

The Battle for the Irrational: Greek Religion 1920-1950¹

For Albert Henrichs

INTRODUCTION

The deep fascination that Greek religion has continued to exert on modern scholarship is a distinctive facet of the classical mirage. The special roles ascribed to Greek rationality as an antecedent, a model and a foil made the religious experience of Hellenism an inexhaustible source of interest. Was the famed Greek rationality an essential part of Greek religion, or did it emerge in opposition to it? Are the bizarre, often shocking rites and stories of the ancient gods to be separated from the serene and lofty heights of ‘the Greek miracle’ and its exemplarity? In what way was that strangely familiar religious heritage related to Christianity? Where does evolution fit in this narrative of origins? The involved debates of many generations incessantly returned to these questions across the centuries and used them to negotiate further significance for the uncanny familiarity of Hellenism. The period that concerns us here (1920-1950), animated by an unprecedented crisis of confidence in the value of Western civilisation and the legacy of Europe, invested a great deal of effort in the answers that could be sought from the celebrated old sources. As the former certainties were battered from all sides, the revered voices from the past often resonated with the intensity of a battle call for renewal. Greek religion, one of the most contested domains in the reception of ancient culture, was to be solicited again and again to help imagine a new future.

If we are to understand something of the forces that shaped the history of Greek religion between the aftermaths of the two world wars, we cannot limit our views to the genealogical vicissitudes of *ordentliche Philologie* and its critics, teleologies that lead to a dominant school, lazy generalisations about Catholics and Protestants, or the anecdotal treasures of the individual scholar in the network of his or her contexts. Tectonic shifts at work in and out of the academic disciplines loom large in this story, and it is crucial to take their contours into account. E. R. Dodds’s work actively sought to reflect the major transformations of its time. While Robert Parker focuses more specifically on the direct engagement of Dodds with contemporary scholarship on Greek religion in this volume, I am concerned with contextualizing Dodds’s work within the broader debates of objects and methods in the field, and look more generally at some of the key currents that animated and divided the study of Greek religion across countries and languages in those years.

There is no room here for a comprehensive review of the significant developments that marked the historiography of Greek religion between 1920 and 1950. Different countries and languages sustained different traditions, and within each country the rise of new currents

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of thought, distinctive forms of institutional inertia, and clashes of individual approaches produced unique configurations. Any unified narrative will lose track of the specificities of different regions, and any study that limits itself to a region will fail to pick up the enmeshed threads of the big picture. Some of the contemporary figures that made the field passed each other like ships in the night, but most were involved in a dense web of relations with each other. The wide diffusion of prestigious journals and publishers, encyclopaedias, regular reviews, conferences, letters, references and visits all reinforced the links that bridged institutions and major European languages of research. The networks that make scholarly communities were particularly dense in this case.² We only have the space to hint at those networks here, but we should not forget their constant labour.

The usual stories told about the historiography of Greek religion in this period depict a passing of the torch. Walter Burkert's representative and influential view, most clearly summarised in the initial pages of *Greek Religion*, insists on the gradual refinement of approaches to understanding the ties that bind myth and ritual. The philological rigour of *Alttertumswissenschaft*, allied with the continued explorations of folklorists, offers the backbone of progress in that view.³ And the development of British social anthropology is cast as the prime agent of paradigm shift, with late Victorian armchair ethnography fruitfully extended to Greece by the 'Cambridge ritualists' and their contemporaries, and the work of the post-Malinowski field anthropologists viewed as a potent source of further scientific renewal. For the members and heirs of the Centre Gernet, on the other hand, the genealogy that really matters in this period is the one that leads from the approaches of Durkheim and Mauss to those of Lévi-Strauss in the study of Greek religion: the research that laid the fundamental groundwork for the sociological investigation of *polis*-religion and the initial developments of what would eventually become the structural (and poststructural) analysis of Greek myth and polytheism.⁴ Both views make strong claims to trace the determinant meeting of classics and anthropology that they complete, both are careful to construct foils and adversaries, and both positions have been heavily contested by decades of substantial criticism.

Histories of scholarship tend to reinforce accepted wisdom and dominant practice. They generally repeat the well-known exploits of the usual suspects, organised in a litany of incremental steps towards higher ground. Or the point is to create neat schematic divisions: we used to do that, now we do this. People look for confirmation bias in their historiography, organised in neat Kuhnian paradigm shifts. Scholarly memory is highly selective. Now that the systems once defended by grand narratives no longer stand on their own as triumphant research programmes, different sets of roles are attached to intellectual genealogy by a discipline that has lost faith in clear evolutions and continues to look for answers in alternative pasts. A messy landscape of alternative 'futures past' is cracked wide open.⁵ The period 1920-50 saw a similar crisis of confidence in the great scholarly edifices of the previous generations, one that started with the breakdown of Humboldtian neo-humanism and the positivistic philology embodied by the towering presence of Wilamowitz.⁶ Some believe that we have never really left the field of ruins produced by the collapse of the neohumanist colossus. Independently of such a view, renewed attention to what paths were explored and

² Cf. the case of social sciences at Harvard circa 1950 analysed by Isaac 2012.

³ Burkert 1985, pp. 1-4. More extensively, Burkert 1980 and 2002. Konaris 2016 richly develops that narrative, with a strict focus on the gods; cf. Versnel 1990a and Bremmer 2010a.

⁴ See for instance Vernant 1968, Di Donato 1983; cf. Vernant 1974 (on myth). *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* was, of course, published in 1949.

⁵ On 'futures past,' see Koselleck 1985.

⁶ Marchand 2003a, pp. 312-30 provides a lively portrait of that moment. For 1920s and 1930s anxiety about the classical tradition in England, see e.g. Budelmann and Haubold 2011, p. 13. For the larger cultural context, see Blom 2015.

what solutions were envisaged in those days of anxious searches for relevance opens a world of forgotten riches. The deep doubts of our own “post-secular” time resonate strongly with the questions of those troubled years.⁷ The dead ends and holdouts of later narratives look different when perspective is less governed by destination. No moment of scholarship is merely an antechamber. The three decades after the end of the First World War generated rich and varied new approaches to the study of Greek religion, often highly polemical in their differences, and the stakes of those debates cannot be reduced to a prelude of what was to follow now that we no longer quite know where we are headed.

This chapter is concerned with conflicts of scholarship. At the heart of the fundamental disagreements that were reshaping the field in the thirty years that we are considering is the growing role given to ‘the Irrational’ in the study of Greek culture and religion. A veritable fascination set in for alternatives to reason in the study *and practice* of classical philology. An interest in the inner psychological dimensions of ancient cult and, more strikingly, in unconventional methods of interpretation and intuitive scholarship that emphasised inner participation in the thought and experience of the old rites and symbols, swept over the domains of classical philology and the newly assertive *Religionswissenschaft*, and the reactions that countered these claims with further empirical collections of material and refined restatements of the historical-critical methods were themselves significantly marked by the radical developments. The study of Greek religion, so thoroughly intertwined with the special status of Greek reason and the roles it has continued to play in Western views of itself, was to be profoundly affected by these developments of intellectual culture. In a period that was intensely aware of standing at the threshold of different epochs and ideals of humanism, a crossroad of possible and divergent futures, the battle for the Irrational was right at the heart of the conflicts that redefined the meanings of Greece for the brave new world ahead.

From well before our period, ‘the Irrational’, *das Irrationale* and their cognates had long pointed to what is absurd and illogical, to a lack of sense, the opposite of reason.⁸ Negative depictions of religion and superstition figure prominently in that regard.⁹ A more technical referent, yet by far the most distinctive usage of the term at the beginning of the twentieth century, is the fundamental mathematical notion of the irrational number.¹⁰ Reflecting the Greek *alogon*, the mathematical irrational represents a whole world of meaning that lies beyond the representational power of integers.¹¹ Inexpressible through the dominion of the *arithmos*, the *alogon* belongs to the different realm of magnitude, the *megethos*, within which its infinite extensions are to be found. A challenge to conventional understandings of number and form, the mathematical irrational is an invitation to think the ineffable and apprehend the presence of incommensurables. A positive object of knowledge at the heart of arithmetic and geometry, the irrational number can be seen as the standard emblem for another type of reason beyond conventional reason.¹² The role of the Greeks in developing the special kind of understanding that gives access to this mathematical dimension was a celebrated achievement. When G. Junge wrote ‘Wann haben die Griechen

⁷ See Bollack 1993, Henrichs 1995; cf. Dumézil 1950, p. 242: ‘Et l’expérience montre que c’est presque toujours en revenant à de tels monuments du passé et en les méditant—erreurs comprises—, et non pas en poussant linéairement, scolairement, dans les voies faciles mais vite exténuées des maîtres immédiats, que de jeunes savants bien doués découvrent des points de vue nouveaux et féconds.’ For the notion of postsecularism, see e.g. Habermas 2008.

⁸ In reactions to Plato already, see for instance Delattre 2004; cf. the current understandings of *Irrationalität* in Asmuth and Neuffer 2015.

⁹ See Gekle 1993.

¹⁰ Niven 1956.

¹¹ For the Greek mathematical *alogon*, see e.g. Lloyd 2004 and Fritz 2004.

¹² See e.g. Ladrière 1950, Gasperoni 2015, Binkelman 2015.

das Irrationale entdeckt?’ in 1907, it was clear to his readers that ‘the Irrational’ in question was the mathematical referent, and the Greek discovery the foundation for all further steps in that direction.

The subjective irrational of emotions and alternatives to reason had a long modern history of praise and valuation, particularly noteworthy from Pascal to Kierkegaard and the Symbolists.¹³ But a powerful and more widespread enthusiasm for the more obscure sides of the mind was to emerge at the close of the Great War. The notorious Surrealist Manifesto of 1924 is but one of the many expressions of this surging interest in the cognitive possibilities of unreason. More strikingly, what becomes more common at this time is the metaphorical understanding of subjective irrationality through the objective reality of irrational numbers. The irrational mode of knowing is enmeshed with the irrational nature of the object of knowledge in this view. Paul Valéry, in his 1919 discussion of the spirit of the Renaissance, could thus celebrate ‘tous ces états à demi impossibles, qui introduisent, dirait-on, des valeurs approchées, des solutions irrationnelles ou transcendantes dans l’équation de la connaissance.’¹⁴ As Dodds wrote in 1945:

Future historians will, I believe, recognise in this preoccupation with the surd element [the Irrational] the governing impulse of our time, the δαίμων or Zeitgeist which in different guises has haunted minds such as Nietzsche, Bergson, Heidegger in philosophy; Jung in psychology; Sorel, Pareto, Spengler in political theory; Yeats, Lawrence, Joyce, Kafka, Sartre in literature; Picasso and the surrealists in painting.¹⁵

Religion is the key domain of reference for this growing concern with the perception of irrational reality.¹⁶ Nowhere is this clearer than in Rudolf Otto’s seminal 1917 *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*.¹⁷ The ‘wholly other’ constituted by the numinous is a distinctive realm of reality with its own logic. The *sensus numinis* is the particular subjective disposition that allows access to the power of the sacred, both for the believer and for the scholar who studies religion.¹⁸ The *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* can only be truly apprehended through experience.¹⁹ Without vital intuition there can be no access to the numinous. This was no mere return to romantic symbolism, but a claim to a new form of scientific knowledge. If religion was to be studied properly, the Irrational was now to be understood on its own terms, as an object of research that requires specific tools. The elusive otherness of the divine and the sacred demanded an alternative to the demonstrable certitudes and the clinical taxonomies of positivism.

The Greeks and the Irrational had to be reconfigured a thousand times before *The Greeks and the Irrational* could be written. This chapter seeks to evoke something of the vibrant intellectual environment in which these reconfigurations took place. It will sketch a big-picture view of a moment of scholarship on Greek religion from that particular angle. ‘The Irrational’ is a notoriously problematic term of analysis. Whose Irrational? The usage of that term in this study is subordinated to the perspectives of the scholars and writers under review. I do not use ‘the Irrational’ myself as a term for my own analysis. With that said, I

¹³ Clair 2011, Pireddu 2006.

¹⁴ Valéry 1919a.

¹⁵ Dodds 1945, p. 16. Cf. Rosteutscher 1947, who follows the development of a classicising, Dionysiac *Irrationalismus* at the heart of German culture since the time of Hölderlin.

¹⁶ See e.g. Flasche 1991; Kippenberg 1997, pp. 95-7.

¹⁷ On Otto, see e.g. Gooch 2000; Kreech 2002, p. 62-65; Lauster *et al.* 2013 cf. Dodds 1951, p. 63, n. 112. For Otto’s current recuperation by the ‘Cognitive Science of Religion’ (CSR), see Alles 2014.

¹⁸ See Otto 1932, Wach 1931; cf. Flasche 1982. On the historiography of ‘the sacred,’ see Borgeaud 2016 [1994], pp. 19-46.

¹⁹ Various papers in Otto 1923; cf. Stavru 2002, Slenczka 2014.

will refrain from adding scare quotes whenever the Irrational is mentioned. A broad range of psychological and social phenomena was embraced by that term and its equivalents: everything that was framed by opposition to the realm of Reason. A space of negative definition, its very indeterminacy increased the charge and the anxiety of the questions it provokes: what, then, is Reason? Where does the dichotomy rational-irrational fit in the relativity of plural rationalities? How rational is *our* 'Reason'? And from whose perspective? Dodds described the Irrational in 1945 as: 'that surd element in human experience, both in our experience of ourselves and in our experience of the world about us, which has exercised so powerful – and, as some of us think, so perilous – a fascination on the philosophers, artists, and men of letters of our day.'²⁰ With that expansive view of the Irrational as a running thread, the following pages look at how the historiography of Greek religion renewed itself between 1920 and 1950. A first section is concerned with the great changes that saw the Belle Époque study of ancient religion thoroughly transformed after the Great War. The second section focuses on the stakes of some of the fundamental disagreements that set influential scholars of the Interwar years against each other. Situating the rationality of Greek religion remained a highly polemical and charged way to reflect on the crisis of European culture after the death of God and the cataclysm of all out mechanical warfare. The battle for the Greek Irrational was a search for the new foundations of modernity.

THE BELLE ÉPOQUE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

Scholarship on ancient religion was undergoing a profound transformation at the beginning of our period, one that set the tone for much of what was to come later. To assess the significance of that shift, we have to start by considering what it was reacting to.²¹ In line with the upheavals of fervent *laïcité* in the France of the Third Republic, the *Kulturkampf* of Bismarck's Germany and the muted secularism of Victorian Great Britain, the previous two generations had established the institutional foundations of non-confessional religious studies in higher education.²² The first academic chairs of 'religious science' were set up in the 1870s: Geneva in 1873, Leiden and Amsterdam in 1877, and Paris (Collège de France) in 1879.²³ The *Revue de l'histoire des religions* was also founded in Paris in 1879 and the famed 'Ve Section (Sciences religieuses)' of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) was opened there in 1886.²⁴ Durkheim's *Année Sociologique*, with its important section on religious sociology, was founded in 1898.²⁵ Marcel Mauss, one of the leading lights of the Ve Section and the holder of its chair of 'Histoire des religions des peuples non civilisés' since 1901, taught a whole generation and was to become one of the founding fathers of French ethnology.²⁶

²⁰ Dodds 1945, p. 16; cf. Schenker 2006. On page 1 of *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Dodds further identifies the opposite of what is *rational* as 'the awareness of mystery and the ability to penetrate to the deeper, less conscious levels of human experience.' I suspect Dodds's concept of 'the irrational' owes as much to Proclus' *alagon* (for which see e.g. Lernould 2012) as to Plato. For the genesis of *The Greeks and the Irrational*, see Todd 1998.

²¹ For the larger picture, see still Sharpe 1986; see also Stausberg 2007 and Alles 2008.

²² Cf. McLeod 2000, pp. 108-17; cf. Molendijk 2005, pp. 1-22.

²³ See e.g. Rudolph 1962, pp. 20-2; Sharpe 1986, p. 121; Platvoet 1998; Molendijk 2005, pp. 71-9; Borgeaud 2016 [2006], pp. 131-41; in the USA, the first chair – the Frothingham Professorship of the History of Religions – was created at Harvard in 1904 (Turner 2011, p. 58). See Jordan 1905, pp. 581-3.

²⁴ Cabanel 1994; Borgeaud 2016 [1986], pp. 11-15; on the influence of Durkheim's circle in the Ve Section, see Brooks III 2002.

²⁵ Fournier 2007, pp. 329-63. See Honigsheim 1995 for its influence on the study of religion.

²⁶ See e.g. Strenski 2003. Other leading scholars of the Ve Section, contemporary and later, include Henri Hubert, Marcel Granet, Sylvain Lévi, Robert Herz, Louis Massignon, Henri-Charles Puech, Paul Alphandéry,

In Oxford and Cambridge, the comparative study of ancient religion, heir of a long tradition, had become a dominant presence of intellectual life, from the massive output of Max Müller to the fundamental insights of Robertson Smith, the exhaustive compilations of Frazer and the many enthusiastic followers of the myth-and-ritual persuasion.²⁷ The development of late Victorian anthropology into a discipline of its own remained thoroughly intertwined with this comparative research on ancient religion, together with the new sociological study of religion, whose territory was being traced by Durkheim and Weber.²⁸ Although institutionally marginal, the folklore approach of Van Gennep was to produce fundamental results.²⁹ In Göttingen and elsewhere, the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* was revolutionising Biblical exegesis with its detailed demonstrations of historically situated hermeneutics.³⁰ The first edition of the great encyclopaedia *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (RGG) was published between 1909 and 1913.³¹ In Bonn, the *Religionswissenschaftliche Schule* of Usener and his disciples, most notably Dieterich, was pioneering the further imbrication of ethnology, philology and folklore.³² The foundation of the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* in 1898 was a landmark event.³³ Rohde had achieved an inspired synthesis of methodologies and sources in his ground-breaking *Psyche* (1890-4), where experimentations with the animism of Tylor are intertwined with the finest level of philological skill.³⁴ After the opposition of von Harnack was finally overcome, the first German *Lehrstuhl* of *Religionswissenschaft* was founded in 1910 in Berlin.³⁵ Thoroughly

and Alfred Loisy (see Baubérot 2002). There was nothing quite like this concentration of comparative talent and collaboration in the field anywhere else in the world. The position of *Directeur d'études* in the history of the religions of Greece and Rome at the Ve Section was first held by André Berthelot (1886-1903), followed by Jules Toutain (1903-34), who, among all his other work, was also the French translator of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The post was vacant from 1934 to 1943, when Henri Jeanmaire and André-Jean Festugière respectively took hold of the chairs of "religion grecque ancienne" and "religions hellénistiques et de la fin du paganisme." Georges Dumézil obtained his position of 'directeur d'étude de mythologie comparée' at the Ve Section in 1935. The latter plays no part in *The Greeks and the Irrational*. For Dodds, knowledge about the Indo-Europeans still comes essentially from the Chadwicks (Chadwick and Chadwick 1932-40).

²⁷ Jones 1984; Kitawaga and Strong 1985. On the 'Cambridge School,' see e.g. the various papers in Calder III 1991.

²⁸ Krech 2002, pp. 28-37. For the notion of rationality in Weber, see Neugebauer 2015. On Weber and Usener, see Kalinowski 2011. Valéry (1934, p. 9) describes the charm of the analogies and contrasts of Frazerian comparison as a motif that appears 'comme sur une frise intellectuelle où paraîtraient captifs de l'art et de la connaissance, des spécimens de toutes les races humaines.'

²⁹ The standout contribution is the 1909 *Les rites de passage*. Long before the reappropriations of Victor Turner and Angelo Brelich, Henri Jeanmaire was the first to make systematic usage of Van Gennep's *rites de passage* in the 1930s. H. J. Rose, in his 1939 *JHS* (59, p. 298) review of *Couroi et courètes*, characteristically fails to realise the significance of that important work; cf. Dodds 1951 [1940], p. 280, n. 36. See further Jeanmaire 1951.

³⁰ Simon 1975, Koester 1986, Lüdemann and Schröder 1987; Krech 2002, pp. 147-8. For the evolution of contemporary perception, it can be interesting to compare Rade 1913 and Eissfeldt 1930.

³¹ Konrad 2006, pp. 179-346; cf. Dodds 1951, p. 276.

³² Momigliano 1982; Sassi 1982; Schlesier 1994, pp. 193-241; Bremmer 2011; cf. Clemen 1935. On the immense impact of Usener, see Bremmer 1990, Wessels 2003, and the essays in Espagne and Rabault-Feurhahn 2011.

³³ Dürkop 2013, p. 1. It is a notable fact that the journal was founded in the same year as the *Année Sociologique*.

³⁴ *Psyche* achieved a level of fame and influence across the decades that even the *Greeks and the Irrational* would not surpass in its time. See e.g. Dodds 1951, pp. 7, 65, 68, 86, n. 29, 87, n. 41, 88, n. 45, 139, 150, 161, n. 32. The Italian translation of 1914-1916, the English translation of 1925 and French translation of 1928 reaffirmed its continued presence and relevance throughout our period. Rohde's masterpiece is directly woven into the Dionysiac dream of Thomas Mann's 1912 *Death in Venice* (see Sanchiño Martínez 2013, pp. 520-1, 529). The Californian punk band 'The Mr. T Experience' explicitly mentions Dodds and *The Greeks and the Irrational* in their song *The History of the Concept of the Soul*; different homages for different periods.

³⁵ See Krech 2002, p. 123, n. 3.

international, the new and confident *fin-de-siècle* study of religion organised great regular conferences that encouraged contact and exchange across languages and borders. The triumphal *Premier Congrès International d'Histoire des Religions* of 1900 in Paris, embedded in the great Exposition Universelle, was to be followed by further affirmations of clout and relevance, with meetings in Basel in 1904; Oxford in 1908; and Leiden in 1912.³⁶

The Belle Époque history of religions mostly channelled a liberal ethos of rationalist progress. That moment in the consolidation of religious studies as a professional academic discipline was marked by a generalized faith in the ability of reason to classify the stages of religious development. Similarities across periods and peoples had to be identified and categorized. While the vertical axes of evolution or degeneration dominated reflection on the topic, the horizontal axis of diffusion also had great currency. In German scholarship, for instance, there was a strong tension between the evolutionist approach of Adolf Bastian and the diffusionist views of Richard Andree and Friedrich Ratzel.³⁷ Common objects of research included the recurrent patterns of 'primitive' myth and ritual; the strange practices of magic and superstition; the trajectories leading to monotheism or away from it; the juxtapositions of cult and polytheism; the impact of natural cycles on religious ideas and behaviour; the imbrications of kingship, kinship and cosmos; or the projections of social organization. Some currents of scholarship were seeking to further demarcate and undermine the power of religion more generally, while others were more interested in buttressing confessional positions. A sustained commentary on modernity and progress through contrast, the history of religions practised in those times cultivated the frisson of bizarre difference and the exotic foil. The evaluation of contemporary Christianity remained the fundamental reference of everything else, if ever more indirectly as time went by.³⁸ While the historical setting of early Christianity largely dominated the first two international meetings of history of religions, that was no longer the case in the 1908 Oxford international Congress, which was organized under the honorary presidency of 'the Nestor of Anthropology', E. B. Tylor.³⁹

Lewis Farnell, who had just been appointed the first Wilde Lecturer in Natural and Comparative Religion at Oxford, was a driving force of that meeting. The recognition that the specific objects pursued by the history of religions needed more epistemological reflection led to the constitution of a lively new section on methodology at the Oxford Congress.⁴⁰ The distinctive nature of historical research into religious ideas, forms, and social organisation was discussed there in papers that marked contrasts and convergences with history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and biology. Beyond the further collection and understanding of philological and archaeological documents, and the continued refinement of research able to combine the two, a common set of questions and themes was found across the peoples, 'races', and civilizations studied in the other sections of the Congress. This was helped by the fact that many of the same speakers participated in different sections. Causal misunderstandings and social projections were recognised across the board of religious ideas. The primitive and the archaic were explored in their many forms through comparative juxtaposition, and the trajectories of exchange and evolution plotted onto the old oppositions of East and West, Aryan and Semite, and natural and civilized belief.⁴¹ Origins and survivals

³⁶ Molendijk 2010.

³⁷ See Fisher, Bolz and Kamel 2007.

³⁸ See e.g. Bloch 1905.

³⁹ Allen 1908; cf. Alphandéry 1908.

⁴⁰ Allen 1908, pp. 365-449.

⁴¹ See especially Allen 1908, pp. 21-102, 232-326; cf. Olender 1989 for the previous generations. The only pages that had been cut in J. G. Frazer's copy, which is now in the Haddon Library (Cambridge), are the section on the 'Religions of the lower culture' (note the singular) and the section on the 'Religions of the Greeks and Romans.' Frazer's own contribution (Frazer 1908) has notes in Frazer's hand that show him adding further references and bibliography.

were the recurrent explanations of the oddity that characterized so much of the high and developed religions of the ancient world. Modern Western reason is the foil for much of that comparative scholarship.⁴²

At the heart of that Congress was the classical world, given its own individual section. Interventions on Greece included contributions and responses by A. B. Cook, F. Cumont, A. J. Evans, L. R. Farnell, J. G. Frazer, J. E. Harrison, and G. Murray, among others.⁴³ The central role that Greek philosophy had played for centuries in comparative studies of religion was now to be largely replaced by cult. In his presidential address, Salomon Reinach paints a landscape of rapidly changing systems.⁴⁴ Euhemerism, ancestor worship and solar myths have all had their day, and ‘the so-called anthropological school’ that now holds sway over the young generation will eventually lose ground in turn. Animism and totemism are already seriously contested and the benefits of cultural comparison are confronted to renewed claims of irreducible cultural specificity. The later work of Dieterich is identified as an example of the view that Greece falls outside the regular grid of evolution; a sophisticated, cutting-edge reimagination of the old ‘miracle grec’. Orphism is being eclipsed as the key that opens all doors, and astrology has returned to greater prominence than at any time since Dupuis’ long-discredited *Origine de tous les cultes* (1795).⁴⁵ Against the idea of a succession of advances leading to clear progress, the portrait that emerges from this short text is one of superimposition and coexistence: different moments and systems of scholarship adding something of lasting value to the ongoing discussion. The situation is compared to the state of historical linguistics before the revolution of the *Junggrammatiker* in the 1880s, when the accumulation of evidence based on analogy gave way to the observation of regular patterns in the distribution of differences.⁴⁶ Further aggregation and refinement of evidence will continue, argues Reinach, and new systems will add new insights, but the future watershed change that will give sure scientific footing to the study of ancient religion is the goal that really matters, and that still lies ahead. These are days of feverish activity and great promise, in other words, and the foundations are being laid for the imminent leap forward.

What Reinach is essentially doing in this address at the heart of English academia is warning against the certitudes of the British anthropological school in the study of Greek religion. His own version of a systematic anthropological science of ancient religion was to be given a detailed airing just the next year (1909) in *Orpheus: Histoire générale des religions*, where he proposes to read ancient cults, duly compared and classified, through the common lenses of taboos, animism, fetishism, totemism, and magic.⁴⁷ In *Orpheus*, a book that was to have as much visibility and influence in its time as it is now comprehensively forgotten, Reinach makes a case for understanding the remains of European religion as vestiges of primordial emotional and instinctive illusions:

Les religions d’Europe ont devant elles un avenir indéfini et qu’on peut être certain qu’il en restera toujours quelque chose, parce qu’il y aura toujours du mystère dans le monde, parce que la science n’aura jamais accompli toute sa tâche, parce que les hommes apporteront toujours dans la vie les illusions de l’animisme ancestral, tour à tour exaltées par la douleur qui cherche une consolation, par le sentiment de notre faiblesse, par l’admiration émue des magnificences ou des terreurs de la nature. Mais les religions elles-mêmes tendent à se laïciser comme les sciences auxquelles elles ont

⁴² See Krech 2000.

⁴³ Allen 1908, pp. 117-98.

⁴⁴ Reinach 1908.

⁴⁵ Reinach 1908, p. 119.

⁴⁶ Reinach 1908, p. 118.

⁴⁷ See Schlesier 2008.

donné naissance et... un courant invincible vers la laïcisation entraîne la pensée humaine tout entière.⁴⁸

The goal of the general history of religions is to explain and categorize this field of vestigial oddities on the way to common secular reason.

Such broad-brush reductions were not without their opponents, needless to say. Alfred Loisy, to take one example, still freshly defrocked and excommunicated and newly appointed to the Chair of the History of Religions at the Collège de France, vigorously opposed the unbridled usage of analogy championed by Reinach to teach the pupils of the Third Republic how to circumscribe religious illusion. In a series of texts quickly written in reaction to *Orpheus*, republished together in *À propos d'histoire des religions*, the champion of Biblical Modernism attacks his rival's fetishization of origins.⁴⁹ The overly abstract categories of sociology and anthropology were not adequate for producing positive knowledge of the concrete evidence. For Loisy, also wedded to 'the comparative method' but remaining firmly grounded in the specificities of historical philology, and committed to the intense scrutiny of religion in a progressively more secular world, what the burgeoning new science of religion needed was the development of tools that allowed the appraisal of specific exchanges and developments. This quickly went far beyond the remit of German Higher Criticism and the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. As he argued particularly clearly in 1914 with his *Les mystères païens et le mystère chrétien*, the early history of Christianity is the one development that looms over all others, and the place of Hellenism in shaping its distinctive character is identified as the key question, one that cannot be reduced to accusations of deviation and attempts to recover putatively pure beginnings.⁵⁰ The scientific, historical assessment of Greek religion is a core concern of general importance for modern secular society. While in Paris the Dominicans of the *Revue Biblique* (notably Lagrange, followed by Festugière) opposed Loisy in earnest, people like Ernesto Buonaiuti were arguing a similar case in Rome itself.⁵¹

Less circumspect than Reinach in his triumphalism, Gilbert Murray could famously write in 1907 that 'it is a bold statement, yet on reflection we are prepared to maintain it, that one of the greatest practical advances made by the human race in the last fifteen or twenty years has been in our improved understanding of ancient and especially of Greek religion.'⁵² It is no surprise to see Greece singled out in this way. The study of Greek cult is recognised as a privileged path into nothing less than 'the meaning of Religion' itself. As a link between 'primitive' and 'high' religion, and one of the founts of both Christianity and science, Greek cult is an essential object of enquiry in the continuing advance towards reason and positive knowledge. In *Four Stages of Ancient Greek Religion* (1912), one of the most influential books on the topic ever written, Murray lays out his vision of a Greek civilization completely imbricated with the vestigial forces of myth and ritual.⁵³ The stages that lead from the ascent out of primitivism to the long decline into superstition frame a tale of continuities, reinventions, and deep legacies. The later addition of a chapter on philosophy (Murray 1925) simply completes the picture offered by the original book, without modifying it in any significant way. The story of that religious evolution is a key to the meaning of the

⁴⁸ Reinach 1909, p. 123.

⁴⁹ Loisy 1911.

⁵⁰ Roessli 2013; sent to the publisher in 1914, *Les mystères païens et le mystère chrétien* was only published in 1919.

⁵¹ Klein 1977; for Lagrange's engagement with the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* more generally in the heady days of victory over Germany, see Lagrange 1918.

⁵² Parker 2007, p. 81; cf. Toutain 1910. See Kippenberg 1997, pp. 143-62.

⁵³ See Fowler 1991.

fundamental forms of Greek culture and its Western heritage. Origins are the prime explanatory factors. The veneer of civilization hides a source of survivals that motivated as many recurrent patterns then as it does now. Greece is a red-hot paradigm.

The success of the *Four Stages* can be better underlined by setting it side-by-side with the abbé Habert's substantial and now rightly forgotten *La religion de la Grèce antique*, published in Paris in 1910. Like Murray, Father Habert tries to identify the four stages that punctuate the development of Greek religion. The investigation is fully *au fait* with the most recent developments of religious anthropology and sociology as well as philological research.⁵⁴ The stages of his analysis (naturism, anthropomorphism, "epuration", syncretism) embody different facets of the absence of monotheism and moments of failure in the quest for God. A sympathetic curiosity about the oddities of ancient error punctuates every page of this popularizing book. The goal is to counter the notion that the exemplarity of Greek culture has any value for the study of true religion. The Greeks have lost all traces of the primitive Revelation. Their religion reflected the phenomena of Nature, without ever fulfilling the deep aspirations of men. Christianity was a clean break and a radical transformation. The charming superstitions of the Greek race, in other words, have little to contribute to the violent debates of the day concerning education and *laïcité*.

Much sharper and eminently more scholarly than Habert, but just as polemical in their opposition to the triumphal claims of the anthropological school, are the twin books of Farnell, *Greece and Babylon* (1911) and *The Higher Aspects of Greek Religion* (1912).⁵⁵ Following on the monumental *Cults of the Greek States* (1896-1909), the comparative impulse of this later work is generally subordinated to establishing contrasts and specificities or typological patterns. In opposition to Murray, Farnell privileges the historico-critical classifications inspired by the German philology and archaeology he knew so well, and he has little patience for generalizing the importance of primitive survivals and symbolism. The rituals he studies are less interesting for what they mean for the individual, than for what they do in society, in the *polis*. What both Murray and Farnell have in common, and what characterises so much of Belle Époque scholarship on Greek religion, is faith in the belief that the proper application of the comparative method would be leading to an imminent scientific breakthrough. The quest for a regular, mechanical method was changing religion into a province of positive science. At the heart of this process, the fascinating oddity of Greek cult had to be sanitized and given its proper place in the museum of evolution, one that had exemplary value. Scholarship on Greek religion was a cornerstone of this whole moment in the history of religions.⁵⁶ Understanding Greek religion was a necessary foundation for the disenchantment of the world.

All of these modes of scholarship were to be pursued many decades later and there was to be no shortage in creative continuity after the War. Arthur Bernard Cook furthered the orthodox programme of myth and ritual in his interminable study of Zeus (Cook 1914-40).⁵⁷ Jane Ellen Harrison gave ever-greater prominence to the insights of Durkheim and Bergson in her later work.⁵⁸ Gilbert Murray persisted on his path of research, and his writing had a

⁵⁴ See, for instance, n. 2, p. 46, where Habert engages with Hubert and Mauss' ideas about totemism.

⁵⁵ See Konaris 2016, pp. 209-37.

⁵⁶ Note, for instance, the fact that the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* was edited by Hellenists from its foundation in 1898 to its demise in 1943. The foundation of the *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* in 1999 by Jan Assmann, Fritz Graf, Tonio Hölscher, Ludwig Koenen and Jon Scheid – all specialists in the ancient Mediterranean world – was conceived as an homage to the old journal.

⁵⁷ Schwabl 1991; cf. Dodds 1951, p. 70.

⁵⁸ See Schlesier 1991; 1994, pp. 135, 158, 160; 189; cf. Nilsson 1941, p. 11. The performative eccentricity of Harrison accentuated the exoticism of her research. For Harrison and 'the Irrational,' see Robinson 2006. It is often noticed that Dodds makes little reference to Harrison in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (e.g. p. 122, n. 5; see n. 212 below).

continuous and great impact on the work of others, notably the 1936 *The Hero* by Lord Raglan.⁵⁹ Francis Cornford continued his work on the religious origins of Greek reason.⁶⁰ Herbert J. Rose, an indefatigable writer of reviews on works about Greek religion in this period, took on the role of champion of safe common sense, and the same could be said of Keith Guthrie.⁶¹ Charles Picard disputed the arbiter's throne of the field in France with André-Jean Festugière and pushed for greater integration of archaeology in religious history.⁶² Karl Meuli continued the application of *Völkerkunde* and folklore research to the problems of philology, with extensive essays on shamanism and sacrifice, and championed the rediscovery of Bachofen.⁶³ Georges Dumézil moved from an orthodox Frazerian position to a more productive take on ideology (largely inspired by Mauss and Granet) in his comparative studies of Indo-European myths and institutions.⁶⁴ Frazer himself continued to command a great deal of influence on religious scholarship and modernist literature (and not only in English).⁶⁵ A fascinating combination of both can be found in Paul Valéry's introduction to the 1934 French translation of *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*.⁶⁶ Louis Robert's long reign of terror began then, and he spearheaded the ever-growing contribution of epigraphy to research on Greek religion.⁶⁷ Historico-critical philology remained the pillar of professional authorized scholarship, with Martin P. Nilsson one of the commanding figures in the field, although one who also mastered the old Tylorian anthropological approach.⁶⁸ Racialized theories on the 'mongrelization' of the Hellenistic and Imperial periods remained particularly popular themes.⁶⁹ Deep antisemitism continued to colour many of the debates about identity, tradition, and *Reinheit* that were conducted through scholarship on Greek religion and the Hellenisation of Christianity.⁷⁰ A veritable fascination with astrology, magic, Neoplatonism and the decline of Hellenism can be noticed after the War, but that also continued many old patterns of research already long in place, notably in the work of Reitzenstein.⁷¹ Like Nilsson, Franz Cumont was a pillar of continuity over half a century.⁷² One of the most creative minds in the field in the Belle Époque period and exceptionally active throughout our decades up to the posthumous publication of *Lux*

⁵⁹ Cf. Smertenko and Belknap 1935.

⁶⁰ See e.g. Cornford 1923, 1952.

⁶¹ Note Rose 1925, 1929, 1948; Guthrie 1935, 1950.

⁶² Picard 1930-32, 1948.

⁶³ See Graf 1992, especially the article by Henrichs. On the context for the 1948 reedition of *Das Mutterrecht*, see Zinser 1991; cf. Dodds 1951, pp. 88, n. 43, 140, 157, n. 6, 158, n. 8, 160, n. 30, 164, n. 47, 168, n. 75-6.

⁶⁴ See still Littleton 1973.

⁶⁵ Beard 1992.

⁶⁶ Valéry 1934, p. 8: 'Quoique chargé et pénétré d'une prodigieuse érudition, et comme tissu de faits, ce livre est d'un grand artiste.'

⁶⁷ See e.g. *Hellenica* vol. I-IX (1940-50).

⁶⁸ See n. 210.

⁶⁹ See e.g. Bissing 1921, Nilsson 1921, 1939 with Bengtsson 2014. Cf. Strenski 1987.

⁷⁰ See e.g. the essays in Cancik and Puschner 2004; Arvidsson 2006, pp. 149-238 (see especially p. 223-232: 'Myth, Order, and Irrationalism').

⁷¹ See e.g. Boll 1918; cf. Dodds 1951, n. 132. The culmination of many decades of earlier work, Karl Preisendanz's authoritative *Papyri Graecae Magicae* were first published in 1928-1931.

⁷² And his posthumous influence lasted even longer. It will, for instance, take Richard Gordon's crucial 1975 article to break the long dominance of Cumont's views on Roman Mithraism. For the web of correspondence that united Cumont to the major scholars of the time, see Bonnet 1997, 2005, Bongard-Levine *et al.* 2007. Bonnet and Van Haepelen's introduction to the new *Bibliotheca Cumontiana* edition of *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, first published in 1906, gives an excellent overview of the significance of that work; cf. also the introductions to the new editions of *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* by Balty and Balty and *Lux Perpetua* by Rochette and Motte (with Bonnet *et al.* 2010); cf. Dodds 1951, pp. 83, n. 11, 127, n. 52, 158, n. 8, 258, n. 29, 263, n. 67, 268, n. 102, 291, 300, 304, 306. In 1951, p. 266, n. 85, Dodds compares Cumont's *Lux Perpetua* to Rohde's *Psyche*. Cumont was just slightly older than Nilsson.

Perpetua in 1949, he was with Joseph Bidez one of the leading lights of that vast enterprise of rediscovery of Imperial and Late Antique Hellenism, within which the research of Nock, Festugière and their contemporary Dodds's early and highly formative work on Late Antique religion and theology has to be situated.⁷³

The last edition of Chantepie de la Saussaye's important and influential *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, an old-school comparative overview of ancient religions, with the chapter on Greece written by Nilsson, came out in 1925.⁷⁴ Otto Weinreich took over (1916-1939) the publication of the famous *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten*, which had been founded by Dieterich and Wünsch in 1902.⁷⁵ Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, begun in 1908, was completed in 1927. The second edition of the great encyclopaedia *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* was published between 1927 and 1931.⁷⁶ The *Ausführliche Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, largely finished before Roscher's death in 1923, was finally completed in 1937 with Konrat Ziegler at the helm. The overwhelming majority of the second *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, begun in 1890, was in fact written between 1920 and 1950, with innumerable entries of interest to the study of Greek religion, and a clear tendency to express the now safe, conservative scholarly positions of earlier decades.⁷⁷

THE INTERWAR YEARS

If continuity should not be downplayed, a profound shift in the centre of gravity of religious scholarship can be observed after the First World War. The previous dominance of evolutionary comparative approaches gave way to a more restricted focus on the relative specificities of individual cultures and the logic that structures their difference. Culture, now relative and horizontal, rather than absolute and vertical, demanded different forms of comparison.⁷⁸ Comparative religion, that is, did remain as popular as ever. But whereas the individual culture tended to be mined for its contribution to the general comparative picture, comparison was now mostly to be a tool for making sense of the individual culture. The search for the internal coherence of each system, and the rules that govern particular configurations, became a fundamental parameter of analysis. This was particularly true in the developments of post-war anthropology, now more fully independent as a discipline and beginning to assert an ever more pronounced theoretical and methodological ascendancy over related fields. While identifying the vertical stages of the evolutionary ladder through analogy eventually lost some of its appeal, people continued to pursue the horizontal parallels of different cultural units set side-by-side.⁷⁹ In the US, the Culture and Personality 'movement' centred on the work of Boas and his disciples pioneered studies into how the individual mind

⁷³ It is probably fair to say that Neoplatonism decisively nourished Dodds's view of ancient Greek religion. Dodds's uncharacteristic triple trajectory in his career – from Proclus to Plato / from Homer to Plato / from Plato to Proclus – is a fact that would warrant closer scrutiny. As one of the deep and enduring inspirations of both Peter Brown (a reverse inspiration in that case?) and Henri Dominique Saffrey, among so many others, Dodds is a major precursor of the current Golden Age of research into Late Antiquity, and not only as the author of *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*. See Hankey 2007; Todd 2008.

⁷⁴ See Molendijk 2005, pp. 113-17.

⁷⁵ Schlesier 1994, p. 335. On Weinreich, see Wessels 2011.

⁷⁶ See Konrad 2006, pp. 347-423.

⁷⁷ Most of the Germanophone specialists in the field contributed something to the *RE*. As Dodds and Chadwick write in their 1963 *JRS* obituary, Arthur Darby Nock, while a student at Trinity College (Cambridge), was famous for being 'the greatest living authority on Pauly-Wissowa'.

⁷⁸ See e.g. Pye 1991.

⁷⁹ For the resulting plurality of rationalities, see Wagner 2015.

and affect are shaped by the scripted imprint of the cultural landscape.⁸⁰ The triumphant functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, and the many successors of Durkheim and Mauss replaced the old order of evolution and diffusion with rigorously differentiated investigations of social structure and the concrete uses of collective representation.⁸¹ It is telling that Mauss was institutionally a historian of religions before the War, while he came to be identified as an ethnologist after it.⁸² The foundation of the *Institut d'Ethnologie* in 1925 by Mauss, Lévy-Bruhl and Rivet marked a key moment in the ethnological bifurcation away from History in France. Yet the frontiers remained creatively porous and fertile, long before the great successes of the *Annales* School; in the study of Greek religion, the Hellenists Gustave Glotz, Louis Gernet and Henri Jeanmaire, among others, original collaborators of Durkheim and Mauss, never ceased to interact with the heirs of the *Année Sociologique*.⁸³

In Germany and Austria, the *Kulturkreise* school stood out for its radical take on the translation of cultural difference.⁸⁴ Less familiar today, it was a prominent agent of innovation in the years after the war. Still wedded to the old diffusionist tropes, it continued to study exchange and survival, but its great appeal was the claim to offer direct access to the meaning of foreign forms and ideas and to open roads into culture from the far reaches of time. Its centres of operation were Cologne and Vienna, with Fritz Graebner and Wilhelm Schmidt.⁸⁵ For the maverick but highly influential ethnologist Leo Frobenius, the scholar confronted with the strange worlds of distant and ancient cultural groups needs to attune his mind to those different forms of thought and literally be possessed by them: a form of intuitive, rapturous cognition.⁸⁶ Carl Gustav Jung and Martin Heidegger were to use the notion of *Ergriffenheit* (ontic seizure) to great effect in the 1930s.⁸⁷ Oswald Spengler and Ezra Pound prominently adapted the notion of *paideuma* to their own radically conservative views of organic culture.⁸⁸ While Frobenius had achieved fame and developed a wide readership outside the regular channels of academia in the years before the war, notably through the sponsorship of the Kaiser, the interwar years saw him institutionally consecrated. The foundation and directorship of the *Institut für Kulturmorphologie* in 1920 (Munich and then Frankfurt), the conferral of an honorary Professorship in 1932 at Frankfurt and the election as the head of the *Völkerkundemuseum* in 1934 marked the official recognition he had achieved by the end of his life.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Hofstede and Mcrae 2004. After Lévy-Bruhl, the work of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead is the foremost anthropological influence on Dodds's work; see e.g. 1951, p. 26, n. 106, 54, n. 34, 279, n. 11, 282, n. 51, 310, n. 118; cf. Cairns 1993, pp. 27-47. Kluckhohn would single out Dodds's book as an example of fruitful interaction between Classics and Anthropology (Kluckhohn 1961).

⁸¹ Evans-Pritchard is another anthropologist with a strong direct influence on Dodds. See for instance 1951, p. 24 (n. 90); p. 52, n. 10. On p. 25 (n. 94), Dodds quotes Robert Lowie's anthropology of artistic religious forms at length. Lowie was most probably in the audience for the Sather Lectures at Berkeley.

⁸² Fournier 1994, pp. 186-99, 521-6.

⁸³ See Di Donato 1987; cf. Picard 1948, p. 33-32. For Dodds on Glotz, see e.g. 1951, p. 34; 40; 57, n. 69; 60, n. 96; n. 99.

⁸⁴ Petermann 2004, pp. 583-93; Georget, Ivanoff, Kuba 2016.

⁸⁵ Hahn 2014, pp. 160-3.

⁸⁶ See e.g. Sylvain 1996; Marchand 2003c.

⁸⁷ Wasserstrom 1999, p. 121.

⁸⁸ Wallace 2010, pp. 60-1; cf. Dodds 1951, p. 269.

⁸⁹ Frobenius collaborated extensively with classical philologists in Frankfurt, another generally neglected crossroads of classics and anthropology: see Schlesier 1994, p. 217. For Walter F. Otto on Frobenius, see Otto 1931, especially p. 216, where Frobenius is praised as 'einer der bedeutendsten Forscher in einer Zeit, die sich in der Philosophie vom Materialismus und Rationalismus abgewandt hat'; cf. Leege 2016, pp. 104-9.

In *Paideuma: Umrisse einer Kultur- und Seelenlehre*, Frobenius traces the contours of a theory of organic cultural evolution.⁹⁰ The Greek term is used to conceive alternatives to the classical tradition. Every culture goes through stages of development, from childhood to maturity to age, and to each stage corresponds a fundamental moment: *Ergriffenheit* (ontic seizure), the initial impulse; *Ausdruck* (expression), when this initial impulse is given its full mature shape; and *Anwendung* (practice), when the mechanistic and technical imperatives finally take over in the triumph of disenchantment.⁹¹ The *paideuma* of each culture is the stable core that governs everything else, and the essence of the culture is predicated on the retention of that continuity radiating from the primordial insight. The soul of a culture is a distinctive and organic ontological unit. The overwhelming vision of reality that marks the emergence of a culture in its original environment, the ontic epiphany of *Ergriffenheit*, is the fundamental vision that gives the culture its distinctive forms, the imprint of its development, and the condition of its engagements with other cultures. The *Ergriffenheit* of the primordial moment is a force that must be accessed directly for the soul and the forms of culture to manifest their authentic life.⁹² Far beyond worldview and belief, *Ergriffenheit* insists on the emotional reality of total vital experience. For a *paideuma* to become visible and meaningful across cultural boundaries, it is necessary for the observer to have a direct share in this ontic seizure and to participate in its version of the world through intuition. Religion is the kernel of every *paideuma* and any valid cultural understanding. Art is both its fundamental expression and a most privileged point of entry for the observer who knows how to read the *Gestalten*.⁹³

A good example of this school's direct impact on the study of Greek religion is Károly Kerényi's 1936 essay 'Ergriffenheit und Weisheit'. The text was written for a presentation at Frobenius' *Institut für Kulturmorphologie* in Frankfurt. Published in *Apollon: Studien über Antike Religion und Humanität* (1937), it exemplifies the 'existenzielle Philologie' of the author in the days when he was still bound to Walter F. Otto and Frobenius and before he fully committed himself to Jung's archetypes.⁹⁴ The text starts with a consideration of the artistic experience of alternative reality embedded in the African rock-drawings collected by Frobenius; it reads like an inverted mirror image of the British Museum anecdote at the beginning of *The Greeks and the Irrational*. In that essay, Kerényi emphasises the shared experience of the religious person and the scholar of religion, who are both seized by the truth of a primordial vision in their experience of the god's meaning. In 'Antike Religion und Religionspsychologie', the opening essay of *Apollon*, Kerényi insists on the importance of recognising one's own situatedness when studying ancient religions – the necessity for the scholar to identify his place and the boundaries of his particular *Kulturmorphologie* before attempting cultural translation. The staid Nordic Nilsson is cast as the learned scholar whose superficial knowledge remains on the outside of the *klingende Welt*, the antithesis of the new paradigm that has been taking shape in Frankfurt and that now allows access to the deep interior religious life of antiquity.⁹⁵ That deep interior religious life of antiquity can only be truly ascertained by communion with a deep interior religious life here and now: *Erlebnis*. The complete intuitive fusion of the religious scholar with the *Realitätsgefühl* of his object of study is the condition for proper, *tief* understanding, for the

⁹⁰ Frobenius 1922.

⁹¹ Cf. Bauschulte 2007, pp. 178-212; Streck 2016.

⁹² See e.g. Heinrichs 1998, p. 96.

⁹³ Husemann 2016.

⁹⁴ Kerényi's earlier book on the novel (1927) was more directly indebted to Boll and Rohde (see Heinrichs 2006).

⁹⁵ Kerényi 1937b, pp. 1, 20-1.

aesthetic attunement needed to grasp the profound symbol of divinity.⁹⁶ In the 1940 *La religione antica nelle sue linee fondamentali*, Kerényi expanded this programme into a full set of new prolegomena to the study of ancient religion.⁹⁷

Like *Paideuma*, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *La mentalité primitive* was also published in 1922, and it also built on previous radically original work from the beginning of the century. But, apart from channelling a very different political and cultural ethos, its take on alternative rationality remained much more positivistic. Lévy-Bruhl's further research, most notably *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive* (1931), never shed its old evolutionary baggage, even if he came to firmly condemn his previous use of the term 'primitive' at the end of his life. Lévy-Bruhl had long sought philosophical ways out of the sociological reductionism of Comte and Durkheim, and his insights into the patterns of the prelogical mentality and mystical participation were to open novel paths into the possibilities of meaning beyond the principle of non-contradiction.⁹⁸ Here was a mode of interpretation that offered an alternative to the prevalent understandings of exotic symbolic systems based on error, allegory, or social projection. At the crossroads of philosophy, psychology, sociology and ethnology, his work on the culturally situated inconsistencies of (non-Western) religious thought offered a powerful template for reading meaning across *modes de pensée* and *principes d'action*. For Lévy-Bruhl, the fundamental difference between the West and the premises of other mentalities is conceived in terms of the transition out of prelogical thought achieved in Greece.⁹⁹ The universally significant turning point is Classical Greece, and the determinant factor is the long legacy of the Greek logical tradition. The networks of participations that constitute the categories of individual cultures are highly variable, but they all follow the same principles. Following great amounts of criticism and without hesitating to mark their distance from such a take on primitive mentality, anthropologists like Evans-Pritchard never ceased to acknowledge their debt to this drawing of the curtains to reveal the different logic of alternative rationalities.¹⁰⁰

Even more successful in its continuation of pioneering research paradigms of the Belle Époque, and very much of its time in seeking to understand the deep forces beyond logic on their own terms, the research of the many schools of psychology and psychoanalysis into the irrational forces of the individual and the collective mind continued to profoundly transform scholarship in the history of religions.¹⁰¹ Wilhelm Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* was the foil for much of this later work.¹⁰² William James had assaulted the positivistic certitudes of contemporary secularism and opened immense vistas into the vital, fecund irrationalities of religious experience.¹⁰³ Freud's writing informed generations of reflection on the deep and contradictory impulses that link childhood and/or neurosis to primitive religion (and its modern heirs).¹⁰⁴ Otto Rank insisted on the key role of separation anxiety in religious experience.¹⁰⁵ C. G. Jung spent a good part of his life interpreting the history of religions

⁹⁶ See Magris 2006 and Trembl 2006; cf. Meuli 1943, pp. 48-51.

⁹⁷ See the 1942 review by Festugière in *L'Antiquité Classique*.

⁹⁸ See Keck 2007; Lévy-Bruhl is probably the ethnologist whose work had the greatest impact on Dodds. See e.g. Dodds 1951, pp. viii, 40, 51, n. 8, 53, n. 27, 54, n. 33, 94, n. 82, 121, n. 1, 122, n. 5, 123, n. 23, 129, n. 73, 157, n. 6.

⁹⁹ See e.g. Deprez 2010, pp. 217-47.

¹⁰⁰ Evans-Pritchard 1934; cf. Prandi 2006; Casadio 2008

¹⁰¹ See Krech 2002, pp. 70-9, 130-4.

¹⁰² Wundt 1900-20; see e.g. R. Otto 1932. Wundt, it is worth remembering, was one of the teachers of Durkheim.

¹⁰³ James 1902; cf. Goblet d'Alviella 1908, pp. 373-5; Dodds 1951, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Die Traumdeutung* (1900) and *Totem und Tabu* (1913) are the works that stand out in that regard. See Bauschulte 2007, pp. 272-309. Cf. Dodds 1951, pp. 42, 49, 59, 106, 114, 116, 119-20, 123, n. 23, 129, n. 67, 133, n. 106, 134, n. 112, 151-3, 213, 218.

¹⁰⁵ Rank 1922.

through depth psychology, and promoting the archetypes of the collective unconscious as keys for further scholarship.¹⁰⁶ The yearly Eranos meetings organised at Ascona from 1933 on provided a prestigious, highly visible forum for comparative exchanges between historians of religion and (mostly Jungian) psychoanalysts, where Hellenists, most notably Károly Kerényi, were generally well represented, and where the irrational forces of Eastern and Western mysticism were compared, explored, and actively cultivated.¹⁰⁷ Parapsychology generated high academic interest, particularly in England and the United States, and scholars attempted to apply its results to the historical record.¹⁰⁸ Historical psychology and ethnopsychiatry, probably most creatively in the work of Abram Kardiner and Ignace Meyerson, actively pursued the cognitive and emotional foundations of apparently bizarre religious belief and practice.¹⁰⁹ In Germany, the heavily religion-centred *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Soziologie* was founded in 1925 by Richard Thurnwald, and the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie* was founded in 1928.¹¹⁰ Much closer to Freud, Oskar Pfister published *Religionswissenschaft und Psychoanalyse* in 1927. Fantasies, subconscious drives, childhood patterns of cognition, dreams and madness were the bread and butter of this research. Far from being isolated from research on ancient religion, these developments cultivated regular contacts with historians of religions and philologists, who were well aware of their potential significance for their own work. Otto Weinreich's 1933 *Menekrates, Zeus und Salomoneus. Religionsgeschichtliche Studien zur Psychopathologie des Gottmenschentums in Antike und Neuzeit* is a case in point.¹¹¹ Marie Delcourt pioneered psychoanalytic research into Greek religion in numerous studies.¹¹² Friedrich Pfister's 1930 *Die Religion der Griechen und Römer*, to take another example, offers a detailed and highly critical review of relevant contemporary psychoanalytic research.¹¹³

Pfister's book is conceived as a cutting-edge overview of approaches to the contemporary study of Greek and Roman religion, and an exhortation for the fundamental role of comparative religion in showing the way forward. This extensive review of scholarship from (nominally) 1918 to 1930 is a tremendous window into the historiographical developments that followed the War. Solidly anchored in philological research, it makes a powerful case for a necessary convergence of forces within the realm of *Religionswissenschaft*. *Die Religion der Griechen und Römer* sounds a clarion call for the new state of play in the postbellum history of religions. While the Belle Époque history of religions had essentially defined itself in opposition to theology, carving out an epistemological space with tools from philology, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology and philosophy, the new *Religionswissenschaft* made a claim for independence

¹⁰⁶ See Aziz 1990; cf. Dodds 1951, pp. 121, n. 4, 125, n. 37.

¹⁰⁷ See von Reibnitz 2006, Stausberg 2008, pp. 313-14, Hakl 2013. Walter F. Otto notably attended the 1939 meeting, which discussed 'Die Symbolik der Wiedergeburt in der religiösen Vorstellung der Zeiten und Völker'.

¹⁰⁸ The profound involvement of figures like Andrew Lang and Gilbert Murray in the august *Society for Psychical Research* is notable in this regard (for the early days of the S. P. R., see Cerullo 1982), and a key antecedent for Dodds's later involvement (see e.g. Dodds 1951, p. 91, n. 61, 130, n. 82, 309, nn. 116 and 118, 310, n. 120; 123); for Dodds's explicit rejection of occultism, and his insistence on its opposition to the 'modern discipline of psychical research,' see e.g. 1951, p. 265, n. 76. Cf. Lowe's chapter in this volume.

¹⁰⁹ Kardiner 1945, Parrot 1996; cf. Dodds 1951, pp. 37, 94, n. 75, 260, n. 38. Georges Devereux' landmark *Reality and Dream: Psychotherapy of a Plains Indian* was published in 1951, the same year as *The Greeks and the Irrational*.

¹¹⁰ Melk-Koch 1989.

¹¹¹ See Dodds 1951, pp. 66, 112, 83, n. 9; cf. Clemen 1928 and Heiler 1920.

¹¹² See e.g. Delcourt 1938, 1944.

¹¹³ Pfister 1930, pp. 43-9; cf. Dodds 1951, pp. 25, n. 97, 37, 44, 59, n. 87, 94-5, n. 84, 97, n. 98, 195, n. 3. Nilsson will identify Dodds's *The Greeks and the Irrational* as a book that is 'für den psychologischen Hintergrund und zwar besonders den der archaischen Zeit einschlägig' in the last edition of the *GGR* (vol. 1, p. 66).

from other fields, with the whole of religion as its own distinctive remit. It was now claiming full disciplinary status.¹¹⁴ The institutional refoundation of the field was to be consecrated after the Second World War with the creation of the International Association for the Study of the History of Religions (IAHR) in 1950 and the journal *Numen*.¹¹⁵ International congresses were thereafter to be organized every four (and then five) years, and they have continued regularly to this day. Just like the first *Congrès* of Paris in 1900, the newly authorized moment of professional scholarship inaugurated in 1950 with the foundation of the IAHR signalled the confirmation of a different era.¹¹⁶ It is during the interwar years, between the Belle Époque moment of the first *Congrès International d'Histoire des Religions* and that new beginning of the IAHR, a period of great effervescence and soul-searching experimentation, that the historical study of religions fully invested in attempting to define its disciplinary boundaries.

The upheavals of the time were reflected in the upheavals of the standard institutions that had come to represent the centre of the discipline. The *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* had to be rescued by Nilsson in 1923 and buttressed by the Swedes throughout the decade to prevent complete collapse.¹¹⁷ The two irregular *Congrès* that took place during this period, at Lund in 1929 and Brussels in 1935, illustrate the raw energy and overwhelming disorganization that characterized those years. The 1929 Lund meeting, where Nathan Söderblom was the President of Honour and Martin P. Nilsson was one of the main organizers and a member of the new international committee, together with Franz Boas, Franz Cumont, Robert H. Lowie, Raffaele Pettazzoni, Jules Toutain, and Thaddeus Zieliński (among others), was designed as a real show of strength.¹¹⁸ This was the first *Congrès* since the disruption of the War (there should have been meetings in 1916, 1920, 1924, and 1928). The last international committee had been elected in 1912 and most of its members were in fact now dead. An assertiveness and attempt at renewal informed the whole event. Anthropology was still represented, but indirectly, and only as an outside observer; contrary to 1908, the separation between the two disciplines had by then been mostly completed.

What was a methodological afterthought in 1908, an epilogue at the end of the congress, had become a focused introduction to the state of play in the first two sessions in 1929, with papers by Wach, Bertholet, Pettazzoni, Nilsson, van der Leeuw and others. Those introductory papers sought to draw the specific lines of a sovereign discipline in its investigations of belief about the soul. The list of contributors to the section on classical religions is particularly tantalizing: it includes Weinreich, Eitrem, Zieliński, Nock (still at Cambridge), Dodds (still in Birmingham), Bickel, Cornford, Rose, Deubner, Blinkenberg, Persson, Cumont, Latte, and Sinclair. Among the participants were Nilsson himself, Mauss, van der Leeuw, Pettazzoni, and Radermacher. A veritable symphony of minds in the field, the session is dominated by interest in the 'irrational' elements of the soul in the classical world. Dodds's paper, 'Religion and Magic in the Last Age of Greek Philosophy', a product of the research that prepared *Proclus: The Elements of Theology*, is fully at home in that environment, and it stands out for the boldness of its experimental recourse to contemporary mediumistic trance in its investigation of theurgy.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ See Hjelde 1998, Krech 2002, pp. 84-160.

¹¹⁵ The 1950 congress that consecrated the foundation of the IAHR was emphatically conceived as the 7th international congress for the history of religions (Bleeker *et al.* 1951). On the foundation of the IAHR and its development, see now Jensen and Geertz 2016.

¹¹⁶ See Stausberg 2008, pp. 308-9.

¹¹⁷ Dürkop 2013.

¹¹⁸ *Actes* 1930.

¹¹⁹ Dodds 1930. The material of that paper was retooled as the 1947 *JRS* article 'Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism', which was republished (with minor revisions) as the last appendix of *The Greeks and the Irrational*.

It would be perverse to find fault with the quality of the contributions presented at such a dazzling meeting. But the 1929 *Congrès* did not lead to the desired renewal of the international organization that had generated such bright hopes for the field in the Belle Époque years. The catastrophic events of the time would catch up with the plans of this scholarly community and the rising tension and insecurity prevented further institutional regularity. The once hopeful international association, like the League of Nations, was doomed to failure. No other meeting was organized before the much smaller affair of Brussels in 1935, and that was to be the last *Congrès International d'Histoire des Religions* before the foundation of the IAHR in 1950.¹²⁰ Starting in 1933, the annual Eranos meetings attempted their own marginal effort to advance *Religionswissenschaft* around the insights of Rudolf Otto and the methods of C. G. Jung and the dark realms of 'the Irrational,' but they never sought to occupy the centre of the field.¹²¹ The official 1935 *Congrès* in Brussels was essentially a celebration in honour of Franz Cumont, and it offered little of the ecumenical fervour that still marked the 1929 meeting.¹²² Germans and Italians were mostly absent this time.¹²³ Still, Hellenists largely dominated the proceedings, even more than previously, with contributions from A. Aymard, J. Bayet, E. Bickermann, J. Bidez, P. Chantraine, É. Des Places, L. Gernet ('Dolon le Loup'), H. Jeanmaire, V. Magnien, M. P. Nilsson, J. Toutain, and O. Weinreich, among others. Research on ancient Greek religion remained at the forefront of this aristocracy of religious scholarship till the very last.¹²⁴

Notwithstanding the lack of any leading institutional steer and outside of any stable framework, the search for a breakthrough in the demarcation of ancient religious studies still was to be vigorously pursued in the interbellum years. Despite the fragmentation of all those efforts, a certain convergence of developments can be observed. More and more recognized as a discipline in its own right throughout European and American universities, the historical study of religions continued to mark its territory. Joachim Wach's important 1924 *Religionswissenschaft: Prolegomena zu ihrer wissenschaftstheoretischen Grundlegung* proposed to establish the epistemological foundations of the discipline as a unified combination of approaches able to combine the complementary study of inner experience, of outer practice, and of social organization.¹²⁵ After fleeing Leipzig in 1935, Wach was to move on to Brown and then Chicago to teach the history of religions. Raffaele Pettazzoni, the great polymath scholar of ancient religions and the author of *La religione nella Grecia antica fino ad Alessandro* (1921), reaffirmed the centrality of the commitment to the specificities of history and the cultural differences of traditions.¹²⁶ First holder of the chair of the History of Religions at the royal university of Rome from 1923 on and founder of the *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* in 1925, he fought the Catholic Church to establish his field at the heart of the scholarly world of Italy and laid to rest the old ghost of primitive monotheism still desperately defended by Father Schmidt.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Cf. Pettazzoni 1940, with Bianchi 1979.

¹²¹ See Barone, Riedl, Tischel 2004.

¹²² *Mélanges* 1936; cf. Dodds 1951, pp. 61, n. 103, 300, n. 2, 311, n. 125. For Cumont's explicit condemnation of totalitarian states, notably in the 1935 *Congrès*, see Bonnet 2001 and 2014 and Elsner 2016.

¹²³ See Dürkop 2012, pp. 208, 242; cf., more generally, Heinrich 2002.

¹²⁴ Cf. Krech 2002, pp. 97-101.

¹²⁵ On the foundational significance of Wach's work, see Flasche 1978 and Rudolph 2008.

¹²⁶ One of the characteristics of his historical approach was its ability to incorporate the insights of phenomenology. Philippe Borgeaud (2016 [1999], p. 60) calls him a 'phénoménologue à temps partiel'.

¹²⁷ See Gandini 1998, 1999. Ernesto Buonaiuti was made Professor of the History of Christianity in 1915; see Guerri 2001. On the other side of the fence, Henry Pinard de la Boullaye, author of the dense and still remarkably useful *L'étude comparée des religions* (1922-1925), was the Professor of the History of Religions at the Gregorian University in Rome in those years and a keen interlocutor. *L'étude comparée des religions* stems from a seminar on Greek religion given by the Jesuit scholar. It would be a mistake to continue reducing the Catholic scholarship of those years to simple reaction.

First effective president of the IAHR from 1950 to 1959 and founder and editor-in-chief of *Numen*, Pettazzoni insisted on the crucial role of initiation and rites of passage in structuring the distinctive realm of religious experience throughout his long career.¹²⁸ His investigations of the liminal power of ritual and mystical symbolism were not entirely uninteresting to the Fascist regime in the 1920s and 1930s.¹²⁹ There and elsewhere, the disciplinary evolution of *Religionswissenschaft* was, inevitably, fully intertwined with the upheavals of a world in profound crisis.¹³⁰ The School of Rome that Pettazzoni nurtured became one of the leading lights in the history of religions, and his four main pupils and protégés (apart from Mircea Eliade), Angelo Brelich (student of Kerényi and Alföldi), Dario Sabbatucci, Ugo Bianchi, and Ernesto de Martino, also went on to produce influential scholarship in the study of Greek religion, one of their central objects of interest.¹³¹ Textual hermeneutics remained the centrepiece of that historical study of religions, but close interaction with archaeology and visual culture were also highly prized.

In German Protestant theology, this is the fundamental period of transition from von Harnack to Bultmann.¹³² The Irrational was a core concern of the interwar study of religion, with Rudolf Otto's 1917 book a pioneering point of reference.¹³³ That book captures an intellectual shift of momentous proportions in its identification of the ineffable numinous as the main object of the brave new discipline. For Dodds in 1945, 'the irrational' is still nothing less than 'the governing principle of our time'.¹³⁴ It would probably not be an exaggeration to call this the moment of 'the Irrational turn'. The hopeful scientism of earlier days now often gave way to an awed fascination for the power of the *mysterium tremendum* and the great variety of human responses to it. The odd customs and ideas that Belle Époque scholarship had so often identified as naive error and explained through evolution were now being absorbed into the much larger category of incommensurable cultural difference. In the new history of religions, the irreducible otherness of the Irrational was to be further confined to the special realm of the sacred. Profoundly indebted to Romantic theology and the challenges posed by Nietzsche, this insistence on the uncanny experience of divine power favoured interpretive insight over positivistic objectivity. It demanded the deep personal engagement of the scholar with his object of study.

Key vitalist currents of thought came into serious contact with the experimentations of the new *Religionswissenschaft*. *Lebensphilosophie*, anthroposophy, *Kulturkritik*, nationalist mysticism, *völkisch* activism and spiritual renewal: many of the highly active forces that gravitated around the study of religion – especially in Weimar Germany, but not only there – pushed for a scholarship that was fully engaged with the crisis of the age.¹³⁵ Bergson's *élan vital* was given a terrifying new urgency.¹³⁶ The spiritual decline of the West had to be turned back with a return to the raw forces of authentic Life.¹³⁷ Tradition and racial purity were

¹²⁸ Mihelcic 2003, Casadio 2013, pp. 201-71. For the links between the School of Rome and German *Religionswissenschaft*, see Dörr and Mohr 2002.

¹²⁹ See Gandini 2001, Stausberg 2008a.

¹³⁰ The long correspondence between Pettazzoni and Eliade provides a fascinating commentary; see Spineto 1994 with Ciurtin 2008. For the equally rich correspondence between Pettazzoni and Rose, see Accorinti 2014, with the preface of Giovanni Casadio (pp. ix-xv).

¹³¹ See Piccaluga 1979, Sacco 2006. On Ugo Bianchi and the School of Rome, see Casadio 2002, Stausberg 2009, pp. 266-7; on the influence of Kerényi in Italy, see Spineto 2006.

¹³² See e.g. Nüssel 2002, Bauschulte 2007, pp. 213-40.

¹³³ Flasche 1991; Benavides 2008.

¹³⁴ Dodds 1945, p. 16.

¹³⁵ Sedwick 2004, Krech 2002, pp. 259-85. Cf. Krieck 1934 or Hippler 1937 for that development in the Third Reich.

¹³⁶ Wunsch 2015.

¹³⁷ See still the classic study of Stern 1961; cf. Caruso 1979.

elevated as mystic ideals, with the Jews often identified as their common enemy.¹³⁸ The interrelation of culture and aggression at both the level of the individual mind and the social conditioning of institutions like the ritual *Männerbund* were actively pursued in research.¹³⁹ Fighting the degenerate modernity of the technical age and cultivating the life-affirming promises of spirit and soul involved recurrent recourses to the religious insights of ancient customs and teaching.¹⁴⁰ Poets like Stefan George expressed a great amount of interest in the lessons of the old gods and the higher reality of their beauty.¹⁴¹ The radical antimodernist aesthetics of the *George-Kreis* mined the cruel heights of Olympus for inspiration.¹⁴² The uncompromising loftiness of Greek religion had a key role to play in the education of the ‘Secret Germany’. The symbolic theology of Neoplatonism was an object of potent fascination in this light.¹⁴³ There was new interest in the implications of “Der Kampf um Creuzers Symbolik” and the contested rationalist watershed represented by Lobeck’s *Aglaophamus* (1829) a hundred years earlier.¹⁴⁴

The esoteric literary and scholarly movements that proliferated in the salons and meeting-halls of those years had profound impact on the study of religion. Formerly marginal figures like the Munich ‘Cosmic’ Ludwig Klages or the anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner, for instance, received much greater attention from the students of religion after the war.¹⁴⁵ The renewal of paganism continued to excite passion as a key to Western civilization.¹⁴⁶ Neopagans were even more active, and the search for spiritual regeneration through the cultivation of ancient religious practice was given an unprecedented prominence.¹⁴⁷ University figures like Jakob Wilhelm Hauer or Walther Wüst and fringe scholarly ideologues like Herman Wirth or Friedrich Cornelius were efficiently active in the development and advocacy of racialized Aryan pagan religiosity, before and into the Third Reich.¹⁴⁸ The NSDAP, needless to say, did not have a monopoly on those ideas. The sacralization of power was actively cultivated by many factions at all levels of thought and action.¹⁴⁹ The commonly expressed idea that interwar *Religionswissenschaft* was a factor in the growth of fascist worldviews across Europe is certainly overplayed, but not entirely false.¹⁵⁰ The overwhelming dominance of conservative and extreme right elements of society in so many of the most radical innovations of the discipline during this period is, in any case, a notable feature of contemporary developments.¹⁵¹ The heavy-handed ideological instrumentalization of the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* by its editors the Hellenists Friedrich Pfister and Otto Weinreich (1936-8) is a case in point.¹⁵² Nilsson, it must be said,

¹³⁸ The mad Hyperborean fantasies of ideologues like Guénon, Wirth and Evola, and the immense interest they generated, distinctively belong to this period; cf. Grottanelli 2002.

¹³⁹ See e.g. Sigerist 1931 (especially Wach), with Horney 1960; Höfler 1934; Wikander 1938; cf. Timus 2008. Very much of its own time, the post-war fascination with violence and the sacred exemplified by the work of Girard and Burkert also has profound roots in those earlier developments.

¹⁴⁰ Harrington 1996.

¹⁴¹ Landmann 1995, Arbogast 1998. More generally: Van Laak 2016.

¹⁴² Lacchin 2006. For the George-Kreis, see Baumann 2000, Norton 2002, pp. 395-746.

¹⁴³ See Brecht 1929.

¹⁴⁴ Howald 1926.

¹⁴⁵ Zander 2007, pp. 1290-4; cf. Faber 1994, Leege 2016, pp. 35-43.

¹⁴⁶ See e.g. Warburg 1932. Warburg, of course, was a student of Usener (see e.g. Schlesier 1994, p. 218-21).

¹⁴⁷ See Cancik 198, Faber and Schlesier 1986, Faber 1986.

¹⁴⁸ Flasche 1993. On Wüst, see Junginger 2008c; on Hauer, Alles 2002, Kubota 2005; for Cornelius on Greek religion, see Cornelius 1942, p. 123-173.

¹⁴⁹ See e.g. Gentile 1993; in Germany, Carl Schmitt is a prominent example of this current (see Faber 2001).

¹⁵⁰ See Junginger 2008b.

¹⁵¹ The examples of Eliade and Dumézil have brought much attention to this issue in recent years, ever since Momigliano’s 1983 and Carlo Ginzburg’s 1985 pieces; cf. Lincoln 1998. See e.g. Turcanu 2003, Dana 2012 and Éribon 1993. The case against Dumézil tends to be overplayed in my opinion.

¹⁵² Dürkop 2013, pp. 214-50. See the two programmatic articles of Pfister 1939a and 1939b.

was not just an innocent bystander.¹⁵³ *Religionswissenschaft* is a field that emerged from the Second World War highly compromised by its many enthusiasms for fascist spiritual renewal, one of the reasons for its subsequent generalized retreat from history.

At the heart of the new *Religionswissenschaft* of this period, phenomenology emerged as the driving force of change and the new hope for a breakthrough in understanding religious experience.¹⁵⁴ The term phenomenology has in fact little to do with Husserl and his school when applied to the history of religions.¹⁵⁵ The earlier phenomenological insights of Tiele and Chantepie de la Saussaye were guided into new directions by a number of scholars who, profoundly influenced by Rudolf Otto, quickly transformed the field.¹⁵⁶ Gerardus van der Leeuw, Professor of the History of Religions at Groningen since 1918 and elected first President of the IAHR in 1950 shortly before his death, became the most prominent defender of the new method; Geo Widengren was another crucial actor in that methodological revolution, together with Károly Kerényi and Mircea Eliade, to name some of those who are still (nominally) read today.¹⁵⁷ One central tenet of that movement is that the deep psychological manifestations of religion, historically situated in the essence of individual cultures and their symbols, could only be understood from within, through *verstehen*, as opposed to the sterile causal laws of *erklären*.¹⁵⁸ The objectifications of divine power and their revelations in the subjective experience of the soul involve the scholar in a hermeneutics of intuitive decipherment of the sacred. The same basic patterns of religious thought and behaviour can be uncovered across cultures and periods and translated into common categories. Greece, as a privileged point of access into the early historical transition from archaic to high religion and a window into Christianity, is constantly solicited as a paradigm in this research.¹⁵⁹ An attempt to answer the spiritual confusion of the day undergirds much of the efforts of the phenomenologists.

VALÉRY AND GEORGE

Understanding Greek religion, in some quarters, became a cornerstone in the necessary reenchantment of the world, following the mechanical butchery in the trenches. The sense of crisis and possibility that characterises the relevant historiography of our period channelled broad and deep contemporary developments. Any attempt to look at those years' scholarship on Greek religion in isolation will miss the driving forces at play. The appeal of Greek religion was still far from being confined to the narrow disciplinary boundaries of academia that would later define it, and the mirage of Greek reason was revisited again and again as European intellectuals struggled to think a new future after the war. The intensity of the engagement with the classical world reflects the stakes of the struggles involved in rewriting origins and models. Poets and artists were at the centre of this effort, and their words can best convey the sense of a fracture between eras, the interstitial exhilaration, that characterises so much of the reflection that went into the meanings inscribed upon Greece. Two texts from well beyond the confines of scholarship can serve to illustrate the urgency that the war directed into the resonance of the Greeks and the Irrational at the beginning of our period.

¹⁵³ See Svenbro 2007, pp. 263-309.

¹⁵⁴ See e.g. Kippenberg 1991 and Wiebe 1991; Kippenberg 1997, pp. 244-58; Krech 2002, pp. 65-70. For the continued dominance of phenomenology after the Second World War, see e.g. Stausberg 2009, p. 265.

¹⁵⁵ See e.g. Waardenburg 1991, p. 44.

¹⁵⁶ Molendijk 2004, 2005, p. 1-3; 117-121; cf. Schröter 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Kehnscherper 2000.

¹⁵⁸ See e.g. van der Leeuw 1933, pp. 658-9; for the antecedents of that *Verstehen*, see Wach 1926-33.

¹⁵⁹ See e.g. Bremmer 1991.

One from France (Paul Valéry) and the other from Germany (Stefan George), one from the cosmopolitan Left and the other from the nationalist Right, two heirs of Mallarmé and the prophetic language of Symbolism, they both exhort a rediscovery of incommensurable Greek reason as a hope of salvation.¹⁶⁰

'Will Europe become what it is in reality — that is, a little promontory on the continent of Asia?'¹⁶¹ This is the question that haunts Valéry's *The Crisis of the Mind*, a text in two letters written for an English audience and first published in the *Athenaeum* in the spring of 1919. No better forum than the *Athenaeum* could have been chosen for those letters about the world that was then coming to an end. Addressing his fellow Europeans across the Channel, Valéry puts forward the mortality of all civilisations, and he asks his readers to consider the nature of the real struggle for life ahead now that the guns have fallen silent. The lofty culture revered by the *Athenaeum*'s elite cosmopolitan audience is the object at hand. The mind, *l'esprit*, is what sustains Europe's special place as 'the elect portion of the terrestrial globe,' and the mind of Europe is being shattered from its own internal contradictions. That breakdown of the old intellectual equilibrium is what led to the butchery in the trenches, and the present, much more crucial battle for peace is what will determine the possibility of a future. 'Everything has not been lost, but everything has sensed that it might come to an end.'¹⁶² Uniquely open to outside influence and able to project itself everywhere through the worth of its ideas, the Europe that matters in these letters is not a product of national essences or inherent superiority, but a delicate and open balance of qualities in creative tension. The avoidance of extremes, which has made the continent in all its diversity embrace an 'ardent and disinterested curiosity, a happy mixture of imagination and rigorous logic, a certain unpessimistic skepticism, an unresigned mysticism,'¹⁶³ allowed the long efflorescence of ever richer adventures in understanding. The middle course charted through the many centuries of European supremacy is the dominant feature of this extraordinary intellectual success.

If the Orient of Persepolis and Susa represents the faded empires that the sand has covered, the Greeks are asked to illustrate the productive mixture that has sustained European achievement. The Greece of the Languedocian Valéry is an idea of fragmented unity that contains the whole Mediterranean, from Smyrna to Marseille, from Athens to Alexandria. What makes the Alexandria of the Ptolemies recognisably *modern*, like the Rome of Trajan, is the meeting of many races, cultures and modes of life in dialogue. The ability of the Greeks to make opposites talk and to refuse the confines of clear boundaries perfectly captures the European experience of mind. Greek geometry, with the many dimensions of its rationality, well embodies the distinctive characteristics of this adventurous spirit.

'This was an enterprise requiring gifts that, when found together, are usually the most incompatible. It required argonauts of the mind, tough pilots who refused to be either lost in their thoughts or distracted by their impressions. Neither the frailty of the premises that supported them, nor the infinite number and subtlety of the inferences they explored could dismay them. They were as though equidistant from the inconsistent Negro and the indefinite fakir. They accomplished the extremely delicate and improbable feat of adapting common speech to precise reasoning; they analyzed the most complex combinations of motor and visual functions, and found that these corresponded to certain linguistic and grammatical properties; they trusted in words to lead them through space like far-seeing blind men. And space itself became, from century to century, a richer and more surprising creation, as thought gained possession of itself and had more confidence in the marvelous system of

¹⁶⁰ See Duthie 1933.

¹⁶¹ Valéry 1919a, p. 995.

¹⁶² Valéry 1919a, p. 989.

¹⁶³ Valéry 1919a, p. 996.

reason and in the original intuition which had endowed it with such incompatible instruments as definitions, axioms, lemmas, theorems, problems, porisms, etc.¹⁶⁴

That vision of harmonious reason from the past has a counterpoint in the tragedies of the present. Concrete geometry has become an instrument of power. Utility and function have taken over and the aim of reaching for ever greater accuracy has transformed what had been an elegant, open-ended exploration of the possibilities of space into a practical tool of measurement. The fatal evolution of precision is driven by the concrete pressures of domination and exchange. Knowledge is now a commodity that can be traded and used by all who own it, its worth determined by its function. There are two *examples* in the text: Greece and Germany. Germany, with the unmatched labour of its specialised science and its mass discipline, has unleashed unprecedented destruction on the continent.¹⁶⁵ The polar opposite of the Greeks summoned in the letters, Germany evokes the victory of technical utility and the extreme culture of power. The moral and intellectual qualities that have powered its ascension signal the breakup of the European balance of mind -- common defeat. Now that modernity can go no further, the very condition of Europe's long supremacy has become the source of its downfall. The same path that once led to geometry now leads to the Somme and Verdun. The triumph of the *demos* and of technology, the 'lost illusion of a European culture,' can no longer mask the chasm ahead of *progress*. As Hamlet contemplates those fields of skulls from the past, the mind of Europe ponders the death that lurks in practical reason.¹⁶⁶

That bleak picture is no mere lamentation. The struggle for peace described by Valéry does not have a set conclusion. The real lesson of the text is the immense power of mind, the extravagant sway it can hold over all matters, against all odds, and the deep legacy of European reason as a balance of opposites tracing a way into the unknown. Here, Greece is reaffirmed as a common foundation and a model. The intuitive, holistic and human-centred nature of Greek intellectual culture has delimited a field of experience that separates Europe from the world. The quest for the *imperator spiritus* will succeed when it recovers that balance. And before the tangible tensions of groups and nations can even be considered, all attention must be given to the tensions at work within the individuals that make the mind of Europe. The crisis of the mind is first and foremost a matter of one's place before the group, it involves "the thinking individual in a struggle between personal life and life in society."¹⁶⁷ The conflicts that shape the future course of society are to be resolved in the inner space of the individual mind. Across the national boundaries of the continent, every reader of *The Athenaeum* (and the other journals where the text was reprinted) is solicited and asked to take part in this struggle. The special value of Greek reason is the measure of what hope there is for Europe in the struggle for peace. A radically different call to action is to be found in Stefan George's *The War*.

Written and published in the second half of 1917, republished in *Das neue Reich* (1928), *der Krieg* is often described as the pinnacle of George's poetic work, and it consecrated his status as the great, hallowed prophet of future Germany.¹⁶⁸ As Robert E. Norton writes, soldiers carried copies of the poem in the field. In this long, brutal text of twelve stanzas, the Master paints a twisted and bleak landscape of the real conflict that hides from profane view behind the carnage, the war for the spirit, the invisible war between authentic life and mechanical materialism that will decide the fate of Germany and the world.

¹⁶⁴ Valéry 1919a, p. 996-997.

¹⁶⁵ Valéry 1919a, p. 988-989.

¹⁶⁶ Valéry 1919a, p. 993.

¹⁶⁷ Valéry 1919a, p. 1000.

¹⁶⁸ Norton 2002, p. 544-549.

'What are the slaughtered multitudes to him, if life itself is slain!'¹⁶⁹ Ripened by the 'hate and scorn of mankind' unleashed on so many battlefields, salvation is finally at hand in the ruins. The sacred boundaries of German blood and territory, proclaims the penultimate stanza, are set to fulfil their legacy. This is the land where 'the all-flourishing Mother of the white race,' that is, Hellas, first unveiled her true face.¹⁷⁰ The *weisse Art* is now savage and decrepit. Only in this country's realm of flowing promise can the corruption be overcome. The primordial unveiling of Hellas, the revelation of her veritable nature, the marriage that made her a mother, is firmly located. Greece, that is, only truly became Greece in Germany. And that is what presages a hopeful future for the audience. The idea is fully developed in the last stanza of the poem, where the *vates* invokes a meeting of the gods.

'Die Jugend ruft die Götter auf .. Erstandne
Wie Ewige nach des Tages fülle .. Lenker
Im sturmgewölk gibt Dem des heitren himmels
Das zepter und verschiebt den Längsten Winter.
Der an dem Baum des Heiles hing warf ab
Die blässe blasser seelen · dem Zerstückten
Im glut-rausch gleich .. Apollo lehnt geheim
An Baldur: "Eine weile währt noch nacht ·
Doch diesmal kommt von Osten nicht das licht."
Der kampf entschied sich schon auf sternen: Sieger
Bleibt wer das schutzbild birgt in seinen marken
Und Herr der zukunft wer sich wandeln kann.'

'Now youth calls up the gods, both the eternal
And the returning, when their day is rounded.
The king of storms gives him of clear horizons
The sceptre and delays the Longest Winter.
Who hung upon the Tree of Weal cast off
The pallor of pale souls and vies in frenzy
With him they rent. Secretly Apollo turns
To Balder: 'For a while there will be night,
And not the East will bring the light!' The war
Was solved on stars: who shelters the palladium
Within his land is victor, and who changes
Himself at will is lord of times to come.'

The old gods that are called forth by the youth are of two kinds: the *Erstandne* and the *Ewige*. That distinction between the resurrected and the timeless simultaneously suggests echoes of the complementary plurality within the Christian godhead and evokes something of the dichotomy pagan-Christian, at the same time as it points to the different dichotomy Greek-Germanic that emphatically structures the passage. The studied ambiguity of *nach des Tages fülle's* position after *Ewige*, rather than *Erstandne*, further confuses the distinction between eternal and returning, with the recurrence of the day made out as a characteristic of the Everlasting, and the imbrication of one element with the other thus rendered tangible. Time's long flow and the burning significance of the present moment are drawn through this evocation of parallel gods. The three pairs of divinities placed at the centre of the stanza invite the reader to conceive each god through the other and consider the different sets side-by-side. The characteristically high level of allusiveness packed in those few lines demands

¹⁶⁹ "Was ist ihm mord von hunderttausenden / Vorm mord am Leben selbst?"

¹⁷⁰ See Norton 2002, p. 548.

knowledge of Greek and Germanic mythology to acquire meaning, knowledge that goes beyond the Classical veneer or the *Götterdämmerung* familiar to all good burghers, a solicitation further encouraged by the anonymity of all but the last two gods.¹⁷¹

The first set of divinities refers to a guide within the storm who hands over a sceptre and delays the Long Winter. The *Lenker im Sturmgewölk* is obviously Thor/Donar.¹⁷² The war god in his storm clouds does two things: he transmits his power to the god of peaceful skies and defers the ominous arrival of dark times. That is, the transient storm that is his realm is distinguished from the long season of tempests. The *längste Winter* points to Ragnarök, the end times of cataclysm and renewal that will see the world purged through destruction. The promise of the real war is still ahead and it will shatter everything in sight before dawn can return. The sky-god who receives the sceptre from Thor (Zeus/Tiwas?) is there to oversee a moment of transition. The hanging of Odin/Wotan from Yggdrasil is the central figure of the next line, an image that further suggests the redemptive divine suffering of the Crucifixion. With the invocatory *o* of the poet channelling the call of the youth, the god's power over death and the creative knowledge of the runes he gained through hanging is compared to the burning madness of Dionysos. *Gleich* is the hinge that foregrounds the blending of the two figures. The esoteric story of Zagreus and the generative murder of the young god by the Titans, the primordial violence that buried divine essence in humanity, are read into Odin's ability to cross the boundaries of existence.¹⁷³ Each resurrection echoes the other. At the heart of the passage, the blazing madness of the torn god is equated with the higher understanding reached by Odin through suffering and his power over death.

Following Dionysos, Apollo is shown as a prophetic conveyor of knowledge. While the second god of the first pair passively received the sceptre, and Dionysos is only present through comparison, Apollo is the first god of the last pair, and he is the one who acts. The Greek divinity fully occupies the space allowed by the Longest Winter's delay. Like the esoteric Zagreus, his realm is secret, *geheim*. But contrary to Zagreus, he is named and speaks in his own voice. The secret we are hearing can only be understood by those who know how to read it. *Geheim*, a fundamental keyword of the George-Kreis, is made to resonate here with the brilliant, shining oracular power of Apollo. The dominant figure of the "Secret Germany" (*geheimes Deutschland*) embodied and pursued by George and his followers is inscribed in the prophecy.¹⁷⁴ Apollo's words confirm the imminent arrival of the long night. *Ex oriente lux* is denied (does that refer to Christianity as well?).¹⁷⁵ The clear skies of the first god, the burning madness of the second, the radiant clarity of Phoebus: the eternal source of Western light remains in place here in Germany, where Greece *first* unveiled herself. The slaughter in the trenches announces the real war ahead. The radiant, beautiful young Balder, the god to whom Apollo speaks in secret as if looking in a mirror, is to die at the beginning of Ragnarök, where Thor and Odin and the other Germanic gods also perish. The sacrifice of German youth announces the cataclysm that will make regeneration possible. Victory will not be through conquest. Following the devastation, Balder will rise to rule over the new world with his brother. The future belongs to those able to will the inner metamorphosis. Recognising the underlying permanence of Greek gods across forms and bodies is the condition for recovering the exalted nature of the German spirit locked in its blood and soil.

Der Krieg locates the salvation of Germany in the final invocation of the youth, its call to the gods. The Greek paradigm demands a national metamorphosis of thought and being. Not an ability to perceive difference, but a path back to the recognition of the true self.

¹⁷¹ See Ölmann 2001, p. 141.

¹⁷² Ölmann 2001, p. 141.

¹⁷³ See the possible references to Hölderlin in Ölmann 2001, p. 141.

¹⁷⁴ Norton 2002, p. 680-685.

¹⁷⁵ Ölmann 2001, p. 142. Cf. Marchand 2004.

The prophecy of Apollo and the madness of Dionysos are to serve as guides through the cataclysm. A Nietzschean complementarity unites the two modes of knowing embodied by the divinities.¹⁷⁶ Contrary to the pan-European outlook of Valéry's *La crise de l'esprit*, George's *Krieg* invites his audience to seek the renewal ahead in the embrace of the deep boundaries that separate his country and blood from all others. Contrary to the individual mind willing peace through inner freedom depicted in the first text, the redemptive sacrifice of the second text calls for victory through the rebirth of the nation. One poet advocates a restoration of the common European spirit in the higher realm of intangible thought exemplified by Greek reason against German functional logic and will to power. The other casts the Greek paradigm of sublime knowledge embodied by Dionysos and Apollo as the essence of a return to the pure German soul. In both cases, the generalised collapse of the surrounding world is opposed to the promise of a new beginning inspired by the ineffable power of the Greek experience for thinking across appearances and forms. In both Valéry and George, a reenchantment of the world is the necessary condition for redemption, and the Greek model of a reason beyond reason supports inspired visions of the future. *La crise de l'esprit* and *Der Krieg* both insist in their own way that the real war is still to come, and that Greece remains an indispensable interlocutor for finding a path through the troubles ahead. Both texts, two of the most celebrated and significant depictions of the unprecedented epochal trauma caused by the First World War, invite their audiences to seek inner renewal of the spirit through the encounter with Greece.

NILSSON AND WILAMOWITZ

That urgency was particularly manifest in the onslaught on the heritage of Wilamowitz at the end of the scholar's long reign, before and after his retirement from the chair of Greek Philology at the University of Berlin in 1921.¹⁷⁷ Identified as the enemy of everything that Nietzsche now stood for, a position that had had different implications in 1872 than it now had in the 1920s – that is, once Nietzsche had achieved quasi-sainthood amongst large swathes of the intelligentsia and had been anointed as the prophet of vitalism and *Lebensphilosophie* – Wilamowitz served as a target to channel the animosity of the age against the educational structure of the previous generation.¹⁷⁸ George's indictment was categorical: 'Was bleibt von dem ganzen Wilamops? Vielleicht der Schmutz, den er auf Nietzsches Rockschoßen abgeladen hat.'¹⁷⁹ The violence of the attacks against the great Prussian scholar was aimed at uprooting the academic culture he had come to represent. The aesthetic philistinism of the erudite technician was portrayed as a spiritual wasteland. What had been the peripheral aesthetic judgment of an aristocratic coterie now became a common trope.¹⁸⁰ The scientific renunciation, the detailed objective precision and the sterile technical asceticism of traditional classical humanism no longer commanded the same admiration they once had. The Neo-Humanism that Wilamowitz had championed all his life was seen as an anachronism and an inadequate answer to the social and cultural crisis of the age. Worse, it was even recognized by some as an agent of national corruption, one of the symptoms of defeat. Some advocated a partial retreat from the classical canon, and the *Gymnasium* reforms

¹⁷⁶ See Leifer 1963, p. 218-243.

¹⁷⁷ Marchand 2003a, pp. 312-19; cf. Ringer 1969, p. 288, Solmsen 1979.

¹⁷⁸ See Cancik 1989, Braungart 1997, pp. 12-14, 47-49, Krech 2002, pp. 293-311, Lacchin, 2006, pp. 72-88.

¹⁷⁹ See Schwindt 2000; cf. Goldsmith 1985.

¹⁸⁰ For the early attacks, see e.g. Hildebrandt 1910.

of the early Weimar Republic made significant changes in that direction.¹⁸¹ But what many more sought instead was a different, more encompassing and life-affirming kind of encounter with the ancient texts.

Werner Jaeger, the prodigal pupil, came to embody that yearning for renewal in the public significance of philology and a return to the primacy of *Bildung* over the mass of specialised research.¹⁸² The educational value of classics was to be modernised and continue to provide the privileged blueprint for the national *paideia*. Appointed to the Chair of Greek Philology at the University of Berlin in 1921 as the successor to Wilamowitz, a position he was to keep until his exile to the US in 1936, Jaeger was at the very summit of the *Altertumswissenschaft* pyramid. He was the most prominent figure in the movement for the spiritual transformation of the discipline as a guide in troubled and hopeful times. In the early days of his new Berlin position, Jaeger underlined the fact that this was a changing of the guard, that a long era of scholarship had ended and a new one was beginning.¹⁸³ The Third Humanism he energetically advocated on the national stage with his friend and collaborator Eduard Spranger was to play a leading role in the fight against barbarism and spiritual degenerescence and inspire the cultivation of a rich inner space against the standardized mechanization of mass culture and commerce.¹⁸⁴ A noble, totalizing education of the spirit through the knowledge of Greece was needed. Western history is the long unfolding of the *hellenozentrischer Kulturkreis* and the acquisition of *paideia* is the condition for a free and integral participation of the individual mind in the vast spirit of its society, a key instrument in the struggle for national renewal.¹⁸⁵ Long before the takeover of the Nazi regime, which he never fully supported, although support it he did, and which he eventually had to leave behind in 1936, a *Dritter Humanismus* for the *Drittes Reich* was the battle-cry of this conservative institutionalisation of *Kulturkritik*.¹⁸⁶ At the heart of that programme is the notion that the specific nature of Western reason is culturally embedded in the long history of Humanism – that is, receptions of Greece – and that a full deployment of its immense reach requires a lived familiarity with the tradition.¹⁸⁷ Classical education opens the path to authentic life. Greek religion is an integral part of that radical vision, both as a key to the origin and development of Christianity, and as the original canvass of Philosophy. Understanding Greek religion is, ultimately, a necessary act of self-knowing.

Wilamowitz' 31 December 1921 letter to Martin P. Nilsson contains an admonition to the Swedish historian of religion: 'Wer an einen Gott nicht glauben kann, wird ihn nie verstehen.'¹⁸⁸ Ten years later, the direct encounter with Greek divinity is exactly what he was to offer in his last, most extensive and unfinished work. *Der Glaube der Hellenen* proposes a holistic vision of religious Hellenism, from its origins to the end of antiquity.¹⁸⁹ The authoritative declarations of the author are written with his characteristic precision and eye for the telling detail, with apparently minor problems given their major due and bold solutions offered at every turn. A pyrotechnic display of strong conjectures is orchestrated with sure hand and confidence. Aphorisms punctuate the text and give it a certain hieratic quality. This work was conceived as a monument to the continuing superiority and relevance

¹⁸¹ Ringer 1969, pp. 200-52; Kraul 1984, pp. 127-156; Marchand 2003, p. 314.

¹⁸² See Elsner 2013, pp. 138-145.

¹⁸³ Jaeger 1921, 1924; see Hölscher 1995, pp. 74-6.

¹⁸⁴ Stiewe 2011, pp. 135-206; cf. Dodds 1951, p. 26, n. 107.

¹⁸⁵ Jaeger 1925, p. 23; cf. Jaeger 1932.

¹⁸⁶ See Stiewe 2011.

¹⁸⁷ Jaeger 1934. *Paideia* is referred to regularly in Dodds 1951. But *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, Jaeger's 1936 Gifford Lectures, is the work of Jaeger that had the greatest direct impact on *The Greeks and the Irrational*; cf. 1951, p. 146.

¹⁸⁸ Calder III and Bierl 1994, p. 166.

¹⁸⁹ Henrichs 1985 will long remain the essential study on that work.

of *Altertumswissenschaft*. Neither a nostalgic swansong nor a rearguard action, it attempts to demonstrate the productive analytical power and the necessity of proper philology. The anthropological approach of the past decades is dismissed out of hand. A fundamental principle of the work is the cultural independence of authentic Greek thought: what matters is *echthellenisch*. Aegean substrates are of minor importance, and eastern influence is either shown to be negligible when early or late and degenerate. Typology is a red herring. While Pfister (a student of Dieterich), echoing Max Müller, maintained in 1930 that ‘Wer nur eine Religion kennt, kennt keine’ (Pfister 1930, p. 52), Wilamowitz famously pronounced in his 1931 book that ‘Über andere Völker habe ich kein Urteil; die Griechen kenne ich.’¹⁹⁰ The old battles against Usener are clearly as relevant in 1931 as they were at the beginning of the century.¹⁹¹

Another fundamental principle of the work is its uncompromising respect for the immense variety of historical developments. What matter are the movements of change within Hellenism. Each important moment develops aspects of the gods or religious feeling and allows another facet of the Hellenic spirit to manifest itself; even if the essence, the core, always remains the same. The tribulations of the *Urhellene* remain the foundation of all that was to follow. Far from being superfluous erudition or yet another variation on the venerable insights of Karl Otfried Müller about original tribal movements, the investigation of the various migrations into Greece found in Chapter Two is an essential part of the story told by *Der Glaube der Hellenen*.¹⁹² It was, at the time, a tour-de-force of analytical synthesis, and it functions as an illustration of the precise, almost divinatory force of proper philology. Similarly, the long agony of Hellenism in the Hellenistic and Imperial ages is not just another sad tale of decline and corruption from the East for Wilamowitz, even if it is partly that, but fertile ground for further developments of high Hellenism, which are pursued by the scholar with acumen and sympathy. At the heart of the book, the great currents of religious thought that criss-cross through the Archaic and Classical periods – Heracles and the idea of the hero, the Mysteries of Eleusis, Delphic predication, the Dionysiac spirit – are traced in space and time and assessed in their most illuminating expressions. The great diversity of Hellenism is reflected at every turn of the analysis, but the common ground is never out of sight. Mysticism is downplayed and presented as an obstacle that was first overcome before it returned in force after the classical age. Orphism is dismissed as a fantasy of modern scholarship, and Plato acquitted of any influence.¹⁹³ Magic, superstition and popular belief are of little interest to the author.

The dominant principle of the book is the primacy of concepts and beliefs over acts. Cult and institutions have next to no part to play in this picture.¹⁹⁴ The *Glaube* that is being pursued is the immediacy of the encounter with the *kreitton* of divinity.¹⁹⁵ The Olympian gods are the undisputed prime object of the study. ‘Die Götter sind da’ is the objective reality

¹⁹⁰ Wilamowitz 1931, p. 288.

¹⁹¹ Wessels 2003, p. 71-5; cf. Leege 2011, pp. 240-1.

¹⁹² Wilamowitz 1931, pp. 46-88.

¹⁹³ Wilamowitz 1932, pp. 246-58.

¹⁹⁴ Pitting Wilamowitz against Wilamowitz, Otto Kern proposes a popular survey of Greek religion, with an emphasis on the development in *Kultus* of every individual god in his three volume *Die Religion der Griechen* (1926-38). The books are conceived as a tribute to the enduring value of Wilamowitz’ method, beyond the very unwilamowitzian *Der Glaube der Hellenen*. The work is highly derivative and limited in insight (see e.g. the methodological epilogue, ‘Von Aristoteles zu Wilamowitz,’ pp. 280-319, where 28 out of 39 pages are devoted to the students of Usener), and probably most notable for its total ignorance of non-German scholarship; cf. Dodds 1951, p. 203, n. 83. For the resonance of *Kultus* in the field at the time, see Pfister 1922; cf. Bonnet 2007. On the larger ideological and theological charge involved in the concept of *Kultus* by the authors of this time, see Lehmkuhler 1996, most notably pp. 17-52. Cf. Bredholdt 2009, Rüpke 2011, Fornaro 2011.

¹⁹⁵ For the contemporary understanding of *Glaube* in scholarship, compare Troeltsch 1910 with Schmidt 1928.

of belief that is to be described and analysed by historical examination and intuitive dialogue with the profound messages of the texts.¹⁹⁶ The depths of religious emotion and the experience of the ancient believer are conveyed magisterially and with certitude, as if from actual direct observation. A hermeneutics of authoritative interpretation identifies the fundamental concepts put forward by each text: the belief of the author. Nuances and variation inform the dialogue between great minds, where connotations and reference are determinant. What we are made to see is a tradition that explores its own boundaries. The blunt instruments of anthropology have no purchase on this expression of ancient religious sentiment, which only the philologist can truly access, using his own tried and tested critical tools. Banality has no place in these lofty heights of noble literary thought, only the individual genius faced with the power of the god – and the exact discernment of the exalted scholar. Homer is a key witness to earlier times, but he is first and foremost the antecedent against which all subsequent writers are to be assessed.¹⁹⁷ The individual authors that matter are evaluated and given a place in the pantheon of high culture. The ‘Offenbarung des Göttlichen’ pursued by the work is a direct encounter with the beliefs of great minds. Plato is the pinnacle of this long history in the development of Greek religious sentiment.

Nilsson answered Wilamowitz’ letter of December 1921 with the recognition that ‘Es geht mir wohl das innere Verständnis für gewisse Seiten der Religion ab, und vielleicht die höchsten. Ich versuche sie zu erfassen, das kann ich aber nur durch Überlegung, diskursives Denken tun, und wer sie nicht instinktiv erfassen und mitfühlen kann, hat nicht das rechte, innere Verständnis’ (January 1922).¹⁹⁸ His own monument of scholarship, the *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, was first published in two volumes in 1941 and 1950, and he worked to the end of his life on refining and updating his *magnum opus*, both volumes of which were twice reedited posthumously. Based on the short 1921 Swedish *Den grekiska religionens historia*, which is what Nilsson and Wilamowitz are discussing in the epistolary exchange mentioned above, the German *Handbuch* sought to arrange all available knowledge on ancient Greek religion chronologically and thematically.¹⁹⁹ It defined the field for decades to come and has never been replaced. Like Wilamowitz, Nilsson pursues the history of Greek *Glaube* in his great work, but the belief he analyses is in no way limited to high culture, and he never fails to show how even the high authors reflect the popular ideas of their time.²⁰⁰ Nilsson is essentially a Tylorian in his view of belief. It would take Burkert for functionalism to fully take over. Contrary to Gruppe and so many other predecessors and contemporaries, myth is sidestepped as an aesthetic domain of little religious value. It is *Kult* that is to be the main key to belief. The *Geschichte* classifies every possible piece of evidence and assigns it its proper place. The chronological organization of the two volumes traces a trajectory of development and change that never fails to present its course and solutions as the measured elucidation of the problem at hand. The masterpiece of Nilsson is not a secondary synthesis of scholarship, but the product of a constant and direct engagement with the sources. The enormous amount of data is handled with assurance and clear critical judgment. The consolidation of knowledge achieved by Nilsson in this work is an achievement of staggering proportions. The previous *Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft* on Greek religion, the 1906

¹⁹⁶ Wilamowitz 1931, p. 18-21; cf. Dodds 1951, p. 131, n. 84. For the tantalizing possibility that Wilamowitz’s 1931 ‘Die Götter sind da’ is an ironic commentary on Otto’s ‘Die Götter sind’ (1929, p. 231), see n. 219. Otto certainly took it that way, and he responded in kind (1933, pp. 13, 17-18); see Henrichs 1985, pp. 293-4; 1990, pp. 118-20, 139-41; Cancik 1986, p. 116; Hölscher 1995, pp. 83-4; Leege 2008, pp. 137-40.

¹⁹⁷ Wilamowitz 1931, pp. 317-378.

¹⁹⁸ Calder III and Bierl 1994, p. 167.

¹⁹⁹ An English translation of the 1921 book was published with a preface by J.G. Frazer.

²⁰⁰ See e.g. Nilsson 1940; 1948.

Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte of Otto Gruppe, a colossal and rather bloodless compilation of evidence, was to be comprehensively replaced and forgotten.²⁰¹

Nilsson's range as a scholar was phenomenal, if always focused on Greek religion, and he wrote on all aspects of research in the field over the course of his long career. Methodologically aware, although always meticulously careful and fairly conservative in practice, and infallibly proficient in the most technical aspects of philology and archaeology, he was a master of synthesis and long-distance connections. A recurring concern in his work is the search for the enduring survival of primitive religious forms over long periods of time. The lasting imprint of the land and its rhythms is inscribed in the thought and practice of meaningful religion, something that can only be truly understood by experience, and the deep sympathy of the scholar with the world of the Swedish peasant and the work of the family farm is constantly invoked to forge analogies and justify an intuition. Comparative insights are essential to the operation.²⁰² The old concepts and methodologies of Mannhardt, Wilhelminian *Völkerkunde* and Victorian anthropology, refined to respect the documents and relieved of their more outlandish claims, are the key tools of the author. The solid commonsensical faith of men who work the earth is never far from the surface. The popular and the implicit are the foundations of the religious experience that supports everything else. What comes after, both in terms of explicit symbolism, higher religious thought and later refinement, lofty or superstitious, is built on this stable core. Ritual is the most productive object of scholarship on religion and the fundamental anchor of belief and myth. Religion is 'Man's protest against the meaninglessness of events', and the piety that it demands follows simple imbricated patterns.²⁰³ The individual, the family and the city all have their own domain, and the scholar cannot ignore one to the detriment of the others. Religion is a totalizing whole, and it is fully embedded in society and history. The organization of religious time and space with meaningful points of seasonal and cultic reference is a web of criss-crossing attempts to produce and stabilise meaning. The Greeks allow us to see in great detail a gradual evolution from primitive culture to high religion. At the heart of the Nilssonian project is the old fascination with Man's encounter with the awful power of Nature.

Kult und Glaube have a precise history and periodization plays a major role in Nilsson's writing. The most original contribution of Nilsson was his insistence on the continuities of Aegean religion.²⁰⁴ Charting a middle course between the excesses of an Evans or a Picard and the dismissals of a Wilamowitz, Nilsson spent an immense amount of effort assessing the Minoan and Mycenaean material. He recurrently tried to show the highly significant amount of continuity and survival in cult and myth that can be traced from the non-Indo-European Bronze Age to historical times, despite the many disruptions that have to be acknowledged. At the other end of the spectrum, Hellenistic and Imperial mysticism, syncretism, ruler-cult, and the growing importance of individual religion in contrast to the declining role of the *polis* are interpreted against the model of the Archaic and Classical periods.²⁰⁵ What continuity and survivals matter, in other words, are the ones that shed light on those central centuries before Alexander. The Archaic and Classical times, where the gods are firmly set in place, festivals regulate the seasons, sanctuaries and oracles operate in full, and religious movements ebb and flow without great disruption, are the entelechy of Greek

²⁰¹ Cf. Dodds 1951, p. 277.

²⁰² E.g. 1911, 1920.

²⁰³ Nilsson 1954.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Nilsson 1960.

²⁰⁵ The initial plan for the *Handbuch* was, first, for Otto Weinreich to write the second volume, and then Arthur Darby Nock. The fact that, when both proved impossible (although Nock did fully revise the manuscript), Nilsson was able to write this sum of knowledge late in life in an area far from his main field of expertise is a testimony to the man's astounding industry.

religion. A beautiful ordering of the world already in its Homeric representation, and one that led the Greeks out of primitive magic and toward rationality, but one whose distant, superficial spiritual values never fully answered the yearnings of heart and soul. Its long demise is what prepared the way for the radically different inner vision of universal Christian salvation. At the end of the day, a highly familiar and fairly traditional representation of Greek religious history is what Nilsson sought to confirm and defend in his work, with unparalleled productivity and mastery of the sources and scholarship.

Many polemics punctuate this life in research, which we do not have the time or space to cover here. Two are particularly relevant for our history of scholarship. A critical assessment of scholarship is to be found in the letters that Nilsson wrote to Arthur Darby Nock in 1949 and 1951 to discuss the present state of play in the history of religions.²⁰⁶ In the second letter, which stands out for its conciliatory tone, Nilsson lists some of the lasting advances made by research in the field in his lifetime, such as the recognition of the importance of primitive cult for understanding the origins of Greek religion, or the absence of systematic theology in Greek religious culture. He sees in the demise of the successive theories that have dominated the last decades – those that insisted on natural mythology, primitive monotheism, animism and taboo, myth and ritual – the inevitable reckoning of the evidence, but recognises that all of these theories have added facets to our understanding of early religion. Evans, Usener, Rohde, and Harrison are singled out for the unsupported boldness of their claims, and the enduring nature of their contribution. The study of late antique religion has been put on a new footing by Usener, Cumont and Reitzenstein, who opened the way for all those who were to come after.²⁰⁷ The collection of evidence has been considerably enriched. No recent work has made an impact on its age as transformative as Lobeck's *Aglaophamus*, but many have significantly moved us forward.²⁰⁸ It is a notable fact that almost all the scholars recognised for the 'positive gains' they have made are essentially figures of the Belle Époque years. Still, the overall assessment of the letter is largely positive.

It is in the first, much longer text, the 'Letter to Professor Arthur D. Nock on some fundamental concepts in the science of religion', that Nilsson signals his alarm about and opposition to recent developments. Making an ardent plea for the continuing value of evolution as a paradigm of analysis in the history of religions, Nilsson argues that recognizing stages of culture is imperative for the proper study of ancient religion.²⁰⁹ Understanding the nature of primitive culture and the traces of its survival in later times is crucial for making sense of change and transformation. Nilsson has no interest in opening a dialogue with contemporary anthropology on this topic. He acknowledges that he has only the faintest idea about Malinowski's work (this in 1949...) and Kluckhohn's direct warning about the notion of the 'primitive' is left unheeded.²¹⁰ His anthropology is, proudly, half a century old. What matters is the course now taken in *his* field, *Religionswissenschaft*. The concepts that have been used by his peers to analyse belief are assessed and all found wanting. All have been cut down to size in due time. The leitmotiv of this review is the idea that all generalizing approaches fail, even when they make some lasting contribution, and that the primacy of the particular document, precisely situated in historical time, can never be sacrificed to the illusory claims of the system. *Le dernier cri* is tomorrow's old news. Those

²⁰⁶ Nock, it can be interesting to note, kept in his Harvard study a portrait of Nilsson wreathed in fronds (Stewart *et al.* 1964).

²⁰⁷ Nilsson 1951, p. 146 = p. 223.

²⁰⁸ Nilsson 1951, p. 148 = p. 224.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Nowak 1987.

²¹⁰ Nilsson 1949, p. 79 = p. 353. The letter is written two years after Cumont has died, when Nilsson has become one of the last intellectual witnesses of his generation – ironically, a vestige himself. In 1951, p. 26-27 (n. 110), Dodds opposes Nilsson's Victorian intellectualism to the more socially grounded insights of recent anthropology; cf. Dodds 1951, p. 45, 59-60, n. 92, 63, n. 111, 121, n. 3, 122, n. 5.

who are now, like his Uppsala rival Geo Widengren, trying to promote forth the theory of the High God, should realize that the house of cards they are building will not last.²¹¹ Phenomenology, the last item on the list and the real target of the letter, is the worst offender, nothing less than a complete negation of history. Evolution – or rather, evolutionism! – cannot be denied. Defending evolution, for Nilsson, is a validation of the ultimate triumph of Christianity. As he writes at the end of the letter, ‘there is a difference between the Baïame of the Australians, the Zeus of the Greeks, and Jahwe in the later Jewish religion.’ The position of Zeus between the primitive Baïame and Jahwe is no coincidence.

NILSSON AND OTTO

The other polemic, more significant in many ways, if not unrelated, is the opposition of Nilsson to the approach of Walter F. Otto, his exact contemporary, and in many ways his nemesis.²¹² The iconoclastic Otto was the prime representative of the new intuitive, existential history of Greek religion that generated such an immense amount of enthusiasm in German scholarship in the 1920s and 1930s, and he came to exemplify everything that Nilsson fought against in his work. The Ottonian instrumentalisation of myth is one of the foils against which Nilsson’s prioritising of *Kult* is conceived. In the opening of the first letter to Nock, Nilsson can’t resist a sideswipe at Otto, who is accused of being the paradigmatic anti-evolutionist.²¹³ In the *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, Otto is taken to task for his theological systematization of Homeric religion, and his idealisations of Demeter and Dionysus.²¹⁴ More importantly, at the beginning of the *Schlusswort* of the first volume, Nilsson presents the ‘stark hervortretende neue Orientierung’, that is, the work of Otto and his school, with its insistence on ‘die sogenannten inneren und bleibenden Werte der griechischen Religion’, as the antithesis of his own approach, and a dangerous illusion.²¹⁵ Theology through myth, in stark contrast to the meaning it had in antiquity, is a modern imposition on the messy record of ancient *Glaube* and it offers no purchase on the old beliefs. It is in that light that Ernst Peterich, the author of the 1938 *Die Theologie der Hellenen*, is dismissed as a fantasist.²¹⁶ In his 1929 review of *Die Götter Griechenlands*, Nilsson rails against the mystic mirage of the book. In his 1935 review of *Dionysos*, Nilsson presents his nemesis as an ecstatic visionary waging holy war on serious religious scholarship. His view of divine essence as fully formed at the moment of *Urschöpfung* is nothing less than a total negation of change in time, the primal sin of historical scholarship. The conclusion of the review is meant to be damning: ‘Dieses Buch ist nicht Wissenschaft, wie ich Wissenschaft begreife und begreifen muss, sondern Prophetentum.’²¹⁷ But it is not clear that Otto would have disagreed with that sentence.

Scholarship as prophecy was indeed what Otto proposed in his mature work. And it was meant to provoke exactly the kind of response it received from Nilsson. The criticism he levelled at the dominant traditions of scholarship was harsh and uncompromising. No other philologist better embodies the restless radicalism of the age in its quest for a new, more

²¹¹ Nilsson 1949, pp. 102-7 = pp. 377-82.

²¹² See Leege 2016, p. 230-234. Dodds sided emphatically with the camp of Nilsson and Nock. Neither Otto nor Kerényi are cited in *The Greeks and the Irrational*. As he writes at the beginning of his 1944 commentary to the *Bacchae*: ‘Miss Harrison’s *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* and W. F. Otto’s *Dionysos* are interesting but should be used with caution’ (1944, pp. ix-x, n. 1); see Henrichs 1984, p. 237, n. 88.

²¹³ Nilsson 1949, pp. 72-73 = p. 346-7.

²¹⁴ Nilsson 1941, pp. 10-11, 349, 498, n. 4, 532, n. 1.

²¹⁵ Nilsson 1941, p. 794.

²¹⁶ Nilsson 1941, p. 59.

²¹⁷ Nilsson 1935a, p. 181.

immediate encounter with the spirit of the ancient world.²¹⁸ The vitalist urge to total experience sought answers in the presence of the old gods. Something singularly more overwhelming than the Third Humanism is pursued in Otto's work, the flagship of 'existenzielle Humanismus', which offered a form of aesthetic communion with a higher aspect of existence. Greek reason is not a mere precursor in this view, nor an antithesis of the Irrational, but a superior mode of being in the world. Like Wilamowitz, Otto is after an 'Offenbarung des Göttlichen.' But the battle-cry of Wilamowitz, 'die Götter sind da', rings hollow for that pursuit. For Otto, 'die Götter sind', out of time and out of place, an ontological alternative to Wilamowitz's dictum.²¹⁹ The proximity of the divine is not mediated by the great minds of the ancient authors, it is an objective reality. Unveiling that reality is the task of the existential philologist. The theophany of the ancient believer and the modern student have to be intertwined through the shared vision of *Ergriffenheit*.²²⁰ This was read at the time as nothing less than an alternative to Christian transcendence. The contrast with Christianity, confronted most directly in the 1923 *Der Geist der Antike und die christliche Welt* and the 1926 *Die altgriechische Gottesidee*, was never fully resolved.²²¹

Born in 1874 like Nilsson, a student of Bücheler (and briefly, of Usener) in Bonn, Otto quickly established himself as a successful Latinist, a learned historian of religion and, finally, much later in his career, a formidable Hellenist.²²² Named to a chair in Basel in 1913, he moved to Frankfurt as *Ordinarius* in 1914 and stayed there until 1934, when he relocated to Königsberg to replace Paul Maas. He remained in Königsberg until 1944. A friend and/or collaborator of Karl Reinhardt, Franz Altheim, Leo Frobenius, Karoly Kerényi, and Martin Heidegger, he cultivated an active circle of fellow militant humanists in Frankfurt. When people referred to the 'Frankfurter Schule' in the 1930s, *that* is what they meant.²²³ Otto was a devoted follower of Nietzsche and he was on the board of the *Stiftung Nietzsche-Archiv Weimar* from 1935 to the end of the war.²²⁴ An activist, anti-establishment conservative, in contact with the George-Kreis, Otto saw his work as a contribution towards the necessary spiritual renewal of Europe.²²⁵ His attempt to launch a new periodical, together with Karl Reinhardt and Ernesto Grassi, for the defence of the classical tradition under the *Neuordnung Europas*, the *Geistige Überlieferung*, where Heidegger also published, was badly received by the Nazi authorities and the periodical was shut down after two issues (1940 and 1942).²²⁶ Otto continued to produce major work throughout the 1940s and 1950s, including the notable *Theophania*, first published in 1954. He exerted a profound influence on many scholars and

²¹⁸ See e.g. Kerényi 1937, pp. 2123. Otto's 1933 *Radiovortrag*, interestingly, sought a wider audience.

²¹⁹ Cancik 1984, p. 76; Henrichs 1985, pp. 293-4, 2011, p. 107; Bremmer 2010, pp. 8-10; Leege 2016, p. 136. The opposition 'Die Götter sind' vs. 'Die Götter sind da' captures one of the most fundamental disagreements of scholarship of that time in the field.

²²⁰ Stavru 2004, p. 315-316. Nilsson, ironically, refers to artistic *Ergriffenheit* in a positively Frobenian way in his contribution to the Brussels *Congrès* (1936, p. 372): 'Man könnte noch auf den Wandel in der Kunst hinweisen, da nunmehr der Kunstwille nicht mehr von religiöser Ergriffenheit geleitet wird, sondern in den Götterbildern nur Vorwürfe seines Schaffens sieht; man vergleiche z.B. Pheidias und Praxiteles.' Maybe that is why it was not reproduced in the *Opuscula Selecta*.

²²¹ See Stavru 2012.

²²² On Otto more generally, see Stavru 2005; cf. Wessels 2003, pp. 185-218, Kerényi 1988, p. 200-63.

²²³ Schlesier 1994, pp. 215-18; Stavru 2011, pp. 194-5; Leege 2016, pp. 69-114; cf. e.g. Momigliano 1940. The new monograph series *Frankfurter Studien zur Religion und Kultur der Antike*, founded in 1932, was to be the main vehicle of the group. Otto's *Dionysos* was published in that series. It was another Frankfurt colleague of Otto, Erich Fromm, who was to exert a decisive influence on Dodds in *The Greeks and the Irrational*; see e.g. 1951, p. 267, n. 96-97.

²²⁴ Leege 2016, p. 208-15. For the flourishing presence of Nietzsche in the classical scholarship of the time, see Cancik 1995.

²²⁵ See Cancik 1984 and 1986.

²²⁶ Fariás 1989, pp. 260-8, Stavru 2013; cf. Losemann 1998. For the more general context, see Losemann 1977.

students. Kerényi quickly became the most creative successor of this approach to Greek religion, even if he was in time to turn away from Otto.²²⁷

In his 1929 *magnum opus*, *Die Götter Griechenlands: Das Bild des Göttlichen im Spiegel des griechischen Geistes*, Otto seeks to reveal the true nature of the Greek gods to his readers.²²⁸ The poetic framework of Schiller's poetry is followed as a guide to the essential spirit of Greek divinity. Close to Frobenius' vision of primordial origins, and channelling the whole German Romantic and Idealist traditions of mythical truth, with Nietzsche a constant reference and inspiration, Otto shows how the coherent, fully-formed divine system can be seen to appear in its full splendour in Homer already, and how later expressions of divinity in Greek literature all tap from the same enduring source.²²⁹ The primary vision that informs the original manifestation of the god is a permanent reality. The gods *are*. Their existence is absolute. In that view, divinities are not products of history, culture, or society, but the ontological configuration that shapes history, culture, and society. The immanent structure of nature they embody is a complete and perfect whole, where everything has its proper place. A total defamiliarization from the modern Christian filters of the world is necessary for the life-affirming communion with that experience of Olympian proximity. Existential philology, like poetry, can open paths through the ontological plurality of cultures. Otto has been cast as a precursor by many movements and scholars, and most notably an inspiration for the structuralist study of ancient polytheisms.²³⁰ It is now probably a matter of time before his work is seen as an antecedent of the contemporary ontological turn in anthropology.

The other book from Otto that (some) classicists still read is the 1933 *Dionysos*.²³¹ There, Otto opens polemically with a double attack on scholars of Greek religion: on the ethnologists and the followers of *Völkerpsychologie*, on the one hand, and on the philologists who limit themselves to the old historico-critical method.²³² The error of both approaches is to privilege change and evolution and reduce the essence of the god to a series of contingent historical developments. The imprint of the social and the historical has no effect on the essence of the god. That is why, decades before the decipherment of Linear B, Otto so energetically refused the prevalent view that Dionysus was a late intruder in the Greek pantheon.²³³ The stories of his arrival have nothing to do with an event, they are manifestations of his essence as the epiphanic god, of the vision of his perpetual arrival. More importantly, cult cannot legitimately be privileged as a source of information. Myth and cult have to be studied together as traces of the divine. For Otto, religion is not a matter of function, but the all-encompassing revelation of an ontological structure that informs all thought and action, and that owes nothing to any thought or action. There is no space for collective representations in this view. A god is a self-contained, independent entity, a world in itself, with its own domain of reality in dialogue with that of other gods. The book-length study of Dionysos, with its imbricated opposites and inspired evocation of the deity, is designed to demonstrate that point.²³⁴ As maddening as it was to Nilsson, and as it surely is

²²⁷ See Graf 2006, p. 77. As Graf notes, Carl Koch, one of the teachers of Walter Burkert, was himself a pupil of Otto.

²²⁸ See Cancik 1984, Stavru 2004.

²²⁹ Cf. the question about 'real religion' in Homer at the beginning of *The Greeks and the Irrational* (p. 2).

²³⁰ See e.g. Marcel Detienne's fascinating foreword to the French translation of *Die Götter Griechenlands*. Van der Leeuw identifies Walter F. Otto as one of the founders of phenomenology in the posthumous edition of *Phänomenologie der Religion* (1956, p. 797, n. 2).

²³¹ On Otto's *Dionysos*, see McGinty 1978; Henrichs 1984; Cancik 1986; Schlesier 1994, pp. 215-18; Baumeier 2007, pp. 364-9; Bremmer 2013, and, now, the inspiring and wide-ranging study of Leege 2016, which I was only able to see after this chapter was written.

²³² Leege 2016, pp. 123-64.

²³³ See Versnel 1990b, p. 165, n. 256; Stavru 2011, pp. 203-4

²³⁴ See Leege 2016, pp. 189-93.

still to many who read it today, Otto's book probably remains the single most influential study written on Dionysus since Nietzsche.

THREE FLASHPOINTS

Innumerable conflicts marked the study of Greek religion in the decades after the First World War, with little consensus in sight, and the doubts, boldness and experimentation in methodology that characterise this period are matched only by the urgency of the ideological programmes that were pursued through scholarship. A profound sense of concrete significance continued to be inscribed in the study of Greek religion. Three flashpoints can be quickly singled out to close this chapter. The first is the ancient question of Christianity's debt to Greek religion. I will only mention two titles from the gargantuan literature that was produced on the topic in those decades, between whose extremes every conceivable position was occupied. On the one side is Arthur Darby Nock's long seminal 1928 article, 'Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background', which attacked Harnack and Loisy and denied any value to the idea that 'the mystery cults' of Hellenism contributed anything significant to the development of Christianity.²³⁵ The purely Jewish roots of Christianity are squarely affirmed. More than a renewal of the old apologetic tradition, which it also is in some ways, Nock's work reflects a certain view of religious essentialism prevalent at the time.²³⁶ The analysis is methodical and detailed, conducted with calm critical mastery and no rhetorical flourish. That article came, in time, as close as anything to embody the *communis opinio* against which further scholarship was measured.²³⁷

On the other side is Thaddeus Zieliński's 1921 *Religia starożytnej Grecji*, translated in English for Oxford University Press as *The Religion of Ancient Greece* (1926) and in French for the Belles Lettres as *La religion de la Grèce antique* (Paris) – a rare level of diffusion for such scholarship in those days.²³⁸ The author continued to revise this work until his death in 1944.²³⁹ Zieliński was one of the most productive and respected classical scholars of the age (one of the few to still have a 'law' to his name), and this book was probably one of his most read pieces of research.²⁴⁰ The author proclaims that a new age of scholarship and

²³⁵ Smith 1990, pp. 64-77; Auffarth 2006; Bremmer 2014, p. 147-51. For Nock's crucial role in redefining ancient mysteries, see Casadio 2009.

²³⁶ See now Bremmer 2016; cf. Price's (2010) rather harsh portrait.

²³⁷ Nock became the Frothingham Professor of the History of Religions at Harvard in 1930. His first major work in 1926 (when he was 23) was an edition of Sallustius' *On the Gods and the Universe*, which answers the challenge made in the last chapter of Gilbert Murray's *Five Stages of Greek Religion*. His later four-volume edition of the Hermetic Corpus for Budé (1945-54), published together with Festugière, was one of the great monuments of scholarship of the time. In his 1933 *Conversion*, Nock reinvents the old argument that the only real Greek antecedent of Christianity is philosophy. In their 1963 *JRS* obituary for Nock, Dodds and Chadwick write that 'Religion to him meant feeling – a refusal to admit meaninglessness and helplessness and a like feeling and a like refusal to admit that man has the power to solve his own problems.' The *Harvard Theological Review* became a leading forum for the study of ancient Greek religion under Nock's long stewardship (1930-63); for an example of Nock's imperious arbitration of the field, see e.g. his devastating review of Cumont's 1942 *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (Nock 1946, with Balty and Balty 2015, pp. l-lvi).

²³⁸ Originally written in Russian, it was translated into Polish itself – and fully revised – in 1921; on Zieliński more generally, see Zaborowski 2010; cf. Dodds 1951, p. 157, n. 7.

²³⁹ Gillmeister 2013; for the larger context of Zieliński's scholarship, see Grzymala-Moszczyńska and Hoffmann 1998.

²⁴⁰ See e.g. Picard 1948, who writes 'Les travaux de Th. Zielinski, en Pologne, n'ont pas seulement répandu sur une infinité de questions des lumières hardies, séduisantes; l'auteur a développé concernant la religion grecque en général, des points de vue très personnels, inspirés d'une généreuse sympathie pour le paganisme.' The Lutheran Nilsson is more severe (1941, p. 59): 'Die Zusammenhang dieser Arbeit mit katholisierenden

renewed spirituality is within grasp with the recent advances in our understanding of Greek religion. Rohde and Wilamowitz have shown the way in recognising the unique spiritual worth of Hellenism.²⁴¹ Gruppe is singled out as the example of the diligent classificatory scholar whose atheism prevents any real understanding of the organic essence of Greek religion. Religious feeling is not only the ‘the kernel of religion,’ but it is also the foundation of the intuitive empathy necessary for successful religious scholarship, and understanding ‘the idea beneath the rite.’²⁴² Greek religion was the first religion to recognize the revelation of God in Beauty, in Goodness, and in Truth. It acknowledged the presence of God in Nature and consecrated the sanctity of Work and Society. It is the fundamental and necessary framework for the development of genuine Christianity. Greek religion *is* the real Old Testament. The early Judaization of Christianity, and the modern re-Judaization that is Protestantism, can only be countered by the rediscovery of Christianity’s true Hellenic source.²⁴³ Neohumanism leads directly to that reawakening. The study of Greek religion is to play a leading role in the imminent regeneration and de-Judaization of the Christian world. This book is, among many things, an important witness to the deep and open antisemitism that marked so much scholarship on Greek religion in those years. Three years after its publication in French and English, Zieliński was elected as a member of the governing board of the *Congrès International d’Histoire des Religions* in Lund, where Nock and Dodds were also present.²⁴⁴

Orphism is another flashpoint of some consequence for the scholarship of the day, and for the question of Hellenism’s contribution to Christianity. As Nilsson wrote in 1935: ‘Orphism is more famous and more debated than any other phenomenon of Greek religion.’²⁴⁵ Those years saw the groundbreaking publication of Kern’s 1922 *Orphicorum fragmenta*, preceded by his *Orpheus: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* in 1920, and the study of Orphism moved to a new phase in its long history, following the fundamental contributions of Rohde, Harrison or Reinach: one that focused less on origins and more on Christianity. It would be a mistake to imagine that Wilamowitz’ famous remark in *Der Glaube der Hellenen* that ‘Die Modernen reden so entsetzlich viel von Orphikern’ discouraged further work on the topic.²⁴⁶ On the contrary, the question of Orphism’s nature and influence remained a beacon of controversy, and many scholars continued to project elaborate scenarios of a distinctive and uniquely important spiritual trajectory on to the traces left by the ‘Orphic’ fragments.²⁴⁷ Many were reacting to the extreme claims of Vittorio Macchioro and Robert Eisler.²⁴⁸ The most radical ‘Panorapist’ of the age, Macchioro – in a series of publications throughout the 1920s, fully recast in the second, massive edition of *Zagreus* published in 1930 – argued for the existence of an Orphic Church, with priests and a clear body of doctrine, that profoundly influenced Greek and Roman antiquity, and set the stage for the mythical and theological elaboration of Pauline Christianity.²⁴⁹ Orphism, in that view, is the key to the origins of Christianity.

Among the reactions to Macchioro, André Boulanger’s 1926 *Orphée. Rapports de l’Orphisme et du Christianisme* (1925) stands out for the clarity of its rebuttal. Direct

Tendenzen kann nicht geleugnet werden.’ I am not sure a Lagrange or a Festugière would have recognised *katholizierende Tendenzen* in Zieliński’s ideas.

²⁴¹ Zieliński 1921, p. 5.

²⁴² Zieliński 1921, pp. 13, 44-5, 131-4.

²⁴³ Zieliński 1921, pp. 222-3.

²⁴⁴ *Actes* 1930, p. 4.

²⁴⁵ Nilsson 1935b, p. 181.

²⁴⁶ Wilamowitz 1932, p. 199.

²⁴⁷ See Graf and Johnston 2013, pp. 58-61.

²⁴⁸ Eisler 1921.

²⁴⁹ Macchioro 1930a and 1930b. Cf. Lannoy 2012.

influence on Christianity is denied, but Orphism is indeed portrayed as a mystical movement rooted in the Archaic period, and it is shown to have been ‘comme une préparation du Christianisme.’²⁵⁰ Another restatement of the old trope of the *praeparatio evangelica*, in other words. Father Lagrange was to greatly refine and expand those views in his 1937 *Les Mystères: L’Orphisme*, which is part of an exhaustive, monumental introduction to the New Testament, where he argues that the affinities between Orphism and Early Christianity are indeed real, but superficial and insignificant.²⁵¹ Still, the fact that an entire volume is dedicated to Orphism in what was probably the most prominent authorized Catholic introduction to the New Testament written in the interwar period is indicative of the charge attached to that scholarship in those years.²⁵² In the 1935 *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement*, Keith Guthrie recentred the focus on Greece and philosophy. Guthrie carefully traces the contours of a movement that comes into light around 600 BCE as an early effort at theological synthesis, and that had a real but circumscribed impact on early Greek thought, and most notably Plato. He accepts, with little resistance, the idea of a direct influence on St. Paul.²⁵³

Martin Nilsson’s magisterial 1935 article, ‘Early Orphism and Kindred Religious Movements’, predictably doesn’t, and it goes much further in terms of circumscribing the location of Orphism to the Archaic period, even if it disagrees with the minimalism of Wilamowitz. Nilsson argued for Orphism as ‘one of the many currents of mystic and cathartic ideas emerging in the Archaic age.’²⁵⁴ That is, the many Archaic notions of purification, metempsychosis, retributive justice, afterlife punishment and other such ideas are not reflections of Orphism, but, together with Orphism, they all reflect the religious developments of the age. Orphism is a phenomenon that belongs squarely to one moment: the later Archaic period. Its place in historical evolution is the factor that matters. There is no sacred book or uniform doctrine, no separate religion. If any Orphic originality is to be recognised, it is this: ‘The greatness of Orphism lies in having combined all this into a system, and in the incontestable originality which made the individual in his relationship to guilt and retribution the centre of its teaching.’²⁵⁵ The history of Archaic guilt is to be found in that material. Further along the way, the comprehensive and relentless, brilliantly hypercritical deconstruction of all scholarship on Orphism found in Ivan Linforth’s 1941 *The Arts of Orpheus* shattered the many houses of cards that had been built over the years, and it had lasting impact on further attempts to put the pieces back together. Enough, at least, for Dodds to wisely stay away in his 1951 masterpiece, although he made considerable use of the immense amount of literature devoted to Orphism in previous decades.²⁵⁶ His portrait of the Archaic period, in particular, is written on the extensive ruins of Orphic scholarship.

A final flashpoint to mention in this rapid survey is the question of personal vs social religion. Valéry’s reference to ‘the thinking individual in a struggle between personal life and life in society’ resonates with the programmes of research of those years, and scholarship on Greek religion reflected the anguished interrogations of the day about the space of free will in the face of mechanisation, mass culture’s increasing sway and the all-embracing ideological control demanded by totalitarian regimes.²⁵⁷ Should the study of Greek religion insist on the personal experience of the individual and the inner life of the free agent in his choices across

²⁵⁰ Boulanger 1925, p. 170.

²⁵¹ Cf. Edmonds 2013, pp. 58-9.

²⁵² See more generally Laplanche 2006.

²⁵³ Guthrie 1935, pp. 267-9.

²⁵⁴ Nilsson 1935b, p. 185; cf. Dodds 1951, pp. 171, n. 95, 176, nn. 127, 129.

²⁵⁵ Nilsson 1935b, p. 230.

²⁵⁶ Dodds 1951, pp. 147, 168, n. 79, 170, n. 88.

²⁵⁷ See e.g. Trevisi 1979.

high and low culture? Or should it emphasize regular social structures, groups and family, collective representations, and the evolution of the *polis*? This tension informs much of the work produced in those years, and both positions were defended with great energy. A systematically argued example of the second is the work of Louis Gernet. The most significant contribution to the field to come from the militant Left, Gernet's research placed the study of religious action and thought in the context of the overarching legal and political frameworks that organized life in the city. He showed how the cult of the gods and their myths reflected the changing order of society. Representations, not beliefs, are the proper objects of study.²⁵⁸

The ground-breaking 1917 *Recherches sur le développement de la pensée juridique en Grèce ancienne* set the stage for the programme of study that Gernet was to pursue all his life. In the first two thirds of the 1932 *Le génie grec dans la religion* (the last third is written by Boulanger), Gernet describes the relevant institutions and social praxis that define the religious system of the *polis*. Origins are deemphasized, and the category of the primitive is definitively abandoned. The apparent strangeness of ancient Greek religion is a structure with a logic of its own that is perfectly coherent and intelligible. There, at the heart of the so-called Greek miracle, what is rational or irrational is shown to lie in the eye of the beholder. Gernet never let anyone forget that Fustel de Coulanges' *La cité antique* was one of the foundations of the French sociological school, and he collaborated with the other heirs of Durkheim throughout the decades that followed the end of the First World War.²⁵⁹ After a lifetime of teaching Greek in Algiers, he was called in 1948 to the EPHE to direct research on the 'Anthropologie historique de la Grèce antique', and he directed the flagship *Année Sociologique* itself from 1949 to 1961.²⁶⁰ History and anthropology are fully intertwined in this programme. For the many who followed this centrally recognized agenda, Greek religion was always embedded.

Piety, for Gernet, is defined by its absence, and it embodies the proper position of the individual in a social system. Other approaches turned away from public cult and focused instead on the inner life of the individual, and the piety they emphasize is to be found in the realm of personal religion: private belief, intimate choice and the different levels of religiosity that coexist in the city. Bruno Snell published his magisterial *Die Entdeckung des Geistes* in 1946.²⁶¹ Although civic religion was clearly the dominant concern of scholarship, Greek *Religiosität* and the study of religious sentiment and individual religious emotions generated widespread interest from different quarters in those years.²⁶² No work captures this better than Father Festugière's *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, the set of Sather Lectures that was to follow close on the heels of *The Greeks and the Irrational* in 1952, and the culmination of decades of previous work on the topic, all anticipated in the 1932 *L'idéal religieux des Grecs et l'Évangile* (with a preface by Father Lagrange). The Dominican André-Jean Festugière, a friend and close collaborator of Nock and Dodds and an eminent historian of later Greek religion and philosophy, was a colleague of Gernet at the EPHE.²⁶³ In

²⁵⁸ Cf. Dodds 1951, pp. 53, n. 29, 56, n. 48.

²⁵⁹ Di Donato 1983.

²⁶⁰ See Di Donato 1982.

²⁶¹ Snell's book exerted a decisive influence on Dodds. See e.g. 1951, pp. 15, 22, n. 47, 24, n. 90, 25, n. 95, 51, n. 2, 197, n. 28.

²⁶² See e.g. Pfeiffer 1929, Nestle 1930-4, Nilsson 1936, 1960b.

²⁶³ He becomes Directeur d'Études at the EPHE in 1943 (n. 26); see Marichal 1982. The chalcenic Festugière published more than seventy books and hundreds of articles. He was, among many other high honours, made Foreign Member of the German *Ordre pour le Mérite* in 1963. His impact on *The Greeks and the Irrational* is massive; see e.g. Dodds 1951, pp. 124, n. 29, 127, n. 53, 147-8, 168, n. 79, 169, n. 84, 176, n. 127, 198, n. 35, 225, n. 6, 226, n. 9, 227, n. 23, 229, n. 33, n. 45, 232, n. 67, 233, n. 72, 234, n. 82, 240, 249, 251, 257, n. 20, n.

Personal Religion Among the Greeks, he follows the manifestations of popular and reflective piety from the Archaic period to Late Antiquity through a series of brisk sketches.

The book, dedicated to Werner Jaeger and the hope of a new humanist *paideia* in America, invites the reader to respect the genuine spiritual aspirations of Greek religion, to recognise the authenticity of its ability to foster the sentiment of proximity to the divine and answer man's thirst for the absolute. A teleology is followed from the 'gentle and naïve faith' of the Archaic period to the universal triumph of the Cosmic God.²⁶⁴ Tragedy already prefigures Hellenistic mysticism in its deep theological explorations.²⁶⁵ Quoting Dodds's commentary on the *Bacchae*, Festugière insists on Euripides' ability to communicate 'the inward feeling of unity with the θεῶς and through it with the god.'²⁶⁶ But it is Plato who is the leading figure of this narrative, and the long unfolding of the Platonic tradition its primary material. A subtext of the book is that the historical situation of Christianity in the religious culture of late Hellenism fulfilled the deep yearnings of the time, without there being any need to invoke influence or derivation. The profound affinity between the ancient pagan record and the Christian tradition offers rich material for meditation on the value of all true religion, and it opens a vertiginous window into the ancient solutions of the problems now misconstrued by Existentialism.²⁶⁷ The ancient efforts of the Greek inner self towards the contemplation of God show that the outward forms of Greek religion conceal a world of extraordinary vitality, just like the classical statues mentioned by Dodds in the delicious British Museum anecdote at the beginning of *The Greeks and the Irrational*.²⁶⁸ The paths to the *alogon* of divine ineffability reveal an awe-inspiring level of emotion and reality that cannot be conveyed by mere reason. The organic evolution of Hellenic religious culture directly engages the reader in a voyage of introspection. There and elsewhere, in the sociological research of the atheist Gernet just as in the historical spiritual exercises of Father Festugière, the Greek experience of the Irrational is efficiently made to question the reasons of today.

CONCLUSION

At a time when so many possible worlds lay within reach, the battle for the Irrational was a battle for the course of culture. Dodds, like Valéry, knew that civilizations die, and that knowledge informed his characteristic bird's-eye-view of scholarship. At the end of his 1929 article, 'Euripides the Irrationalist', the blueprint for so much of his later work, Dodds eloquently traces the contours of 'systematic irrationalism' (p. 103), the disease that would eventually kill Greek culture, and that also gave it some of its most sublime aesthetic monuments. Euripides is identified as its main figure at the heart of the Classical Enlightenment, and the great prophet of its savagely beautiful destructiveness. The concluding section sets up a larger context for the study:

But I need hardly remind you that at the present time its [rationalism's] supremacy is threatened from a great variety of quarters: by pragmatists and behaviourists, by

25, 259, n. 29, 260, n. 45, 261, n. 49, nn. 53-4, 262, n. 56, n. 64, 263, n. 67, 264, n. 71, nn. 74-5, 266, nn. 85-6, 267, n. 89, 304, n. 49, 306, n. 80.

²⁶⁴ Festugière 1954, p. vii.

²⁶⁵ Festugière 1954, p. 10.

²⁶⁶ Festugière 1954, p. 26.

²⁶⁷ Festugière 1954, p. 114.

²⁶⁸ Dodds 1951, pp. 1-2.

theosophists and by spiritualists, by Dr. Jung and by Dr. Freud. That is perhaps one reason why Euripides, who seemed so poor a creature to Schlegel and to Jowett, whom Swinburne could describe as a scenic sophist and a mutilated monkey, is for our generation one of the most sympathetic figures in the whole of ancient literature.²⁶⁹

Our generation is now attuned to the deep resonance of ‘the surd element’. It is also directly threatened by the imminence of the conflagration it can unleash on a world out of joint. Dodds casts himself simultaneously as the exegete of irrationalism, and a warner about the immense danger of its charms. The Greek Irrational is, very emphatically, a cautionary paradigm for today. Read before the Classical Association in 1929, as the fragile postwar order was starting to unravel, the text asks its audience to think about its own moment through the example of Greece. Addressing himself, this time, to the audience of America’s triumphant new order, Dodds was to renew his diagnosis twenty years later in California, standing on the ruins of Europe, and looking to the dire prospect of an uncertain future. But the Irrational he presents there is much more intrinsically intertwined with its opposite.

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²⁶⁹ Dodds 1929, p. 104.

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