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On Ritual Pollution by Seeing: I.Lindos II 487.1-3 and Hdt. 2.37.5

Abstract: This paper focuses on the request not to look at breast-fed children attested at the beginning of the cathartic regulation from the sanctuary of Athena Lindia in Rhodes (I.Lindos II 487 = LSS 91). We highlight uniqueness of visual taboos in extant Greek sacred regulations, and suggest that the stipulation from the Lindian sanctuary of Athena may have been influenced by Egyptian purity precepts.

Keywords: abstentions; Athena Lindia; beans; nursing; pollution; purity; visual taboo.

Wherever we encounter the ‘doctrine of purity’ or the ‘doctrine of pollution’, as historians of religion and anthropologists came to label this ‘human universal’,¹ we find it applied in multiple contexts and at all sensory levels. In virtually all cultures the binary opposition of purity and defilement surpassed the limits of physicality and became a prism that diffracted religious, social, political and cultural dichotomies of positive and negative values. Purity is, as Mary Douglas often remarks, regularly associated with ideas of order and stability, and pollution with the opposites.² A *clean* person became a *pure* person, that is, not just hygienically devoid of bodily defilement, but also pious, socially acceptable, politically correct, and culturally refined: orderly.

There is a downside. As ‘pure’ became a synonym for ‘good’, and ‘impure’ for ‘bad’, a seed of destruction was planted, the consequences of which the world has been witnessing for the past three thousand years. From ancient Greece to the present day, the binary of purity and pollution was employed as the line demarcating all-pervasive cultural and societal divisions which, taken to the extreme, led to atrocities committed in the name of purity. From ethnic ‘cleansings,’ both ancient and modern, religious persecutions, more recent abominations such as ‘Rassenhygiene’ to the present day extreme right wing parties elected to the European parliament to perpetuate myths of ethnic or societal purity and whose politics target the ‘pollutant’ minorities of every kind, the doctrine of purity has been utilized as a dangerous discriminatory tool.

In the distinct religious context, it is significant that the diffraction of the notion of purity also took place at the sensory level. Consequently, a person could eat pure or impure foodstuffs, touch pure or impure objects, smell pure or impure smells, but also hear pure and impure words and see pure and impure sights. This naturally led to the synesthetic mixing of categories in the language of the doctrine of purity, and one speaks of the purity of objects, both in a tactile and a visual sense, purity of words

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¹ As far as we can see, one of the earliest uses of the term “doctrine of purity” is found in William Law’s 1726 treatise *The Absolute Unlawfulness of Stage Entertainments*, and related, interestingly, to “Christian doctrine of purity of heart” (p. 413 of the eighth edition of the *Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*, Newport 1807 which prints the 1726 treatise as an addendum). On “doctrine of pollution,” see Gagné 2013, 138-140. Pollution belief as ‘human universal’: Parker 1983, 2. For the suitability of the term ‘doctrine’ for discussion of purity in the Greek context, see below, n. 5.

² Douglas 1966, esp. 44-50.

and utterances, purity of smells and purity of foodstuffs. Or, as Hesiod does, of universal purity, purity ‘from badness’, which, however, extends also well beyond the physical realm, as we show elsewhere.³

Where there is diffraction, there is often also the tendency to reconstitute. As ‘cleanliness’ became the path to ‘godliness’ and the means to endear oneself to the divine, we note increased efforts of members of communities to observe purity regulations that would facilitate the acquisition of *universal* purity for the worshipper. In the Greek context, we note the emergence of distinct pure ‘ways of life,’ which aimed at providing universal purity, and regulated sensory experiences at various levels.

A Greek worshipper, if we are, for the sake of generalization, to amalgamate the evidence that is in historical reality spread over some ten centuries into one unified abstract set of purity requirements, was concerned with pollution at all sensory levels.⁴ For such a worshipper, purity requirements formed a part of a distinct doctrine of orthopraxy predicated on the existence of a certain set of beliefs and convictions. While we should by all means recognize and acknowledge the absence of an elaborated religious ‘creed’ or dogma, the Greek sacred regulations (“sacred laws”), – as we label the cluster of some 500 inscriptional texts detailing rules of conduct in Greek sanctuaries or of modes of engaging with the divine –, do collectively bear witness to some form of a doctrinal mode of operation in cults of Greek cults.⁵ This is especially so when it comes to issues of purity and pollution – sacred regulations represent a particularly valuable source in the study of the purity requirements in Greek cults from early times, and even more so from the Hellenistic period onwards.⁶

Touching, tasting (eating) and even smelling are in the extant Greek evidence all associated with notions of purity and pollution. However, the requests to the worshipper not to look at certain sights which might endanger his purity are extremely seldom found in ritual regulations: in fact, in the extant corpus of some forty Greek cathartic regulations which survive on stone, there is only one inscription, as far as we can see, which demands of the worshippers not to look at a potential source of pollution, being the text from the Lindian sanctuary of Athena, carved in the late 2nd or 3rd c. A.D. (*I.Lindos* II 487). In this paper, we wish to advance the view that, as with the remainder of the inscription, as we believe, the clause to abstain from looking at a potential source of pollution resonates with the Egyptian purity precepts.

Pollution and the senses

Let us then turn to the sensory levels. Physical contact, not just in the sense of a tactile or bodily experience, but also in the sense of plain physical proximity to a polluting matter, is the subject of the greatest concern of Greek cathartic regulations. As is very well known, the materiality of pollutants in Greek

³ Petrovic – Petrovic (forthcoming).

⁴ A selection of the most influential and most recent studies of the Greek material: Parker 1983; Chaniotis 1997; Lupu 2005; Chaniotis 2012; Robertson 2013, 195-244; Günther 2013, 245-60.

⁵ In a religion in which unequivocally doctrinal elements, such as purity requirements or practices of prayer and dedication are closely associated with, or even embedded in ‘imagistic’ experiences, it is difficult to maintain the neatness of the dichotomy between imagistic and doctrinal religious modes. For the distinction between imagistic and doctrinal modes of operation, cf. Whitehouse 1995 and 2004; for attempts at its application in Greco-Roman religions, see contributions in Martin – Pachis 2009.

⁶ We employ the term “sacred regulations” in place of the vexed term “sacred law.” For an overview of scholarly debates and relevant evidence: Parker 2004 and Carbon – Pirenne-Delforge 2012. On purity in sacred regulations see the seminal studies of Chaniotis 1997 and, with some adjustments to his positions, Chaniotis 2012; Robertson 2013, 195-245. While relatively few cathartic regulations survive from before the 3rd c. B.C., one of the fullest descriptions of a ritual of purification in the case of murder is provided by the famous sacred law from Selinous (Sicily), dated to late sixth century B.C., see Lupu 2005, 15-18, and there No. 27 for text, translation and the commentary.

ritual ranges from (the avoidance of) blood, sex, and various taboo objects to (the avoidance of) the physical presence in a house of a parturient woman or a corpse.⁷

Relatedly, taboo foodstuffs represents another area of concern in purity regulations. Depending upon the nature of the cult, we register prohibition of the consumption of meat (esp. pork), meat of animals who died naturally, fish of various kinds, ‘house-birds,’ various types of beans, eggs and ‘egg-laying animals’, apples, and pomegranates.⁸

The notion of pure smells is also attested, yet olfactory purity remains a generally under-researched topic in the history of Greek religion. The smell of offering is occasionally labeled as ‘pure,’ and the practice of fumigation is thought to eliminate ‘impure smells’ and prevent the inhalation of impure matter.⁹

Hearing pure or impure words and utterances is a frequently attested concept in the literary religion from the early Greek period onwards. The idea of ‘pure speech’ stemming from a ‘pure mouth’ is found throughout Greek texts, and closely relates to notions of ‘good-’ and ‘bad-speech’, *euphemia* and *dusphemia* respectively.¹⁰ Nothing encapsulates this concept better, perhaps, than Euripides’ presentation of Hippolytus’ urge to purify his ears by washing them clean after hearing polluting words - an illustrative case of the concept of the aforementioned mixing of categories, as well.¹¹ In the inscriptional evidence and ‘lived religion’, cathartic regulations can associate ‘proper speech’ with the concept of *hagneia*: πάντες δ’ εὐσεβίεις τε καὶ εὐγλωθῆσσι παρίθ’ ἀγνοί, “All who are pious and *good-of-tongue* proceed as ritually pure”, states a 2nd c. B.C. cathartic regulation from the temple of Mater in Phaistos.¹²

It is evident that touching, digesting, or even inhaling, constitutes either directly or per proxy a physical contact with pollutants that can be taken to affect the body directly and without mediation. Physical pollution, and physical purity, is directly predicated on the idea of contact with or the avoidance of pollutants, but this is less clear with the remaining two senses.

Contagion by seeing pollutants or hearing polluting utterances, on the other hand, represents a less material type of pollution, since both seeing and hearing imply a mediated contagion, a contagion without physical contact. While it is true that this type of pollution also can have an origin in physical impurities (such as seeing a corpse, or hearing an incestuous proposition), the worshippers’ bodily distance from the materiality of pollutants in the case of touching, tasting and inhaling is, we may assume, smaller than in the case of seeing or hearing.

Pollutions by hearing and seeing are then pollutions that are to some extent, but not entirely, metaphysical: they are not entirely metaphysical, because even if they are not triggered by a direct physical contact with pollutants, they can still have their origins in dirt, in Mary Douglas’ famous “matter out of place”. But due to the material remoteness of the senses from the pollutants, this type of pollution is akin to what Robert Parker labels real “metaphysical pollutions,” that is ritual transgressions and various types of sacrilege (wearing wrong clothes in a ritual context, or jewelry, or disregarding the rules of a ritual, or entering a sacred space without permission, would all belong to this class), that is pollutions which do not originate in ‘dirt’.¹³

⁷ Parker 1983, *passim* and esp. 33-143.

⁸ Parker 1983, 357-366 provides an overview of polluting animals and food.

⁹ On fumigation, Burkert 1985, 75-76.

¹⁰ Cf. Gödde 2011, 1-27 and 37-47.

¹¹ Hipp. 653-655.

¹² I.Cret. I XXIII 3; EBGR 93-94 47; 1997 375; 2000 198; 2007 23, with Chaniotis 1997.

¹³ On this, Parker 1983, 144-152, from whom we borrow the term ‘metaphysical purity and metaphysical pollution’ (at 145) to designate pollution and purity which has no origin in contact or avoidance of contact with physical impurities.

Seeing is polluting: I.Lindos II 487.1-3 and Hdt. 2.37.5

Greek sacred regulations dealing with cathartic issues are almost exclusively concerned with the physicality of pollution, and accordingly, with the senses of touch and taste, both of these broadly defined in terms of the contact-constitution: a mere presence in the house of a parturient woman or of one who has died can be taken to constitute contact with a pollutant, and the banning of some animal products within the sanctuary may be interpreted as an extension of the prohibition to consume some of these products.¹⁴ Such issues also represent some of the main concerns of the Lindian inscription which requests of the visitors a lengthy list of abstentions (in which sex, death and blood taking an important role). But its preamble also contains an unusual request: In order to remain pure, a worshipper could be requested to abstain from looking at certain sights.

[κα]θαρο[ὺ]ς π[α]ρίναι κατὰ ὑποκείμενα
 [π]εριπαντηρίων εἶσω καὶ τῶν τοῦ ναοῦ [πυλῶν]·
 [ἴ]ναι ὄσιον φειδομένους ὀράσεως τέκνων βδ[αλλόντων]

*Visitors may proceed as pure according to the regulations
 within the lustral basins and the gates of the temple:
 let them enter piously, abstaining from looking at [breast-fed?] children.*

This is, as far as we can tell, the only Greek cathartic inscription which requests purity of the worshipper by requesting that he abstain from looking at a source of religious danger. According to Blinkenberg's (widely accepted and almost inevitable) restitution [ἴ]ναι ὄσιον φειδομένους ὀράσεως τέκνων βδ[αλλόντων]¹⁵ of the line 3, the visitors were requested to abstain from *looking* at children being breast-fed. Sokolowski's conjecture (ad LSS 91, [βλ]άστης) attempts to avoid the notion of breast-feeding which he thought out of place in this context.¹⁶ However, we know of two further documents in which nursing women were excluded from participation in cult, or where breast-feeding appears to be polluting.¹⁷ The reason for this could be that milk is a bodily 'flow', a matter crossing the boundaries of the body, and hence 'out of place,' and, like blood, it can be thought of as polluting. Perhaps it is relevant in this context to remark that ancient thinkers considered mothers' milk to be a product of putrefied or fully concocted blood.¹⁸

Alternative suggestions could also be made: one could search for moral reasons, such as an attempt to protect nursing mothers in a sanctuary of a distinctly kourotrophic divinity, as Athena Lindia was.¹⁹ Furthermore, one could, perhaps, speculate that this clause bears witness to the attempts to protect the children themselves from the malevolent gaze of the on-lookers: *baskania*.²⁰

Whatever the underlying logic behind this stipulation might be, we are dealing with a visual taboo. In Greek theological thinking, some of the visual taboos, such as the idea that gods abhor looking at a

¹⁴ For overviews, Wächter 1910, and Moulinier 1952 remain useful.

¹⁵ [ἴ]ναι (= ἰέναι) is to be taken as *infinitivus pro imperativo*, and ὄσιον as an adverb. On conjecture, cf. Blinkenberg ad loc.

¹⁶ LSS, p. 160.

¹⁷ Cf. LSS 119.6, where contact with nursing women is defined as a source of pollution, Ptolemais, 1st c. B.C. For an explicit exclusion of lactating (and pregnant) women from ritual, see LSCG 68, (IG V,2 514), 11-13, cult of Despoina, Lykosura, 3rd c. B.C.: μηδὲ | μύεσθαι [[μύεσθαι]] κύενσαν μηδὲ θη|λαζομέναν.

¹⁸ Putrified: Empedocles fr. 59 [68] Wright; fully concocted: Aristotle, Gen.an. 777a7. On Greek views of human milk, see Laskaris 2008, 459-464, who points out (p. 461) that: "Kourotrophic goddesses are not ... imagined as lactating ... [They] cared for their kouroi in more abstract ways".

¹⁹ Hadzisteliou Price 1978, 154-156 for the evidence.

²⁰ We are grateful to Esther Eidinow for this suggestion.

corpse,²¹ are understandable from the point of view of traditional doctrine of purity: Birth, death, sex, and blood represent, across cultures and time, the most powerful pollutants, and Greek gods could be envisaged as avoiding them for this reason. What we lack in the Greek evidence, however, are requests from the worshipper to refrain from looking at potential sources of *pollution* in the ritual context. In mythological narratives, seeing what ought not be seen is a narrative trope of the human path to peril: time and again Greek myth warns of such scenarios.²²

Why do we then find this kind of a stipulation in the ritual context in Lindos? Elsewhere we have argued that the temple of Athena Lindia has a long tradition according to which it was closely associated with Egypt. We reiterate key points here: its legendary founders were Egyptians (daughters of Danaos), it was perceived by Herodotus and others as a sanctuary particularly important for the Egyptians (to the extent that the Egyptians thought of it as an Egyptian sanctuary and closely related to Neith), and archaeological evidence also bears witness to close links between Egypt and Lindian sanctuary.

The Egyptian background, we argued, is mirrored throughout the text of the I.Lindos II 487 – many of the stipulations represent close parallels to Egyptian cathartic regulation – from the zonal thinking implied in the regulation, to the level of detail attested in this text, one can detect resonances of Egyptian tradition in the Lindian text. We posit that the Egyptian influence on the Lindian cult might also explain the existence of a visual taboo.

Herodotus' fascination with what we label cultural anthropology is obvious throughout his work, but his reflection concerning convergences and divergences between the Greeks and other peoples is probably nowhere more clearly exposed than in his second book. Egyptian customs relating to purity are of particular interest to Herodotus: time and again he reflects on similarities and differences between Greek and Egyptian purity beliefs and practices. In one such paragraph, the historian comments on Egyptians, who are "religious beyond measure, more than any other people," and catalogues what Egyptians do in order to maintain their purity, '*kathariotes*', paying great attention in particular to sensory diffraction of their concerns: he starts with taste, and comments that the cups from which they drink are cleaned daily, and the foodstuffs that they eat and avoid (2.37.1, 3-5), he comments on touch and body, remarking on the clothes and circumcision (2.37.2); then he turns to Egyptian priests, who are even more observant than others when it comes to purity: he comments on their clothes, footwear, and washing habits (2.37.3). Then he comments again on diet of the population and priests (2.37.5):

κνάμους δὲ οὔτε τι μάλα σπείρουσι Αἰγύπτιοι ἐν τῇ χώρῃ, τοὺς τε γινομένους οὔτε τρώγουσι οὔτε ἔψοντες πατέονται, οἳ δὲ δὴ ἱρέες οὐδὲ ὀρέοντες ἀνέχονται, νομίζοντες οὐ καθαρὸν εἶναί μιν ὄσπριον.

*The Egyptians sow no beans in their country; if any grow, they will not eat them either raw or cooked; the priests cannot endure even to see them, considering beans an unclean kind of legume.*²³

Refraining from looking a source of impurity (*ὀρέοντες ἀνέχονται*) in Egypt recalls Lindian *φειδομένους ὀράσεως*. While this particular stipulation in the text of Herodotus has not been highlighted by earlier commentators, we think that it is of great import for our understanding of the Lindian text: The Egyptian background of the sanctuary, we posit, also shaped the tradition and articulation in the cathartic regulation of the sanctuary. Numerous Egyptian visitors to the ancient and cosmopoli-

²¹ E. Hipp. 1435-1440, Parker 1983, 33 and 67.

²² Especially in aetiological narratives: cf. TAM II 174; famously, Artemis punished Aktaion with a gruesome death, and Athena blinded Teiresias: Callimachus' *Hymn on the bath of Pallas* (107-118), with Apollodorus B. 3.4.4. The blinding of Teiresias as a consequence of seeing Athena naked is first attested by Pherekydes (3F92). Callimachus' Athena even qualifies the prohibition of seeing a divinity against its will as an ancient divine law (H.Pal. 101-102 with Bulloch 1985, Commentary ad l.)

²³ Text after Hude, tr. Godley.

tan sanctuary of Athena Lindia may have understood the existence of a visual taboo in a cathartic regulation without much difficulty, but for the Greeks, it had to be written out.

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Özet

Görme Yoluyla Dinî Kirlenme: I.Lindos II 487.1-3 ve Hdt. 2.37.5

Bu makale, Rhodos'taki Athena Lindia Tapınağı'nda olan katartik düzenlemenin (I.Lindos II 487 = LSS 91) baş kısmında belirtilmiş olan 'emziren çocuklara bakmama' isteği üzerine odaklanmıştır. Yazarlar, mevcut Yunan dinî düzenlemelerindeki görsel tabuların eşsizliğinin altını çizmekte ve Athena Lindia Tapınağı'ndaki bu koşulun Mısır "saflık" kaidelerinden etkilenmiş olabileceğini önermektedirler. Yazarlar, genel anlamda "temiz" bir kişinin "saf" bir insana dönüştüğü ve bu dönüşümün sadece fizikî açıdan değil, aynı zamanda dindarlık, sosyal olarak kabul görmüşlük, politik olarak doğruluk ve kültürel olarak arınmışlık açılarından da gerçekleştiği düşüncesinin olumsuz yanı da olduğunu belirtmektedirler. Zira "saf" sözcüğünün "iyi" ve "saf olmayan"ın ise "kötü" olarak algılanması zarar verici bir olgu olarak görünmektedir. Hem antik dönemde hem de günümüzde dini kısımlar, ırkçı yaklaşımlar gibi "kirletici" azınlıkları hedef alarak etnik ve sosyal "saflık" mitini sürdüren politikalar neticesinde "saflık" doktrini tehlikeli bir ayrımcılık aygıtı olarak kullanılmaktadır. Dinsel anlamda "saflık" kavramı ise duyuşal düzeyde bulunmakta, sonuç olarak kişi saf ya da saf olmayan yiyecekler yiyebilmekte, nesnelere dokunabilmekte, aynı zamanda saf ya da saf olmayan kelimeler duyabilmekte ve görüntülere bakabilmektedir.

Bilgimiz dâhilinde Yunan dini için detaylı bir amentü olmamakla birlikte, yak. 500 epigrafik metin Yunan dinî uygulamalarına ilişkin, özellikle de saflık ve kirlilik konularındaki bazı dogmatik detayları vermektedir. Dokunmak, yemek ve koklamak gibi duyuşlar, saflık ve kirlilik olgularıyla bağlantılıydı. Bununla birlikte saflığı tehlikeye düşürebilecek şeylere bakmama gibi bir istek dinî düzenlemelerde çok nadiren görünmektedir. Bu tip bir durum Athena Lindia Tapınağı'nda, İ. S. 2.-3. yy.'da yazılmış olan bir yazıtta mevcuttur (I.Lindos II 487). Bununla birlikte, bu kısıtlama büyük olasılıkla Mısır saflık ilkeleriyle etkileşimlidir. Eski Yunan dinindeki kirletici unsurlar kan, cinsellik, çeşitli tabu nesnelere başlayıp hamile bir kadının ya da cesedin bulunduğu bir evdeki fiziksel mevcudiyete kadar uzamaktadır. Benzer olarak yeme içmede, koklamada, dokunmada benzer kısıtlamalar bulunmakta, duyma ve görme yoluyla kirlenmeye ise az da olsa rastlanmaktadır. Athena Lindia Tapınağı'ndaki saflık kısıtları arasında, "çocuklara emzirilirken bakılmaması" beklentisi bulunmaktadır. Bu şekilde bazı görüntülere bakmama beklentisi sıra dışıdır. Bu, şu ana kadar bilinen yazıtlar içerisinde bu tip bir beklentinin olduğu tek yazıttır. Bunun arkasında, anne sütünün bir vücut sıvısı olması, emziren annenin korunması ya da çocukların nazardan korunması olabileceği gibi fikirler olsa da bu bir görsel tabu niteliğindedir. Bununla birlikte Herodotos'un Mısırlıların kirlilik kaynağını görmeye bile tahammül edemediklerini belirtmesi, Athena Lindia Tapınağı'nın, arkeolojik verilerin de desteklediği üzere, Mısır'la mitolojik ve tarihsel ilişkisinin güçlü olması, bu kısıtlamanın Mısır'la ilişkili olması gerektiğini düşündürmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: kaçınma; Athena Lindia; fasulye; emzirme; kirlilik; saflık; görsel tabu.