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Introduction

The first section of this volume explores founding narratives and early stages in narrative traditions. It is not the rise of historical narrative *per se* which is the subject of this first group of articles. Within the comparative framework of the present volume they ask: What are the circumstances, what are the triggers to apply strategies of historicisation to religion? Quite often, religion is seen as, or claims to be, outside of the realm of historical change. The chapters by Rüpke and Bronkhorst for instance focus on traditions which have been classified as ‘cold’ traditions. Their findings clearly contradict such views. Here, history comes in a plurality of histories. Historical narratives might have become important for purposes of legitimation, but legitimation is asked for when claims are rivaled or contested.

In his article ‘The historiography of Brahmanism’ JOHANNES BRONKHORST focusses on the self-projected image of Indian ‘Brahmanism’ (which Bronkhorst also labels a ‘re-invented form of Vedic religion’) as being eternal, founder-less and unchangeable since the beginning of time. Against the prevalent assumption that ‘India did not and could not have history’ – itself a result of the ‘non-historical attitude of Brahmanism’ and the relative absence of historical events in most Brahmanic texts – Bronkhorst identifies a fairly short phase in Indian history (‘the centuries surrounding the beginning of the Common Era’) where history may have been of greater importance to some Brahmins. He reveals traces of a ‘millenarist’ attitude in the *Yuga Purāṇa* and parts of the *Mahābhārata*, presumably driven by a series of catastrophes (such as foreign invasions) that took place at that time. Especially in the *Yuga Purāṇa* these catastrophes are interpreted as signs of the upcoming end of the last of four world eras, the Kali-Yuga. Compared to later Sanskrit sources (such as most later Purāṇas), this text extensively referred to historical persons, places and events as, from the viewpoint of its author(s), these were signs of the upcoming end of the world and thus of cosmic dimension. However, as the end of the world did not come as expected, Bronkhorst notes a ‘major change [...] in the brahmanical conception of history’ in the subsequent centuries: the ‘millenarist’ outlook made way for a prolonged interpretation of the Kali-Yuga and thus for a cyclical interpretation of historical events which turned them into mere ‘imitations of what had happened before’. The author also uses this scheme to interpret the focus shift from foreign invaders to religious ‘heretics’ in Sanskrit sources of that time, as well as the later tendency to identify rulers with ‘mythical heroes’.

In ‘Construing religion by doing historiography’ JÖRG RÜPKE analyzes early stages of ‘the historicisation of religion’ in different genres of the late Roman re-

public. It is not in genuine historical narratives that arguments about the historicity of religion can be found. Conceptualisations of what the lost books of the founding figure Numa might have been, and the identification of historical change in the Roman calendar are identified as incipient forms of historicisation of religion and thereby as incipient forms of conceptualisation of religion. But what are the interests of such arguments, what is their expressive value? It is in the comprehensive account of Roman religion provided by Varro in mid-first century BCE that a full-scale historical narrative of religious changes is to be found. Here, the question of triggers and alternatives is helpful. It is not narrowly bordered local identities, Rüpke claims, which drive this account. In the context of a nascent empire, Varro's text seems to be interested in balancing local and universal developments and in building bridges and thus tapping resources of other religious traditions rather than boundary work in the construction of a Roman religion. Within the landscape of historical accounts of religious practices, Varro's endeavour of creating a comprehensive, yet internally differentiated, circum-Mediterranean history of religion constitutes a minority position, which deserves further exploration.

Historiography – *in statu nascendi* – is the subject of the following chapter on 'The use of historiography in Paul'. In his analysis of the letters of Paul, 1/2 Corinthians and Galatians in particular, ANDERS KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN demonstrates how the basically argumentative letters are undergirded by a historiographic narrative. It is not in the reconstruction of any Pauline 'salvation history' that the chapter is interested. Rather, it is the construction of a historical narrative on the basis of a highly selective use of what Paul's audience would have accepted as privileged 'scripture' which is the focus of the analysis. This narrative is not just one of many motifs of the letters, but takes on argumentative value at crucial points of Paul's reasoning.

In 'Flirty fishing and poisonous serpents' INGVILD GILHUS analyses a paradigmatic text for the tradition of heresiography. The encyclopaedic approach of that genre has not rendered it a centre piece of historiography. And yet, the enumeration of dangerous aberrances usually employs genealogical principles to relate the origins and developments of individual heresies to the larger history of Christianity. Epiphanius, writing in Cypriote Salamis in the second half of the fourth century, is competing within that genre to be the most prolific writer, amassing around one thousand five hundred pages, and thus tries to bolster his authority as a bishop within the theological conflicts of his time. Part of his strategy to create an image of ongoing danger and his own heroic role is, as Gilhus demonstrates in two exemplary interpretations, his inscribing himself into the text by means of autobiographical narratives. She shows how this illustrates different types of threats as well as the different roles of Epiphanius, point-

ing to possible heresies underlying ascetic and monastic practices and the way of life of members of the church. These threats are gendered, embracing sexual temptation and spiritual fatherhood which might lead into deviance. Historiographically, such scenes help to veil the massive invention of ‘heretical groups’ that frequently were seen as neither groups nor heresies by their contemporaries.

SYLVIE HUREAU, in her article ‘Reading sutras in biographies of Chinese Buddhist monks’, sheds light on the oldest collection of Chinese Buddhist monks’ biographies, the *Biographies of eminent monks (Gaoseng zhuan)* which was compiled around the first half of the sixth century. Hureau struggles with the tension between biography and hagiography in this text corpus: on the one hand, various types of ‘historical’ information about the lives of respective monks are given (such as birth-and-death-dates, provenance, physical appearance, or former profession). On the other hand, recurring hagiographic *topoi* are woven into each narration – Hureau here differentiates the fields of asceticism, thaumaturgy, and outstanding scholarship. While discussing a series of exemplary biographies, Hureau reveals allusions to at that time well-known Buddhist *Sūtras* (such as the *Sūtra on the emission of light [Fangguang jing]* or the *Sūtra of the wise and the foolish [Xianyu jing]*), which are here exemplified within an individual monk’s life. Hureau also demonstrates adaptations to Chinese thought and culture in these texts, for example when ‘Indian’ animals (elephants) are exchanged for ‘Chinese’ ones (birds). According to Hureau, scholars have far too long devaluated the ‘scientific’ value of these ‘tales’: in effect, they ‘were full of sense and meaning for their readers [and] played a significant role in the acceptance of the Buddhist faith in China’.

Explosion of fictive narrative detail is part of CHASE ROBINSON’s analysis of the earliest phases of written accounts on Muhammad’s life. Again the focus of ‘History and *Heilsgeschichte* in early Islam’ is however not on historicity, but on the contexts of the rise of many and competing narrative accounts. Political functions, in particular the legitimation of an Umayyad dynasty under attack, are one part of the story; but first and foremost the narrators themselves are in need of authority, which is provided by the plausibility of their narratives as well as by their professional access to details and soon to chronology also. Interests in phases beyond the original interest in the prophetic role and the necessity to take up and neutralise polemical discourses accrue. The past is malleable, but to a limited extent only. Established images of prophets constrain the new and greater prophet.

In his article ‘The development and formation of religious historiography in Tibet’ PER SØRENSEN gives an overview of the most prominent forms of historiographical writing in medieval Tibet. These forms were naturally adapted from Tibet’s grand neighbours – Buddhist India and Imperial China – but soon evolved

into an array of historiographic genres with distinct perspectives, narration styles, and stereotypic religious motifs, thereby reflecting the unique development of Buddhism in Tibet. Sørensen begins with the earliest surviving sources from the medieval period and proceeds alongside the fragmentation of Tibetan Buddhism into numerous local monastic seats and ruling houses, revealing a development that led to an ever-increasing importance and textual output of historiographic writing in Tibet. In fact, Sørensen stresses the fact that one can hardly distinguish ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ historiography in medieval Tibet and continuously struggles with the interwovenness of historical ‘facts’ and religious *topoi* such as thaumaturgy, providence, or the workings of Buddhist ‘deities’ (such as Avalokiteśvara, who allegedly administered the proliferation of Buddhism in Tibet) in Tibetan historical writing. He provides a typology of medieval Tibetan genres of historiography consisting of five items and highlights the example case of ‘treasure literature’ which supported the adaptation of a medieval Buddhist founding myth during the institutionalisation of the Dalai Lamas. Sørensen finally points to the great importance of rituals and their manifestation in historiography and delineates an emic, threefold taxonomy of biographies which apparently reflects Tibetan Buddhist doctrine.

In ‘Medieval memories of the origins of the Waldensian movement’ PEKKA TOLONEN traces back the textual sources on the origins of the medieval European Waldensian movement. He presents texts from 1174 to the 1360 s that adopted very different narratives and ideological patterns while dealing with the movement. These memories are constructed on very different patterns and communicative settings. The thin strand of accounts produced by or for lay people try to understand the action of Valdes on the basis of older hagiographic models. In contrast, the accounts written by or for inquisitors and their classificatory interests organise their narratives on the basis of questions regarding the origins, the name and the error of the heresy persecuted. In both cases, origins are deeply rooted in preceding history. Heresies enrich and modify, but also stabilise competing accounts of the history of the Church. In its quest for origins, later Waldensian historiography based its judgment on the motifs of sanctity of the founder and apostolic origins developed in these early accounts.

YVES KRUMENACKER analyses ‘The use of history by French Protestants and its impact on Protestant historiography’ with a focus on a later period. French Protestant historiography of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is presented by his chapter as a sort of text answering the question ‘Where was your church before the Reformation, before Luther and Calvin?’. The heuristic apparatus developed includes dogmatic inventions and critique before 1500, individuals who spread new ideas, and the continuity of groups from Apostolic times onwards who served as ‘witnesses of the truth’ against the majority of the papal

Church. Here again the Waldensians and the apostolic origins credited to them are of foremost importance, but accompanied for some time by such unlikely companions as the Cathars and Christians of Ethiopia. The contribution demonstrates the role of narratives of martyrdom for the historiography of groups that remained defeated minorities in their struggle with French Catholicism and the importance of historiography for a specific Protestant identity.