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Εὐσέβεια, θρησκεία and *religio*
An etymological analysis of three disputed terms

While extensive philological research work has made clear the usage and the semantics of the words εὐσέβεια (also θεοσέβεια), θρησκεία and *religio* in Greek and Roman literature, their prehistoric meaning, whence the later sense of these terms has developed, is not transparent at all.[1] This is due to the fact that one has not paid too much attention to their etymologies, and thus the problems attached have not yet been definitely solved. By renewing these highly disputed questions the following paper hopes to contribute to a more appropriate understanding of the original sense of the Greek and Latin words for religion, which beyond any doubt belonged to the most important concepts of ancient Hellas and Rome.

Let us start with the word 'religion' itself which is derived from Latin *religio, -onis*. Examining the first occurrences and usages of this noun one can see that *religio* originally had a clear connotation: 'holy scruples', 'awe', Slovene 'religiozen strah, svetna bojecnost', German 'religiöses Bedenken', 'heilige Scheu'. In this sense the word can be attested for the first time in Roman Comedy: cf. Plaut. *Curc.* 350, where against the usual reading *vocat me ad cenam: religio fuit, denegare nolui* (Leo, Lindsay and others), one should rather change the comma and let the parasite say: *...religio fuit denegare; nolui*, thus having the same construction and meaning as one finds in Fab. Pict. apud Gell. *N.A.*10,15,4 (= frg. 3 Huschke) *equo Dialem flaminem vehi religio est* "There exist religious scruples that the *flamen Dialis* should ride a horse (= the *flamen Dialis* must not ride a horse)", or in German "Es gibt religiöses Bedenken (dagegen), daß..." The last example clearly shows, that the construction of *religio* + infinitive in the sense of "it is forbidden" has its origin in a sacred prerogative concerning the *flamen Dialis*. By making the parasite use the formula *religio* + inf. in *Curc.* loc. cit., Plautus wants the parasite Curculio to be solemn in a ridiculous way. There is also a passage in Plautus *Merc.* 881 which throws light on the original meaning of *religio*, and even more illustrative is Ter. *Andr.* 940 ff. and Acc. TRF 171f. ed. R³. In Terence the old Chremes expresses his doubts that he really might have found his daughter, saying to Pamphilus: *At mi unus scrupulus etiam restat, qui me male habet*, to what Pamphilus answers: *dignus es cum tua religione – odium!: nodum in scirpo quaeris*. And in Accius' tragedy *Astyanax* Menelaos exclaims:

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1   See the select general bibliography at the end of this paper, where you can also find the full bibliographical informations on the books and articles which in the following will be quoted only by their authors' names.

Nunc, Calcas, finem religionum fac! Desiste exercitum morari meque ab domui-tione arcere tuo obsceno omine!

It is a matter of fact that awful fear of the supernatural were special charac-teristics of Roman religion. Therefore, according to the definition given by Nigidius Figulus (apud Gell. *N.A.* 4,9,2), a person who was not only anxious in that respect, but also too fearful and superstitious, was called *'religiosus'.*[2]

The verb itself, from which the nomen *religio* is derived, is only once to be found in Latin literature, and there – in the form of a participle – in an old carmen whose author is not certain and from which Nigidius Figulus apud Gell. *N.A.* 4,9,1 (= frg. inc. 148 R³ = p. 7 FPL ed. Morel-Büchner = frg. 4 Swoboda) quotes the following words as part of a sacred order : *religentem esse oportet, religiosus ne fuas.*

Most philologists and scholars of historical linguistics have derived *religio* from *re+legere,* not only because of the participle *religens,* but also with regard to Cicero, *de nat. deor.* 2,72: *qui autem omnia quae ad cultum deorum pertinerent diligenter retractarent et tamquam* **relegerent,** *<hi> dicti sunt religiosi ex religendo, ut eligantes ex eligendo, ex diligendo diligentes, ex intellegendo intellegentes; his enim in verbis omnibus inest vis legendi eadem quae in 'religioso'.*

Since antiquity, however, there have been others, who in agreeing with Lactanti-us, *inst. div.* 4,28,2, and Servius, *Verg. Aen.* 8,349, have combined *religio* with *re + ligare 'to bind to'.* Ernout-Meillet 569 seem to support the latter derivation rather than that one from *re+legere* in the sense of *'to gather'.* Nevertheless, considering the meaning of other verbs like *diligo, neglego, intellego* (the last two words sometimes appear also written as *negligo, intelligo,* which perhaps might be the older and more correct orthography, although later attested in Roman literature), the connection of *religio* with *legere* is much more plausible than that with *ligare.* So in his very tho-rough etymological and semantical investigation Lieberg 57 (following Walde-Hof-mann I 352 f.) rightly states: *"Dobbiamo del tutto abbandonare l'etimologia da reli-gare e ritenere sicura quella da religere "* (= *relegere*). The same scholar convincingly refutes the assumption of Pokorny I 658, Kaetzler 11 ff., and Szemerényi 149, who tried to show that the Indoeuropeans had two verbal roots *leĝ-* : one of which ending in a palatal *g* had the meaning of *'to gather'* (to be found in *legere, relegere, eligere* etc.: perf. *lēgi*), whereas the *leg-* with velar *g* originally had the sense *'to heed'* and was the basis of *religio, religens, religiosus* and *neglego* (perf. *neglexi*), having its parallel in Greek ἀλέγω. But since the explanation of the α in ἀλέγω had caused difficulties – Hermann 171 and Seiler (1) 288 and (2) 8 ff. declared it to be the zero grade of the preverb ἐν(+ λέγω)–, this theory had been abandoned already by Frisk I 66 f., and also Chantraine I 56 regarded it as highly uncertain.

For the same reason Lieberg 50 also did not accept the theory of Wilt 13 ff., who, although denying any etymological connection of *religio* with *relegere* or *religere*, nevertheless did not see any obstacle to combine the word with Greek ἀλέγω.

But, to my opinion, there are good grounds for connecting *religio, religere* with ἀλέγω, if one assumes, as Rix 86 f. did, an Indoeuropean verbal root *$h_2$lege/o-* with the sense of *'to respect, regard, care for* or *of, heed'* etc. Benveniste (2) 152, Frisk I 66 f., Rix 86 f., and also recently Schrijver 21 f., tried to connect this verb with Greek ἄλγος *'pain, grief'* and its derivations (e.g. δυσ-ηλεγής etc.), and Frisk and Schrijver thought that the original sense of ἀλέγω must have been *'to feel pain'*. But there is no evidence for this assumption. So Chantraine I 56 (following Seiler [2] 9) rightly states: *"Il semble difficile de rattacher pour le sense cette famille de mots* (scil. de ἀλέγω) *à ἄλγος, encore que les deux séries aient pu agir l'une sur l'autre. (cf. sous ἄλγος)"*.

Examining the occurrences of ἀλέγω and its enlarged forms ἀλεγίζω, ἀλεγύνω one can see that, with the exception of Latin *religere, religio* etc., this verbal root cannot be traced elsewhere but in Greek, where these verbs obviously were expressions of archaic poetry: the last two words are only to be found in epics, whereas ἀλέγω occurs in archaic lyrics as well: cf. e.g. Pind. *Ol.* 2, 78: Πηλεύς τε καὶ Κάδμος ἐν τοῖσιν ἀλέγονται and also later in IG 14,1389 II 6 (a metrical inscription found in the via Appia) ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀλέγεσθον.

The meaning of ἀλέγω in the quoted passages is not, however, primarily *'to count among'*, as rendered by LSJ s.v. 61, but rather *'to respect'* (scil. with reverence and awe), *'to adore'*. Furthermore, the majority of testimonies, where the simplex ἀλέγω occurs, belong to a religious context (e.g. with accusative): Hom. *Il.* 16, 388 θεῶν ὄπιν οὐκ ἀλέγοντες, Hes. *Op.* 251; (with genetive): Hom. *Od.* 9,115 οὐ γὰρ Κύκλωπες Διὸς .....ἀλέγουσιν etc.

We have already pointed out that the Latin word *religio,* in its earliest occurrences in Roman literature, also had the meaning of *'respect with reverence and awe'*. Just as *legio* goes back to *legere 'to gather'*, *religio* and *religens* (from *religere*) can be derived from the Italic prefix *re-* + *$h_2$lege/o-*. Because of the usual quantity *ē* in *religio*[3] the conjunction of the two elements must have taken place after the disappearing of the laryngal in the Italic languages; otherwise the Latin form would be **rāligio*. On the other hand, the change of *e* to *i* in *leg-* points to an archaic period of the

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3   Szemerényi 149 and Schrijver 22 (as already Seiler [1] 288 and [2] 9) are mistaken in assuming an *ē* in *religio*. Where the lengthening of the *e* in *religio* occurs (mainly in Latin poetry), it can be explained as a metrical liberty, which, however, has its origin in the pronunciation of everyday life. There the doubling of the *l* was optional, a custom which in later times became typical of the Latin speaking people in Africa, as attested by the Roman grammarians: cf. Isid. *Etym.* I, 32,8: *labdacismus est, si pro uno l duo pronuntiantur, ut Afri faciunt;* Pomp. GLK V, 282, 4 ff. *labdacismis scatent Afri; raro est, ut aliquis dicat 'l'.* But this phenomenon can be detected also in many metrical inscriptions outside Africa. Cf. Leumann 560.

Latin language. Furthermore, the prefix *re-* and the ending *-io* show that *religio* had become a typical Latin word. Since we have seen that from the very beginning *$h_2$lege/o-* must have had the sense of *'respectful awe'*, we can understand why, in combination with *re-* denoting the iteration, this verbal root was used as basis to define the Romans' attitude towards their gods.

Intensive and respectful awe for the supernatural is not only a typical feature of Roman religion – although there it is most obvious –, but it is common to man's belief in divine powers in general. It was, therefore, also an essential part of the ancient Greeks' religious feelings. This is expressed by the words εὐσέβεια and θεοσέβεια. These words, however, semantically do not cover the same large scope as the Latin word *religio* does, since, as already Wilamowitz 15 justly observed, the Greeks originally did not have a comprehensive proper term for this concept. Εὐσέβεια occurs for the first time in Greek Tragedy, θεοσέβεια, however, not before Xenophon (*Anab.* 2,6,26): the latter word in the sense of *'service* or *fear of God'*, *'religiousness'*, whereas εὐσέβεια did not only signify the Greek's *reverence* towards their gods, but also towards the parents, thus being in some way an expression corresponding to Roman *pietas* (cf. LSJ 731 s.v.).

Analysing εὐσέβεια or θεοσέβεια etc. from the etymological point of view the main question is: What was the original meaning of the verbal root σεβ- which is the basis of σέβω, σέβομαι, σέβας, σεμνός (*σεβ-νος), εὐ-σεβ-ής etc. But before trying to give an answer to this question it must be stated that the verb for the first time occurs in Hom. *Il.* 4, 242 in the middle form, which is the only evidence of this word in epic literature at all. The active form σέβω, however, can be found from post-Homeric times onwards (since Pindar and Trag.). For LSJ, the original meaning of σέβο—μαι is *'to feel awe* or *fear before God'*, *'feel shame'*, *Il.* 4, 242 as the earliest example quoted, whereas the active σέβω is rendered *'to worship, to honour* (mostly scil. the gods)'. For Frisk II 686 f. the etymology of σέβομαι is not clear. He says: "Lautlich möglich, aber wenigstens beim ersten Anblick wenig überzeugend ist die Zusammenstellung mit altind. *tyájati* *'verlassen, im Stich lassen, aufgeben'*" (this connection had been put forward by Brugmann 301 ff., Pokorny I 1086 and others), thus sharing the doubts which had been uttered already by Mayrhofer I 529. But in regard to the causative σοβέω Frisk thinks that the original meaning of σέβομαι could have been: "*wegeilen, davonfliehen'* ..... daraus *'(scheu) vor etwas zurücktreten'*, *'zurückweichen'*". Burkert 408 in his thorough analysis of εὐσέβεια declares, quoting Frisk and Aesch. *Pers. 694* : "Der Wortstamm *seb-*...weist etymologisch auf *'Gefahr'* und *'Flucht'* zurück", and Chantraine II 993, rejecting Mayrhofer's doubts, states: "La diversité remarquable des emplis réduit à la signification unique *'se retirer'* ou *'faire se retirer'*, confirmée par l'étymologie, cf. skr. *tyájati* *'quitter, abandonner'* de *$tieg^u$-.*" Also Rix (1) 90, without any comment, connects σέβεται with sanskr. *tyájate*.

Comparing the usage of σεβ- and σοβ- one can see that according to the statements given in the relevant dictionaries, the stem σεβ- is restricted to the religious sphere, whereas σοβ- is used in profane context. An examination of σοβ-, however, clearly shows that the sense was not only *'to move away, to drive away'*, but also *'to move towards, to drive towards, to walk towards'*, especially in an impressive, often pompous or fierce manner: cf. the relevant passages in LSJ s.v. σοβέω and, above all, the meaning of σοβαρός *'rushing'*, *'violent'*, *'haughty'* etc. Thus the earliest sense of σοβ- must have been a neutral one: simply *'to move in an impressive way'*, and the indication of a direction cannot have been original (just as *fero* first had the neutral sense of *'to bring'*, either *to* or *away* [for the latter cf. φῶρ, *fur*]). The very same also holds good for σέβομαι, and this can be proved by Sanskrit, where *tyájati* on the one hand means *'to quit, to abandon'*, whereas *tanu-tyáj-* has the sense of *'to offer one's body and life to'*. Thus we can see that the common Indoeuropean verbal root *$tieg^u$-, from which sanskr. *tyáj-* and σεβ-, σοβ- can be derived, originally had the neutral meaning *'to move either to* or *away from* somebody or something'. The Greeks, however, seem to have given to this word of moving the special connotation of impressiveness.

This original sense of σέβεσθαι, to my mind, is obvious in Hom. *Il.* 4, 242 ff., where Agamemnon encourages his kinfolk to rush again into battle, exclaiming:

Ἀργέιοι ἰόμωροι, ἐλέγχεα, οὔ νυ σέβεσθε;

τίφθ' οὕτως ἔστητε τεθηπότες ἠΰτε νεβροί,

αἵ τ' ἐπεὶ οὖν ἔκαμον πολέος πεδίοιο θέουσαι,

ἑστᾶσ', οὐδ' ἄρα τίς σφι μετὰ φρεσὶ γίγνεται ἀλκή.

Most translators render οὔ νυ σέβεσθε with *"why don't you feel shame?"*, but, in my opinion, the question *"why do you stand here so shocked as the young deer stand..."* imposes rather an encouraging exhortation to rush into battle than to be ashamed. Therefore, I would propose to translate here οὔ νυ σέβεσθε *"why don't you move now?"* (= *"why don't you rush into battle?"*).

That this was the original meaning of σέβομαι can also be proved by a passage in Aristoph. *Nub.* 291ff., where Socrates first addresses the Clouds and then asks Strepsiades:

ὦ μέγα σεμναὶ Νεφέλαι, φανερῶς ἠκούσατέ μου καλέσαντος.

ἤσθου φωνῆς ἅμα καὶ βροντῆς μυκησαμένης θεοσέπτου;

The form θεοσέπτου has caused problems of understanding, so that Wilamowitz changed it to θεόσεπτον, to which Dover in his commentary replied: "I wish (with Wilamowitz [SPAW 1921, 741] that Ar. had written θεόσεπτον (or –τα), an internal accusative characterizing the roar of the thunder; but emendation cannot be supported by adequate stylistic evidence." Bearing in mind, however, what σέβομαι originally

meant, one can see that the genetive θεοσέπτου here yields good sense: the βροντή is θεόσεπτος, *'moved, sent by the gods'*, i.e. *'the Clouds'*. And Strepsiades picking up –σεπ- (-σεβ-), as Dover accurately observed, answers:

κοὰ σέβομαί γ', ὦ πολυτίμητοι, κοὰ βούλομαι ἀντοπαρδεῖν

πρὸς τὰς βροντάς.

Here σέβομαι can be translated as *'I move myself in the proper way* (scil. in front of the gods)', which leads to the sense *'I adore* (scil. the gods)', *'I revere'*. The original meaning of σεβ-, however, evidently has been retained in the religious word θεόσεπ–τος, a fact that might be explained by the conservative character of sacred language.

Now we also comprehend the construction σέβεσθαι θεούς, where θεούς can be defined as an accusative of direction (just as with [ἀφ]ικνέομαι: e.g. Hom. *Od.* 1, 332 μνηστῆρας ἀφίκετο, etc., cf. Schwyzer II 68). Thus σέβεσθαι could mean *'to move towards* (scil. the gods)' or *'to move back* (scil. from their altars)', *'to quit them in a proper way'*, which, of course, was done with reverence and awe. This then led to the use of σέβομαι, σέβω in the general sense of *'to worship'* or *'to fear the gods'*.

Besides paying reverence to the gods by moving humbly and decently to or from their altars, a main characteristic of religion is, furthermore, the observance of the gods' privileges, laws, rites and ceremonies as well as the handling of their statues and property with care and awe. The adequate expression for this careful handling was εὐλαβέομαι, εὐλάβεια, in which -λαβ-, the stem of λαμβάνω, leads back to Indo-european *slh₂gʷ- *'to grasp, to seize, to hold'*. From the concrete meaning of *'holding with care and awe'* the word εὐλάβεια achieved also the general sense of *'fear of god'*.

The importance of the careful observance of the divine privileges, laws and tradi-tional rites, on the other side, is reflected in the term θρησκεία. Although the usage of this noun, which in early historical times denoted *'cult'*, *'ritual'*, *'worship of the gods'*, and in the period of the Roman Empire had already achieved the general mea-ning of *'religion'*, has been investigated quite well,[4] there are still some problems of its etymology to be solved. Hesychius' notice θρήσκω· νοῶ, θράσκειν· ἀνα–μιμνήσκειν, ἐν-θρεῖν· φυλάσσειν and ἀ-θερ-ές· ἀνόητον, ἀνόσιον can give a hint to the original meaning of the words θρησκεία and θρησκεύω, which obviously belonged to the Ionian dialect. Therefore the α in Hesychius' θράσκειν is difficult to explain, unless one assumes here the influence of the Doric or a N.-West Greek dialect (just as in Hesychius' τεθρᾶσθαι instead of τεθρῶσθαι, the perfect form from θρῷσκομαι).[5] Another difficulty is not only to be found in the presumable aorist ἐν-θρεῖν instead of ἐν-θερεῖν, but also in Hesychius' θρεσκής· περιττός, δεισι–

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4   Cf. Van Herten, Benveniste (2) II 266 f. and Robert 226 ff.

5   Cf. Petersmann 45 (note 25); 46.

δαίμων, and Hymn. ad Isin 5 (= IG XII (5) 739,5) φιλόθρεσκος *'loving ceremonies'*, while we have θρησκός *'pious, religious'* in the New Testament *Ep. Iacob.* 1,26.

The present θρήσκω, θρησκεύω, in which σκ just as in θρῴ-σκω, θνῄσκω, is an infix, to my mind is to be derived from the Indo-European root **dherh₁-*. Its full form can also be detected in Hesychius' above mentioned ἀ-θερ-ές˙ ἀνόητον, ἀνόσιον, and Homeric ἀ-θερ-ίζω *'to take no notice of'*, whereas **dhr̥h₁-* is the basis of θρή-(σκω) etc. (Cf. the similar development of **dherh₃-* in ἔ-θορ-ον, θορ-εῖν; **dhr̥h₃-* in θρω-ι-σκ-ω etc.[6]). There is no realization of this root in other Indo-European idioms.

As far as the Greek origin is concerned, the words θρησκεία, θρησκεύω etc. belong, as stated above, to the Ionian dialect. They occur for the first time in Herodotus (2,18,2; 2,37,3; 2,64,1), and after disappearing in the literature for centuries, they emerged again in the period of the Roman Empire and proved to be most vivid terms. Thus they became also central expressions in Ancient Christianity, and in later ages θρησκεία turned out to be the common word for *'religion'* in general, the result of which can be seen in modern Greek.

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6   Cf. Petersmann 44 (note 25).

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Povzetek
Εὐσέβεια, θρησκεία in *religio*
ETIMOLOŠKA ANALIZA TREH SPORNIH TERMINOV

Obsežne filološke analize so pojasnile rabo in pomen leksemov εὐσέβεια (tudi θεοσέβεια), θρησκεία in *religio* v grški in rimski literaturi. Njihovi predhistorični pomeni pa niso zadovoljivo pojasnjeni, ker se pri raziskavah premalo upošteva etimologija. Z etimološko analizo se tu zato skuša prispevati k bolj primernemu razumevanju prvotnega pomena omenjenih treh religioznih terminov.

Lat. samostalnik *religio, -onis* je bil prvotno konotiran z "religiozen strah", "sveta boječnost", angl. "holy scruples", "awe", nvn. "religiöses Bedenken", "heilige Scheu", z *religiosus* pa je bila označena oseba, ki ni izražala le zaskrbljenosti do nadnaravnega, ampak je bila v tem oziru tudi preveč boječa in praznoverna. Glagol, iz katerega je bil samostalnik *religio* izpeljan, je izpričan le enkrat in posredno z deležnikom v zvezi *religentem esse oportet, religiosus ne fuas*. Lat. *religio, religere* se zato povezuje z gr. glagolom ἀλέγω "spoštovati, častiti", ki ga je potrebno izvesti iz ievr. glagolske osnove *h₂lege/o-* s pomenom "spoštovati, upoštevati, skrbeti za/o, paziti". Lat. glagol je moral biti z iterativnim *re-* iz te ievr. glagolske osnove tvorjen šele po izpadu vzglasnega laringala v italskih jezikih.

Stari Grki so močan in spoštljiv strah pred nadnaravnim izražali z leksemoma εὐσέβεια in θεοσέβεια. Medtem ko zadnji leksem pomeni "služba božja, strah pred bogom, pobožnost", označuje prvi "spoštovanje do bogov" pa tudi "spoštovanje do staršev" in ustreza lat. *pietas*. Glagolska osnova σεβ- je za razliko od σοβ- v σοβέω in σοβαρός omejena na rabo v leksemih z religioznega področja in se ohranja v σέβω, σέβομαι, σέβας, σεμνός, εὐ-σεβ-ής itd. Ievr. glagolska osnova *ṯi̯egʷ-*, od koder je možno izvajati sti. *tyáj-* in σεβ-, σοβ-, je imela prvotno nevtralen pomen "premikati k oz. od koga ali česa", o čemer je možno sklepati na podlagi analize grškega gradiva in pomenskega razmerja med *tyájati* "opustiti, zapustiti" ob *tanu-tyáj-* "ponuditi, darovati telo ali življenje komu". Kaže pa, da so Grki temu izrazu premikanja dodali posebno konotacijo izrazitosti.

Na osnovi Hesychijevih glos je gr. θρησκεία, ki v zgodnjih historičnih časih pomeni "kult; ritual; čaščenje bogov" in v času rimskega imperija pridobi splošni pomen "vera", možno prepoznati za ionsko besedo. Sedanjika θρήσκω in θρησκεύω z medpono σκ je potrebno izvesti iz ievr. osnove *dherh₁-*. Polna stopnja te osnove se ohranja v Hesychijevi glosi ἀ-θερ-ές· ἀνόητον, ἀνόσιον in v homerskem ἀ-θερ-ίζω "prezirati", ničtostopenjska *dhr̥h₁-* pa v θρή-(σκω) itd. Te ievr. osnove v drugih ievr. jezikih ni zaslediti.