτερότης); difference (διαφορά), contrast, opposite (ἀντικείμενον), exclusive contrary (ἀντι-κείμενα ὧν μή ἐστι μεταξύ, *Anal. post.* 97 a 19 ff.), analogy (ἀνάλογον, ἀναλογία); terms denoting the basic operations of distinction and division (διαίρεσις), and classification theories built upon these, "where in each case a difference at one level is compatible with a sameness at the next level up".[6] We shall encounter these concepts in various fields of Greco-Roman culture – in philosophy, historiography,[7] rhetoric, gram-

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A. Wierlacher (ed.), *Kulturthema Toleranz. Zur Grundlegung einer interdisziplinären und interkulturellen Toleranzforschung* (München 1996) 263–282. – Brief but pertinent remarks on the contrast between Romans and Greeks as to 'scientific' inquisitiveness are given by E. Norden in his survey of ancient ethnography (*Die germanische Urgeschichte in Tacitus Germania* [Leipzig ³1923 = 1959] 30–41).

[5] For a survey see G. E. R. Lloyd, *Methods and Problems in Greek Science* (Cambridge 1991) with bibliography.

[6] A detailed analysis of Aristotle's classification theories: G. E. R. Lloyd, "The development of Aristotle's theory of the classification of animals" (1961) (with an introduction expounding the state of research up to 1990) in: id., *Methods and Problems*, 1–26; the quotation is from p. 5, with references to Arist., *Met.* 1016 b 31 ff.; 1018 a 12 ff.; 1054 a 32 ff.; *PA* 644 a 16 ff.; 645 b 26 ff.; *HA* 497 b 10 ff.

[7] Establishing synchronisms by comparing different chronological systems: cf. esp. Polyb. 12. 11. 1 (σύγκρισις, παραβάλλειν): Dion. Hal. 1, 74, 2 (ἀναμετρέω, ἀπευθύνω); Gell. 17. 211: Censor., *De die nat.* 21. 4 f. (<...> Varro <...> diversarum civitatium conferens tempora). Eusebius and Hieronymus used this terminology in their chronographic works which became a sourcebook for later historiographers; cf. the introduction by Rudolf Helm (in his edition of Eusebius *Werke*, vol. VII: *Die Chronik des Hieronymus* [Berlin 1956]) esp. pp. XXXVIII f.: ἀντιπαρατιθέναι – παράλληλα – ὁμόχρονος etc. or Eusebius' preface, *ibid.* 8, 16–20 and 9, 1–2: "contra se invicem ponens" – "coetaneum"; "dissonantes"; cf. Alden A. Mosshammer, *The Chronicle of Eusebius and Greek Chronographic Tradition* (Lewisburg – London 1979).

mar / philology, political thought, art and literature, law, religion – both in Greek and in Latin.[8]

§ 1. 2. 2. Comparison and ranking

In addition to an obvious curiosity and a genuinely theoretical interest in the variety of matter, things, life, and human actions and institutions we realize a strong drive for evaluation in Greco-Roman culture resulting in questions like these: who was the first? which one or what is the best? Comparing, then, leads to ranking and the establishment of all kinds of taxonomies. In Herodotus we have a debate on which is the best constitution, enacted as a discussion among Persian aristocrats.[9] Aristotle was the first to approach the problem in a systematic and organized way. He had a collection of 158 constitutions (one example is known from a papyrus, namely the *Constitution of Athens*) providing comparative material for a political theory. Polybius, the Greek historiographer who became the friend of Scipio Aemilianus, wrote a 'universal history' demonstrating the necessity of the Roman empire. He, too, drew a comparison between the most important constitutions and found that the Romans had the best one.[10] From the very beginning of his work onward, his methodological keywords are συγκρί-νειν, σύγκρισις and παραβάλλειν, παραβολή.[11]

The conclusions drawn from these and other compilations of material and their confrontation could follow more historical or more systematical lines and serve more or less obvious legitimation purposes, be it the construction of political genealogies – that is claims for power or hegemony –, of philosophical or scientific dependances, or the establishing of ranks in art and literature. Ancient literary history is, in the main, literary criticism.[12]

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[8] See e. g. Cic., *Invent.* 1, 30, 49: collatio est oratio rem cum re ex similitudine conferens. – A philosophical notion of 'analogy': Cic., *Fin.* 3, 10, 33 (in a sketch of a theory of knowledge): cumque rerum notiones in animis fiant, si aut usu aliquid cognitum sit aut coniunctione aut similitudine aut collatione rationis, hoc quarto, quod extremum posui, boni notitia facta est.

[9] Hdt. 3, 80–82: there are three speches, each of them pleading for one type of constitutions and against the other two in a 'pro-and-con'-syntax: a complex structure of subordinate antitheses combined with evaluations: better, best, worse.

[10] Polyb. 6, 3–10.

[11] See e. g. Polyb. 1. 2: τὰς ἐλλογιμωτάτας τῶν προγεγενημένων δυναστειῶν [that is the Persians. the Lacedemonians and the Macedonians] παραβάλοιμεν καὶ συγκρίναιμεν πρὸς τὴν Ῥωμαίων ὑπεροχήν. εἰσὶ δὲ τῆς παραβολῆς ἄξιαι καὶ συγκρίσεως αὗται.

[12] As to the interrelationship between public contests at public festivals and the emergence of philology, public ranking and the origin of canonizing cf. H. Cancik, *Standardization and Ranking of Texts in Ancient Institutions. Lecture delivered at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University Jerusalem, December 1999*, forthcoming.

Like the judges in the Greek arts' contests (ἀγῶνες μουσικοί), which were called "critics" (κριτικοί), philologists drew up lists of authors – diachronic or synchronic – in every genre: the best, the second, the third; these lines were to be handed down for centuries. The tenth book of Quintilianus' *Institutio oratoria*, which we usually call his 'literary history' is a compendium of such lists with short comments on the utility of the authors for the orator's education.[13]

Competition, then, is an essential element in ancient cultural history and theories.[14] It is even more so in the relationship of Romans to Greeks. The Romans were well aware that a great part of their cultural environment had been taken over from the Greeks: by commerce or as spoils of war. Greek culture offered the models – the Romans had to learn: philosophy, science, literature, art. Horace's didactical poem *De arte poetica* has provided centuries of classicists with classic coinages describing this acculturation type. Imitation (*imitari, aemulari*) is a keyword, and more: *superare,* surpassing the model in order to become number one. Hence those catalogues of parallels in which Romans are shown to have become as good as or even better than the Greeks. Quintilianus, consequently, construed Roman literary history by juxtaposition, confronting Roman with Greek authors and commenting in detail on their relationship and their respective ranks.[15]

§ 1. 3. Focus

This sketch may be sufficient to call to mind the cultural context of our disquisition. Our question is whether and how religious topics became the subject of a type of research and reflection richly developed in various sections of Greco-Roman culture. As we shall see, there is intracultural comparison insofar as ancient periods are confronted with more recent ones of the same religion – as in Varro; there is intercultural comparison, between Greek and non-Greek religions, for instance the Egyptian or Phoenician religion – as in Herodotus or Posidonius; between Roman and Greek – as in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch, and also between Roman and Jewish religions – as in Varro and Tacitus. The question of how the ancients

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[13] See Cancik. *Standardization and Ranking* § 3. 2.

[14] A. Zaicev. *Das griechische Wunder. Die Entstehung der griechischen Zivilisation* (Xenia 30. Konstanz 1993).

[15] Quint.. *Inst. or.* 10. 1. 46–84: Greek authors: 10. 1. 85–131: Roman authors; some examples: § 85: Itaque ut apud illos Homerus. sic apud nos Vergilius auspicatissimum dederit exordium; § 93: elegia quoque Graecos provocamus <...>; § 99 f.: in comoedia maxime claudicamus <...> vix levem consequimur umbram; § 101: at non historia cesserit Graecis nec opponere Thucydidi Sallustium verear nec indignetur sibi Herodotus aequari Titum Livium <...>.

compared their religions is inscribed in the history of ancient historiography and scholarship.

Comparison as a methodology is a means of reflecting on religion, its conditions and functions in society.[16] That is why, in this paper, we shall focus on cases of explicit comparing, where methodological consciousness is evident in the semantic and syntactic structure of the texts. In a larger sense the objective would be to ascertain elements of historicizing and systematizing religion in antiquity.

Finally, since the history of scholarship continues to have an open end, we may have the advantage to ask questions concerning our own work: What do we do when studying comparative religion? What do we owe to the achievements of the ancients? There are considerable reasons to restate the a priori assumption that he who knows one religion, knows none.

§ 2. SIMILIA / ΟΜΟΙΟΤΗΤΕΣ: PLUTARCH AND PSEUDO-PLUTARCH

§ 2. 1. Vesta and Iphigeneia (*Parallela Minora*, nr. 14)

Let us return to our first text in order to examine how its programme has been realized. The work consists of 41 items, each of them consisting of two parts, a Greek story and a Roman one; at the end of each story a source – author and title – is referred to. There is no further argumentation; the 'similarity' of the two parts is evident, since in fact the plot is doubled; only the names of persons and places are different and – sometimes – there are scarce references to a historical or mythical context. The arrangement seems to be haphazard, there is not even an epilogue which would correspond to the programme set out in the introduction. Scholars agree that Plutarch cannot have written this text, be it only because of "the excessive ineptitude of the language".[17] Felix Jacoby, the editor of the great collection of the fragments of Greek historiographers (*FGrHist*),[18] holds that the writing is an extract of a larger collection of material in the tradition of a genre called "Similarities" (ὁμοιότητες).[19] From there stems the author's "scien-

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[16] B. Gladigow. "Vergleich und Interesse", in: *Vergleichen und Verstehen in der Religionswissenschaft*. ed. H.-J. Klimkeit (Wiesbaden 1997) 113–130.

[17] Babbitt. Introduction. 253.

[18] *FGrHist* III A nrs. 284–296: "Schwindelautoren des Ps. Plutarch". with commentary in III a, in particular the introduction *ibid.* 367–369.

[19] The title is attested for the polyhistor Juba (in Rome about 46 BCE: *FGrHist* 275; Funaioli, *Gramm. Rom. Fragm.* 1, 451 ff.); the objective of his comparison is the deduction of Roman institutions and customs from the Greek, cf. A. Barth, *De Iubae ὁμοιότησιν a Plutarcho expressis in quaest. Romanis et in Romulo Numaque* (Diss. Göttingen 1876): Juba as a main source for Plutarch's Roman Questions.

tific affectation", which leads him to the invention of most of his "sources" – authors and titles.[20]

The "Parallel stories" may be illustrated through an example which is slightly diffferent from the ordinary pattern, insofar as the Greek story is not elaborated but limited to a short note attached at the end of the Roman story, that is, in the wrong place, as regards the ordinary arrangement following the logic of the argument. This situation allows some insights into the making of texts in the genre. In this case the reduction of the Greek story to a hint is easily understood, since everybody knows the story of Iphigeneia in Aulis: how general Agamemnon's daughter was to be sacrificed to the goddess Artemis in order to obtain favourable winds for the Greek fleet and how, finally, the human victim was replaced by an animal. Nobody, however, knows about the sacrifice of Metella, daughter of the Roman general Metellus, in order to obtain favourable winds for the Roman fleet during the war against the Carthaginians.[21]

The author carefully painted a picture in Roman colours. There was actually a famous Metellus, namely consul L. Caecilius Metellus[22] who, in 251 BCE, defeated the Carthaginians in Sicily and brought more than 100 elephants to Rome to adorn his triumph. The seer of the Greek story has become a Roman *augur* and got the name Gaius Iulius, and the goddess is even eminently Roman: not, as we would expect, Diana, the Roman 'equivalent' of Artemis, but Vesta. Yet, there is no confirmation for the story about Vesta demanding the sacrifice of a girl. But we have a well-known story about L. Metellus and Vesta. After having been consul in 251 and in 247 he became *pontifex maximus* in 243. In 241, on his way out of Rome, he was warned by an omen, returned and arrived just in time to save the *sacra* out of the burning temple of Vesta.[23] As a *pontifex maximus* Metellus was charged with the supervision of Vesta's priestesses; this severe jurisdiction which is often compared to the *patria potestas* included flogging in case of misdemeanour and the death sentence if a Vestal virgin

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[20] As to the discussion on authenticity. fictionality, parody see Babbitt. *LCL* IV, 253–255.

[21] For the alleged source, Pythocles of Samos, see *FGrHist* III C, 833.

[22] Friedrich Münzer. Caecilius nr. 72. *RE* III (1897) 1203 f.; id., *RE* Suppl. III (1918) 221, 49 ff.: a variation to the story of Iphigenia; Münzer mentions another parallel about Marius and his daughter, in Lydus, *De mensibus* IV, 147. For Metellus' success against the Carthaginians see e. g. Polyb. 1, 40.

[23] Liv. *Per.* XIX. This deed belongs to the classic examples of Roman piety, together with Aeneas saving the *penates* out of the ruins of Troy (cf. Varro, *Antt. rer. div.* frg. 2). Some references: Val. Max. 1, 4, 5; Cic. *Scaur.* 48; Ov. *Fast.* 6, 437–454; Dion. Hal. 2, 66, 4; some sources add that he was struck with blindness – in spite of his piety – because he had seen what was forbidden to see e. g. Sen. *Controv.* 4, 2.

broke her vow of chastity.[24] There is no evidence that L. Caecilius Metellus sentenced a Vestal virgin; but his son, Q. Caecilius Metellus who delivered the funeral oration for his father in 221, a very famous speech transmitted by the elder Pliny,[25] was coopted into the pontifical college in 216,[26] the year of the Roman defeat near Cannae. In this year, according to Livy, two Vestal virgins were sentenced and buried alive.[27]

Stories and names, partly or totally misunderstood, so we would assume, may have provided our author with the stuff to construe his "parallel". In this case, we have a complete fake: the act of comparing itself is feigned. It is hard to imagine to what readers stories of this kind could have been addressed; some scholars suggested that they were intended as parodies.[28] Be this as it may: for our purpose, it is especially the triviality of examples like these[29] that proves the high reputation of comparison as a 'scientific method' in Greco-Roman culture.

§ 2. 2. Comparative religious folklore: Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae* 5

The Greek writer Mestrius Plutarchus was a Roman citizen born about 45 CE in Greek Chaironeia; he received a Platonic education in Athens and was a priest of Apollo in Delphi; on his travels through Greece, Asia Minor and Italy he visited Rome several times and made friends with influential Romans. Mediating between Roman and Greek cultures is the recurrent theme and intention of many of his numerous writings.[30] Time and again he emphasizes the importance of comparing (συγκρίνειν, παρα-βάλλειν, παρατιθέναι) as a means of historical cognition and ethical evaluation.[31]

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[24] H. Cancik-Lindemaier, "Priestly and Female Roles in Roman Religion. The *virgines Vestae*", *Hyperboreus* 2 (1996): 2, 138–150.

[25] Plin., *N. h.* 7, 139–141.

[26] Liv. 23, 21, 7.

[27] Liv. 22, 57, 2–3: the Vestal virigins Opimia and Floronia sentenced to death.

[28] Among them S. Luria, see Babbit's references, p. 254, and his note d: "It must be noted that many of the points which Plutarch has selected for comparison in the Lives, that is, in the so called συγκρίσεις, are very tenuous, not to say inept. They would lend themselves readily to parody".

[29] Valerius Maximus (1st century CE) has the same type of stories and the same edifying intention.

[30] Cf. e. g. Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 10: τὰ Ῥωμαϊκὰ τοῖς Πυθαγορικοῖς συνοικειῶν and A. Barth, *De Iubae ὁμοιότησιν,* 24 ff. – For a general view see C. P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford 1971).

[31] For a general survey see F. Focke, "Synkrisis", *Hermes* 58 (1923) 327–369.

First of all we should briefly consider his compilation of *"Roman questions"* and its smaller counterpart, the *"Greek questions".*[32] Their Greek title "αἴτια" – "causes" shows that these works belong to the widespread genre of "Reasons why":[33] here again we encounter the phenomenon that a logic category and a method of investigation have produced rhetorical topics and a literary genre; the Latin title *quaestiones* reflects the form, most of the items beginning with "why is it that". The "Roman questions" written in Greek are especially intended to explain Roman customs and institutions – many of them concerning religion or religious folklore – to Greeks. Comparison is helpful; the foreign custom loses its strangeness when confronted with a familiar one. Let us look at the Roman question nr. 5:

> Why is it that those who are falsely reported to have died in a foreign country, even if they return, men do not admit by the door, but mount upon the roof-tiles and let them down inside.

First of all Plutarch refers to an explanation he had found in Varro but rejects it as fabulous; then he continues:

> But consider if this be not in some wise like the Greek customs

and emphasizes that the Greeks, too, forbid persons, for whom a funeral had been held on the assumption that they were dead, to approach temples or to have contact with other people. He calls this a "superstition" (δεισιδαι-μονία) and reports the case of a certain Aristinus who was said to have received a Delphic oracle indicating the way of purification: he was to be treated like a new-born baby.

> Hence it is nothing surprising (says Plutarch), if the Romans also did not think it right to admit by the door through which they go out to sacrifice and come in from sacrificing, those who are thought to have been buried <...> and belong to the company of the departed <...>.

The difference to the story about Metella and Vesta is clear: the comparative method is considerably more complex. Plutarch elaborates the abstract core of two rites which, on the material level, have nothing in common; in both cases he recognizes the same ritual conflict: Once a person has been transmitted into the realm of the dead through the definitely final rites,

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[32] *Plutarch's Moralia*, with an English translation by F. C. Babbitt, *LCL* IV, 2–171 and 174–249. Cf. also H. J. Rose, *The Roman Questions of Plutarch*, a New Translation with Introductory Essays and a Running Commentary (Oxford 1924); W. R. Halliday, *The Greek Questions of Plutarch* (Oxford 1928). – Compilations of this type make it plausible that the "Parallels" could be inserted into the catalogue of Plutarch's works.

[33] Cf. Babbit, in his Introduction, *LCL* IV, 2.

he or she, though still alive, cannot live as if they were not ritually dead. Thus Plutarch recognizes that the function of the Roman and the Greek rites is identical. The 'parallel' is mediated on the level of analogy respectively through an abstract *tertium comparationis*.[34]

§ 2. 3. Σύγκρισις: comparison in other works of Plutarch

To conclude the chapter on Plutarch, we can only touch upon the most renowned of his works, which was to become a classic in European education, namely the "Parallel Lives" – τὴν τῶν βίων τῶν παραλλήλων γρα-φήν.[35] The compilation that has come down to us contains 22 pairs of biographies of paradigmatic Greek and Roman men. A comparison (σύγκρισις) was to conclude every pair; in these epilogues, which traditionally provide space for generalizing remarks, we have abundant evidence for Plutarch's methodological consciousness. The syncrisis between the parallel lives of Agis and Cleomenes and of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus is a nice example, where comparison is doubled through the juxtaposition of two Spartan reformers on the one hand and two Roman reformers on the other. Hence we can observe in this passage almost all the elements expounded above: there is intra- and intercultural comparison combined with ranking and there is differentiation, not only a simple tendency to accumulate similarities. Plutarch follows – on his popularizing level – a great historiographical model, as, for instance, Polybius' juxtaposition of Scipio and the Spartan legislator Lycurgus.[36] He still shares Polybius' goal, who had endeavoured to mediate a fragile balance between the defeated Greeks and the victorious Romans in a common citizenship within the Roman empire.

§ 3. CONTRARIUM: VARRO AND TACITUS

§ 3. 1. Old and new – Varro on Romans and Jews

Pseudo-Plutarch, as we have seen, compared different epochs – τὰ ἀρ-χαῖα / τὰ νῦν – in order to corroborate the truth of the ἀρχαῖα. M. Terentius Varro, in his "Antiquities of Divine Things", written about 50 BCE,

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[34] Rose, in his commentary, dryly remarks: "the parallel is apt" (p. 171) without entering into a discussion on the method of comparing. As regards the rites of a "new birth" he refers to a "modern parallel" from Borneo: the scholarly continuity cannot be overlooked.

[35] Cf. e. g. Plutarch, *Theseus and Romulus* 1. 2. Cf. Plutarch, *Comparatio of Agis and Cleomenes to Tib. and C. Gracchus*, 1: ἡμῖν δὲ καὶ ταύτης πέρας ἐχούσης τῆς διηγήσεως ὑπολείπεται λαβεῖν ἐκ παραλλήλου τῶν βίων τὴν ἀποθεώρησιν – <...> "it remains for me to take a survey of all four lives in parallel". See also Focke (n. 31).

[36] Polybius 10, 2, 8 ff.

compared the ancient Roman religion to its present state. As is to be expected, he finds sheer decadence. In earlier times religion was pure, simple, sincere, without luxury and superstition; there were, in particular, no images of the gods, nor houses they dwelt in.[37] "For more than one hundred and seventy years", he says, "the Romans worshipped the gods without images. If they had continued to do so… the gods would be honoured in a purer way".[38] This state of things cries for reform and this is why Varro writes his fifteen books and dedicates them to the pontifex maximus C. Iulius Caesar: 'to save the gods from decay'.[39]

Historicization receives support from comparison;[40] for the true concept of the divine, which the Romans have lost, seduced by the artistry and luxury of Greeks and Etruscans, Varro finds, is still alive – among the Jews, notwithstanding the difference of names. "Iuppiter is worshipped also by those who worship one god without an image, but he is called by another name."[41] Varro emphasizes: "the god of the Jews is Iuppiter… it does not make a difference… by which name he is called, if only the same thing is meant".[42]

To summarize the result of Varro's procedure:

1) The innercultural comparison of ancient and recent epochs leads to a ranking according to the standards taught by the natural theology of Stoic philosophy.

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[37] Varro, *Antt. rer. div.* frg. 38 Cardauns (Tert. *Apol.* 25, 15): Frugi religio et pauperes ritus et nulla Capitolia… sed temporaria de caespite altaria et vasa adhuc Samia. – For a general view see A. Momigliano, "Die theologischen Bemühungen der römischen Oberschichten im 1. Jh. v. Chr. (The Theological Efforts of the Roman Upper Classes in the First Century BC, 1984)", in: id., *Ausgewählte Schriften zur Geschichte und Geschichtsschreibung*. Ed. G. Most e. a. I (Stuttgart 1998) 257–273. – H. Cancik, "Rome as Sacred Landscape. Varro and the End of Republican Religion in Rome", *Visible Religion* 4/5 (1985/86) 250–265; id., "The Reception of Greek Cults in Rome. A Precondition of the Emergence of an 'Imperial Religion' ". *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 1 (1999): 2, 167–169.

[38] Varro, *Antt. rer. div.* frg. 18: antiquos Romanos plus annos centum et septuaginta deos sine simulacro coluisse. Quod si adhuc … mansisset, castius di observarentur… (from Aug. *Civ.* 4, 31); cf. Plut., *Numa* 8, 65 C.

[39] Varro, *Antt. rer. div.* frg. 2 a (from Augustin. *Civ.* 6, 2): se timere ne pereant [sc. dei], non incursu hostili sed civium neglegentia de qua illos velut ruina liberari a se (dicit) et in memoria bonorum per eius modo libros recondi atque servari utiliore cura, quam Metellus de incendio sacra Vestalia et Aeneas de Troiano excidio penates liberasse praedicatur.

[40] For another example of Varronian comparative religion, resp. theology embracing Samothrace, Egypt and Rome see Cancik, "The Reception of Greek Cults" (n. 37).

[41] Varro, *Antt. rer. div.* frg. 15 (from Aug. *Civ.* 4, 9): (Iovem) etiam ab his coli, qui unum deum solum sine simulacro colunt, sed alio nomine nuncupari.

[42] Varro, *Antt. rer. div.* frg. 16: deum Iudaeorum Iovem (esse) … nihil interesse … quo nomine nuncupetur, dum eadem res intellegatur (from Aug. *Cons. ev.* 1, 22, 30).

2) The cross-cultural comparison, bridging a considerable distance in time, results in a high appreciation of a central element of Jewish religion – one god, no images.

3) A more general implication: Varro is aware that religion has a history and that it is subject to various influences and changes; that there are not necessarily religious synchronisms between contemporaries and that, yet, it is possible to detect identity hidden under a superficial difference. This is an approach of comparative history of religion, using methods comparatists cannot do without, up to now.[43]

§ 3. 2. The Greek ancestors of Roman religion: Dionysius of Halicarnassus

The same mode of arguing – though serving a different purpose – is to be found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' Roman History. Closely observing Roman sacrifices[44] as an eye-witness he discovered that this practice had been described already by Homer. The conclusion seems evident: Roman religion is Greek, and even more: compared to contemporary Greek rites, the Romans have better preserved the authentic character of ancient Greek worship – the decadence, here, is on the Greek side.[45]

Like Varro, Dionysius aims at practical consequences: the Greeks are to recognize that Roman culture is actually Greek;[46] thus they should not "feel indignation at their present subjection".[47] Religion, thinks Dionysius, is particularly suitable to prove the Greek origin of Roman culture as a whole, since religious ceremonies are preserved over the longest period of time, the fear of the Gods prohibiting innovation.[48]

Dionysius, then, like Varro, conceives of religion as a distinct segment in Greek or Roman culture. He even goes so far as to confess that he "would prefer Roman to Greek theology".[49]

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[43] See H. Cancik, "Historisierung von Religion – Religionsgeschichtsschreibung in der Antike (Varro – Tacitus – Walahfrid Strabo)", in: *Historicization – Historisierung*, ed. Glenn W. Most (Göttingen 2001) 1–13.

[44] Dion. Hal. 7. 72.

[45] Cf. Cancik. "The Reception of Greek Cults" (n. 37) 161–164.

[46] The basis of similarities, correspondences, identities in Greek and Roman cultures is Greek colonisation; Dionysius' inquiry leads him to striking results: not only the tribes of ancient Italy (e. g. 1, 13; 1, 60; 1, 89) but also the Trojans are of Greek origin (1, 61 f.); cf. Varro's theory on the Italian origin of the Trojans (see Cancik, "The Reception of Greek Cults" § 2. 2).

[47] Dion. Hal. 1, 5, 2.

[48] Dion. Hal. 7, 70.

[49] Dion. Hal. 2, 20, 2.

§ 3. 3. "Opposite to the other mortals" (Tac. *Hist.* 5)

In his so-called *Historiae* of which only parts have come down to us, Tacitus reports the events of the year 69 CE and the rise of the Flavian dynasty. Among the numerous wars of this period he relates Titus' war against the Jews and the conquest of Jerusalem: "Histories", book 5. In a sophisticated composition, Tacitus brings his narration to a halt at the point, where the Romans are about to assail the city, and inserts an ethnographical digression on the Jewish people. He did not give an exposition of its offspring, its customs, its religion, as would be usual, when the Jews occurred first in his work, at the beginning of the war in Judea, at least, but at the very moment when they are, indeed, defeated. This rhetoric device adds an especially sinister thrill to these terrifying chapters. In Tacitus' description the ethnographical categories of difference, opposition, contrary turn out to be charges resulting in a fierce condemnation:

> To establish his influence over the people for all the time, Moses introduced rites which were new and opposite to those of the other mortals. There, everything is profane that is sacred to us, for them, on the other hand, is permitted what is impure (*incestum*) to us.[50]

The formula *ritus contrarii ceteris mortalibus* is the core of Tacitus' conception of Jewish history, culture and religion. The Jewish people originates from isolation, rejection, expulsion; far from being the way to freedom, the Exode leads into an exile from humankind: the Jews against all other human beings. Hence their customs and rites and religion in particular are necessarily opposed to those of the others and this means, necessarily perverse: *pravus, pravitas*; consequently they attracted all the wicked from other peoples.[51] Tacitus succeeds even in blaming what Varro had praised, namely the monotheism and aniconic worship of the Jews: it is but the contrary to the polytheism and image worship of the Egyptians. At the end of the fifth chapter on Jewish rites

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[50] Tac. *Hist.* 5. 4. 1 f. Moyses quo sibi in posterum gentem firmaret novos ritus contrariosque ceteris mortalibus indidit. Profana illic omnia quae apud nos sacra, rursum concessa apud illos quae nobis incesta.

[51] *Hist.* 5. 5. 1–2: (1) Hi ritus quoquo modo inducti antiquitate defenduntur; cetera instituta sinistra foeda pravitate valuere. nam pessimus quisque spretis religionibus patriis tributa et stipes illuc congerebant <...> et quia apud ipsos fides obstinata, misericordia in promptu. sed adversus omnes alios hostile odium. (2) separati epulis, discreti cubilibus, proiectissima ad libidinem gens, alienarum concubitu abstinent; <...> transgressi in morem eorum idem usurpant. nec quidquam prius imbuuntur quam contemnere deos, exuere patriam, parentes liberos fratres vilia habere.

and religion, Tacitus rejects a 'similarity' proposed in one of his sources (*quidam*): there is not the least congruence between Bacchic and Jewish rites, the first being festal and joyful, the second "absurd" and "abominable".[52]

Here we have an eminent example of how heterostereotypes are conditioned by autostereotypes and vice versa.[53] There is an accumulation of negativity projected onto the Jews. To call it an outburst of hatred would be highly superficial, since all those insults are embedded in a complex historical theory of how this religion came into being. Tacitus emphasizes two factors: first the circumstances of the ethnogenesis: being expelled from Egypt, the Jews were forced to react through opposition.[54] The second factor is Moses' strategy of power. It was his goal to tie them together and to himself. Therefore he strengthened their otherness, giving them "rites which were new and contrary to the other mortals".

In Tacitus' small treatise entitled "Germania" we find an ethnographical counterpart to the digression on the Jews in the "Histories". The Germanic tribes, at this time, were far from being defeated, they were, on the contrary, dangerous enemies. Nevertheless, their religion is characterized as barbarian, but not abominable; it appeared to be 'natural' and compatible with Roman religion. Tacitus even finds a "Roman translation" for some of their gods: the *interpretatio Romana*. The term is a Tacitean coinage;[55] it was to become a terminus technicus in comparative religion, especially in the research on so-called syncretism.

§ 4. CONCLUSION

4. 1. Greeks as well as Romans who compared religions – their own and others – were clearly conscious that religion was a distinct symbol system among others. They had at their disposal a set of elaborate methods which were ranging from science to art and literature and recognizable even in texts of poor quality. Comparison was practiced for various reasons and purposes: there are historiographical and ethnographical inquisitiveness as with Hero-

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[52] *Hist.* 5, 5, 4.

[53] For an analogous conception of a foreign religion in terms of a sterotype of an enemy see Livy's report on the so called Bacchanalia scandal. cf. H. Cancik-Lindemaier, "Der Diskurs Religion im Senatsbeschluß über die Bacchanalia von 186 v. Chr. und bei Livius (B. XXXIX)", in: *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion. Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag* II: *Griechische und römische Religion*, ed. by H. Cancik (Tübingen 1996) 77–96.

[54] *Hist.* 5, 4, 1.

[55] Tac. *Germ.* 43, 3.

dotus, an anthropological and methodological interest in Greek philosophy, combined with a considerable openness for self-reflection and self-criticism. Varro intended to lay the foundations for a reform of Roman religion. Dionysius of Halicarnassus drafted a Greek genealogy of Roman religion in order to reconcile Greece and Rome. Ranking and competition are present in almost all of these conceptions.

What about Tacitus? Most of his assumptions are simply false; his evaluations are pure resentment, incredible for a historian of his rank, all the more if we consider the strikingly contemporaneous work of Flavius Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, written in the last decade of the first century, in Rome.[56] Nevertheless his construction as such is remarkable: it is an attempt to explain the uniqueness of the Jewish religion from the historical and psychological factors which he thought to have produced it. This type of analysis is not without parallels in his work. In the first books of the *Annales*, he closely watched and described the rise of a new religion within Roman religion, namely the cult of the emperors, and analyzed the political factors that generated it.[57]

4. 2. Polemic seems to have prevailed in the later centuries of the Roman Empire. Scholarly comparison became more and more difficult. Tertullianus, to mention but one example, denounced the Greek and Roman gods as devils; those who worshipped these gods were possessed by evil spirits – see for instance the acute and powerful rhetoric of his book *De spectaculis*. And more than that: he sentenced the Greco-Roman culture as such. By affirming that it was entirely in Satan's grip, he and other Christian writers sacralized it in a way that – in historical reality – had never been the case. This conception of a primordial unity of society and religion in antiquity was to survive for a long time and is still to be found in some hypotheses of comparative religion.[58] There are, to the best of our knowledge, no ancient Christian descriptions of Greek, Roman, Celtic, African religions which are not polemical. Theology and missionary zeal

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[56] See H. Cancik, "Geschichtsschreibung und Priestertum – Zum Vergleich von orientalischer und hellenischer Geschichtsschreibung bei Flavius Josephus, *contra Apionem*, Buch I". in: *"Wie gut sind deine Zelte, Jaakow… " Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Reinhold Mayer*, ed. E. L. Ehrlich and B. Klappert with Ursula Ast (Gerlingen 1986) 41–62.

[57] See H. Cancik, " 'Nichts blieb übrig für die Verehrung der Götter'. Historische Reflexion über Herrscherverehrung bei Tacitus". in: *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion* II (n. 53) 305–322.

[58] It is repeatedly emphasized as a characteristic quality of the ancient 'City', from Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges onward to e. g. F. de Polignac, *La naissance de la cité grecque* (Paris 1984).

held the privilege of definition – especially in conceptualizations such as 'paganism' or 'neo-paganism'[59] – for centuries.

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Историография и этнография греков и римлян проявляла интерес к формам религиозной жизни, как собственной, так и чужой. Сравнение является методом эмпирического исследования, достаточно широко применявшимся в науке, искусстве и литературе древних. Этому приему сопутствуют различные методологические интересы, рефлексия, развитие критики в отношении чужой и собственной культуры, апологетические и полемические тенденции, политические задачи разного толка. Так, религиеведческие исследования Варрона были призваны служить реформированию римской религии; Дионисий Галикарнасский, выводя римскую религию из греческой, стремился способствовать сближению обоих народов; Тацит дал набросок истории иудейской религии, чтобы объявить ее антиподом "естественных" религий; наконец, христианские писатели древности (в этом их существенное отличие от писателей, принадлежащих греко-римской этнографической традиции) оценивали другие религии исключительно в духе иудейской полемики против "гоим" (языков).

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[59] See H. Cancik. "Heidentum", in: *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* 3 (Stuttgart – Berlin – Köln 1993) 64–66.