ΦΑΙΔΙΜΟΣ ΕΚΤΩΡ
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Forgotten Scholarship: Gustav Adolf Schöll, Herodotus, and Greek Oracular Poetry

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Abstract Schöll's thesis that there was a network of epic narratives with legendary and oracular contents written by chresmologues and prophets can no longer be supported. We should admit, instead, that the oracular stories about the local past that Schöll most acutely detected were in most cases handed down by work of mouth. Oral tradition – or, rather, 'semi-oral' – must be given pre-eminence over chresmological epic. Still, Schöll had insights of the greatest importance concerning the oracular tradition in Herodotus. Today, we can realise it far better than the philologists of his times and the great scholars of Herodotus who came after him have been able to do.

Keywords Herodotus. Delphic verse oracles. Oracular poetry. Local traditions.

> Historical pronouncements of the Pythia were almost never in verse; [...] and nearly all attested verse oracles were invented after the fact for the sake of telling a good story.
>
> (Gainsford 2015, 28)

Some ghosts are worth reviving. At times they are able to tell us about things that interest us very closely. These pages are dedicated with affection to Willy, as a souvenir of our far-gone conversations in Milan, when we happened to offer blood-libations to the ghosts.[1]

1 Obviously enough, an allusion is made to Lloyd-Jones 1982.

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Gustav Adolf Schöll – who was born in Brno in 1805 and died in Weimar in 1882[2] – is possibly still remembered for his connection with Karl Otfried Müller, whom he considered his mentor and who reciprocated him with a close friendship nourished by a profound scientific exchange. [3] Schöll participated in the planning of Müller's study expedition to Greece, accompanying and assisting him in his field research. After Müller's tragic death, Schöll – shocked by the event – went back to Germany and handed to Boeckh all the epigraphic notes and the facsimile of inscriptions that Müller had frantically drawn up. He subsequently elaborated and edited for publication the archaeological and historical-artistic notes and drawings left by his *maestro*, thus succeeding in an enterprise which others, such as Curtius for instance, had deemed hardly possible.[4]

The Schöll who is less known nowadays is the scholar of Attic tragedy; the fine translator of classics, from tragic authors to Pindar and Herodotus;[5] the poet and connoisseur of ancient and modern art; the refined scholar and subtle expert on German poets, especially Goethe and Schiller, and on Shakespeare and Cervantes.[6] Schöll was, indeed, a prominent intellectual figure in the civil and cultural life in Weimar between 1842 and the year of his death.[7] He was also a revered father, especially by the two sons – Rudolf (Weimar 1844-Munich 1893) and Fritz (Weimar 1850-Rottweil 1919) – who would become prominent classical philologists (the elder, especially) and who were both disciples in Göttingen of the great Hermann Sauppe. When Sauppe held the position of Director of the Gymnasium in Weimar (1845-56), he had also been a good friend of Gustav Schöll.

2 Detailed information about Adolf Schöll's life and writings is provided in the obituary written by his son Fritz (Schöll 1882); of the highest interest is the perceptive biographical essay contributed by his son Rudolf to *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Schöll 1891). See also Pöthe 1995, 60-6; Ehringhaus 2012, 21-5. A genealogical tree of Schöll's family is in Ehringhaus, Kanz 2012, 249.

3 On Müller and Schöll, see Schöll 1882, 66, 67 and fn. 5, 72-3 and fnn. 13-14, 74-7. On the study expedition to Greece, see also Döhl 1989, especially 52-5, 57-8, 60, 63, 66 on the role played by Schöll. Gehrke 1991 is also important. Schöll considered Müller his mentor ("mein Lehrer": *Hallische Jahrbücher für deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst*, no. 219, 12.9.1838, 1751), but as his son Fritz remarked, "er war nicht nur der Empfangende" (Schöll 1882, 67).

4 For Curtius' doubts (letter to Schöll of 4.3.1841), see Schöll 1882, 67, and fn. 17. Müllers notes were published in Schöll 1843.

5 As Sandys aptly remarked in his *History of Classical Scholarship* Schöll "translated Sophocles and Herodotus with the highest degree of literary skill" (Sandys 1908, 148). In a letter written before Schöll's arrival in Göttingen (6.7.1826) K.O. Müller wrote: "Ihre Leichtigkeit im Uebersetzen bewundere ich" (Schöll 1882, 66).

6 Schöll 1882, 82-3, 85, 96 (Goethe), 79, 84-5, 96 (Schiller), 88 (Cervantes), 96 (Shakespeare); see also Jansohn 2001. A choice of literary essays by A. Schöll were edited by his sons Fritz and Rudolf posthumously (see Schöll 1884).

7 Jansohn 2016, 118-25; on cultural life in Weimar, see Pöthe 1995 and Kater 2014, 68 ff.

Schöll as a scholar of Herodotus is, instead, almost completely forgotten. As early as the last decades of the nineteenth century, the contribution of Schöll to Herodotean studies was dismissed. In the *dissertatio philologica* "De oraculis ab Herodoto commemoratis quaestionum pars prior" printed in Bonn in 1871, Fr. Benedict dedicated the first seven pages to summarising and criticising Schöll's theses.[8] Although this was always cited as a "refutation" of Schöll's work – by Jacoby,[9] for instance – that discussion actually ended with an agreement on the fact that verse oracles must have been transmitted along with the narrative that gave an account of them, and not as isolated texts.[10] And this was certainly not a secondary aspect of Schöll's reflection. Along with Benedict's alleged rebuttal, other events contributed to the oblivion of Schöll as a scholar of Herodotus: especially Malten's harsh criticism on Schöll's interpretation of Herodotus's account on Cyrene,[11] and Jacoby's sharp distancing from Schöll's general interpretation of the *Histories*.[12]

There are reasons today for a closer look at Schöll's vision of Herodotus. These reasons pertain primarily to Schöll's interest in the narrative dimension of the *Histories* and in the fundamental role played within this dimension by the predetermination of events. Let's see more closely.

Schöll thought that the *Histories* were, in the first place, a masterpiece of world literature. Indeed, most of the scholar's life was devoted to Herodotus's work, as well as to the Greek tragedians, to Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare and Cervantes. For Schöll, the comprehension of a great literary work could not forego its interpretation and, consequently, its translation. Schöll applied the same criterion to Pindar, for instance, as well as to the tragic authors, above all Sophocles.[13] The translation of Herodotus's *Histories* absorbed the young philologist through the late twenties, and was published by Metzler in Stuttgart between 1828 and 1832, with an introduction – indeed not quite incisive – and short explanatory notes.[14] This early endeavour cannot be called immature, especially if we consider the style of Schöll's translation into German. The scholar distanced himself from

8 Benedict 1871, 1-7.

9 Jacoby 1913, 406, 40-5.

10 Benedict 1871, 7: "oracula numquam sola tradi potuisse, sed semper coniuncta cum narratione quadam neminem fugiet (cf. Wachsmuth, hell. Alterthumsk. II,2 Beil. 3 I edit.)".

11 Malten 1911, 196-7.

12 Jacoby 1913, 364-7.

13 See Schöll 1882, 87-8 on Schöll's Pindaric studies and translations, and 78-9, 88-9, 94-6 on his lifelong work on Sophocles.

14 Schöll 1828-32. On Metzler publishing house, see Wittmann 1982.

the archaizing approach of Lange, who, a few years earlier, had resorted to the German used by Luther in the Bible for his own translation of the *Histories*.[15] Schöll's interest in Herodotus then had a revival in the early 1850s in Weimar. He reworked his translation, with the help of Rudolf Köhler, a young philologist from Weimar. He had been a pupil of Göttling in Jena and had recently graduated with a dissertation on Nonnus of Panopolis; in later years, having become a librarian, he would be recognised as a well-learned scholar of folklore.[16] The new edition of the translation was published in 1855, once again by the Metzler publishing house, and was accompanied by a new – and much more significant – introduction.[17]

Schöll had undertaken to study Herodotus with great and renewed commitment in those years, aiming at an overall interpretation of his culture and intent as an author. Evidence of this lies in the fact that, between 1854 and 1855, he published in the "Philologus" of Schneidewin a series of specialised papers[18] that offered some relevant notions that were then re-elaborated in the introduction to the new edition of his translation. The most significant paper, entitled "Herodots Entwicklung zu seinem Beruf",[19] presents a general interpretation of the *Histories*, which evidently had matured concomitantly with the reworking of their translation into German.

Some of the criticisms found in Herodotean studies of the following decades mistakenly suggest that Schöll's paper was a research on the poetic 'sources' of the *Histories*: far from it. Schöll discussed issues of the utmost importance: first, he claimed – indeed with little plausibility – that books 7-9 had been composed first, and in Samos, before Herodotus moved to Athens. Secondly, he ascribed to Panyassis a decisive influence on Herodotus' religiously laden vision of reality (for Jacoby this was, at least, an exaggeration).[20] Above all, though, he devoted more than half of the paper to the narrative role of the future and destiny in the *Histories*. In particular, he focused on the issue of the predetermination of the narrated events, which was provided – often in an obscure way – by omens, prodigies, premonitory dreams and oracles. What Schöll meant when he wrote about "chresmologische Gedichte als Grundlagen von Erzählungen Herodots" (p. 43) is not immediately clear. Only a close reading of his long and conceptually engaged argumentation may reveal his thoughts on the matter. As we will see next, Schöll's discussion was meant to en-

15 On Lange's translation see Kipf 1999.

16 On Köhler see König 2003, 972-3 and Knoche 2015.

17 Schöll 1855a.

18 Schöll 1854; 1855b; 1855c.

19 Schöll 1855b.

20 Jacoby 1913, 218-21.

gage a much wider issue, of which the oracular poetic tradition was only a part.

Retracing Schöll's pages today clearly shows how they anticipated recent developments in research on oracles in Herodotus. From this point of view, Schöll's reflection has a very significant interest and importance. Surely, it is worth trying to prevent them from fading by lapse of time, to use the words of his Herodotus.

Right from the start, Schöll takes into account a broad picture, which goes far beyond the problem of the sources from which Herodotus would have drawn the texts of his verse oracles. Schöll immediately emphasises (Schöll 1855b, 39) that the Herodotean vision of reality is completely pervaded by omens and signs of destiny. This is why the *Histories* are full of warnings, portents, mysteriously symbolic events, ominous words and names, dreams and visions. Prophetic oracles – it is important to emphasise – are for Schöll an integral part of this complex apparatus of narrative tools that are functional to the prefiguration and predetermination of events within the narrative. Thus, Herodotus appears to him as a connoisseur of the divinatory arts which was perfectly inserted into the circles of those (priests, seers and chresmologues) who possessed and transmitted the mantic culture. It is remarkable that Schöll makes Herodotus a true *master of signs*, to quote the title of Hollmann's recent book.[21]

In this framework, it is clear why Schöll did not investigate single oracles or portents; rather, he focused on the narrations to which those omens provide an overall meaning. In particular, he dealt with three stories: that of Croesus, of Battus the founder of Cyrene, and of Cypselus, the first tyrant of Corinth; he was clearly aware that these were tales of a fabulous, legendary nature with moralising nuances, actual exemplary parables.[22] In all three stories, in which the oracles play a very fundamental role, dynasties of kings and tyrants whose end was predetermined are at stake. As regards the verse oracles Schöll believed that they were not composed by Herodotus, but belonged, instead, to the narrations that Herodotus knew and used. For example, Schöll insists on the oracular response to Battus 'for his voice' (*orac. ap.* Hdt. 4.155.3-4 = PW 39 = Fontenrose Q 47) which cannot fail to have originated within the narration, because it presupposes the legendary motif of Battus's stuttering which is characteristic of the Cyrenian version of the story. With extreme lucidity, Schöll does not refute the very important consequence that derives from this observation: that is to say, those narratives, that were constructed in a perspective of exaltation of Pythian Apollo, contain re-

21 Holmann 2011.

22 See Schöll 1855, 48 ("[die] Battos-legende"), 49 ("Geschichtsapologe"), 50 (Beispielgeschichten). Apolog was discussed by Hegel (*Lectures on Aesthetics*, vol. 2, I A2c).

sponses that were "invented" (47 *fin*.), i.e. they were never actually pronounced by the Pythia in Delphi. Those narratives are therefore "Orakel-anekdoten", "Orakelapologe" (52.63). It is important to note that these terms anticipate the definition of "oracular tales" that has become commonplace only in recent years.[23]

More specifically, the oracular narratives to which Herodotus had recourse are, for Schöll, poetic compositions, "chresmologische Gedichte". However, they are not conceived – as the designation suggests, and as indeed Schöll's critics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries believed – as oracular *centos* where different responses in verse are simply juxtaposed or, at most, linked together by inventory-like stylistic features. Instead, Schöll thought that they were epic compositions, i.e. hexametric poetry of a narrative nature, which recounted 'local Delphic stories' marked by fable-like traits. Such stories would have originated after the events, but not much later, as in the case of the story of Cypselus, in which the first two oracles in Herodotus (*oracc. ap.* Hdt. 5.92β.2-3 = PW 6-7 = Fontenrose Q 59-60 "have at their basis the strong impression aroused by the tremendous upheaval that Cypselus accomplished" (49-50). Schöll points out that these narratives in verse – actually complex oracular stories on historical subjects–, drew from sagas (58-59), from gnomic poetry and sages' wisdom tradition (62-63), as well as from the tradition of mantic poetry (50-51, 62-73). They were composed by the chresmologues, i.e. by individuals who in many cases remain unknown, although the Athenian Onomacritus may provide a concrete example. That the content of these poetic narratives is Delphic, argues Schöll, does not prevent us from thinking that they were composed by the chresmologues, because both the mythical prophets and oracular poets and the historically attested chresmologues were familiar with Delphic divination (62-63). The hypothesis that the chresmologues had limited themselves to inserting pre-existing oracular texts in the stories to which they gave a poetic guise, was inadmissible for Schöll for two crucial details. Namely, the fact that the oracles "belong" (52) to the narration, and the fact that they are mutually connected with the story in which they appear (46-49, 52, 61-62); so much so, that the story cannot have been added to the oracles – but neither the oracles could have been interpolated to the narration – neither by the chresmologues nor by Herodotus (!).

As a consequence of the argumentation provided so far, and specifically the demonstration that the verse oracles were composed together with the stories that accompanied them, as well as other detailed observation that undemine the idea of a Delphic archive of oracular responses (57-58), Schöll definitely excludes that the pres-

23 See Juul 2010; Giangiulio 2014; Kindt 2016.

ence of verse oracles in Herodotus depended on the transcription of texts stored in Delphi, or elsewhere. As further evidence of his interpretation, Schöll acutely observes (62) that in several stories some of the oracles not only appear to be closely linked to one another in terms of text and content, but – although sometimes quoted in different sections of the narrative – are also linked together by the same narrative 'thread' ("durch *einem* erzählungsfaden") intrinsic to the narration.[24] This allows him to maintain that the historian had access to narratives that had already been "elaborated and ordered" – which he himself reworked – as applications, so to speak, of a mantic knowledge that Herodotus understood and was able to use.

Especially in the tenth section of Schöll's article, it is clear beyond doubt that the scholar reflects on the oracular tradition in an attempt to understand crucial aspects of the significance of the Herodotean work as a whole.[25] For Schöll the organisation and contents of the narrative – for instance, that related to the 'war of Xerxes' – are the outcome of the desire to present the events not as isolated episodes, but as constitutive parts of a wider whole, in which all the parts are connected to one another. In such concatenation of events, the past is conceived as a prelude to the present, and oracles and omens give events a horizon of meaning that only becomes clear in the present. But the symbolic connection between past and present, as well as the inevitability of the unfolding of events through the generations, truly appear only in, and through, narration (70). In this way, Schöll implicitly justifies his refusal to consider the oracular responses as 'fragments' that are independent from the narrative tradition. At the same time, he provides a fascinating explanation of the reason why Herodotus collected oracular stories and reworked them as part of the basis of his narration to compose the *Histories*.

Discussing the role of prognostic and divinatory knowledge in Herodotus's worldview lies beyond these pages. There is no doubt, though, that the depth of Schöll's reflection in this regard exceeds by far most of the nineteenth – and twentieth-century studies on oracles in Herodotus. It must be emphasised here, however, that the importance of Schöll's contribution lies in having shown the need to discuss the Herodotean oracles in terms of oracular narrative tradition and adaptation of this tradition by Herodotus in the narration of his *Histories*.

There are more specific aspects in Schöll's discussion of oracles that can only be understood and appreciated in recent years, in which research is distancing itself from the belief that the verse oracles cited by Herodotus were texts of Delphic origin, pre-existing the narra-

24 Schöll 1855b, 62 (italics in the original).

25 See Schöll 1855b, 68-76.

tive which gave an account of them. Recent research is indeed demonstrating that those oracles were composed contextually and within the oracular tales composed in various Greek local communities to make sense of their collective past.[26] Those oracular stories are often believed to have circulated as oral tales.[27] However, the role played in their creation by priests, seers and chresmologues – who more than others were familiar with oracular poetry, remains to be studied. Likewise, further investigation must be devoted to the possibility of the existence of 'semi-oral' oracular stories, in which oracles that had already been extrapolated from other stories and collected by the chresmologues were 'recycled'.[28]

Schöll's thesis that there was a network of epic narratives relating of the local past with legendary and oracular contents written by chresmologues and prophets can no longer be supported. The 'oralist revolution' has left its mark also on Greek archaic history. The oral tradition – or, rather, 'semi-oral' – must be given pre-eminence over Schöll's chresmological epic.

It remains, however, that the scholar of classic and modern literature, who in Weimar passed from Herodotus to Sophocles and from Goethe to Shakespeare and Cervantes, had insights of the greatest importance concerning the oracular tradition in Herodotus. Today, we can realise it far better than his coeval philologists and the great scholars of Herodotus who came after him have been able to do.

Also in this case, we are forced to admit that it is the present that sheds light on the past. Herodotus might have agreed.

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26 See Fontenrose 1983; Maurizio 1997; Giangiulio 2001; 2010a; 2010b; 2014; forthcoming; Lupi 2014; Luraghi 2014; Nafissi 2014.

27 Maurizio 1997.

28 In this regard, with reference to the Delphic oracles about the history of Cyrene mentioned by Herodotus, see Giangiulio 2001.

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