

Julia Kindt, *Rethinking Greek Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xiii + 235. ISBN 978-0-521-12773-8 (paperback).

Julia Kindt's point of departure is the study of Greek religion as an interpretive rather than just a descriptive practice. Recognizing the importance of the focus of the past decades on the institutional and official aspects of Greek religion, Kindt follows those who since the 1990s have critically asked what the concept of polis religion omits and does not see. Thus, her aim is to explore Greek religion "beyond the polis", focusing on aspects below the polis level concerning belief and personal experience, and above the polis level, concerning ethnic identity. Common for these aspects is that they were for a long time considered impossible to discuss on a scientifically sound level.

Chapter 1 looks at the model of polis religion, developed in the vein of Durkheim's¹ concept of religion as linked to the collective and social. One advantage of the model is that it is historical and made it possible for the study of Greek religion to break out of the structuralist, a-historical perspective. Whereas the model has helped highlighting many aspects of Greek religion that had previously been hidden, it is now time to look at those aspects left out or overseen by it. These are both personal and private aspects, such as the consultation of oracles, and ethnic aspects, such as religious identity on a larger scale than the level of the polis. Whereas polis religion is indeed to be seen as crucial for Greek religion, it makes up only part of a whole. Yet, the solution is not to set a division between polis religion on the one hand and "the rest" on the other hand; instead, Kindt sees progress in those studies that focus on the *relationship* between the city and the "unauthorized" or local religious beliefs and practices (p.24). The model of polis religion has the advantage of providing a structure to the study of Greek religion which as such lacks structure in the form of, e.g., creed. Yet, the danger for this model, as for any model, is that deviants from the model may be seen as exceptions or deviations from a more or less homogeneous picture, rather than extensions of the model (p.35).

Chapter 2 deals with the "religious gaze" which is discussed on the basis of the variety of Greek cult statues and divine representations, as they come in iconic and an-iconic types, from precious and elaborate chryselephantine statues to crude *xoana* made of wood or metal. The concrete source material is the story of Parmeniscus who learns to laugh again, as his expectations of seeing the statue of Leto in an anthropomorphic form are disappointed because her statue at Delos was in fact a primitive *xoana*. The theoretical material making up the basis for the discussion is on the one hand Elsner's² definition of the religious gaze as not being concerned with aesthetics but oriented towards the ritual function of material artefacts, such as cult statues (p.40). On the other hand it is Guthrie's³ cognitive theory of religion according to which humans (and primates) have a natural inclination for making sense of unknown things, sounds, and phenomena. Elsner points to the important

¹ Durkheim, E. 1912. *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France (1995: *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: Free Press).

² Elsner, J. 1995. *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ Guthrie, S. 2001. "Anthropology and anthropomorphism in religion" in H. Whitehouse & J. Laidlaw (eds.), *Religion, Anthropology, and Cognitive Science*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, pp. 37–62.

fact that materiality, and not ideas, is the real object for the religious gaze. Even so, Kindt argues that his definition is too narrow because it cannot include Parmeniscus whose gaze is not ritual. Without referring specifically to the definition of ritual suggested by Humphrey and Laidlaw,⁴ Kindt argues similarly to them that what defines a gaze as religious is the intention (rather than the object). Thus, there is an aspect of Greek religion which can only be explained cognitively. Although cognitive theory has little to contribute for the understanding of concrete empirical material, it is helpful for inserting Greek religion into the framework of religion as a human phenomenon.

In Chapter 3, the theoretical point of departure is on the one hand Geertz⁵ definition of religion as a symbolic system, and on the other hand Gould's⁶ attempt at applying Geertz to classical scholarship. Kindt argues that one main problem in this attempt is that Geertz' model was constructed on the basis of anthropological studies and participant observation, whereas the Greek material can only be accessed through literary sources, written by people who were themselves observers. Both Geertz and Gould are criticized for seeing the symbolic as something aesthetic and external to society rather than intrinsic to the constitution of power structures as such. The empirical material used for Kindt's argument is a fragment from Philochorus describing a procession in Athens in 403 BC, where after the restoration of democracy the processual equipment used had been crafted from the property of the Thirty Tyrants. This example is used to illustrate that Greek religion cannot be reduced to a tool for individuals to achieve their goals, but that religious symbols were "active players in the negotiation of socio-political power" (p.89).

Chapter 4 takes its leave in Jane Harrison's⁷ thesis of magic as being the more ancient and original layer of Greek religion. Kindt points out that the division between magic and religion is a scholarly invention, whereas among the Greeks themselves magic was part of normative discourse. Burkert,⁸ as well as Bruit Zaidman and Schmitt Pantel,⁹ identified Greek religion with polis religion and largely considered magic as peripheral or a sign of decline. Another trend of scholarship has, however, shown that magic, e.g., in the form of individuals casting spell (*katadesmoi*), was a proliferate act and widespread. Moreover, this line of research has shown how personal choice played a role in Greek religion, e.g., concerning which cults and rituals the individual participated in. In her discussion of magic, Kindt raises the important question whether all religions and all societies have and practice magic in a similar way, i.e., whether magic is a universal category. The empirical example in Chapter 4 is Philostratus' account of Apollonius of Tyana

⁴ Humphrey, C. & J. Laidlaw. 1994. *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁵ Geertz, G. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.

⁶ Gould, J. 2001. "On making sense of Greek religion" in J. Gould, *Myth, Ritual, Memory, and Exchange; Essays in Greek Literature and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 203–34.

⁷ Harrison, J. 1905. *The Religion of Ancient Greece*. London: A. Constable.

⁸ Burkert, W. 1985. *Greek Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁹ Bruit Zaidman, L. & P. Schmitt Pantel. 1992. *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

interpreting a dead lion with 8 unborn cubs in its belly. Apollonius is putting much effort into making his interpretation accord with religion (following divine orders) rather than with magic (coercing the gods to act on his behalf) (p.108). Kindt's point is that it is possible to speak of an official Greek religion trying to marginalize tendencies and practices by naming them magic; yet, that magic took place within the framework of common theology and thus was impossible to exclude all together. Whereas magic served personal interests, it made use of the collective symbolic language of religion.

Chapter 5 deals with local vs. pan-hellenic cults as a dualism set up primarily by scholarship but in recent years increasingly criticized, i.e., on the grounds that large sanctuaries such as Olympia and Delphi were just as focused on competition between *poleis* as on their unity. Instead of a dualism, a case of multiple identities is argued. The empirical material is dedications at the sanctuary at Olympia, in the form of statues, weapons, jewellery, pots, figurines, etc., some with inscriptions and some without. Kindt remarks that despite the huge number of dedications at Olympia, their study has been the concern largely of archaeologists whereas their importance as source material for the study of religion has mostly been overlooked by philologists and ancient historians. Two important functions of the dedications are mentioned: they provided the sanctuary with a permanency (where the games were temporary), and they turned the sanctuary into an "archive" of people and of past events. Overall, the dedications represented both *poleis*, individuals, and the pan-hellenic aspect, both in terms of dedicators, the events recalled, the artistic features, and the language used. More or less directly, the theme of this chapter is material vs written source material. Not only in scholarship has the written been favored over the material, but Kindt shows that this was the attitude also in Antiquity: thus, Pindar "found sculpture inferior to poetry as a medium of artistic expression and heroic praise" (p.147). An analysis of the statues shows on the one hand that many representations of gods illustrate mythology; thus, that material culture mimes text (or *vice versa?*, this reader asks). On the other hand, although at first glance victor statues appear individual, in fact they represent the victor as a type. They represent him as outstanding but also group him within a set typified framework. This analysis throws light on aspects which are not apparent from textual sources. The example shows how any serious scholarship on Greek religion should take account of material culture as well as texts.

Chapter 6 discusses the body of the divine as similar to and different from the human body. Stories of humans being erotically attracted to statues of goddesses illustrate the span between gods being similar to humans, only more beautiful, and at the same time being completely different: inorganic and inanimate. To investigate the issue, Kindt explores texts from the Second Sophistic. Ps. Lucian tells of a young man being so attracted to Aphrodite of Cnidus that he attempts sexual intercourse with her. This shows, Kindt argues, the similarities between the erotic gaze and the religious, and the erotic dimension of the act of understanding. Philostratus stages Apollonius of Tyana as the defender of categories when telling the people of Cnidus that they should reject the proposal of one man to marry Aphrodite of Cnidus. To Clement of Alexandria, statues are lifeless, and the divine should be perceived not by

the sight but by the mind, not by the erotic gaze but by rationality. In these three authors, the development from a classical Greek view of the relation between gods and humans toward the Christian appears condensed form.

The conclusion sums up the project of looking at Greek religion as co-constituting for Greek society rather than simply mapping on to already existing structures. One point throughout the book is to claim a constructional perspective: “world” and “response” to it are not completely separate. Whereas it is often assumed that “world” exists beforehand and religion constructed as a response to it, Kindt insists that “world” and “response” are both constructed, in parallel, and that one does not exist without the other. All in all, Kindt asks for a broader concept of Greek religion, one which includes polis religion as well as levels above and below it, and one which is broad enough to allow for “vibrancy and plurality” (p.191).

Throughout the book, Kindt is in dialogue with anthropological and religio-historical as well as classical scholarship. Her points are worked forth through theoretical debates which are then tested on empirical source material. Important is that “source material” is not limited to textual material or to material which seems “obviously” related religion because it is linked to gods or the supernatural. Instead, material objects as well as iconographic material and sources from all aspects of Greek life are included. Kindt succeeds in balancing between theory and practice. She gives importance to theory but always tests the theory on the concrete study of the sources.

Where, traditionally, discourse about theology has been looked for in tragedy and philosophy, Kindt insists that this is a projection of Christian tradition onto the Greek. In order to discover something new about Greek religion, we should look into other genres. On the whole, Kindt insists on openness: towards the importance of including other disciplines than the Classic ones in the study of Greek religion, and towards considering the variety of sources as possible independent contributors to the puzzle of Greek religion, rather than assuming that, e.g., imagery, supports the assertion of the texts, or vice versa.

Kindt’s book is a sharp overview of and discussion with recent scholarship on Greek religion, inviting the reader to think along and to be just as critical towards interpretations as the author herself. It is a contribution not only to the study of Greek religion and to classical disciplines but to the study of religion in general. To a historian of religion, the book is a reminder of how the study of Greek religion, so rich in sources and so thoroughly investigated, can show how differentiated and varied a phenomenon religion is. It is a reminder of how it is not possible to categorically define or categorize religion, but how a systematic and empirical work with one culture is crucial for discovering where the theoretical models do not fit and need to be adjusted.

LISBETH BREDHOLT CHRISTENSEN
VORDERASIATISCHE ARCHÄOLOGIE
ALBERT-LUDWIGS-UNIVERSITÄT FREIBURG
FREIBURG IM BREISGAU, GERMANY