ON TYRANT PROPERTY TURNED RITUAL OBJECT: POLITICAL POWER AND SACRED SYMBOLS IN ANCIENT GREECE AND IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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> It is only by repetition that signs and practices cease to be perceived or remarked; that they are so habituated, so deeply inscribed in everyday routine, that they may no longer be seen as forms of control—or seen at all. It is only then that they come to be (un-)spoken of as custom, (dis-)regarded as convention—and only disinterred, if at all, on ceremonial occasions when they are symbolically invoked as eternal verities.
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> Comaroff and Comaroff,
> *On Revelation and Revolution*

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the conceptualization of religious symbols in both classical scholarship on ancient Greek religion and social anthropology as indicative of where the two disciplines currently stand in relation to each other. Clifford Geertz's definition of religion remains "good to think with" for classicists because it reminds us of the importance of the symbolic dimension of religion that is frequently treated as a separate category in scholarly works in the field or is altogether absent. Moreover, the ongoing discussion of Geertz in social anthropology and the interdisciplinary study of religions has produced a rich array of new material for the classicist

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to consider. Rather than addressing his much-debated concept of "thick description," this article focuses on Geertz's considerably less explored conception of "religion as a response to chaos," the critical evaluation of it in the interdisciplinary study of religions, and the way in which it has been adapted in classical scholarship.

I argue that John Gould's article "On Making Sense of Greek Religion," which draws on Geertz, Godfrey Lienhardt, and other eminent anthropologists, reveals an inclination in classical scholarship to rely on outdated ethnographic notions long after they have been discarded as obsolete by other disciplines. I further argue that Gould, like Geertz, ultimately separates religious symbols from the domain of power. This separation not only helps to explain why it is so relatively easy for classical scholars to sideline the symbolic dimension altogether in their accounts of ancient Greek religion and society, it also illuminates why those scholars interested in the symbolic frequently depict religious symbols as aesthetic phenomena that can (once again) be separated from the "hard surfaces" (Morris 1993.32) of Greek life (viz. from politics and society). Current ethnographic studies reveal a more productive conceptualization of religious symbols as intrinsic to socio-political power. The explanatory potential of this approach for the study of ancient Greek religion is exemplified with regard to the cultural practice of the "recycling" of symbolic capital after democracy was restored at Athens in 403 B.C. as testified in a fragment from Philochorus.[1] With its focus on religious symbols and their relationship to the political dimensions of society, this article hopes to advance debate on the relationship between religion and society in the areas of classical scholarship, social anthropology, and the interdisciplinary study of religions.

I. CLIFFORD GEERTZ: SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
AS AN INTERPRETATIVE SCIENCE

1. Culture as a Symbolic System

Classical studies and anthropological scholarship have a long history of mutual borrowing and interdisciplinary exchange that goes back way beyond Geertz, but I shall start with a discussion of Geertz, his intellectual context, and the responses his work triggered within social anthropology as a way into the relationship between both disciplines.[2] Geertz's work has become foundational within social anthropology itself and in all other disciplines concerned with the study of culture. Even though social anthropology has now moved decisively beyond Geertz, students of religion as a symbolic system in particular still have to respond to his work, and the way in which they do so reveals important insights into the dynamics of the interdisciplinary debate.[3]

Geertz belongs to a small group of scholars whose individual contributions to the advancement of knowledge are not unconnected to each other but form a coherent agenda adding up to a large edifice of ideas. His standing as the most significant champion of the so-called "interpretative turn" in social anthropology is grounded in the fact that it was developed on two mutually reinforcing planes: his ethnographic agenda evolved in constant oscillation and mutual exchange with more general programmatic reflections on the scope and nature of the concepts used in social anthropology. In this regard, Geertz stood in the tradition of a strong trend in social anthropology in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century (Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie) that anticipated the methods of E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Bronislaw Malinowski.[4] That Geertz's framework for the study of religion is developed both in theory and in practice gives those

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2 See Cartledge 1994 for an outline of the history of the relationship between both disciplines. See also Humphreys 1978, esp. 15–30; Redfield 1991. For two early—now outdated—studies exploring the relationship between anthropology and the classics, see Evans 1908, Kluckhohn 1961.

3 Throughout this article, I refer to symbols and the "symbolic dimension" of religion in the Geertzian sense of "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception—the conception is the symbol's 'meaning,'" Geertz 1973c.91.

4 On this trend as well as on the intellectual influences on Geertz more generally, see Pals 1996.237.

who are keen to learn from him the unique opportunity of reading the two accounts against each other and exploring the extent to which his conceptual contribution has informed and is informed by his ethnographic practice.

In the early 1960s, Geertz began to develop his ethnographic agenda, which would change social anthropology and whose repercussions would be felt in neighbouring disciplines.[5] At the time, there was a larger trend in the American social sciences to move away from behaviourism and the methods of the natural sciences towards interpretation, in particular the interpretation of symbols (Kuper 1999, esp. 80–82). Geertz both embraced and advanced this move. He explicitly formulated his position in response to the then prevailing paradigms of positivism and functionalism, which he regarded as reductionist and merely scratching the surface of the kind of analysis social anthropology was able to offer. Geertz suggested that social anthropology should focus on the study of culture, rather than the narrower concept of society, because culture encompasses a much wider array of ideas, customs, values, motivations, and institutions than the concept of society is able to include (see, esp., Geertz 1973b). This was essentially a move away from the Parsonian sociology that had influenced him in his early professional years and towards an understanding of anthropology as an interpretative science (see Kuper 1999.83–86).

The focus on culture as the key unit of ethnographic inquiry and the radical redefinition of this concept is at the heart of Geertz's contribution to social anthropology and of his ongoing appeal to other areas of scholarly discourse. Following Max Weber's notion of man as "an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (Geertz 1973b.5), Geertz's concept of culture encompasses precisely those webs of significance: "The culture concept to which I adhere . . . denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973c.89).

Despite such succinct formulations, however, Geertz did not pursue a monolithic concept of culture. In fact, his understanding of it, and the way in which it should be researched, is one area in which one can best trace Geertz's intellectual development over time. Richard Parker points

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5 Early works of Geertz already demonstrate his interest in cultural analysis and include Geertz 1960, Geertz 1963a, and Geertz 1963b.

to a series of subtle shifts in Geertz's concept of culture.[6] Throughout his career, Geertz developed his notion of culture to allow for an ever higher degree of flexibility in the relationship between the symbolic and the non-symbolic. What started off as a simple program for human behaviour was soon extended into a "model for" and "model of" reality, and, finally, turned into a flexible medium of symbolic commentary on society. The second step is most succinctly formulated in his definition of religion as a cultural system, in which Geertz suggests that religion (like all systems of symbols) serves as both a "model for" and a "model of" reality. "Culture patterns . . . give meaning . . . to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves" (Geertz 1973c.93). His famous piece on the Balinese cockfight, then, features culture as a symbolic medium for social commentary. Geertz shows how the ritual of the cockfight reflects the modalities of Balinese society.

Such subtle shifts, however, should not obscure the fact that Geertz's concept of culture in its different forms and formulations is essentially semiotic. It focuses on meaning as encoded in and made possible by socially constructed symbols. To use an example from Geertz himself: whether a contraction of the eyelid is a sympathetic gesture of companionship (winking) or merely a more or less meaningless mannerism (twitching) depends on the situational symbolic value of the movement—a distinction which a purely formal description will not capture (see Geertz 1973b.6–7). Culture, according to Geertz, is thus the symbolic context that makes meaningful human interaction possible. This context is public, communal, and tangible and is, at least in principle, separate and separable from the psychological and social dimensions of society. As Daniel Pals nicely puts it (1996.241): "I cannot wink privately at you unless there is a context of meanings— shared by both of us—that enables you to take from the wink the same meaning I give to it."

Geertz's concept of culture is essentially semiotic, but it is not *just* semiotic. In his ethnographic studies, Geertz at times moves significantly beyond the reading of culture as a symbolic system. His account of Islam in Morocco and Indonesia, for example, includes much information on the historical background of these societies and on their social structure (Geertz 1968). Here and elsewhere, Geertz manages to investigate culture in its social and historical contexts without, however, reducing it to behavioural and

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6 Here and in the following, see Parker 1985.

social structures.[7] David Gellner points us to a (perhaps not so) surprising side effect of this: Geertz has "more detail on trade, irrigation, land-holding and village-level organisation" than, for example, the Marxist anthropologist Maurice Bloch (Gellner 1999.141).

Yet at the same time, Geertz is sometimes accused of neglecting the historical circumstances involved in the production of cultural "texts." As William Roseberry asserts, Geertz, in his discussion of the Balinese cockfight, mentions issues of gender, colonialism, and politics as impacting on the cockfight, but does not engage in a deeper discussion of their significance in the production and dissemination of cultural symbols.[8] This effectively excludes a historical dimension which would capture the processes by which the symbols were shaped.

The anthropologist's task, then, according to Geertz, is to explore cultural patterns of meaning, the symbolic dimension included in social interaction. Adapting a term from the English philosopher Gilbert Ryle, Geertz referred to the practice of ethnography as "thick description," a term which has since become programmatic of his entire agenda.[9] To give a "thick description" means going significantly beyond the narrow, formalistic "thin" description of social practices. "Thick description" explores the deeper symbolic dimension that precedes and is included in social action, a task which Geertz himself exemplifies in many of his own ethnographic studies, most notably perhaps in his exemplary piece on the Balinese cockfight (Geertz 1973d).

Taken together, Geertz's theoretical reflections on the nature of social anthropology and the ethnographic practice of "thick description" which it informed inaugurated a profound reorientation of social anthropology "not as an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning" (Geertz 1973b.5; see also Geertz 1980). The scope and methods of social anthropology now resembled those of other hermeneutical sciences, and this explains the influence of Geertz on different interpretative approaches such as the New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt and the cultural history of Natalie Zemon Davis and Robert Darnton.[10]

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7 See Munson 1986.23 on how this is the case for religion as a cultural system.

8 Roseberry 1989; see also Sewell 1997.36.

9 The programme of ethnography as "thick description" is developed in Geertz 1973b.

10 These scholars have pioneered methodological approaches for the study of culture. All three explicitly acknowledge the influence of Geertz (see Darnton 1984, Greenblatt 1997, Zemon Davis 2005).

As a result, the ethnographic agenda changed as well. Ethnographic research now progressed in a more piecemeal and cumulative manner. Ethnography no longer sought to "generalize across cases but to generalize within them" (Geertz 1973b.26). The search for grand syntheses was replaced in favour of a search for an evermore elaborate picture of cultural meanings. Various scholars have subsequently discussed the preference for the particular over the general as one of the most serious shortcomings of cultural anthropology as an interpretative science.[11] Can there be a true advancement of knowledge generated by interpretative anthropology beyond an increasingly detailed (but ultimately unverifiable) description of cultural phenomena—a mode of analysis which has largely lost its capacity to generalize across different cases? But despite such challenging questions, Geertz's agenda had a profound impact on the discipline of social anthropology. With the "symbolic turn" which Geertz inaugurated, social anthropology established itself as the leading discipline in the interdisciplinary study of cultures.

2. Religion as a Cultural System

Geertz's views on religion are central to his overall efforts to propagate a semiotic model of culture and the practice of ethnography as "thick description." His conceptual piece "Religion as a Cultural System," later republished in his seminal *The Interpretation of Cultures,* is amongst the most succinct and fully realised formulations of a cultural (symbolic) system. It firmly reflects the second stage in his intellectual development, in which he conceptualized culture as an extremely flexible symbolic medium of "making sense."[12] Geertz describes the individual elements of religion and their relationship to each other and explores the difference between religion and other symbolic forms of expression, such as art or science (Geertz 1973c). Several aspects of his general definition of culture are developed

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11 See, for example, Gellner 1999.136–37, Shankman 1984. Geertz's repositioning of the scope and methods of social anthropology has been widely criticised by scholars from a variety of backgrounds and positions (see Ortner 1997a). Positivists dislike his move towards lofty symbols, away from the general laws of the social sciences. Functionalists have criticised him for neglecting questions of the use and abuse of religious beliefs and practices in society. Finally, postmodernists and those with a general interest in semiotics have taken offence at his concept of signification.

12 See above and Parker 1985.63.

in detail, using religion as an example. In addition, several of Geertz's own ethnographic studies focus explicitly on the dimension of religion.[13]

Geertz formulates his definition of religion as a series of necessary propositions which he further "unpacks" throughout his article. He argues (1973c.90) that religion is:

> 1) a system of symbols which acts to 2) establish pow-
> erful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations
> in men by 3) formulating conceptions of a general order
> of existence and 4) clothing these conceptions with such
> an aura of factuality that 5) the moods and motivations
> seem uniquely realistic.

Proposition 1 stresses the symbolic and systematic aspects of religion, thus revealing Geertz's indebtedness to structuralism. A symbol is everything (Geertz himself mentions objects, acts, events, qualities, and relations as examples) that serves as a vehicle for a conception (the symbol's meaning) (see Geertz 1973c.91–94). At the heart of Geertz's definition of religion, however, is the interplay between ethos and worldview, included in propositions 2 and 3. Religious symbols evoke emotions of different intensity. Motivations, in contrast, have a "directional cast," that is, they make people inclined to act in a certain way (see Geertz 1973c.94–98). This powerful ethos of religion is grounded in its metaphysical dimension: religion relates these moods and motivations to a general order of existence—this is what makes them powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting.

The appeal of Geertz's definition of religion is certainly due at least in part to the balance it strikes between being general and specific, precise and vague. Unlike many other universal definitions of religion that tend to focus on a single essence of the religious, his definition includes a series of essential propositions.[14] These propositions include not only the symbolic dimension, but also explain the appeal of religious symbols to the emotional (moods and motivations), the worldview religion constructs (conceptions of a general order of existence), and, finally, the authoritative

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13 Geertz has explored various religious traditions. His major studies in this area are Geertz 1960, Geertz 1968.

14 A universalist (or essentialist) definition of religion is a definition that seeks to capture the essence of all religions. A historical definition, in contrast, looks at one specific historical religion.

and persuasive power of religion, which "clothes" general conceptions of order in an aura of factuality. The result is an extremely flexible definition encompassing within itself different ways of looking at religion.

At the same time, Geertz intentionally leaves certain areas of his definition of religion under-theorised. For example, he never spells out what the conceptions of a general order of existence that religion formulates are and whether or not they are grounded in truth (see Frankenberry and Penner 1999.634). The reason for this is that although, according to Geertz, all religions necessarily include a metaphysical dimension, they can do this in very different ways. The omission of an explicit evaluation of the truth-claims inherent in the metaphysical dimension of religion has the startling result that Geertz's definition has been embraced by both theology and the comparative study of religion.[15]

Geertz's universalist definition of religion is in line with his larger concept of culture. Geertz distinguishes between the cultural, social, and psychological dimensions in order to avoid the reductionism he criticised in functionalist or positivist accounts of religion. He looks at religion as a cultural fact in its own right first and not, as it were, as a mere expression of social needs and/or economic tensions as the functionalist perspective would have it (see Pals 1996.243). At the same time, as Frankenberry and Penner rightly point out, although Geertz focuses on giving a substantive account of religion as a symbolic system, one should not overlook the fact that a functionalist dimension is included in his definition of religion itself.[16] For Geertz, religion addresses the fundamental human need to create meaning. The definition of religion along these lines thus opens up the study of religion as the "thick description" of those systems of meanings that religions convey while locating their function in the very nature of *homo semioticus*.

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15 The vagueness in Geertz's definition concerning the nature of this authority and, as a result, the truth value of religion makes his definition appealing for the believer and non-believer alike and prepares the ground for communication between social anthropology and theology (see Morgan 1977). Frankenberry and Penner 1999.621 regard Geertz's lack of engagement with the truth conditions inherent in his definition of religion as a major flaw.

16 Frankenberry and Penner 1999.626. A substantive definition of religion is one which says what religion *is* (in contrast to a functionalist one that says what religion *does*).

II. THE SYMBOLIC IN CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP
ON ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION

Geertz's definition of religion as a cultural (symbolic) system has been influential in the field of social anthropology and beyond. It has inspired accounts as divergent as Dale Eickelman's (1985) on the role of religious intellectuals in Muslim societies, and José Casanova's (1994) on the role of religion in the modern world. The analysis of symbols has become an integral asset in the toolbox of social anthropology and the interdisciplinary study of religions alike.

In classical scholarship, however, symbolic analysis plays a much more contested and limited role. Geertz's approach does not translate easily into the study of ancient Greek religion. His model of religion as a symbolic system is formulated in too abstract and philosophical a fashion to reveal its immediate heuristic value for classical scholarship. If we look at how and where symbolic analysis features in current research in the field, it seems to be surprisingly absent. By and large, symbolic analysis has never really taken off in classical scholarship on ancient Greek religion. This relative lack of symbols is due, at least in part, to the fact that classical scholars are still under the spell of functionalism as the interpretative tool that seems best suited to pursue the larger agenda of current works in the field: to prove the direct relevance of Greek religious beliefs and practices for Greek society.[17] If the symbolic dimension features at all, it is mostly as a possible extension of structuralist or functionalist analysis.[18]

It is, of course, impossible to give a comprehensive overview here of the state of the study of religious symbols in classical scholarship. In the following, I focus instead on two specific areas of current research: the study of *pompeia* (ritual processions) and research on the deposition of votive offerings (dedications) at Greek sanctuaries, and investigate how religious symbols feature in current scholarship. The way in which these areas have

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17 The strong emphasis on the manifold links between the religious and the socio-political (neither, of course, distinctly defined in the ancient world) is itself a response to an earlier tradition in classical scholarship (e.g., the works of the Cambridge School) which depicted religion as a somewhat obscure aspect of Greek culture, separate and separable from Greek politics and society.

18 As, for example, in the works of the Paris School; see the outline of their program in Buxton 1981.

been approached will serve as a background against which I will develop an alternative model of religious signification.

      Votives. Classical archaeology has revealed literally millions of dedications deposited at Greek sanctuaries. Some items, such as *kouroi* and *korai* (figurines of boys and girls), representations of body parts (particularly at healing sanctuaries), as well as statues of gods and goddesses were specifically produced to serve as votives; others, including coins, jewellery, the spoils of warfare, and tripods, to name just a few examples of the broad spectrum of things that were deposited in Greek sanctuaries, originally served another purpose. Some of these votives bear an inscription revealing the names of those who made the dedication as well as their purpose.[19] Votives were dedicated either by individuals or by representatives acting on behalf of an entire community. Hence they represent personal religion as much as the communal religion of the polis.[20] Sometimes, as in the case of amulets, the religious practice of dedicating items to a divinity comes close to, or even overlaps with, what classical scholars refer to as magic. Dedications sometimes feature in the literary evidence, most prominently, perhaps, in Aristotle's discussion of *megaloprepeia* ("magnificence"), which includes an extensive commentary on dedications, and in Pausanias's *Description of Greece*.[21] In addition, we have numerous temple inventories featuring numerous dedications. This rich array of evidence makes the cultural practice of dedicating items at a temple one of the best attested aspects of ancient Greek religion.

      Traditionally, there is a distinction between dedications of elaborate craftsmanship (e.g., the famous Aphrodite of Knidos by Praxiteles or the Peplos Kore) and more mundane items without much aesthetic value. While the former frequently play a key role in the reconstruction of Greek art history, the latter receive much less scholarly attention.[22] Votive deposits were explored mainly by classical archaeologists, who concentrated on their collection, systematization, and description. More recently, however, ancient historians and classical archaeologists have sought to investigate the significance of dedications of both types by placing them within their

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19 See, for example, Lazzarini 1976.
20 On votives as representative of personal religion, see, esp., van Straten 1981.
21 See Pausanias's account of the sanctuaries of Olympia and Delphi in Paus. 5 and 6 (Elis and Olympia), 10 (Phokis and Delphi). See also Arist. *EN* 4.2.1–20.
22 See Whitley 2006 for a criticism of this separation.

socio-cultural and religious contexts. This has opened up a variety of inter-
esting avenues to pursue, including, for example, the link between the form
and function of a dedication.[23] Votive offerings appear to have fulfilled a
variety of roles, including to ward off danger, to bring about the long-awaited
advent of offspring, or to find a cure for a disease.

As Walter Burkert rightly argues, however, at the very core of the
dedication of items at sanctuaries is an act of symbolic exchange (1987.43–
44). Mortals invest "symbolic capital" in a specific god, who will reciprocate
the value in his or her area of competence (or has already done so).[24] Besides
prayer and sacrifice, the dedication of votives is therefore a third means by
which human beings establish symbolic "traffic" between their own, mortal
sphere and that of divinity. The form of this "traffic" and its volume provide
interesting insights into the relationship between the two spheres. But there
is yet more to seeing dedications as symbolic capital: the public display of
votive offerings within a sanctuary long after their original dedication adds
another a layer of symbolic "investment" which is ultimately also directed
towards the members of the worshipping community itself. Temple inven-
tories displayed on *stelai*, in particular, provided an additional medium for
the dissemination of symbolic capital. Because dedications reflect a variety
of key moments (such as warfare, etc.) within the communal life of a city,
it is certainly correct to point out that "the temple treasure . . . embodied
. . . the whole city, its organization, its public life and its achievements"
(Linders 1987.120). Further interesting questions follow: what were the
cultural conventions guiding and regulating the investment of dedications
as "symbolic capital"? Who could invest a sanctuary with symbolic capital
and remove it? And why were some items disposed of relatively soon after
their dedication while others remained in place for a long period of time?
Despite the obvious merits of such an approach, however, this avenue is
rarely pursued.[25] In this area of study, functionalism still takes the form of
the investigation of dedications as a direct means to achieve one's ends,
without, however, devoting much consideration to the symbolic dimension
of this transaction. A comprehensive study which investigates the symbolic

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23 See van Straten 1981, Alroth 1989. See also the survey by Osborne 2004.

24 The most succinct conceptualization of "symbolic capital" is, of course, Bourdieu
    1977.171–83.

25 A number of scholars occasionally invoke the symbolic dimension of dedications, includ-
    ing (but not limited to) Linders 1987.118–22, Langdon 1987, Osborne 1994, Morris
    2000.277.

dimension of dedications at Greek sanctuaries is long overdue. Scholars still use the account of Rouse 1902, which is now conceptually outdated.

   Processions. While the symbolic "value" of votives has not been fully appreciated in classical scholarship, processions regularly feature in the scholarly literature as a primary symbolic medium of ancient Greek religion. Because of the rich literary, iconographic, and epigraphic evidence available for the study of processions, it is possible for classical scholars to appreciate the symbolic value of the different elements and features of individual processions. It is no exaggeration to say that practically every aspect of a procession is considered symbolic: who participated (and who did not), what route was chosen, and, in particular, the kind of objects displayed during the procession. Greek religion saw "the development of a class of ritual equipment which, whatever its original or notional function in ritual performed at the sanctuary, came to be thought of as primarily conspicuous wealth to be displayed in the procession, the *pompê*, and was referred to as *pompeia* . . . The procession had become an end in itself" (Jameson 1999.325).

   Almost every festival featured one or several processions—and we know that there were many festivals throughout the year at Athens and elsewhere in the Greek world.[26] Processions, however, were more than a simple transfer of ritual objects from one place to another before a communal sacrifice.[27] They were a public spectacle and, as such, about performance and spectatorship (see, i.e., Kavoulaki 1999). As Jennifer Neils succinctly puts it: "Ostentation and display play a prominent role in procession, whether they come in the form of musical accompaniment, elaborate dress, or aristocratic conveyances, like horse-drawn chariots" (1996.178). The literary description of specific processions, the iconography of processions as depicted on Greek vases, drinking cups, and, most prominently perhaps, on the Parthenon frieze at Athens, testify to the rich and many-layered texture of this religious spectacle.[28] Rather than a realistic representation of a specific procession, pictorial representations of processions depict idealized

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26 See Parker 2005.155–217 and 486–87 on Athenian festivals and the festival year.

27 On different types of processions, see Nilsson 1916. See Connor 1987 on processions as a means for political leaders (such as Cleisthenes, Pisistratus, and Solon) "to articulate community values and emerging consensuses about state policy" (50). See also Motte 1987.

28 See Neils 1996. For the description of processions in literary sources, see, for example, Hdt. 1.60, Ath. 196a–203b. See van Straten 1995, plate 2, for the discussion of a procession depicted on a drinking cup.

versions, highlighting the aspects that were considered particularly endowed with cultural meaning (Maurizio 1998).

In current scholarship, processions are frequently characterised as a prime platform for communal self-representation and public display and therefore are taken to be reflective of the socio-political structures of Greek society.[29] In particular, the procession of the Panathenaea, amongst the most prominent of Athenian festivals, with its parading of different socio-political groups, has been taken as representative of the democratic structures of Athens.[30] Processions hence ultimately support a picture in which religious structures map onto the socio-political structure of society. Some festivals, however, in particular those associated with Dionysos (such as the Anthesteria and the Lenaea festivals at Athens), include processions which feature the display of *phalloi*, for example, or the singing of obscene songs, and challenge the norms and conventions of everyday life.[31] Rather than a simple representation of social structures, such processions (and the festivals to which they belong) are seen as reformulating social structures through the temporary inversion of the ordinary.[32] Because of these manifold links between processions and social order, however, individuals at times use processions as tools to achieve their own ends.

An examination of current research on votives and processions reveals that the potential of symbolic analysis has not yet been fully realized in classical scholarship. In particular for the dedication of votive offerings as a cultural practice, many questions concerning their role as "symbolic capital" remain unaddressed. Geertz's definition of religion remains "good to think with" for the classical scholar because it reminds us of the symbolic dimension of ancient Greek religion, which should no longer be neglected by scholars. A more thorough embrace of Geertz, and of symbolic

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29 See (amongst others) Kavoulaki 1999, Bremmer 1994.39–43, Jameson 1999. See Maurizio 1998 on the relationship between the Panathenaic procession and Athenian democracy, arguing that the procession did not just reflect politics but provided a platform for the expression of different, even diverging, modes of identity and belonging.

30 Neils 1992.27, discussed (and criticised by) Maurizio 1998.297, Wohl 1996.26, who both prefer a more critical perspective which sees the Panathenaea as "a site of political contestation" (Maurizio 1998.333, 415, note 3).

31 On *phalloi* displayed during processions, see, for example, Ar. *Ach.* 243, Semos in Athen. 622b–c. Besides such scattered literary references, there is also a very rich iconography of phallic display.

32 For a succinct formulation of this interpretation of Dionysos and his worship, see Burkert 1985.161–67.

analysis generally, promises to open up a variety of interesting avenues for the classical scholar to pursue. This would move the discipline away from an all-too-narrow focus on individual practices and social structures in the study of ancient Greek religion.

The picture looks a little better for the study of processions. But the look at how processions feature in current works in the field reveals a tendency for classical scholars to see symbolic analysis as a mere extension of structuralist or functionalist analysis. Processions are seen as representing existing socio-political structures. At times they also maintain these structures through the temporary inversion of the ordinary. As such, processions (and the religious more generally), serve as an interesting extension of the study of society and social structure. But with the exception of W. R. Connor's interpretation of Pisistratus's return, they are rarely seen as intrinsic to the power discourses driving that society.[33]

Because of the reluctance of classical scholars to embrace Geertz and symbolic analysis, it is all the more significant that Geertz has inspired one of the most authoritative accounts of ancient Greek religion: John Gould's influential essay "On Making Sense of Greek Religion." It is to a discussion of this essay that I shall now turn. What can we learn from looking at Gould's attempt to translate Geertz's definition of religion into classical scholarship, an attempt to reveal its intrinsic explanatory power for the study of ancient Greek religion?

III. JOHN GOULD:
ON MAKING SENSE OF GREEK RELIGION

1. Greek Religion between the Primitive and the Sublime

John Gould's piece "On Making Sense of Greek Religion," published first in a collection of articles in 1985 and republished in another in 2001, stands out in its use of ethnographic material in that it does much more than draw on ethnographic data in order to explain certain aspects of

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33 In 550 B.C., for example, when Pisistratus returned from exile, he staged an elaborate procession involving a woman dressed up as Athena with the ultimate goal to reestablish his position as a tyrant at Athens (see Hdt. 1.60.2–5). Connor interprets this incident as an example of the theatricality of Athenian society, as a "ritual drama" involving both Pisistratus and the Athenian onlookers and "affirming the establishment of a new civic order" (Connor 1987.46).

Greek religious beliefs and practices. Gould relies on studies by Clifford Geertz, Godfrey Lienhardt, and other eminent anthropologists in order to explain the nature of ancient Greek religion as such. It is in many ways an ambitious attempt to define, with the help of comparative data, the very core of ancient Greek religion. What can we learn from it with regard to how anthropological models are represented in classical scholarship?

Gould's article aims to bring out equally the eternal, sublime *and* the primitive, archaic aspects of ancient Greek religion. Gould starts from the premise that we should not make a judgemental distinction between mystical, magical, and superstitious ways of thinking, on the one hand, and scientific or common sense ones, on the other (Gould 1985 [2001].2–3). He sees them all as equally valid ways of explaining the world. Religion, he argues, is not a pseudo-science. He then sets out to "make sense" of Greek religion as a way of dealing with the realities of ancient Greek life. In Gould's account, the archaic, primitive aspects of ancient Greek religion reflect the primitive realities of life in ancient Greece. The Greeks, like other ancients, Gould argues, were subject to disease and natural disasters in a much more immediate fashion than modern societies (Gould 1985 [2001].6). Moreover, they lacked the technical and scientific means that could have eased the instant and pressing impact of these natural forces. The ancient world is a world of crop failures, famines, and plagues, a world in which "chaos . . . is never far away" and which was "far closer to present-day India than to anything in our own immediate experience" (Gould 1985 [2001].6). Gould goes on to explain the darker aspects of ancient Greek religion as a way of responding to these uncertainties and challenges. The slaughter of daughters in Greek mythology, the belief in divine anger and retribution, as well as the occurrence of disturbing revelatory dreams and of divine possession reflect these uncertainties of Greek life. They address the uncanny and threatening aspects of human existence and reflect the doubts and anxieties resulting from them (Gould 1985 [2001].9).

But Gould also highlights the presence of the sublime. In particular in Homeric divinity he sees a manifestation of a layer of Greek religion which is both elevated and cognitively sophisticated. The Homeric gods, he states, "are imagined as comprising an extended family of anthropomorphic beings, with Zeus . . . as head and master of the company. Conceived as a metaphor of human experience, this is a brilliant stroke; the model of the family provides a framework within which we can intuitively understand both unity and conflict as the working out of a complex web of loyalties, interests, and obligations" (Gould 1985 [2001].24–25). For Gould, the par-

ticular explanatory power of the Homeric pantheon lies in its capacity to embrace both unity and diversity: "The Homeric image of divinity is an image of marvellous and compelling adequacy; it underwrites and explains the human sense of contradiction and conflict in experience, and yet contains contradiction within a more fundamental order" (Gould 1985 [2001].25). But even behind the brilliance of the Olympian gods as exemplified by Homer, Gould detects a darker side of Greek religion in the Fates, Furies, Gorgons, and other "older and more primitive powers" of Hesiodic myth and in the prominent role they get to play in Greek tragedy (Gould 1985 [2001].25–26). Gould sees the coexistence of both the archaic/primitive and the elevated/sublime dimensions as being at the very core of ancient Greek religion and of all religions. "The essence of divinity lies in the paradoxical coexistence of incompatible truths of about human experience. In this there is much that is universal in the creation of religious imagery, and much that is illuminatingly Greek" (Gould 1985 [2001].32).

The distinction between the primitive and the sublime, however, is an odd one. It places Gould's account somewhat uneasily between the traditional and more recent self-fashionings of classical studies and of social anthropology. Traditionally, social anthropology and classical studies stood at divergent, even opposing, ends of the spectrum of disciplines concerned with the study of culture. While the former specialised in allegedly "primitive" societies, the latter constructed the teaching of Greco-Roman language and culture as the vehicle of an education that ultimately served western elitism. This image of the ancient world was still heavily indebted to the Victorian view of the "Glory that was Greece" as the exemplar of a rational and enlightened society (see Cartledge 1994.4). In his provocative study *The Greeks and the Irrational,* E. R. Dodds fundamentally challenged this image. By showing not only the presence of "the irrational" (in the form of shamanism, maenadism, magic) in the rational (e.g., Greek philosophical reasoning) and vice versa, Dodds effectively unmasked both categories as a false dichotomy. He also challenged the elevated picture of Greece and aligned the study of the Greco-Roman world with that of other contemporary cultures. Since then the rational, the irrational, and the non-rational have largely vanished from scholarly discourse.[34] Moreover, classics has largely stepped back from its supremacist claims, together, perhaps, with

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34 The rational still features variously in Oswyn Murray's works, most notably, perhaps, in Murray 1997. See also Harrison's critique (Harrison 2006).

the decline of Greek and Latin in secondary education. And anthropologists these days would surely frown upon a reference to any culture (at home or abroad) as "primitive." Gould's account follows in Dodds's footsteps in attempting to present a complex picture of ancient Greek religion which includes both rational and irrational aspects. Yet by evoking the dark and the light, the primitive and the sublime as fundamental categories, Gould's account appears to be heavily laden with anthropological notions that were already outdated by the time his article was first published.

The most worrying aspect of Gould's use of ethnographic material, however, is his failure to differentiate between religion as represented in Greek literature, on the one hand, and the ethnographic data of the anthropologist, on the other. While Gould's point, that we should not reduce Homeric religion to mere literary fiction (Gould 1985 [2001].25), is well taken, it is disturbing to see him move so easily between ancient Greece and modern societies. As Paul Cartledge points out, data derived from social anthropology is mainly used in classical Greek scholarship in two ways. Firstly, in order to compare and to fill the gaps in the ancient evidence with the much more abundant material available from ethnographic research— Cartledge calls scholars pursuing this approach the "lumpers." Secondly, it is used as a contrasting background against which the specific features of the ancient data are brought to light (the "splitters").[35] Gould mostly belongs to the first category of "lumpers." For what Gould in effect offers is the application of a universal definition of religion (religions are "languages" that formulate responses to the world) tailored to conceptualize the historically specific religion of the ancient Greeks. In fact, Gould's definition oscillates between the two poles of a universal (or anthropological) and a culturally specific (or historical) definition of religion. Gould thus does not use data derived from social anthropology primarily to find an essentialist definition of religion that would include the Greeks. Instead, in his claim that religion *is* a response to the world, he presupposes such an essence. This presupposition of essence then serves as a common denominator enabling him to compare Greek religion with that of other cultures.

Gould repeatedly refers to Godfrey Lienhardt's seminal study on

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35 Cartledge 1994. The anthropological method of the "splitters" has shaped recent trends in the writing of history, in particular of cultural history à la Darnton, who uses "the strange" (that which is not directly intelligible) as an entry point to recover another reality than the one of the historian (see Darnton 1984, esp. 3–7).

the religion of the Dinka, "because it offers a wealth of recorded detail that is hardly ever available in the Greek evidence" (Gould 1985 [2001].9). Yet the way in which he compares Dinka religion and ancient Greek religion entirely disregards the form in which information on ancient Greek religion is available to us. The unusual and emotionally detached behaviour of a young Dinka boy, who showed uncontrolled movement, reminds Gould of the Cassandra scene in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. Gould compares the interpretation by the Dinka of the boy's actions as a sign of divine possession to the response of the Chorus to the behaviour of Phaedra in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. The Dinka example, Gould argues, "could be rendered without distortion into Greek terms" (Gould 1985 [2001].10–11). He even goes so far as to reverse the narrative sequence of an incident related by Herodotus to make the ancient example fit his explanatory framework. For Gould, the story of the Spartan Glaucus, whose family had become extinct during the lifetime of Herodotus, serves as an example of an uncanny event which is explained as the result of various religious offences (the breach of an oath, the dishonest consultation of an oracle). Yet this explanation is valid only, as Gould readily admits, if we reverse the sequence of events as outlined by Herodotus in 6.86 (Gould 1985 [2001].13). If we follow the story as outlined in the *Histories*, however, the episode involving Glaucus seems to be exploring questions of justice and injustice in the context of the divine.[36] Significantly, perhaps, in this reading, the destruction of Glaucus's family appears to be the ultimate consequence of his immoral behaviour, a representation of the gravity of that behaviour, rather than a trigger for religious sense-making by Herodotus and others.

As David Gellner pointedly remarks: "Anthropologists are specialists in other people's meanings" (1999.136). It is in this sense, perhaps, that the classicist is also essentially an anthropologist, despite the tendency, still sometimes found in classical scholarship, to convert the ancients—in the words of Moses Finley—"into good chaps practically like us" (1985.xiii). Classics and anthropology share many thematic interests and face common methodological problems which challenge all who strive to understand a culture different from their own. But despite the obvious synergies between the two disciplines, there are also profound differences which are frequently glossed over by classical scholars drawing on ethnographic material. To state the obvious: anthropologists work with the living, while classicists

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36 See the interpretation of Harrison 2000.117–20.

explore a culture that has long ceased to exist. Classical scholars are there-
fore unable to engage in that most cherished of anthropological methods,
participant observation. Their "informants" are illustrious figures such as
poets, historians, and philosophers. These are, in the anthropological sense, at
least one step removed from the cultural practice itself and can be accessed
only through the medium of literature. These differences, however, make it
necessary to modify and test the models derived from social anthropology
in terms of their applicability to classical scholarship. With regard to our
investigation, this means that we must consider the symbolic dimension of
Greek religion within its literary contexts first. How is the representation of
its symbols shaped and determined by the generic conventions of a given
work? How do religious symbols fit into the overall outlook of a work?
Only when we have answered such questions can we move on to estab-
lish the role of these symbols with regard to cultural practice. Despite its
undeniable merits, Gould's account shows less care than one would wish
in the handling of comparative data. In addition, his account seems heav-
ily laden with outdated anthropological concepts. A close look at another
example of Gould's use of the Greek literary evidence identifies Gould's
reception of Geertz as central to his use of ethnographic data. His discus-
sion of the horrific suicide of the Spartan king Cleomenes demonstrates
that Gould, like Geertz, constructs religious symbols as separate from the
domain of power.

2. Geertz, Gould, and the Symbolic Dimension
of Ancient Greek Religion

In Book 6 of the *Histories*, Herodotus reports that after Cleomenes
returned from Arcadia, he behaved so erratically that his relatives decided
to restrain him.[37] Cleomenes, however, managed to get possession of a
knife and slowly sliced up his own body until he died. Herodotus tells us
that the majority of the Greeks believed that this was some form of divine
punishment—and disagreement erupted only about the nature of Cleomenes'
offence. The Athenians, for example, believed that his invasion of the sacred
land of Demeter and Persephone in Eleusis triggered divine punishment. The
Argives, in turn, attributed his death to the disrespect he showed towards

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37 Hdt. 6.75–84, Gould 1985 (2001).12–13. For a brilliant reading of the different interpre-
    tative layers that can be drawn from Herodotus's account of Cleomenes more generally,
    see also Robert Parker's inaugural lecture (Parker 1998).

Argive fugitives and the holy ground of Argos, while the rest of the Greeks maintained that it was a result of his bribery of the Delphic oracle. The Spartans themselves, however, found a much more worldly and ultimately un-Spartan explanation for the shocking death of their king: his adoption of Scythian drinking habits.

Gould reads the diverging Greek interpretations of Cleomenes' suicide as different responses to an "uncanny" incident: "Problems of interpretation, where conflict of interest may be reflected in conflict of interpretation are bound to occur. The horrific self-mutilation and suicide of the Spartan king Cleomenes is uncanny enough to be a sign of divine activity" (Gould 1985 [2001].12).

The claim that religion is a response to chaos—chaos understood as a "tumult of events which lack not just interpretation but interpretability"— is perhaps Gould's most significant conceptual borrowing from Geertz (Gould 1985 [2001].5).[38] This claim, however, is based on a variety of further notions that Gould shares with Geertz. His reading of Geertz involves sophisticated conceptual borrowing and adaptation, and goes beyond a simple takeover of his major premises. In contrast to Geertz's compact list of necessary propositions, which he introduces in the beginning of his essay, Gould's definition of religion evolves throughout his article. Both scholars' definitions take the form of a series of essentialist claims about the nature and quality of religion.

Gould adopts from Geertz the notion of religion as a cultural system. He sets out to define Greek religion as "a complex and quite subtle statement about what the world is like and a set of responses for dealing with that world" (Gould 1985 [2001].2). The intellectual debt to Geertz is immediately apparent if we take into account Gould's further addition to his definition (Gould 1985 [2001].4):

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38 It might be a trivial point to make, but this is a reductionist view of "world" and ultimately also of religion as a response to it. For to reduce "world" (as relevant for the study of religion) to "chaos" means to assign to religion a place in society which deals only with those aspects of life which cannot be explained otherwise (aspects which are thus perceived as chaos). On religion as a response to chaos, see also Geertz 1973c.99–108. Geertz, of course, did not "invent" the religion-as-response-to-chaos hypothesis himself; it has a much longer history in scholarly discourse. It was particularly developed in the sociology of religion (see, for example, Berger 1969, esp. 51–52). Nor was Gould the first scholar to use this hypothesis in classical scholarship (for an early example of this line of reasoning, see Grote 1862.296–98). A productive discussion of the link between religion and chaos can also be found in Smith 1978.

> If we want an analogy to help us understand religion, one
> that will direct our attention positively to what is important
> in religious systems, we should turn . . . to language. Like
> language, religion is a cultural phenomenon, a phenom-
> enon of the group (there are no "private" religions, any
> more than there are "private" languages, except by some
> metaphorical devaluation of the two terms), like language,
> any religion is a system of signs enabling communica-
> tion both between members of the group in interpreting
> and responding to experience of the external world and
> in the individual's inner discourse with himself as to his
> own behaviour, emotional and private.

While the symbolic aspect is included in the analogy between reli-
gion and language (and his reading of language as a "system of signs"), the
second part of Gould's article explicitly stresses the systematic character
of the "language" of Greek religion as defined in the first.[39] For Gould, as
for Geertz, religion is a cultural phenomenon in the sense that it transcends
the individual ("there are no 'private' religions, any more than there are
'private' languages"). Both definitions link a substantive account of religion
as a system of signs to a functionalist one that describes what religion *does*
in society. It *formulates* a general order of existence (Geertz); it *provides* a
set of responses for dealing with the world (Geertz/Gould).[40]

However, despite the centrality of this claim to Gould's argument,
his account leaves curiously under-theorized the question of exactly how
the two key elements of his definition, "world perceived as chaos" and
"response," are related to each other. Gould seems to suggest that the two
are separate categories, that "world" exists, if not necessarily prior to, at
least independently from, "response." The same sense of conceptual sepa-
ration between "world" and "response" is implied in his suggestion that
to "make sense" of Greek religion involves a two-stage process, that both
layers of "world" and "response" can (at least in theory) be considered
separately (Gould 1985 [2001].5):

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39 See Gould 1985 (2001).14–33 for Gould's account of the systematic quality of Greek
   religion.
40 On substantive and functional theories of essence in the comparative study of religion, see
   Saler 1993.24.

> . . . to make sense of it, to see what religion is a response
> to, and what kind of response it is, we need . . . to take
> account of differences of two kinds: firstly, differences of
> the world, that is between our experience of the external
> world and that of the ancient Greeks, and secondly, insti-
> tutional differences, in the response, differences between
> two traditions and conventions in the organization of reli-
> gious thought and behaviour.

This suggestion directly echoes the recommendation of Geertz to separate
the interpretation of symbols from investigation of their relationship to the
socio-political sphere. "The anthropological study of religion is therefore
a two-stage operation: first, an analysis of the system of meanings embod-
ied in the symbols which make up the religion proper, and, second, the
relation of these systems to social structural and psychological processes"
(Geertz 1973c.125).

Like Gould, Geertz conceptualizes the interpretation of religion in
two steps. Gould, however, seems to apply the strict division between the
two interpretative steps much more strongly and schematically than Geertz.
He sets out to identify the differences between ancient and modern experi-
ences of the world, differences which he sees as ultimately grounded in the
larger degree of contingency of Greek life. It is in this context that Gould's
observations concerning the archaism and primitivism of ancient Greek life
belong. The Greeks, like other ancients, he argues, were less protected from
natural forces such as famine and disease than modern societies (Gould
1985 [2001].6). Moreover, they lacked the technical and scientific means
that could have eased the instant and pressing impact of these natural forces.
The ancient world is a world of crop failures, famines and plagues, a world
that Gould finds comparable to present-day India.

Gould concludes his account of the high degree of contingency in
Greek culture and society by pointing out that "in such a world, the threat
of chaos was never far away. Yet the religious institutions and systems of
belief of the ancient Greeks were equally different, less structured, less
worked out than those we tend to take for granted" (Gould 1985 [2001].6).
Is Gould implying a connection? Is he suggesting that the flexibility of a
religious structure somehow participates in/follows from/mirrors/represents
the lack of structure in a "world" perceived as chaos?

Gould seems to imply a structural analogy between "world" and
"religion": "The improvisatory character of Greek myth is not just a literary

fact, not only the source of its perennial vitality in literature, but also the guarantee of its centrality in Greek religion. It is not bound to forms hardened and stiffened by canonical authority, but mobile, fluent and free to respond to a changing experience of the world" (Gould 1985 [2001].5). It is the flexibility of Greek myth and ritual that enables the "language" of Greek religion to represent and respond to chaos perceived as a lack of meaning. But Gould never addresses the question of how this structural analogy comes about. He does not explain to what extent the versatile structure of Greek religion is related to the lack of structure in the world as experienced by the Greeks. This question, however, is of paradigmatic importance because it sets up the way in which religion is studied in relation to other aspects of Greek culture and society.

     While Gould could be forgiven for not working out the semiotic implications of his "religion-as-language analogy" in great detail, this semiotic vagueness leads to a more fundamental problem he shares with Geertz. Talal Asad, a social anthropologist at City University of New York with a particular interest in the concepts involved in the comparative study of religions, extends his criticism of Geertz to the claim that Geertz's conceptualization of religion has, in effect, resulted in the separation of religion from the domain of power.[41] Asad sees this as a problem intrinsic to universal definitions of religion, that is, to definitions of religion that identify the essence of all religions. Like all universal definitions of religion, Asad argues, the account Geertz gives of religion as a cultural system allows the separation of the religious symbol from the social practice which establishes its meaning. The same point applies even more forcefully to Gould, who shares Geertz's conception of religious signification. By conceptualizing both layers separately, both scholars set religious symbols apart from the social actions and processes from which they derive their meaning. In effect, this means assigning religious symbols a *sui generis* quality.[42]

     To return to the example of Cleomenes' suicide and the responses

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41 Asad 1993; see also Asad 1983. Asad is perhaps the most serious representative of the materialist line of criticism with regard to Geertz's conceptualisation of the religious. He is part of a relatively recent trend in social anthropology that not only acknowledges the significance of the historical dimension in understanding foreign cultures, but also historicises the methods and concepts used in their investigation.

42 Compare Asad's point on religious symbols being *sui generis* in Geertz's concept of religion (Asad 1983.250). On Geertz's tendency to turn culture into an aesthetic object, see Ortner 1997a.10.

this surely "uncanny" incident triggered in Greek religious discourse, there is much more to the varying interpretations of the death of Cleomenes than Gould is ready to include. The various interpretations reflect the ways in which Greek religion as an explanatory discourse is used to negotiate different, even diverging concerns. The different interpretations of Cleomenes' death use religion as an authoritative discourse to validate a model of historical causation that supports local interests and maintains the status quo. Athens and Argos use the common Greek "language" of religion to draw a distinction between their own interests and those of Sparta (as represented by their king) and, at the same time, to authorize their claims and to discredit those of Sparta. The Spartan interpretation, in contrast, is an attempt to challenge and ultimately refute this use of religious discourse as an authoritative discourse by denying the incident any religious relevance. Gould, however, does not move beyond a simple narration of the different Greek responses to the death of Cleomenes. In his account, the hidden power discourses and political ideologies driving the diverging representations of royal suicide as a divine sign (or merely as a result of a much more worldly over-enthusiastic consumption of alcohol) are not unpacked. Arguably, however, it is exactly these competing power discourses and hidden ideologies that Herodotus found intriguing and that compelled him to preserve the different voices within his own account. But Gould is as indifferent to their existence as he is to the narrative framing of the evidence. The example of Cleomenes' death serves him simply to demonstrate how religion "makes sense" of the world as a response to chaos.

Paradoxically, perhaps, Gould's account seeks to place Greek religion in Greek society but sketches too schematic a relationship between the two. This harbours the real risk of seeing culture (and religion as part of it) as an aesthetic object that can be disentangled from the hard surfaces of Greek life (see also Morris 1993.32, Ortner 1997a.10). Gould, like Geertz, "moves away from a notion of symbols that are intrinsic to signifying and organizing practices, and back to a notion of symbols as meaning-carrying objects external to social conditions and states of the self" (Asad 1993.31). Because of his somewhat limited conceptualization of the religious symbol, Gould does very little to help translate Geertz and symbolic analysis more generally into classical scholarship on ancient Greek religion. He follows the prevailing line too closely to challenge scholarly conceptualisations of ancient Greek religion.

IV. THE SYMBOLIC AS ORNAMENTAL IN CLASSICAL
SCHOLARSHIP ON ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION

The extent to which the conceptualization of religious symbols as separate and separable from the domain of power is "embedded" in current scholarship in the field is best demonstrated by the fact that even those scholars who focus on the study of religious representation frequently present religious symbols as aesthetic objects that can (once again) be separated from the "hard surfaces" of Greek politics and society. A good example is Robin Osborne's otherwise excellent article on Greek notions of death (Osborne 1988). Writing against the widespread trend of using the material record as a mere illustration of assumptions derived from the literary evidence, Osborne corrects the idea of a single, uniform construal of death in archaic and classical Greece. The innovative nature of Osborne's account is particularly noticeable if we compare his study with those of other students of ancient Greek religion. Scholars like Donna Kurtz and John Boardman, Robert Garland, and Ian Morris focus extensively on the ritualistic aspects of death and, in doing so, depict a largely monovocal statement of what Osborne shows to be a polyvalent discourse.[43]

Juxtaposing several representations and pictures related to death and the dead, Osborne sketches an intriguing image of a whole spectrum of alternative notions of what it meant to die. In his account, the visual representation of death draws the spectator into a sophisticated negotiation of belief and practice, of subject and object, "of seeing and being seen" (Osborne 1988.4). Through the careful "unpacking" of imagery, he is able to uncover deeper layers of meaning. The pictorial representation of several mythological scenes on a pot used to bury a young boy in Eleusis, for instance, is interpreted as "a construal of death, a discussion of the nature of death as sensory deprivation. Death comes when the visual world closes in on you when you yourself are to be seen in a pot" (Osborne 1988.4).

Osborne's account goes a long way in demonstrating how productive symbolic analysis can be for the study of ancient Greek religion. The strength of his contribution lies in its revelation of different levels of symbolic meaning in the imagery presented and in the links he establishes between visual/artistic context and the situational context of the individual burial. His account reveals that Greek construals of death and the dead are

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43 Kurtz and Boardman 1971, Garland 1985, Morris 1992.

vehicles for much larger conceptions of life, community, and the individual. Ultimately, Osborne's approach reveals a picture of ancient Greek religion as a central mediator between the individual and community and between life and death. Or to borrow a metaphor from Geertz/Gould: Osborne's account shows that Greek religion does indeed serve as a "language," not so much for the formulation of final answers, but as an instrument of reflection "upon the fragility of human life and upon the delicately balanced relationship between man and the natural world, between man's ability and inability to control his environment" (Osborne 1988.17).

It is, however, no coincidence that Osborne chose to publish his article in *Art History*. His account fails to establish a link between the symbolic dimension of funerary ritual and the socio-political domain of power. As Ian Morris rightly remarks (1993.32):

> Osborne offers an intriguing poetics of archaic ritual and overcomes the separation between sociology and psychology that plagued earlier approaches; but in doing so he succumbs to the ever present danger that Geertz noted and loses touch with the hard surfaces of life. The approach ends up being every bit as reductionist as earlier all-embracing theories. The hard surfaces of seventh-century Attic society were excessively hard, and social conflict, whether along class or regional lines . . . should be at the heart of any history of the period.

While Morris is certainly right in pointing out the absence of the hard surfaces of Greek culture and society in Osborne's account, I do not believe this is, as Morris suggests, representative of the generic limitations of symbolic (or culturalist) analyses (see Morris 1993.28–32). Surely Osborne's type of analysis is in principle compatible with an interest in the politics of gender, class distinctions, and the poetics of socio-political power. Osborne himself at times shows possible points of departure for such a different investigative focus, for example, when he points to the privileged background of the deceased or to the gendered representation of death on a tombstone in the Kerameikos cemetery.[44] To have addressed such aspects more squarely

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44 See Osborne's discussion of the Athenian Kroisos (Osborne 1988.8–11) and of the grave relief that depicts Hegeso with a woman servant and "female adornment" (18).

would further have complicated Osborne's account and helped avoid accusations of aestheticism.

If the reluctance to include these aspects more prominently is representative of anything, it is of a certain tendency in classical scholarship to follow Geertz and Gould in conceiving of the symbolic dimension as separate and separable from the domain of power. Examination of current works in social anthropology reveals a much more complicated conceptualization of religious signification than the one we find in classical scholarship. Scholars such as Victor Turner, James Fernandez, and Marshal Sahlins, to mention just a few from a much larger cluster, have shown that power is intrinsic to signifying practices.[45] In their two-volume work on the colonial frontier in South Africa, Jean and John Comaroff, in particular, demonstrate how productive it is to see the symbolic as actively involved (and hence inseparable from) the negotiation of socio-political power.[46] What makes their accounts conceptually interesting is their focus on symbols, including religious symbols, as a prime medium of conflicting power discourses: the colonial frontier as a space of contestation and negotiation between the Nonconformist Christian missionaries and the indigenous people of Southern Tswana. In this two-way encounter, socio-political power structures are involved in the production and shaping of symbols just as they are themselves shaped by them. Symbolic analysis, it can be concluded from the works of Comaroff and Comaroff, should be seen as a central interpretative tool on a par with structuralism and functionalism.

A more dynamic approach is needed in classical scholarship that does not depict religious beliefs and practices merely as a disguise for ambitions in the political sphere. The socio-political power of Greek religion must be seen as grounded to a significant extent in the persuasive and authoritative power of its symbols.

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45 See, for example, Turner 1967, Fernandez 1982, Kirch and Sahlins 1992.

46 Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997 (a third volume is in production). For an appreciation of the significance and impact of their work in social anthropology and beyond, see the review essays in *AHR* 108.2.

V. THE SYMBOLIC VALUE OF TYRANT PROPERTY
TURNED RITUAL OBJECT

One brief example will suffice to illustrate how productive a more flexible and complicated conceptualisation of the symbolic dimension would be for the study of ancient Greek religion. Osborne makes a convincing case for the way in which symbolic analysis can reveal the plurality of voices and points of view that shaped Greek religious discourse, but he has left open the question of how compatible this type of analysis is with questions of socio-political power. Our example explores the symbolic value of tyrant property turned ritual equipment and demonstrates that the symbolic dimension of Greek religion is indeed an important medium for the negotiation of socio-political power.

It is, in particular, against the background of the symbolic value of processions as discussed towards the beginning of this article that we can appreciate the special symbolic spectacle that the Athenians enjoyed in 403 B.C. after the overthrow of the Thirty. A fragment from Philochorus attests that after the restoration of democracy, the Athenians used equipment that was specifically fashioned for processional use (*pompeia*), equipment which had been crafted (*kataskeuadzein*) out of the property of the Thirty.[47]

Harpocration s.v. πομπείας καὶ πομπεύειν· . . . πομπεῖα δὲ λέγεται τὰ εἰς τὰς πομπὰς κατασκευαζόμενα σκεύη, ὡς ὁ αὐτὸς ῥήτωρ ⟨ἐν τῷ⟩ Κατ' Ἀνδροτίωνος ὑποσημαίνει. "πομπείοις δέ" φησι Φιλόχορος "πρότερον ἐχρῶντο οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τοῖς ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τῶν λ΄ κατασκευασθεῖσιν. ὀψὲ δέ" [φησί] "καὶ Ἀνδροτίων ἄλλα κτεσκεύασεν."[48]

Processions and parading . . . instruments made for the processions are called *pompeia*, as the same orator (Demosthenes) mentions in his *Against Androtion*. "Earlier," Philochorus says, "the Athenians used as processional

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47 *FGrHist* 382 (Philochorus) F181. On this see also Wilson (forthcoming). I would like to thank Peter Wilson for pointing this example out to me.

48 The text and the translation given here follow Fornara and Yates, who have adapted *FGrHist* 328 according to recent research on Harpocration by John Kearney (Fornara and Yates 2007.31; see also Kearney 1991.217, Π 80).

instruments those which had been fashioned out of the property of the Thirty. Later, Androtion also fashioned others."

This casually reported incident, as Charles Fornara and David Yates point out, has so far received little scholarly attention.[49] As a document for the symbolic dimension of ancient Greek religion, however, this fragment is remarkable, for it testifies how, after the oligarchic revolution and the restoration of democracy, religion was used in Athens as a symbolic medium to negotiate the frictions and internal divisions that accompany any kind of socio-political change.

To start with, the riches of tyrants, their wealth and possessions, were themselves symbols before this episode. During the reign of the Thirty between 404 and 403 B.C., the great affluence of the Tyrants was seen as one of the most ruthless expressions of oligarchic power. Xenophon stresses several incidents in which the Tyrants did not hesitate to silence dissenters in order to seize their property and enhance their own personal wealth. In 404 B.C., for example, the Thirty proclaimed that all those who were not on their roll would lose their estates (to the Tyrants and their friends, of course).[50]

One of the challenges after the restoration of democracy and the far-reaching amnesties, however, was to unify the internally divided citizen body. As at other transitory points in history, there was a special need for the fashioning and refashioning of power, increased, perhaps, at this point in time by the brutal regime of the Thirty and the widespread abolition of democratic institutions during their short tenure. The Athenian populace mastered this challenge by appealing to their common worship of the Greek gods.[51] This was an area in which the populace could claim the moral higher ground, as the Tyrants were regarded as oblivious to the norms and conventions of ancient Greek religion. Xenophon tells us that they were happy to arrest and kill Theramenes, himself a member of the oligarchy, who had fallen out with Kritias and sought refuge at an altar in Athens as a suppliant (Xen. *HG* 2.3.52–56).

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49 Fornara and Yates 2007. Fornara and Yates suggest that the fragment was not an Attido-graphic entry but probably originates from one of Philochorus's other works.
50 See, for example, Xen. *HG* 2.4.1; also Arist. *Ath.* 35.
51 See also Kleokritos's appeal to his fellow citizens to reunite after the battle of Peiraios in Xen. *HG* 2.4.18–22.

It is in this context that the ritual display of tyrant property turned ritual object resonates and unfolds its symbolic power. The episode demonstrates how wealth, the prime marker of oligarchic power, was redefined to represent the power and unity of the Athenian people and their commitment to divine *charis* ("benevolence"). The wealth of individuals was now displayed as the wealth of the community used in communication with the gods. The power of the few lay once more with the people. What once represented the extravagance and moral corruption of individual wealth and oligarchic power was now recast to feature in a communal spectacle. Not, however, just any kind of spectacle, but a special one that served the still shaky democracy as an important medium for the self-representation of inner cohesion. This public parading of symbols involved a direct inversion of religious appropriation: we know from Xenophon that the Thirty themselves had stored the confiscated arms of those who were not on the roll of the Three Thousand in a temple on the Acropolis (Xen. *HG* 2.3.20).

I believe we can take our reading of the symbolic value of tyrant property refashioned as festival equipment one step further. Although our fragment does not refer to any specific festival, it is reasonably safe to assume that it was during either the Panathenaea or the City Dionysia, two outstanding Athenian festivals which both involved grand processions.[52] The simple allusion in the fragment to *pompeia* and *pompê* evokes such associations, and it is unlikely that the Athenians would have bothered to invest their symbolic currency so heavily in much smaller festivals.[53]

Amongst the different groups that marched in the processions at these festivals, however, the metics featured as a particularly symbolic subgroup (see Parker 2005.170). Male metics (as well as young Athenian *ephebes*) were dressed in purple tunics and carried the *skaphai* (special sacrificial trays), while unmarried metic women helped the *kanephoroi*, the Athenian maidens who carried the sacred baskets or vessels of gold and silver containing ritual equipment (such as the sacrificial knife). Was the ritual equipment carried by these metics perhaps crafted out of the possessions of the Thirty?

Unfortunately, the fragment is vague concerning the exact quality of the objects involved and the way in which they were displayed during the procession. There are, however, other ways for us to find out to what

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52 See Neils 1996, Maurizio 1998.
53 I would like to thank Peter Wilson for pointing this out to me.

kind of transaction Philochorus referred. Several marble stelai, probably from a single monument in the Agora, testify that in 402/1 B.C., after the restoration of democracy, the property of the Tyrants was confiscated and sold.[54] The stelai provide detailed information on several series of sales of the property of the Thirty and of their oligarchic associates by the *poletai* ("sellers"). The fragments list various estates, their sale price, and the names of those who bought them.[55] Perhaps it was the money derived from these sales that was used to finance ritual equipment, as Michael Walbank suggests as a possible interpretation of the fragment (Walbank 1982.96).

However, if *kataskeuadzein* in the last line of the fragment is taken to mean that the Athenians melted oligarchic prestige objects into ritual equipment, as I think Philochorus implies, the redefinition of meaning through the medium of gold, silver, or bronze becomes an even more pronounced statement of symbolic discourse. The inventories of the temple of Athena Polias list twenty-seven silver *hydriae* for the years after the restoration of democracy which were not included in earlier records from the same temple.[56] It has been suggested that these might have been part of the *pompeia* made out of the property of the Thirty, and it is at least conceivable that some items of movable property of the tyrants were melted down to create these *hydriae*.[57] *Hydriae*, however, were among the ritual equipment carried in processions by female metics, which supports the proposition that it might have been the subgroup of the metics who paraded the refashioned property of the tyrants (see Miller 1992.104). If this was indeed the case, there would have been much more at stake than a simple restoration of religious equipment and temple treasures that had been seriously diminished in the years before the oligarchic revolution (see Blamire 2001). If it was the movable property of the Tyrants that was recast into ritual equipment, there would be a fundamental "recycling" of symbolic capital at the heart of this transaction. Oligarchic prestige objects would have been removed from their circulation as "political capital" first. They would have then been melted down and recast into a very different, religious

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54 The nine fragments are fully published together with a critical apparatus in Walbank 1982. Six were previously published, three are new.

55 See, for example, lines 19–20 in *IG* II2, 1579 (= Walbank 79–82) which mention a purchase made by a certain Meletos.

56 See, for example, *IG* II2 1372, *IG* II2 1385, *IG* II2 1400. See also Ferguson 1932.113, note 2, Linders 1987.119.

57 See Ferguson 1932.113, Foucart 1888, esp. 288–89.

kind of symbolic "currency" to be recirculated, in processions and other ritual contexts, in the reestablished democratic order. If Philochorus, then, referred to the melting and recasting of tyrant property into ritual objects, the whole episode would gain even more in symbolic value, for the Thirty were infamous for killing metics of considerable wealth. In this scenario, the metics would have displayed the repossessed and refashioned wealth of their murdered relatives.

However that may be, this episode involves an incident which was by no means singular. Rather, the incident in the fragment consists of several cultural practices concerned with the circulation of symbolic capital at the intersection between socio-political power and religious symbols, practices that were well attested for Athens. To start with and to stay strictly within the religious realm, we have plenty of evidence for the recasting of one kind of symbolic religious currency into another (Ferguson 1932.110–27). We know, for example, that during the third century B.C., the priest of the Asklepieion at Athens was entitled to melt down those dedications that the sanctuary had received during his tenure and to have the material recast as an offering made in his name (ἐκ τῶν τύπων).[58] There was even a special class of temple inventory, the καθαίρεσις, which listed objects that were removed from the sanctuary, mostly for the purpose of being melted and recast into new ritual objects (see Aleshire 1989.104).

The opposite procedure to the recycling of secular prestige objects into ritual equipment, the melting and use of temple inventory for worldly purposes in times of crisis and financial hardship, is also well attested for Athens.[59] The *locus classicus* here is Thucydides 2.13, which has Pericles in 434 B.C. speak at great length of the possibility of using gold and silver offerings, sacred vessels, and other procedural equipment, even the gold of the statue of Athena if necessary, in order to finance Athenian military operations. And, indeed, even though the statue of Athena remained untouched, we know that golden Nikai dedicated to Athena were turned into coinage in 407/6 B.C.[60]

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58 See Aleshire 1989.83; also Aleshire 1992.

59 Several speeches by Demosthenes (*Against Androtion, Against Timocrates*) also address the issue of the melting and recasting of temple dedications. See Ferguson 1932.85–95 and, more recently, Harris 1995.25–39, Blamire 2001 for an overview of this procedure at Athens (contra Linders 1987, who argues that the remelting and recasting of votives was "a rare occurrence, the exception which proves the rule," 117).

60 Hellanikos *FGrHist* 323a F26, Philochoros *FGrHist* 328 F141. See also Thompson 1965, Linders 1987.115.

The Thirty themselves in many ways provided the very pinnacle of a wartime process of melting and recasting of temple property to finance military operations. We know that in 404/3 B.C., they melted down two gold-plated Nikai to turn them into about thirty-six to forty-eight silver talents, probably to finance the 700 Lakonian hoplites supporting their regime.[61] With the end of the Peloponnesian War and the restoration of democracy in Athens, there was consequently a real need to pay back at least some of the funds that had been "borrowed" from the gods—another aspect which contextualises the Philochorus fragment.

Even the very strategy the Athenians followed to repay their debt to the gods is not as singular as it might appear at first sight. Athenian democracy routinely confiscated property from convicted offenders. Those who were found guilty of mutilating the Hermae and violating the Eleusinian Mysteries in 414/3 B.C., for example, had their property confiscated and sold (see Thompson and Wycherley 1972.73). There was even a special group of ten officials, the *poletai*, elected from each of the ten *phylai*, whose job involved the selling or leasing of confiscated property. Most frequently this took the form of a public auction in front of the council, the outcomes of which were recorded on stone and displayed in public.[62] We have numerous fragments of such stones, which, just like our marble *stelai,* demonstrate the popularity of this kind of procedure.[63]

To conclude, then, the example of tyrant property turned into processual equipment demonstrates that Greek religion was more than a simple tool for individuals to achieve their (political) goals. Rather, religious symbols were active players in the negotiation of socio-political power. Religious symbols, perhaps quite literally and materially in this example, shaped and were shaped by the power discourses pervading Greek culture and society.

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61 See Krentz 1979.61–63, Thompson 1965.
62 See Langdon 1994, contra Hallof 1990.
63 The *stelai* set up at the Eleusinion recording the proceedings after the mutilation of the Hermae and the profanation of the Mysteries, for example, are discussed in Lewis 1966.

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