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Mapping ancient gods

Naming and embodiment beyond “anthropomorphism”

A survey of the field in echo to the books of M.S. Smith and R. Parker

Corinne Bonnet, Maria Bianco, Thomas Galoppin, Elodie Guillon

Antoine Laurent, Sylvain Lebreton, Fabio Porzia

1. The interaction between names and locations

Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists are all in agreement regarding the claim that space gives shape to religious practices, institutions, and representations. The recent emergence of a research project dedicated to “Religion and Urbanity”, based at the Max-Weber-Kolleg at the University of Erfurt,¹ is a testament to the importance of these issues. The question how cults, in both the Greek and Semitic areas, are inscribed in specific places and landscapes, not specifically urban, is at the centre of the ERC Advanced Grant “Mapping Ancient Polytheisms: Cult Epithets as an Interface between Religious Systems and Human Agency”, in Toulouse,² which employs a specific and original approach: the naming processes.³

The naming of the gods is a key point in regard to the interaction between men and deities. In ritual communication, onomastic sequences of greater or lesser complexity served to accurately identify the gods being addressed. The gods’ names do not consist of randomly selected elements or “onomastic attributes”⁴ (epithets, nominal or verbal syntagmas, suffixes,

¹ The project is directed by Susanne Rau and Jörg Rüpke and funded by the German Science Foundation.

² The five-year project is directed by Corinne Bonnet (ERC 741182; 2017–2022). It has the vocation of embracing a vast corpus of evidence from Greek and Semitic texts throughout the first millennium BCE.

³ See Bonnet 2017; Bonnet et al. 2018.

⁴ On the new concepts of “onomastic attribute” and “onomastic sequence”, see Bonnet et al. 2018, and also *infra*.

etc.); they are not mere labels, on the contrary, they provide an initial “portrait” of the god and reveal links shared between different deities. In other words, they provide access to cognitive elements, to deep structures of the pantheons and to the logics of human agencies, as we have reasons to believe that in ritual contexts, people navigated the repertoire of divine names and epithets with a great deal of expertise, generating combinations of names charged with meaning and effectiveness. Depending on the place’s traditions, the socio-cultural context, the goals of the interaction with the divine and the propensity to innovate or not, an individual or a group had recourse to a specific set of onomastic attributes.

These dynamics involve a general reappraisal of ancient religions and, in particular, of their ways to conceptualize and activate the communication between humans and gods.⁵ Among the wide range of onomastic attributes, many of them point to places, settings, and physical features. The categories of information conveyed by the divine names themselves are all the more numerous. While different publications address the question on a merely local scale, through the lens of one specific topic epithet,⁶ this issue has never been targeted as part of a language on the divine, neither in polytheistic nor in monotheistic contexts. However, the cross-referencing of these data – names and spaces – has rarely been taken into consideration, at least on a global scale. Due to the expansion of Greek and West-Semitic languages over the Mediterranean world, the diffusion of divine names and integration of more and more places into a bigger linguistic scale is also to be observed as a network of names *and* places evolving in time.

Two recent books provide exceptionally stimulating insights on these very topics. On the one hand, Mark S. Smith’s 2016 book entitled *Where the Gods Are. Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* focuses on the spatial dimension of the divine presence, as “a fundamental dimension of human experience”. On the other hand, Robert Parker’s 2017 book *Greek Gods Abroad. Names, Natures and Transformations* concentrates on the naming processes and their evolution in cross-cultural contexts, especially in the Hellenistic and Roman period. Both publications offer rich evidence on the interaction

⁵ Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad*, 80: “One can also try to look more broadly at forms of divine naming throughout the polytheisms of the ancient Near East, on the assumption that they had all been in direct contact or mediated interaction since at least the second millennium B.C. A detailed survey of these various comparanda would be a huge task, and one requiring a team of specialists”. This is precisely one of the main aims of the MAP project.

⁶ See for example Davies 2007, or Bowden 2007.

between naming and locating the gods. This paper is the fruit of the thorough reading of both books, and an attempt to extend and improve reflection on these topics, by offering a survey of the current research on mapping and naming the gods.

If, according to Thales of Miletos and Plato,⁷ the world is “full of gods”, how do the gods inhabit space, how do they share it with people, how do the naming processes shape the relationship that men and gods have with their associated space? These are some of the points that we will address in the following pages. We will begin by highlighting the most significant points in the books by Smith and Parker. We will then address, in more depth, two specific arguments: first, the multiplicity of divine names and its consequences on the conception of spatialized gods, second, the relation between divine names and divine bodies, which are considered as two main ritual resources. We will argue that cult-places are located at the intersection of space and time, two relevant categories for the study of naming processes. Space refers not only to concrete settings, but also to “theological” conceptions and perceptive experiences. Names and spaces, from the body to the *kosmos*, through the interconnected local cult-places of the Mediterranean, provide useful resources to engineer the identity, representation, and relational status of the gods. Is there anything specifically Mediterranean about the question and potential results?

2. *Where the Gods Are*

Smith’s book is split into three parts preceded by a methodological introduction in which the author reconsiders both the role of space – constructed, experienced or imagined – and the concept of “anthropomorphism”, no longer to be considered a primitive or unsophisticated way of approaching the divine. Moving on from these assessments, the first chapter identifies three types of divine bodies described in the Hebrew Bible: a “natural human body”, anthropomorphic in its aspect and attitudes; a “liturgical body”, superhuman in size, luminous, localized in a ritual and sacerdotal context; and a “cosmic mystical body”, located in heaven. Smith suggests that the first two bodies are traditional in the Levant from the Late Bronze Age, at least, in domestic contexts and temples. In contrast, the third body should be an innovation, dating back to the seventh to sixth centuries BCE, and influenced by Mesopotamian texts and iconography, even before the Jewish exile in Babylonia. In the second chapter, Smith shows how deities are connected with temples and peoples, through

⁷ Thal., *Testimonia* 22 Diels-Kranz; Pl., *Lg.* X, 899b.

intersections, recapitulations, participations, and analogies. On a broader level, he draws attention to the fact that, through architecture and decoration, rituals and narratives, the temples themselves epitomize divine qualities and offer a portal for humans to access them.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the articulation between anthropomorphism and theriomorphism (animal shaping of the divine). In the third chapter, Smith overcomes the commonly stated opposition between anthropomorphism in Ugaritic evidence and in biblical evidence. By recognizing the same phenomenon at work in both literatures, Smith makes an important statement. Moreover, he remarks that anthropomorphism, theriomorphism and even physiomorphism (when natural elements are mobilized, like fire, lightning and thunder, etc.) are often interconnected in both texts and images. Together, they offer “a kaleidoscopic view of the deity” (57), and show the radical otherness which divides gods and humans. The case-study of the calf images in the cult places of Dan and Bethel according to Kgs 12:28–29 is analysed in the fourth chapter. Conveying a large and updated set of sources and parallels, the author takes the Israelite documentation seriously and compares it with the bull and calf iconography attested in all the Levant, especially in a ritual context. This way, he is able to return a multiplicity of images to the cult of YHWH.

Smith dedicates the third and final part of the book to an examination of how gods are connected to their cities. In Chapter 5, Smith reviews the historiography on the link between gods and toponyms, and takes up the typology elaborated by Barré and followed by McCarter with four different spatial definitions of gods: 1) divine name (DN) “of” geographical name (GN); 2) DN *b*-GN (“in”) or DN GN-*h* (locative suffix); 3) DN *yšb/škn* (*b*-)GN (“established/living in”); 4) DN *b’l/b’lt* GN (“lord/mistress of”). Along with this categorization, Smith includes a rich repertoire of examples, drawing from extensive documentation: Ugaritic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Phoenician and Punic, Akkadian, and Southern Arabic. In Chapter 6, he defines what a city is, and then focuses on the divine and human agency within the urban space, through rituals. Different scales and settings are taken into consideration, such as regions, cities, social groups, individuals, etc. The comparison between Yahweh in Jerusalem and Baal Šapan in Ugarit puts forward stimulating convergences and divergences in their relation to space and societies. Paying attention to the linguistic elements – how divine names are associated with toponyms – Smith makes it clear that spatializing (connecting gods with spaces) works like a language, providing access to different dynamics regarding the divine, such as competition, association, translation, and so forth. The construction of different spaces, concrete and/or fictional (Mount Olympus, for example, is

both a real mountain and the imaginary living place of gods, just like Mount Şapan is both a real and imaginary living place of the god Baal), related to the perception of divine presences, as well as the attempt to connect divine name(s) with this experience is a milestone for the MAP project.

3. *Greek Gods Abroad*

Parker's book also tackles spatial issues connected with the naming processes, but he also pays great attention to chronological issues. Cult epithets appear in Greek texts as early as the Mycenaean times, but it is the Hellenistic period which sees the stock of epithets growing in the wake of cross-cultural contacts with Egypt and Syria. The use of long onomastic combinations becomes more and more frequent as Greek cults spread out across the Mediterranean, giving birth to more complex designations such as the combination of several epithets and names of goddesses from different cultural origins into "Isis Saviour Astarte Aphrodite Good-navigation Who-listens" (*Isis Soteirai Astartei Aphroditei Euploiai Ep[ekooi]*),⁸ coined by a dedicant in the second-century BCE Delos. What was the impact of more complex naming processes? Which factors account for the overall tendency to use an increasing number of divine epithets or titles? Does it reflect a larger fragmentation of the divine due to a new cultural framework?

As a starting point for his analysis (Chapter 1), Parker scrutinizes the system of divine denominations during the Archaic and Classical times.⁹ Analytical categories are necessary in order to encompass the multiplicity of naming strategies. First, he distinguishes poetic and cultic epithets, making a further distinction between topic epithets and those referring to a specific aspect or power of the god. He points out that an epithet can be used as a full and autonomous divine name, as in the case of *Hypsistos* ("[the] Highest"), while theonyms can be juxtaposed to form a compound divine name, like Artemis Eileithyia, Zeus Ares, or Şid Tanit.¹⁰ The nature of the evidence also recommends distinguishing between direct ways of addressing the gods and mere references to them. In the second chapter, Parker focuses on the process of *interpretatio*, through which agents belonging to a specific culture reformulate a foreign divine name, including epithets. Since polytheism is notably open to translatability,

⁸ *ID* 2132 (cf. Wallensten 2014 and Bonnet 2015, 506–8).

⁹ Cf. previously Parker 2003.

¹⁰ Cf. Parker 2005; Parker, "Zeus Plus".

allowing for example to consider the Egyptian Amon as an equivalent to the Greek Zeus, this process implies mutual influences and empirical solutions within asymmetrical contexts. As Parker remarks, no ancient theorization on this can be found. In the third chapter, Parker investigates the ways in which Greeks named foreign divinities in their own language. He identifies some general rules and different options, depending mainly on the communication strategies. One frequently adopted option consists in adding a toponym, such as Zeus Thebaieus, Zeus “of (Egyptian) Thebes” (i.e., Amun-Ra). All in all, Parker observes the continuous fabrication of new epithets, particularly in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, in order to accommodate a new religious agenda. Do these flexible, cross-cultural articulations between different gods and polytheisms of the ancient Mediterranean generate a kind of “universal” polytheism? Do the ethnic and toponymic epithets used to distinguish local gods imply the existence of globalized gods? Such questions suggest an assessment of how time and space shape the divine worlds and the naming processes.

In the fourth chapter, Parker addresses four case studies and their theological implications. First, the gods of “individuals”, singled out by epithets or names of agents (individuals as well as groups) in the genitive. This phenomenon, quite rare in Greece (see Parker’s appendix G¹¹), is more frequently attested in Anatolia, and becomes common in the Imperial period. Next, Parker pays attention to ancestral and personal gods. He considers the fact that Greek epithets like *patro[i]os* (paternal, ancestral), are equivalent to the Semitic use of suffixes like “my”, “our”, “their”. In other words, each language expresses the same “value” with different semantic and linguistic options. The third case-study concerns “Supreme Gods”, such as Zeus in the Greek world. But who is “Zeus” exactly, when mentioned outside of Greece, with different local epithets? Finally, Parker analyses the evidence concerning (Zeus or Theos) Hypsistos. By calling the god “Highest”, people intend to exalt him as a supreme divine power, but not as the only one. This phenomenon must be interpreted within polytheistic logic.

The Hellenistic period is also a turning point in the recourse to “praise epithets”, as shown in Chapter 5. They are used to glorify the gods and, therefore, to enhance their power. Although these epithets often go back to Homer, their use is novel. Among different causes, Parker mentions the influence of foreign traditions, the appearance of new forms of ritual (such as the *eulogia*, influenced by Egypt and Christianity), the practice of evergetism (the rise of “personal religion” and the seeking of protection), as well as the religious competition due to

¹¹ Cf. already Wallensten 2008.

priestly propaganda. Delos between 166 and 88 BCE, which is studied in Chapter 6, provides a unique, hybrid, political, socio-ethnic, and religious landscape, where cult-places of foreign associations, with an ethnic background, are attended to by a heterogeneous audience of Greek and non-Greek people. However, non-Greek names for the gods are rare. Dedications show original combinations of Greek and foreign gods, with *synnaoi theoi* (gods sharing a temple), *interpretatio*, and even newly created figures. No general norm seems to emerge, but rather an empirical middle ground. Among the eight appendices of the book, the last one (appendix H) deals with the cults of Hellenistic colonies, which combine ancestral gods from the metropolis, standard (Panhellenic) Greek gods, “indigenous” gods, and, last but not least, ruler-cults.

To conclude the first part of our analysis, both Parker and Smith pay great attention to the relation between gods and spaces, and to the different ways in which names, narratives and images reflect this crucial interaction. While Smith draws our attention to the embeddedness of the body, the temple, the city, and the *kosmos*, Parker moves between two spatial and chronological poles: “original” Greece in the Archaic and Classical period, and an “extended” Greece, coming into contact with other areas, especially the East, in the Hellenistic and Roman times. In both books, we appreciate the acute and cautious sense of analysis, as well as the impressive erudition of the authors. By moving Greek gods abroad, Parker considerably enlarges the habitual focus adopted by scholars of ancient Greek religion. Given that his vision of “oriental influences” appears somewhat monolithic, he runs the risk of suggesting that they contribute to an alteration, even a degeneration of the “classical” Greek polytheism. Smith’s comparative approach between Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible is highly appreciable, and never naive or clear-cut, particularly due to the fact that he does not succumb to the traditional opposition between polytheism and monotheism, or between iconic and aniconic traditions.

Both authors rely on well-established descriptive categories: the pair theonym + epithet for the Greek world, the Semitic typology attesting four possibilities for inscribing a god into space (god of; god in; god living in; lord of a given place). However, a comparatist perspective suggests the need to reassess this pivotal issue with greater flexibility, and to

provide definitions and categories which are more suited to the complexity of the naming practices.¹²

So far, we would like to pinpoint two main issues emerging from the stimulating contributions provided by Smith and Parker on how time and space shape the gods, their names, powers, images, and rituals. First, we will explore the *multiplicity of divine names*, related to places, functions or agencies, a feature which raises the question of the coherence within the religious systems, Yahwism included. The connection between the many names of a specific god and the conception of its unity through time and space is particularly at stake in this issue. We will then consider the different aspects of the *divine bodies* in order to suggest that images and names can be grasped as parallel strategies of communication between men and gods. Both representations can be considered a “fragment of description”, to quote Hermann Usener.¹³ In other words, onomastic attributes and iconographic attributes can cooperate, despite their inalienable specificities.

4. *The multiplicity of divine names*

The gods, as brilliantly demonstrated by Parker and Smith, can have many names. Isis, for example, is *myrionymos*, the “Thousand-Named”.¹⁴ Moreover, according to K. Hopkins’s book, the Mediterranean is *A World Full of Gods* (1999) and consequently of divine names. One of the most common types of onomastic attributes among Greek and Semitic divine names is the toponymic or topographic. Parker correctly recognizes that, in Greek, the standard way to link a god to a particular space is the use of an adjective,¹⁵ but Smith advocates a more complex “grammar of divine manifestation”, where anchoring to space can be professed in many ways in Semitic languages. Following a well-established typology,¹⁶ Smith offers a worthy list of relevant attestations (72–76). In regard to the biblical

¹²Bonnet et al. 2018.

¹³ *Bruchstück einer Beschreibung*: Usener 1896, 4.

¹⁴ On which, see Bricault 1994.

¹⁵ It is the most common way, but not the only one. Phrases such as *Dodones medeon* (“he who protects Dodona”, i.e., Zeus) date back to Homer and flourished in different contexts, cultic as well as poetic, for different gods: for example, Athena is invoked as *Athenon medeouse* (“she who protects Athens”) to legitimate the imperialistic politic of fifth-century Athens (cf. Parker 1996, 144–45). See also the many deities *pro poleos* (“before the city”; cf. Étienne 2013, 17–20).

¹⁶ Barré 1983; McCarter 1987; Allen 2015.

documentation,¹⁷ he considers the possibility of recognizing other geographical epithets for YHWH besides the two from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud: YHWH of Samaria and YHWH of Teman.¹⁸

The different names of the mountain-peak god in Ugarit and Jerusalem provide us with a relevant case-study for at least two reasons: 1) on a comparative level, the mountain-peak god is a pivotal feature in both the Semitic and Greek domains; 2) on a theoretical level, it raises the long-standing question about the (difficult and instable) articulation between the one and the many in the construction and representation of the divine.¹⁹ The relation between Baal of (mount) Şapan and Baal of Ugarit is debated in detail by Smith and supported by his authoritative expertise in Ugaritic studies (81–87). Notwithstanding the use of two different toponyms, Şapan and Ugarit, Smith claims²⁰ that Baal of (mount) Şapan and Baal of Ugarit do not constitute independent deities. According to him, the divine jurisdiction operates at different levels in distinct spaces, and thus avoids a mechanical multiplication of divine actors. Subsequently, Smith is able to ensure the intrinsic relation between three settings: the mythical abode of the god on his holy mountain; the city-temple where people can perform rituals and, finally, the royal palace, a kind of replica of the divine celestial residence where other specific rituals occurred. The organic relation between the mountain and the city, well attested in the Ugaritic texts, is echoed in the Hebrew Bible through the intimate relation between the city of Jerusalem and Mount Zion. If mount Şapan, located outside of the urban perimeter, is a mirror for the city of Ugarit, and vice versa, in the Hebrew Bible this phenomenon is definitely amplified. Integrated into the urban configuration of the capital city, Zion is progressively personified with two other geographic entities: Jerusalem and the whole country, Israel, both acting in many biblical texts as dramatic actors and female counterparts of god, thanks to the fact that the substantives *’r* (city) and *’rş* (country) are feminine.

Focussing now on the Greek area, it is worth mentioning that onomastic attributes applied to mountain-peak gods (often Zeus), pertaining to toponymy, that is, deriving from the mountain’s name, or to topography, such as Epakrios, Akraios, (literally “on/of the top”) and so on, or even hinting at some meteorological phenomenon, are also attested in urban areas, at the foot of the mountain. The first configuration consists of a simple duplication, namely the presence of an urban branch of the cult devoted to a mountain-peak god, as for Zeus

¹⁷ For a minimalistic list, see Allen 2015, 297–308.

¹⁸ See the final publication of Meshel 2012.

¹⁹ See Porter 2000, still relevant.

²⁰ Again *contra* Allen 2015.

Parnessios on the Parnes *and* in Athens.²¹ But wider networks seem to be at work, especially when the influence of such cults stretches beyond the boundaries of a single city-state. This case can be exemplified by the dissemination of Zeus Ataburios from Mount Atabyron, in Rhodes, which follows both centrifugal (through diaspora and colonization: in Akragas, in the Rhodian Peraia) and centripetal (through *sunoikismos*, a process of fusion of different city-states: in Rhodes-city as well as in Lindos, Ialysos, and in Camiros) dynamics connected with the Rhodian history.²² Processes of *sunoikismo*i favoured the duplication of mountain-peak cults in different city-centres, as the presence of a sanctuary of Zeus Lukaios (“of the [Mount] Lykaios”) in Arcadian Megalopolis suggests. In all these cases, cult-epithets are eloquent clues to the way political organizations interacted on different scales with collective identities. On the larger scale, the recurrent references to mountain-top Zeuses by regional or ethnic collectivities, especially abroad, indicate that Zeus Lukaios for the Arcadians, Zeus Akraios for the Magnesians, Zeus Basileus (literally “King”, whose sanctuary stood on Mount Profitis Ilias near Lebadeia) for the Boeotians, partake to the identity of these groups.²³ The connection between cults linked to mountain-peaks and cults located in urban areas – the former often enjoying a wider and probably older attendance than the latter²⁴ – can go beyond duplication or dissemination. In Attica at least, Zeus Polieus (“of the acropolis” as well as “of the city-state”) holds a pivotal role between the mountain-tops and the *agora*, guaranteeing the unity of the political community by being worshipped both on the acropolis *and* in the very heart of the city.²⁵ Thus, despite obvious differences, analogous spatial dynamics can be observed between the duplications of Baal of (mount) Şapan in Ugarit and Zeus Parnessios in Athens, as well as between the relations of YHWH to Zion and that of Zeus to the Athenian acropolis. The process of *interpretatio* – much discussed by Parker – of mountain-peak Baals

²¹ *SEG* 33, 244c and Paus. I, 32, 2 (Parnes); *IG* I³, 1057bis (Athens).

²² Mount Atabyron: Jacopi 1932, 236–55, no. 144–217. Akragas: see *infra*, note 254. Loryma (Rhodian Peraia): *I.Rhod.Per.* 1–2 (*SEG* 53, 1236–1237). Rhodes-city: *IG* XII 1, 31. Lindos: *IG* XII 1, 890, and *I. Lindos* 339. Ialysos: *SEG* 39, 723. For Camiros (in whose territory Atabyron was located), see particularly the dedication made by Camirians in the sanctuary of the god on the top of the mountain: *Tit.Cam.* App. 23.

²³ See for example the Lykaia celebrated in Peltae (Lydia) by Xenias the Arcadian (*X. An.* 1, 2, 10); the dedication to Zeus Basileus and the other ancestral gods (*patrioi theoi*) by the priest of the *politeuma* of the Boiotians in Xoïs (Egypt) (*SEG* 2, 871); about Zeus Akraios and Magnesian identity, see, at last, Kravaritou 2016, 145–46.

²⁴ See Parker 1996, 29–32 for the case of mountain-peak cults in archaic Attica.

²⁵ See Lebreton 2015. Outside Athens, see for example the case of Zeus cult *on the top of the akropolis* of Akragas, for which compare Plb IX, 27, 7–8 (Ataburios) and Polyaen. V, 1, 1 (Polieus).

as Zeuses (for example Baal of Şapan as Zeus *Kasios*²⁶) probably lies, at least in part, in the attempt to continue to inscribe interactions between gods and men in specific spaces.

The case-study of mountain-peak gods illustrates the “one vs many” question. Addressed in a comparative perspective by Porter 2000, the question has been further developed autonomously in the field of Greek and Semitic religious studies, giving way to the fruitful dialogue between the two disciplines. Among scholars of ancient Greek religion, Versnel dealt with this issue more directly than anybody else in recent years.²⁷ His interpretation of it as an inherent “inconsistency” of Hellenic polytheism is stimulating, but probably excessive, and perhaps misleading. More than “inconsistencies”, we are dealing with the very resources of polytheism, which refrains from fixing one identity to the gods and rather explores it through ritual practices, narratives, and also through onomastic attributes. For instance, do the different denominations of Zeus in Kestros (Rough Cilicia) conceal the same local god, namely the Luwian Tarhunt of Mount Maslan Dağı?²⁸ His many epithets, like Androklas, Aneiketos, Keraunios, Megas, seem to label distinct priesthoods, but do they reflect different gods, or different aspects of the same god? The multiplication of onomastic attributes applied to Zeus in Kestros allows to link the large extension of his relevant divine power with liturgical and socio-political concerns. In other words, they refer to different priests, possibly serving during different festivals, in one or several sanctuaries, according to strategies of social distinction employed by different local, regional, or global agents. Significantly, the interaction between the “one” and the “many” does not seem to have raised problems for ancient people. According to Herodotus, when Croesus called on Zeus Katharsios, Epistios, Hetaireios and Xenios, he was naming the same god (*ton auton touton onomazon theon*).²⁹ And if we consider “Greek gods abroad”, moving to third-century CE Anatolia, a dedication from the area of Nikaia is used to address three separate Zeus(es) (Bronton, Karpodotes, and Eucharistos) who are mentioned as a single *theos* at the end of the inscription.³⁰

From a Semitic perspective, Allen (2015) has recently argued that toponyms associated with gods and related to cities, regions or mountains do not attest a local manifestation of a

²⁶ See Bonnet 1987; Fauth 1990; Hajjar 1990, 2264–2266.

²⁷ Versnel 1990 and 2011.

²⁸ Mitford 1990, 2145–2146 (all evidence dates from the first or second century CE). Zeus Epekoos, attested only by a single dedication, is not taken into account here.

²⁹ Hdt. I, 44.

³⁰ *I.Iznik* 1085.

“global” deity, as usually stated, but a distinct and independent divine power, with his/her own rituals and traditions. This is particularly true for the different Baals, or “lords” of different places, as well as for Ištar used not only for a specific goddess, but also as a common name meaning “goddess” and applied to different feminine divine powers.³¹ However, this interpretation should be nuanced since not all toponymic attributes have the same significance and impact. When they result from a diffusion process, they simultaneously imply a connection with the original model and a certain degree of autonomy in its different local reformulations. YHWH of Samaria attested in Kuntilet ‘Ajrud or Artemis Ephesia venerated in Massalia point to an assumed derivation from a “mother-cult”, even though it also involves transformations.

Splintered gods did exist in the Levant, including Israel, and also in the Greek world. By fully integrating the Levantine, and thus Hebrew, evidence on a Mediterranean scale analysis, the MAP project intends to contribute to a new approach inaugurated in the last decades. Essentially, this breaks away from the “splendid isolation” reserved for Israel, and focuses on “ordinary contacts” with the whole Levantine environment. In light of this analysis, the notion of “universal polytheism” coined by Parker³² must be questioned: is it actually useful, insightful, and even pertinent? Translatability may be a hallmark of polytheisms, however, no divine “essence” is traceable in all religious experiences and behind all possible names. The claim for a “universal polytheism” has thus the inconvenience of erasing the singularities of local contexts – even if at the end of his book Parker provides a good overview of the situation in Delos, which shows how determining are specific settings in the rituals. It is thus crucial to safeguard the possibility of moving from general to specific and backwards. Moreover, gods, or divine powers, are undoubtedly constructed through (*inter alia*) complex systems of denominations, which allowed ancient societies to combine, condense, polarize – or, on the contrary, to dismiss – notions, values, phenomena, experiences, which are at stake in specific contexts. Gods and their multiple names are – no more and no less – products of history. They are part of a dynamic process involving anthropological structures shaped by human agencies.

³¹ “When a single corpus represents a DN (where the DN really is a name and not an ambiguous term such as **b’l*) with two or more GNs, it seems that the DN is still that DN. This, it seems to me, was the basic reality that the ancient producers of texts at Ugarit would have recognized about these Baal names” (p. 87).

³² Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad*, 75–76. See Richter 2011, 209: “The logic of polytheism excludes the possibility of the existence of another pantheon; by virtue of their divinity, all gods are necessarily part of the same divine pantheon”.

5. Names and embodiment

By exploring *Where the Gods Are*, Smith stresses the hermeneutic relevance of the gods' corporeal presence in the world. Yet, naming processes are similar to processes of shaping divine bodies: they belong to the same human capacity of "making the divine" into something "other" in essence.³³ Because human knowledge of the divine is approximate and allusive, names and bodies create the conditions for an interaction between mortals and gods. Two principal media are mobilized in this process. Discourses mention, describe, or provide a narrative on the name or the body of the gods, whereas the materiality of ritual landscapes, ritual spaces, devices, and practices contribute to the construction of a concrete and symbolic environment for the enactment of the divine power. Names and bodies enable human agents to ascribe specific spaces and qualities to the divine.

Smith distinguishes three types of divine bodies.³⁴ The "natural" or "physical body" refers to anthropomorphic, theriomorphic or physiomorphic shaping of the god; the "liturgical body" is related to the sacerdotal and temple embodiment of a god, within a community of gods (or "pantheon"), including divine images;³⁵ the "cosmic" or "mystic body" corresponds to the largest scale of the embodiment, when a god assumes, through discourses and names, the shape of the very universe itself.³⁶

For each level, onomastic and iconographic attributes can work as a sound box, that is as devices meant to increase the cognitive signal. Let us consider a case-study in a so-called "Greek magical papyrus". In a codex from the late Roman Egypt, an invocation is addressed to the "decaying moon" (*selene apokroustike*),³⁷ as indicated in the title of the hymn. It clearly connects the ritual with a physical astral body, whose divine nature is assumed by the act of consecutive speech. The naming of the moon as a "natural/physical body" does not make it divine: it is the ritual which identifies it as an active divine power. The subsequent invocation portrays a hybrid, anthropomorphic and theriomorphic body, through a set of epithets: the goddess is a maiden (*parthenos*), shining with grace and beauty, provided with specific

³³ Belayche, Pirenne-Delforge 2015.

³⁴ Cf *supra*!

³⁵ Mylonopoulos 2010.

³⁶ Smith 2016, 13–30; about the embodiment of the gods in Egypt, cf. Assman 2001.

³⁷ *PGM* IV, 2241–2358 (ed. K. Preisendanz, translation in Betz 1992, 78–81 = Bortolani 2016, no. 11, 243–279).

colours, noisy; she has visual attributes (clothes, crown and weapons), and animal forms (bitch, mare, lioness, etc.). Such onomastic attributes imply a strong polysensorial impact. It is worth noticing that the whole ritual is performed without pronouncing a so-called “theonym”. The onomastic sequence, deeply related with her complex body, constructs the goddess’ power. A cumulative strategy, with onomastic polysemous and multisensorial elements, takes precedence over a clearly named and identified goddess, such as the “traditional” Selene.

Visual or perceptive epithets may also refer to divine images found in sanctuaries, in other words to “liturgical bodies”, as Smith’s book argues. Divine imagery can also circulate and spread, closely associated with names. Artemis Ephesia, for example, is venerated not only in Ephesus, although her name evokes her origin. Similarly, her very typical image is attested in different cult-places all over the Mediterranean. Name and image travel together, as tokens of a prestigious past, or a *perceptive tradition*, which establishes a complex relation between unity and plurality. In fact, the onomastic and iconographic attributes of Artemis Ephesia attach the goddess to one place where she is worshipped – and therefore named and physically made present – and at the same time to a distant, but connected space, where she came from and where she remains. The perception of time and space, here, is engaged and interlinked.

Coming to a monotheistic environment, the “liturgical body” of YHWH in Jerusalem is nothing less than his “Name”, inhabiting the sanctuary,³⁸ a presence that in rabbinic literature is called *šekhinah*. Name and body have merged in a theological discourse, the aim of which is perfect unity. The prohibition of naming the divinity, the so-called “third commandment”, aims at underlining his radical otherness, whereas the listing of many names (in polytheistic contexts, but not only), meaningful or not (like some “barbaric names”³⁹), displays the superlative and ungraspable nature of the divine.

The paradoxical nature of the divine body, in its liturgical and cosmic dimension, can be illustrated through the narrative and rituals concerning Osiris’s dismemberment. After his death, at the hands of his brother Seth, Osiris’s butchered body is found by Isis, who gathers every single piece (except the phallus) and manages to conceive Horus. As Jan Assman argues,⁴⁰ the solemn ritual of “re-membering” Osiris is celebrated everywhere in Egypt, as a symbol of unity. At the same time, different cult-places claim to keep a holy relic of Osiris – a

³⁸ Dt 12,5.11 and parallels.

³⁹ Tardieu et al. 2013.

⁴⁰ Assman 2003, 409–10.

leg, an arm, and so forth – and annually organize great processions in order to exhibit a piece of the divine body (*pars pro toto*) to the whole population. Osiris is thus one and many, locally rooted yet globally shared. Osiris is also granted many different names; for instance, in the *Books of Breathing* dating from the first to second century CE,⁴¹ Osiris is exalted through a long catalogue of names connected to specific places and functions, as well as “bodies” or representations. “God” is his generic and eternal cult name, declined or splintered through many different manifestations related to time (periods of his life) and space (ritual settings).⁴²

Conclusion

Names and bodies constitute theological resources, culturally construed, to go beyond ordinary experiences of space and time, but also to manage the ontological divide between men and gods. The traditional category of “anthropomorphism” undoubtedly fails to do justice to the multifaceted rationale of naming and embodying the gods.

A temple is located at the intersection of space and time. It provides a place where people can interact with the gods through different kinds of ritual practices integrated in a specific chronological framework. Smith, following Ömür Harmansha,⁴³ states that cult-places are meaningful locations, produced by local practices, intersecting trajectories of movement and accumulated material assemblages. They are maintained by stories, legends and other forms of local knowledge.⁴⁴ Space is thus a concrete notion and a particularly relevant category for the study of ancient Mediterranean religions. It encompasses the milieu, the environment of human activities, the system of relations and the organized social products resulting from these activities.⁴⁵ All in all, as emphasized by Smith, space is also affected by a conceptual

⁴¹ Herbin 1984, 255–56.

⁴² “O Osiris NN, when you enter the Duat in the Valley and the great god makes you perfect in the West, you receive your name in the Duat beside Osiris in the necropolis. You come as a man on the day he is born, you are a child on his birth brick. You are given the name Osiris. You are called ‘god’, because your name is known in the Valley. You benefit from the good things from every land. O Osiris NN! Your mother gave you birth in [this] land. She proclaimed your beautiful name: Osiris is your name among the transfigured ones, Wennefer is your name inside the Duat, ‘Master of Life’ is your name among the living, ‘The Foremost of the Westerners’ is your name in the hall of the two Truths, ‘Excellent mummy’ is your name in the august hall; ‘Great god’ is your name in the divine booth. ‘God’ is your name inside the sanctuaries and your name will endure forever.” Cf. Goyon 1972, 282–83, English translation by L. Coulon (with many thanks).

⁴³ Harmansha 2013.

⁴⁴ Smith 2016, 2.

⁴⁵ Brunet, Ferras, Théry 2005.

dimension and by perceptive experiences.⁴⁶ It is a multi-layered reality. The many concrete and imaginary dimensions of space unfold and integrate into both synchronic and diachronic dimensions. A comparative approach towards Greek and Semitic naming systems in the Mediterranean dimension generates a multi-scale network of practices, with diverse intersections and overlaps.

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⁴⁶ Smith 2016, 3; Soja 1996.

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