

Religion on the Ground: Lived Religion in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*

Carson Bay, Florida State University

'Right' Religion in the *Aethiopica*

1. Charikleia (priestess of Artemis) and Theagenes (priest of Apollo) perform 'divine service' (ιερατεύειν) (1.22-23)

Before marriage, Charikleia asks to find 'an altar or shrine to Apollo' (ἢ ἔνθα βωμὸς ἢ ναὸς Ἀπόλλωνι) at which to lay aside 'priesthood' (τὴν ἱερωσύνην) and its 'insignia' (τὰ σύμβολα). Thyamis respects this 'traditional rite' (τὰ πάτρια), being destined for 'divine service' (ιεροῖς) himself, and sensitive to such 'religious observance' (τὸ περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ὄσιον). The crowd lauds Charikleia's religious sentiment in 1.23. Heliodorus shows 'right religion' by having heroes perform it and a crowd praise it.

2. Calasiris acts 'according to the law of the wise men of Egypt' (ὡς νόμος Αἰγυπτίων σοφοῖς) (2.22-23)

Neither grief nor hunger dissuades Calasiris from his 'duty to the divine' (μνήμην τὴν εἰς τὸ θεῖον). Calasiris pours water libations 'to local and Greek gods' (θεοῖς ἐγχωρίοις τε καὶ Ἑλληνίοις), esp. Pythian Apollo. Calasiris is abstemiously devout and regionally appropriate in saying: ἐπεισθω τὰ πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς.

3. Calasiris observes propriety as a peace-making priest when he 'enters the shrine' (ἐντὸς ... τῶν ἀνακτόρων) (7.8-9)

He 'prostrates himself, embracing the cult statue's feet' (ρίπτει μὲν ἑαυτὸν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον τοῖς δὲ ἴχνεσι προσφύς τοῦ ἀγάλματος) so long that 'he nearly expired there' (ἔχων ὀλίγου μὲν καὶ ἐκθανεῖν ἐδέησεν). He 'offers and libation and prayer to the goddess' (σπείσας τε τῇ θεῶ καὶ κατεθξάμενος) and passes 'the crown of priestly office' (τὸν τῆς ἱερωσύνης στέφανον) to the appropriate son. He entrusts 'the insignia of priesthood' (τὰ σύμβολα τῆς προφητείας) to a son legally, spiritually, and bodily capable of performing 'the duties of a priest' (τὰς τῆς ἱερωσύνης λειτουργίας).

4. Throughout the narrative, common forms of religion are assumed and implicitly acceptable

Charikles offers 'a hymn to the god' (ῥυθμὸν ἀποθύει τῷ θεῷ) in response to an alarming dream (3.18). *Xenoi* 'offer the festal sacrifice to Herakles' (ἔθουον δὲ ἄρα σὺν αὐλήμασιν Ἡρακλεῖ) and pour libations (4.16). *Xenoi* 'offer incense' (τοῦ λιβανωτοῦ λαβῶν ἀπέθυσσα) and 'pour libations' (ῥυθμὸν ἕσπεισας) with Calasiris (4.16).

'Wrong' Religion in the *Aethiopica*

5. Calasiris describes religion 'of a low rank' (δημώδης), which 'crawls upon the earth' (χαμαὶ ἐρχομένη) (3.16)

This religion 'waits upon ghosts' (εἰδῶλων θεράπεινα), 'skulks around dead bodies' (περὶ σώματα νεκρῶν εἰλουμένη), 'is addicted to magic herbs' (βοτάναις προστετηκυῖα); it deals in 'spells' (ἐπωδαῖς); its concerns are 'wicked' (κακῶν) and 'earthly' (γῆϊνων). 'No good ever comes of it' (πρὸς οὐδὲν ἀγαθὸν τέλος οὔτε αὐτῇ προϊούσα); 'no benefit ever accrues to its practitioners' (οὔτε τοὺς χρωμένους φέρουσα); it causes its own downfall and even its occasional successes are 'paltry and mean-spirited' (λυπρὰ καὶ γλίσχρα). This kind of religion makes the unreal appear real (φαντασίας τῶν μὴ ὄντων ὡς ὄντων) and brings hope to nothing (ἀποτυχίας τῶν ἐλπιζομένων); 'it devises wickedness and panders to corrupt pleasures' (πράξεων ἀθεμίτων εὐρέτις καὶ ἡδονῶν ἀκολάστων ὑπηρέτις).

6. The *Aethiopica*'s narrator himself condemns the Egyptian woman's 'abominable' (διαγρυπνοῦσα) practice (5.13-15)

Placing her dead son's body between a fire and a pit, the woman 'pours a libation' (ἐπέσπενδεν) of honey, then milk, then wine from separate bowls. Then she makes a human effigy of cake crowned with bay and fennel and throws it into the pit. 'In excess of feverish ecstasy' (ἐνθουσιῶδες), the woman invokes the moon 'by a series of grotesque and outlandish names' (βαρβάρους τε καὶ ξενίζουσι τὴν ἀκοὴν ὀνόμασι) before cutting her arm with a sword, which she wipes on a sprig and throws into the fire. The woman performs 'a number of other bizarre actions' (ἄλλα τε ἄττα τερατευσάμενη) before kneeling over the corpse whispering 'incantations' (ἐπάδουσα). Thus by 'magic arts' (μαγανεία) and 'incantations' (ταῖς κατανάγκαις) does she wake the dead.

7. Heliodorus also condemns the Egyptian woman's religion via Charikleia, Calasiris, the woman's son, and a fateful end

Charikleia moves from 'alarm' (οὐδὲ ἄδεῶς) to 'horror' (ἐκδειματωθεῖσα) to 'fearful trembling' (ὑπέφριττε), while Calasiris calls the 'appalling ritual' (γινομένων ἀήθων) 'unclean' (οὐκ εὐαγῆ) to a 'priest' (προφητικόν). Calasiris compares the 'magic' of this woman (full of 'sinful practices' [ἀθέμοις πράξεσι]) to 'prophetic powers of priests' (τὸ μαντικόν) which come from 'legitimate sacrifices' (ἐκ θυσιῶν ἐννόμων) and 'pure prayer' (εὐχῶν καθαρῶν). The woman's son accuses her of 'transgressing the laws of man's nature' (παρανομοῦσαν εἰς τὴν ἀνθρωπεῖαν φύσιν), 'affronting the ordinances of destiny' (τοὺς ἐκ μοιρῶν θεσμούς ἐκβιαζομένην), and 'using black arts to move the immovable' (τὰ ἀκίνητα μαγγανείαις κινουῦσαν ἠνειχόμεν).

8. Heliodorus condemns human sacrifice via Gymnosophists of 'in the Temple of Pan' (οἴκησιν τὸ Πανεῖον) (10.4ff)

By 'prayer' (εὐχεσθαι) in the 'inner sanctuary' (τὸ ἄδυτον) the gymnosophists predict divine disruption of the sacrifices: θόρυβον δέ τινα καὶ παραχρῆν προμηνύει τὸ δαιμόνιον, ἐσομένην μὲν παρὰ τὰς θυσίας. The gymnosophists' 'eyes and ears are defiled' (ὄψιν τε καὶ ἀκοὴν ἐχράνθημεν) and they must retreat into 'the temple' (τὸν νεῶν), unable to approve of anything 'as barbaric as human sacrifice' (θυσίαν οὕτως ἐχθεσμον τὴν δι' ἀνθρώπων). Human sacrifice is not 'pleasing to the divinity' (προσιεσθαι τὸ θεῖον) as it is 'unclean' (οὐκ εὐαγῆ μὲν). Sisimithres predicts the sacrifice's disruption based on 'signs given by the godhead' (τοῖς τε ἄλλοις ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ συμβόλοις τεκμαιρομένῳ).

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