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Naming and Mapping the Gods in the Ancient Mediterranean Spaces, Mobilities, Imaginaries

The Antiquity is a world full of gods. Far from being confined to their sanctuaries, the gods are rooted in the human environment in multiple ways: the towns, the crossroads, the borders and boundaries, the forests, the mountains, the sea and many other spaces where they continue to dwell. Equally, they colonise imagined spaces, when poets and authors evoke their living areas or those that they move through on their different adventures. It is therefore logical that specialists on the Antiquity – historians, archaeologists, art historians, philologists... – have studied the inscription of the divine in space for a long time already. This interest has not become exhausted over time and the last few years have been rich with meetings and scientific publications which have gone into considerable and lengthy detail regarding our perception of the subject, be it from the angle of sacred archaeology¹, the notion of religious landscape², or of the sanctuary as a localised space³, perceived⁴, experienced⁵, but also connected⁶.

In this perspective, the conference *Naming and Mapping the gods in the Ancient Mediterranean. Spaces, Mobilities, Imaginaries* hopes to bring together the competences and specialties of multiple disciplines – archaeology, history, geography, anthropology, history of religions, philology, reception, social network analysis – in order to consider new

¹ Wightman 2007 and, more recently, for the Near East, Mierse 2010, Kamlah 2012 or Hundley 2013.

² The notion of “religious landscape” was the object of a very nice file in section 4 of the 2010 edition of the *Revue d'Histoire des Religions*: see foreword by Scheid, Polignac (2010).

³ Alcock, Osborne (1994).

⁴ Brulé (2012). On the sensorial dimension, also see Grand-Clément (2017).

⁵ Which will shortly be the subject of a conference and a study day: “Sanctuaries and Experience: Knowledge, Practice and Space in the Ancient World” (London, 8th-10th April, 2019); “Les sens dans l'espace sacré antique” (Paris, 15th-16th June, 2019). We would also like to highlight the conference “Logistics in Greek sanctuaries. Exploring the Human Experience of Visiting the Gods”, which took place in Athens (13th-16th September, 2018): it invited the adoption of an original point of view regarding Greek sanctuaries, taking particular interest in the logistical conditions which facilitated the organisation of religious festivals, the welcoming of pilgrims, the maintenance of space, buildings and furnishings belonging to the gods.

⁶ Malkin 2011.

documentation corpora concerning the intersection between the divine and space. Indeed, this intersection invokes a multitude of questions and, above all, the revisiting of notions of “sacred space” and “religious landscape”; furthermore, it engages a reflection on the processes of space appropriation, delimitation, exploitation and organisation that involve the gods and the places that they grant with their presence. In this regard, the conference will also be a chance to reflect on the tools, such as cartography, which are most suitable when it comes to grasping the deployment of the divine in space and their associated forms of mobility, without being restricted to an inventory of places linked with the gods. We will therefore endeavour to grasp the concepts, the notions and the methods which are effective for reporting on the inscription of the gods in space, to understand the networks and the dynamics that animate them in time and in space.

Ultimately, the conference aims to differentiate itself by proposing an innovative angle of approach, inspired by the themes of the ERC MAP project: the intersection between the spaces and designations of the gods. The ways of naming the divine powers, given that they are envisaged as ways to define, characterise, differentiate, but also to connect, effectively constitute many indexes of a dynamic and complex “mapping” of the divine. Toponymy and topography undoubtedly constitute a fortunate supply source for the onomastic divine⁷; the quantity and the complexity of the body of documentation covering the intersection between the names of the gods and space, in the broad sense, indicates that it is a true challenge for ancient societies. The fact that several recent works have addressed the gods from ancient worlds in the prism of space and name⁸ is not at all coincidental: the history of religions simply couldn't remain impermeable to the spatial turn which has influenced, directly or indirectly, the whole of the social science field⁹ and has led to the consideration of space not only as a backdrop upon which history is printed, but as an actor in the processes that model social relations. Time and space are the two major cognitive coordinates which serve to understand the world; to work on space is therefore also to work on historical dynamics: evolutions, transformations, forms of resilience, etc., many processes which work on the relationship of man with the gods.

⁷ Observation that can be confirmed for the Greek world with a quick consultation of the *BDEG* (*Banque de Données des Epiclèses Grecques*: <https://epiclesesgrecques.univ-rennes1.fr/>).

⁸ Smith (2016); Parker (2017); Bonnet *et alii* (upcoming).

⁹ Torre 2008.

In this regard, many points have been proposed:

- **Space as an onomastic trait**

The abundance of divine onomastic traits in line with space – toponyms or topographical qualifications – invite the exploration of all of the facets and all of the issues: when and how does the geographical lexicon move within the fabric of the divine names and what is its significance? What do these designations say about the link between the gods and space? How do they express spaces of different qualities, how do they refer to ritual practices or the agents involved? What do they say about the connection between politics and religion? How do these names take multicultural contexts into account?

- **Naming the space of the gods**

The conference will also serve as an opportunity to return to the ancient and modern terminologies which are used to name the space dedicated to the gods. Multiple and varied, often problematic, between emic perspective and etic speech, what do they teach us about the way in which the relation of gods to space has been thought out over time? What do terms such as “tophet”, “saint of saints”, “adyton” or “also” designate, for example? What should we think of the “sacred” nation applied to space? To name is to show, so the terminology used to speak of the spaces devoted to the gods is an important epistemological stake which has rarely been the object of a reflexive approach on the part of historians of religion and archaeologists.

- **The ways of presenting the gods in space**

The “corporeality” (embodiment) of the gods also has to do with space and contributes to its configuration. How does the body of the gods fall under a spatial dimension (terrestrial, cosmic...)? How do images contribute to giving form to their presence? Where are the gods supposed to dwell? The propensity of the gods and their names to be deployed in space can also be seen as voyages (“wandering epithets”), explorations, circuits and networks; it therefore poses the question of the divine ubiquity and, subsequently, the uniqueness and plurality of the divine (One vs. Many).

- **Putting the gods and places in equation**

Attributing cult places to the divine is a difficult process, even impossible in certain cases. Additionally, the current trend is to study, even deconstruct erroneous ancient attributions, often handed down from the Middle Ages. However, can we identify landscapes, spatial configurations or even specific constructions for certain gods or groups of gods? Questions regarding the foundation and origins of these places can also be asked¹⁰, along with their evolutions over time (modifications, reattributions and other divinities...). These questions, familiar to specialists, can be posed by means of well-defined methodological approaches and/or case studies, in order to provide renewed hypotheses or clarifications.

- **Sanctuaries and the emergence of towns**

Civic sanctuaries constitute a key element of the territorial system during the pivotal period between the Iron Age and the Roman era. They have had a paramount role in the deployment of the social dynamics of the groups within the ancient Mediterranean (the hoarding centre for economic resources, storage and diffusion place for wisdom, structures marking the organisation of the lands). Given the influence of the sanctuaries on the lives of the population in the Iron Age and the Roman era, we are drawn to ask ourselves about the role of these religious structures/infrastructures in the emergence of towns and cities, be they foundations or refoundations. What was their role in the development of cities, both from the point of view of the elaboration of identities and the structure of the urban fabric (urban and peri-urban cult places)? How were the sanctuaries mobilised during the integration processes of new political or cultural orders (Barcid conquest, Roman conquest...)? This focus will allow the examination of these different questions confronting the archaeological and historical documentation that comes from different contexts regarding the western Mediterranean, during the end of the Iron Age and the Early Empire (1st millennium BCE).

- **“Urban” religions**

Is religious communication with the gods influenced by the particular setting of the town (defined by its topographical/physical density, its social and ethnical diversity)? Are

¹⁰ Agusta-Boularot, Huber, Van Andringa 2017.

religious practices influenced or modified by a particular conception of urbanity (aspiration)? Particularly in the big cities, such as Rome, we find places of religious action where the gods are named and where they are addressed in different ways, albeit closely related (for example, the sacred altars of Magna Mater in the Vatican called *Cibele triodeia*, *Mater deum*, *MDMI*, or *Rhea*). Is it the urban condition that creates the very structure of what we call polytheism? However, at the same time, opposing strategies can be observed: the gods of others can be named, listed and criticised without their physical location within the city or the socio-spatial situation of their followers being taken into account.

The reflection should not limit itself to these points, which are far from exhaustive, as we want it to be ample and transdisciplinary. With these suggestions, we encourage you to consider the plurality of the levels, to adopt global and local points of view and to think about linking them in the form of nesting as well as into networks. Each one of the proposed focusses will essentially take into account the diversity and richness of the contexts, as well as their evolutions in the long-term of the Antiquity and in a vast Mediterranean dimension.

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