

BETWEEN ORIGINAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE CLASSICAL WORLD: INTERVIEW WITH ANDRÉ CHEVITARESE¹

André Leonardo Chevitarese²

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Interview conducted by Zoom platform on December 21, 2020.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrCiwWqG77E&feature=youtu.be>

Revista Heródoto (Gilberto da Silva Francisco): Hi, I'm Gilberto da Silva Francisco, Professor in Ancient History at the Universidade Federal de São Paulo, UNIFESP, and today I am pleased to talk with Professor André Leonardo Chevitarese, which is Full Professor in History of the Universidade Federal Rio de Janeiro, whereby he received the historical

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training and his master's degree, supervised by Professor Ciro Flamarion Cardoso, and then received his PhD degree at the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Universidade de São Paulo (MAE - USP). Professor André Chevitarese is one of Brazil's leading experts on Historical Jesus, but he has also deeply researched the Greek experience from democracy to the rural, agrarian world, from History to Archaeology. Firstly, I would like to thank you for accepting our invitation, for your willingness and availability to talk to Revista Heródoto, and then ask my first question: André, could you talk a little about your initial trajectory? How did you become interested in the studies of Ancient Greece and the themes of democracy and the rural world in the Attica region?

André Leonardo Chevitarese: Well, Gilberto, I thank you very much for the invitation you and Glaydson made me, and for the opportunity to talk a little about my academic trajectory. Well, I was studying at the Institute of Physics in the UFRJ, when I made the decision to abandon Physics and go to History, carry on the history course. And when I got there, I came across an exceptional Professor, Neyde Thöml, who was at the time the coordinator of classical antiquity studies within that institute; I approached her and started accompanying her as a young researcher, still in my twenties, and I went through the entire undergraduate research and was a monitor in the area of Greek Antiquity. By the time I finish my degree, I was already completely inserted, involved with the studies of Classical Antiquity, particularly the ancient Greek world, and so I made my first approach analyzing the Athenian democratic experience.

Today, thinking backward, I think it was already a deep dialogue that I made between the past and the present. Considering that democracy, today, is the main form of government in at least part of the Western world, of the Western countries, interestingly, we have very little information about this form of government among the ancient Greek authors, because they were markedly averse to democracy. They were primarily oligarchs, aristocrats, some even supported tyrants, but they were absolutely not associated with democratic assumptions. So this was the first opportunity I had to study with the one who, in my opinion, was the greatest of the historians that this country has ever produced: Ciro Flamarion Santana Cardoso, who passed away.

In a second moment, I contacted Professor Haiganuch Sarian, who was, and continues to be, an important reference in the area of archaeological studies. But I did not enter in MAE - USP with Professor Haiganuch. It is as if she had made the decision to migrate to the Anthropology department

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that year. So I did my PhD in Anthropology with her. She spent few years there and quickly returned to MAE. I came out with a PhD in Social Anthropology and not as an archaeologist, if I had worked at MAE.

It was a fantastic experience. Professor Haiganuch drew my attention to the historical formation and how I could look at a whole set of ancient Greek vases, particularly the vases of red figures, and evaluate and study them in the dimension of the rural space. This allowed me to make very interesting crossings between the universe of authors who produced texts and who spoke about this rural world, for example, the world of hunting, and the vase painters, many of them in servile conditions, who received orders and idealized this rural world in light of what was the order to be produced. At that time, the PhD took six years. It was a very rich moment of intellectual growth, of intellectual maturity, because I crossed the information and received new airs, new oxygen from Ciro and Haiganuch. So it was an exponential intellectual growth in my life.

Heródoto: André, you had experience as an archaeologist at the French School of Athens. Could you talk a little about the digging experience, about how it helped you graduate as a researcher?

Chevitarese: I read a lot about archaeology, but at the same time, I had a deep interest in understanding how archaeologists, during the excavation process, during the process in which they are in the field, produced the information that would end up in magazine articles, in book chapters or in books themselves. So, I wanted to understand how this process of knowledge production took place. In 2000 and 2002, I had the opportunity to follow the work of Professor Haiganuch at the Heraion of Delos, and Hélène Siard, working at the Temple of Isis, also in Delos. So these were very rich moments, very interesting to understand, not only from a theoretical point of view, but from a practical point of view, how archaeological knowledge is processed in light of excavations. It was beautiful.

And that trajectory I never gave up. For example, to get an idea of how these things impact us a long time later, now, in January 2021, IPHAN gave me an ordinance to excavate the area of the Leopoldina station, here in Rio de Janeiro, in the central region of Rio Janeiro, where I will do some checks, some analysis on that area. So, see how Archeology ended up impregnating me and I was subsequently read, accepted and recognized by IPHAN as an archaeologist

Heródoto: And, in this experience between History and Archaeology, you also became interested and significantly deepened as the researcher on the Historical Jesus. Could you talk a little bit about how this change was, about what led you to leave the field of Greek history, Greek archeology, and get to the question of the Historical Jesus?

Chevitarese: this is also a wonderful question, because I sometimes get myself thinking, reasoning, if ever I stopped being a historian of Classical Antiquity, if I left, in fact, this classical world. I think not, because almost everything I publish within the field of this original Christianity is intersecting; it is a field of transdisciplinarity and of approximations between New Testament literature and classical literatures. I give some quick examples.

The idea of reading Jesus as a *theos aner*, as a divine man. Well, if I make the decision to read it that way-and I read it - I find a number of figures scattered in Greek literature who are read as divine men; then I can draw comparisons. For example, a malaise that one of these evangelists of the Fourth Gospel, known as John the Evangelist, produces in Jesus by placing him near a well in the region of Samaria, where a woman appears with whom he begins to talk.

I produced an article, which I still intend to publish, about the presence of men in public fountains in attic vases of black and red figures, showing that they are, in fact, unoccupied people - unoccupied men who take the opportunity to find women alone in public fountains to molest them. So it helped me to read this passage from Jesus in a well and the question his disciples asked when they saw him talking when they saw him talking to this woman in the well: "is he talking to a woman? What does he want?"

Do you know what I mean? The very idea of morality that women of good repute - let's put in these words -, by putting them at a higher level of *kaloí k'agathoi*, these beautiful and well-born women would never go to a public fountain or well. They would have a well inside their own house. Those who would go out to get water were women of low social status, when not slaves. So I think I have never stopped making the comparisons, the comparative analyses between Greek literature and material culture with this Mediterranean world of Christianity.

Heródoto: so you did not leave one field and went to another. Your reading of the Historical Jesus has to do with your experience, and with your knowledge of the history and Archaeology of Greece. That's very interesting. And it's a question about how to deal with this theme of the

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Historical Jesus in Brazil, because we know that, not only in Brazil, but internationally, this is a theme that is widely discussed in various spheres.

It is different, for example, when we think of the history of Ancient Greece that has smaller circles, debates that are important, but that are more delimited. When we think about the question of the Historical Jesus, the existence of this figure, these are very important debates that reach, even, the action of people who are in religious circles, theological experts, but also the pastors and priests and the Christian community. What is it like to put yourself as a researcher in this scenario?

Chevitarese: I think, in Brazil, it's living in limbo. Why? From the point of view of my peers, historians, many think that I don't deal with History but Theology. From the point of view of theologians and scientists of religion, they also look at me in a sneaky way, because they understand that this topic does not concern History, but rather their field. Well, in both cases, I resolve as follows: I do not see myself as a historian in its exclusivity. I'm a social scientist. I think that history is part of the field of Social Sciences and, according to the IBGE census, 86% of Brazilians, in the 2010 census, declared themselves Christians.

Indeed, we historians, at least in the training of our students and in the training of our undergraduates, have very little to say about these 86% of the Brazilian population. So it's interesting that we encourage our students - very correctly - to read the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, to read the great classics like Machiavelli, for example, or to read another great classic, but we don't encourage them to read the biblical *corpus*, or the biblical *corpora*, because it's the old and the New Testaments. We do not encourage them to read like literature. We historians often skip this kind of documentation and cease to qualify these future teachers from the municipal network, from the state network, from the private networks. We no longer qualify them to intervene in the classroom, producing debates about it.

So, conclusion: when I was still a young Professor, in my early twenties at the PUC of São Paulo and then at the UFRJ, what I saw from the history of Brazil is that we had to normally stop there in the so-called Revolution, or the military coup in 1964, do you understand? From there on, they were anthropologists, they were sociologists who would talk about the developments. So we gave up a lot. Only recently historians have become interested in the studies of trade unions. Only very recently, few historians are interested in talking about indigenous cultures, as if it was just an

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anthropologist's problem. Only very recently, few historians have turned to discuss issues related to the themes of Christianity.

So, we are creating a new area, within this great area called History, aimed at the study of Christianity, so as to break the primacy, to withdraw the exclusivity of a very confessional study on this object by theologians and by scientists of religion.

Heródoto: thinking about this, this theological perspective and this more, say, scientific, linked to this framework of the Human Sciences, what does this view of the Historical Jesus present differently from the theological, confessional view?

Chevitarese: the Historical Jesus is not the result of the first century, or the second century, on the contrary: he is the fruit of the developments of the Enlightenment, he is the fruit of what we call Modernity. That is, the first author to work on the Historical Jesus will only do this study in the eighties of the eighteenth century, not before that. To speak of the Historical Jesus is to speak in light of criteria absolutely guided by the sciences. So, there is already a malaise because the discussion of faith, which is absolutely a discussion of subjectivity-whether he has or does not have faith - this is from the private sphere.

The researches of the Historical Jesus want to work and discuss topics that pass through the sieve of reason, through the sieve of science; so, we are not interested in Jesus Christ, we are interested in Jesus of Nazareth. We do not want to know whether Jesus was resurrected or not, because for us historians, there is a limit to our research: we work with physical rather than metaphysical questions. We set limits and produce reflections from the academic scope, of science, to discuss various objects. For example, can a religious experience be stripped of its magical element, its mythical element? That's the point.

And as we observe the look of Jesus very much produced by theologians, from the nineteenth century, and not before that, clearly we observe that there is a tradition invented, as the Hobsbawm would say, to design for the first century a Jesus that had nothing to do with magic, that had nothing to do with myth. Then, the research of the Historical Jesus reinserts this individual within history, removes him from a metaphysical level and puts him on the physical level. So, did Jesus know how to read? Well, I have published works in this area, and what will be found is that being of peasant origin, the probability that he is illiterate is gigantic and the rare passages that he presents himself writing are interpolations.

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So we, historians of religion, call these objects all for debate and we will be read like the fly in the soup, those individuals who want to speak from the most academic point of view and not as passionate as the dimension of faith.

Heródoto: André, to finish I would ask you for some indications for reading: for example, for those who have an interest in this subject, which biblical book or ancient work would you indicate? A source for that person to read and also a historiographical work, a historiographical debate that you would indicate for the person to begin reading on this theme of the Historical Jesus.

Chevitarese: I would indicate, from the point of view of biblical reading, the translations that Frederico Lourenço, an academic from Coimbra, Professor of classical Letters, a highly respected intellectual, made of the Bible. Even, there is something interesting that he himself discusses about what the translation project was like. He's gay. He is even married to a Brazilian and both aren't religious. He made this translation without the theological gaze involved. As an academic, a superb intellectual specialist in Greek, he makes a confrontation and a translation taking from there all the theological dimensions that confessional Bibles usually point out. So, Frederico Lourenço's translations by Companhia das Letras are excellent, the footnotes are lean and absolutely exempt from any attempt to add to the text what he does not contemplate.

Regarding history, there are a number of schools, but I really like the one called the *Jesus Seminar*, who are the intellectuals from various fields of knowledge, scholars of religion, philosophers, scientists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, archaeologists, very good people who, every year, you find yourself in meetings that are called or convened. The *Jesus Seminar* has produced a very nice and large set of works. And I think that the main of these authors is John Dominic Crossan, who is an Irishman who is a scholar, an intellectual, and, I would say, a genius who is alive and that I had the pleasure of inviting him to come to Brazil in 2006 or 2007, if my memory does not fail. He had also works translated in Portuguese when he came to Brazil. Anyone who finds this type of work can buy it, because it is a good thing.

I am not going to indicate my books because I think this is quite unpleasant, but, whoever wants, it is not in the plans of a genius: it is in the plan of a mere mortal; there are some things that I have produced.

Heródoto: André, thank you very much for the lecture. I thank you on my behalf and on behalf of the *Heródoto*. Thank you very much and see you next time!

Chevitarese: I thank you, Gilberto. Thank you very much!