Introduction. Exploring the Intersection between Divine Names and Places

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Introduction

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In a world "full of gods",[1] the question "where are the gods?"[2] is at the same time simple and complex.[3] The gods are here, there, anywhere,[4] or even everywhere – but the gods are also invisible, unreachable, ungraspable. This tension is directly related to the ontological ambivalence of the divine entities: they are radically different from the human beings, but they are culturally determined; they are conceived, represented, established in specific locations, and constructed by different kinds of human agency; their existence is closely bound to historical and social factors. Among the latter, names and locations, with the whole set of material evidence they generate, play a salient role. Too often however, because of the growing specialization of knowledge, these two interrelated aspects of "religions" are studied separately. The naming systems are explored and possibly compared by historians of religions, philologists and linguists, while sanctuaries and artefacts are studied by archaeologists and art historians. The principal aim of this book is to promote a dialogue between different approaches to one and the same research question: how did social communities or individuals create the possibility of a communication between the human and the divine spheres? Naming and mapping the gods are two crucial embedded strategies, but how do they intersect and interact? This problem is addressed in the 51 contributions gathered in this book,[5] which bring together multiple disciplines and methods – archaeology, history, history of religions, philology, anthropology, geography, social network analysis – and new or renewed analysis of a large set of evidence from the Mediterranean world, exploring Egypt, the Ancient Near East, the Greek, Roman and Punic worlds. By revisiting the notion of "religious landscape", it engages a reflection on the processes of space appropriation, delimitation, exploitation and organisation that involve the gods.[6] This volume also

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

2 Cf. Smith (M.S.) 2016.

3 This volume is an outcome of the MAP project, which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 741182, 2017–2023).

4 Cf. Smith (J.Z.) 2003.

5 They were all originally presented at a Conference, held remotely, in February 2021. Our warm thanks go to Mathilde Rieu for her precious help in the preparation of the Congress, and to the members of the Scientific Committee.

6 On the notion of space applied to ancient societies, see Wightman 2007 and, more recently, for the Near East, Mierse 2010, Kamlah 2012 or Hundley 2013. On the concept of "religious landscape",

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provides a reassessment on the tools, such as cartography or graphs, which are most suitable to visualize the dynamic deployment of gods and cults in space and their different forms of mobility and connectivity. At the same time, working on the onomastics of the gods show a massive predominance of local designations, related to the lived experience of space. The god on the corner, the protector of the village, the god of the vicinity are figures extremely present in the everyday life, much more than the big international "stars" of the divine system. The parallel investigation on spaces and names is also an opportunity to critically reconsider the exponential amount of scholarship on networks, connectivity, and exchanges, that, in Hans Beck's words, "has altered the landscape in classical studies".[7] He rightly remarks that "few have commented on the limitations of the network paradigm to capture the vertical depths of the lived experience – in power relations, social configurations, cultural expressions, and so forth – that was so characteristic of the Greek city". Such an observation may be extended to many different contexts beyond the Greek world and does not deny the existence of divine mobilities on different scales of spatial reality.

Moreover, a particularly challenging aspect of these issues is that far from being confined to their sanctuaries, the gods are rooted and embedded in the human environment in multiple ways. They "inhabit" towns and rural areas, crossroads, borders and boundaries, forests, mountains and peaks, seas and coastlines, heaven and underground areas, and many other spaces where they permanently or occasionally dwell and act. Equally, they colonise imaginary spaces, described or evoked by different authors, in literary texts or metric inscriptions, which refer, for instance, to the divine entity "who holds the subterranean palace of all Erinyes".[8] In echo to the recent *Unlocking Sacred Landscapes: Spatial Analysis of Ritual and Cult in the Mediterranean*,[9] our approach aims at crossing three main perspectives: first, religion, understood as discourses, ritual and social interactions involving agents, objects and places, informed by the conception and possibility of communication with the gods; secondly, landscapes, which can no longer be approached as simple frameworks, but need to be considered as complex settings hosting multiple religious interactions and reflecting mental representations, between constraints

see Scheid/Polignac 2010; on the role of sanctuaries as localised, perceived, experienced, and connected spaces, see Alcock/Osborne 1994, Malkin 2011, Brulé 2012, Grand-Clément 2017; see also the conferences "Logistics in Greek sanctuaries. Exploring the Human Experience of Visiting the Gods" (Athens, 13th-16th September 2018); "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).

7 Beck 2020, 7.

8 Bonnet, Corinne (dir.), *ERC Mapping Ancient Polytheisms 741182 Database (DB MAP)*, Toulouse, 2017–. https://base-map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr. Testimonies 6358, 6419, 6444, 6489, 6594, 6640, 6732, 6856, 6918, 6936.

9 Papantoniou/Morris/Vionis 2019. See also Papantoniou/Sarris/Morris/Vionis 2020, on the digital humanities perspective.

and opportunities; and finally, material aspects produced, manipulated, moved, used by agents, sometimes endowed with power, which have their own agencies and biographies, and leaving traces.

Inspired by the main goals and achievements of the ERC Advanced Grant project "Mapping Ancient Polytheisms. Cult Epithets as an Interface between Religious Systems and Human Agency" (MAP), this volume addresses the naming processes applied to divine entities as strategies which define, characterise, differentiate, but also connect them. Names and divine onomastic attributes[10] give access to a dynamic and complex "mapping" of the divine, where toponymy and topography, along with genealogies, functions and modes of action point to specific and shared identities within contextual divine configurations. In this perspective, the MAP database (*DB MAP*) offers a robust corpus of data and metadata, gathering all divine onomastic attributes in Greek and West-Semitic epigraphy, between 1000 BCE to 400 CE, now available to the largest audience.[11] Although it is a work in progress with a non-exhaustive coverage of the available edited inscriptions, it already provides a huge quantity of coherent evidence and specifically designed tools to make tailor-made queries and to map them. From these data, it appears that toponyms and topographical elements are massively mobilized in the divine onomastics.[12] They even represent the most frequent kind of onomastic attribute of the gods, with a whole set of slightly different formulations; for example, a god connected with Delphi, mainly Apollo, would be *Delphikos*, *Pythaios*, *Pythios*, *Pythaeus*, *Lord of the rocks of Delphi*, *in Delphi*. All these designations convey different semantic nuances and relate to narratives, images, genealogies. In a nutshell, despite Shakespeare's famous interrogation "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet",[13] naming the gods by choosing specific onomastic elements to give them a *charis* scent is definitely not a random process. Allusions to spaces, places, locations, settings, and spots provide a huge stock of information, especially when combined with all the Greek and Semitic onomastic attributes registered in the *DB MAP*.[14] Historians of religions could not remain impermeable to the spatial turn which has influenced, directly or indirectly, the whole field of social sciences.[15] Spaces are inextricably linked with time, providing an access to a dynamic study of religious practices, in as much as they constitute two major cognitive coordinates used by people to frame their interactions with the gods. Time and

10 Bonnet/Bianco/Galoppin/Guillon/Laurent/Lebreton/Porzia 2018.

11 Bonnet, Corinne (dir.), *ERC Mapping Ancient Polytheisms 741182 Database (DB MAP)*, Toulouse, 2017–. https://base-map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr. See Lebreton/Bonnet 2019.

12 See also Smith (M.S.) 2016; Parker 2017.

13 *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 2.

14 Which amount to approximately 3000 for almost 14000 onomastic sequences attested in the epigraphic documentation in March 2022.

15 Torre 2008.

space determine and are affected by evolutions, transformations, destructions, forms of resilience, which constantly reshape the human-divine communication. Here is the background of the three main directions followed in this volume.

Naming and Locating the Gods: Space as a Divine Onomastic Attribute

The abundance of spatial onomastic attributes requires an in-depth analysis of the geographical lexicon mobilized in this context, both from a morphological, syntactical, and semantic point of view. What do these designations say about the link between the gods and the locations attached to their name? When Melqart is called "the one who is in charge of the rock" (*ʾl ḥṣr*), what does that mean precisely? The Phoenician word for "rock" is *ṣr*, which is also the name of the city of Tyre. The allusion to the "rock" refers to the actual reefs that Tyrian sailors may encounter during their travels in the Mediterranean, but it also conveys the memory of the birth of Tyre, when Melqart fixed two wandering rocks and made them habitable for the Tyrians. A similar interpretation can be given for the title "Baal/Lord of Tyre" (*bʿl ṣr*), but do the first and the second onomastic sequences differ in their semantic scope, like *Delphikos*, *Pythaios*, *Pythios*, *Pythaeus*, *Lord of the rocks of Delphi*, *in Delphi* mentioned above? Spatial onomastic attributes may express spaces of different qualities and scales, and follow different spatial dynamics; they also sometimes implicitly or explicitly refer to ritual practices and/or to agents involved in them. They can shed a significant light on a debated issue, the so-called *polis religion*, and the connection between politics and religion. Beyond binary oppositions between local and global, it is imperative to rethink the embeddedness of cults and the *polis* structure.[16] The obvious pre-eminence of the *polis* in religious affairs does not imply that the civic life and/or scale mediated the entire scope of relations between the citizens and the gods. The local imprinting on cultic practices (naming, mapping, sacrificing, etc.) involves many agents, collective and individuals, public and private so to say, and it does not exclude the recourse to regional, transregional, panhellenic, or multicultural paradigms. The dichotomy between local and global can be a limit to a better understanding of these phenomena; and a new scenario, in which strands of religious representations and agency intertwined and entangled idiosyncratic and multiscalar paradigms, could give additional results. On the other hand, the city is not the only space permeated by the gods' presence: multiple and varied words, often problematic, between emic and etic perspective, refer to the gods' abode, like "tophet", "saint of saints", "adyton"

16 Cf. Beck 2020.

or “alsos”, not to forget the notion of “sacred”, inherited from the phenomenological school of religions, which suggests a clear-cut separation between divine and human spaces. The terminology used to define the spaces devoted to the gods is an important epistemological stake which has rarely been the object of a reflexive approach among historians of religion and archaeologists. A comparative perspective suggests the need to reassess this pivotal issue with greater flexibility, and to provide definitions and categories which are more suited to the complex inscriptions of divine powers in space.

Mapping the Divine: Presenting Gods into Space

Another core issue is how correlated names and spaces contribute to the configuration of divine entities, especially to their “presentification”,[17] corporeality, and embodiment.[18] To answer the question raised in his 2016 book *Where the gods are*, Mark Smith explores “the spatial dimension of anthropomorphism in the biblical world”. “Where the gods are” basically requires an investigation on “How the gods are”: how do they occupy a spatial dimension, be it terrestrial, celestial, subterranean, or cosmic? How do their images, anthropomorphic or not, contribute to giving form to their presence? Names and spaces both contribute to shaping divine “bodies”,[19] material or literary, which, despite or due to their otherness, create the conditions for an interaction between humans and gods. Mark Smith distinguishes three types of divine bodies in his book: the “natural” or “physical body”, which is the portrayal of a god recurring to human, animal or other physical elements in order to picture agency, in discourses and images; the “liturgical body”, related to the sacerdotal and temple embodiment of a god, with or without a material image, and the “cosmic” or “mystic body”, the largest scale of divine manifestation, which refers to the very universe itself. For each body, interrelated names and spaces produce a cognitive signal, which builds a certain indexical knowledge on the gods and helps situating the gods in relation to each other, on a mental map, whose main characteristic is fluidity and flexibility.

To give an example, the onomastic sequence “Artemis Ephesia” designates a goddess venerated in Ephesus and whose origin is part of her identity. She has a close relation to the city and its inhabitants. She dwells *there*. In her worldwide famous sanctuary, she was “embodied” through a typical image, which became an “index” of her presence,[20] profile, and story: the image is at the same time a kind of

17 On that notion, see Vernant 1996.

18 On this topic, see Bonnet/Bianco/Galoppin/Guillon/Laurent/Lebreton/Porzia 2019.

19 Belayche/Pirenne-Delforge 2015.

20 Gell 1998.

iconographic narrative on the goddess, and an object that played a role in the ritual. Since the Artemis Ephesia moved and was adopted in different places all over the Mediterranean, her "official" name and her "official" image travel together, as tokens of her prestigious origin. In Marseille (Phocaea/Massalia) the onomastic and iconographic attributes of Artemis Ephesia were both local and global, driven by communal strategies of distinction, competition, and spatial hierarchy. Connected spaces and times were expressed in her name, as well as in the ritual since a priestess from Asia Minor was in charge of the cult performed according to ancestral standards. The paradoxical nature of the divine body and the complexity of its inscription in different spatial dimensions are reflected in the naming practices, with a whole set of nuances and variations. The propensity of the gods, with their multiple names, to be ubiquitous (in Ephesus and Phocaea for Artemis Ephesia, in Tyre, Tharros and Ibiza for Melqart) raises the tricky question of the articulation between uniqueness and plurality of gods.

Gods and Cities: Urban Religion, Sanctuaries and the Emergence of Towns

Although the world is full of gods, it seems that peculiar landscapes, specific spatial configurations or even particular constructions attract some gods or groups of gods. How did the ancient societies put gods and places in equation, and how did they express this kind of elective affinities in divine designations? The opposition between gods of the "nature" and others considered as "civic" or "urban" is questioned in the following pages. On the one hand, the "Urban Religion" project conducted in Erfurt shows that the town, defined by its topographical/physical density, its social and ethnical diversity, provides specific settings for religious action, interaction and innovation.[21] Considering that "space is condition, medium and outcome of social relations", Jörg Rüpke claims that city-space engineered the major changes that affected religions and played a decisive role in the development of intermittent and multiple religious identities as forms of urbanity. Collective religious identities and religious plurality, triggered by migration to and between cities, had an impact on the multiple equations between names and places. The case of the Mother of the Gods, a foreign and ancestral deity, named "Cybele", "Mother of the Gods" (*Mater deum*), "Great Mother" (*Mater Magna*), "Great Idaean Mother of the Gods" (*Mater Deum Magna Idaea*), etc., and established in different areas of Rome illustrates the multifaceted religious environment of the *Vrbs*.[22] On the other hand, the

21 Rüpke 2020.

22 Van Haeperen 2019.

(re)foundation of sanctuaries and the emergence of towns feed a powerful dialectic: the presence of gods in given landscapes can also give birth to cities and lead to urbanisation of landscapes.[23] From this perspective, while it is clear that urban environments are subject to frequent developments, changes, re-appropriations and redefinitions, they remain in close relation with non-urban areas and welcome divine entities connected with "natural" landscapes, such as Nymphs, Fauns, Silens, or the god Pan. Despite their elective affinity with mountains, groves or springs, these divine powers are not confined to natural spaces and find their way in different spaces, even in the very heart of the cities and at the imperial court, for what concerns Pan, cherished by Augustus. Beyond the opposition between urban and rural areas, each *polis* can be seen as "a tapestry of localities that were both malleable and permeable, stitched together into a convoluted 'space syntax' ".[24] In other words, countrysides do participate to the urban spatial identity and dynamic: physical space both segregates and aggregates. The polyphony of gods and names thus shaped different horizons of social and spatial communication. The triangulation between names, spaces and gods is a key-aspect within the social dimension of the "religions in the making",[25] both polytheistic and monotheistic.

The present book attempts to reconstruct religious action as a social practice that is sensitive to the variety of locations and creative of polysemic designations echoing the gods' spatial dimensions. The MAP database, among other tools, shows that body of evidence for this endeavour is fragmented, and yet, overwhelming at the same time. We all know that continued stories are impossible when it comes to ancient history. As random and incomplete as it is, and with regards to space and time distinctiveness, the evidence enables to propose a consistent image, if not a full picture of the interactions between men and gods in the ancient Mediterranean world. The numerous and original case-studies collected here provide stimulating insights on names, spaces and their interactions, within an ample and transdisciplinary – yet not exhaustive – overview of ancient Mediterranean religious practices. They invite us to move between global and local points of view, between short-term and long-term perspectives, if we want to experiment with names and spaces of the divine. Both names and spaces fuel ordinary as well as extraordinary experiences, representations and knowledge of gods and goddesses, and both store memories of past and present times.

23 See *e.g.* Agusta-Boularot/Huber/Van Andringa 2017.

24 Beck 2020, 31.

25 For an application to urban contexts, Rüpke 2020.

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