Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 299

Fabio Porzia / Corinne Bonnet (eds)

Divine Names on the Spot II

Exploring the Potentials of Names through Images and Narratives

PEETERS

DIVINE NAMES ON THE SPOT II

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PREFACE

This collective volume is the second issue of the series "Divine Names on the Spot". The first one (OBO 293), published in 2021, advocated a dynamic approach of divine denominations in Greek and Semitic contexts. This second issue is dedicated to the exploration of the potentials of names through images and narratives. As the previous volume, it originates from a one-year seminar held at the University of Toulouse in the framework of the ERC Advanced Grant "Mapping Ancient Polytheisms: Cult Epithets as an Interface between Religious Systems and Human Agency", funded by the European Research Council from October 2017 to June 2023 (741182).

Between October 2019 and May 2020, despite the pandemic, we organized first in Toulouse and then remotely a stimulating cycle of conferences covering different horizons, periods, and contexts, within the two main areas of the MAP project, the Greek and the Semitic worlds, and even beyond. The starting point of the reflection was the semantic complexity of names and the unexpected paths that divine onomastics may suggest, since the Ancient themselves admit that any knowledge in that field is extremely fragile and hypothetical. Names need to be explained, displayed, interpreted, represented. By working on the triangulation between names, narratives and images, we aim at decoding the hermeneutical potential driven by onomastic and iconographic attributes, which belong to two different languages. These scattered pieces of information are fragments of knowledge; they can be addressed as contextual attempts to interpret a divine power as a multifaceted and relational entity. This is also an invitation to reflect upon the tension between unity and plurality of the divine, a strategic issue that the MAP project continues to relentlessly unfold.

A third collection of papers is currently in preparation, which is focused on the role of the agents in the naming strategies. It will usefully complete the analysis of the ancient divine names "on the spot". We warmly thank the contributors for their great papers and the whole MAP team for organizing the seminar and contributing to its publication. We are also grateful to the *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* series that hosts this second issue of the MAP Seminar proceedings, which will be followed in due course by another volume, currently in preparation.

Fabio Porzia
Corinne Bonnet

DIVINE NAMES ON THE SPOT II: EXPLORING THE POTENTIALS OF NAMES THROUGH IMAGES AND NARRATIVES

Fabio PORZIA and Corinne BONNET

1. IMAGES VS. TEXTS ONCE AGAIN?

In a letter in which he criticizes the inconsistent behaviour of his contemporaries, who invoke Zeus Xenios while being more inhospitable than the Scythians themselves, Julian asserts that "the names (ἐπωνυμίας) of the gods offer us some kind of drawn/written images (ὥσπερ εἰκόνας γραπτὰς)".[1] He explicitly connects names and images that this volume intends to explore, tackling the complexity of the "signals" conveyed by the onomastic sequences, simple or complex, that designate the gods.[2] It is not by chance, for instance, that the Hebrew Bible forbids both the fabrication of images of God and the utterance of his name (Ex 20, 4-7; Dt 5, 8-11). The so-called second and third commandments are bound in a particular way to conceptualise the divine, where images and names are two sides of the same coin.[3] Such a bond was not a prerogative of what came to be known as a monotheistic religion but was, on the contrary, a shared feature in the ancient Mediterranean religious landscapes.

Names and images, with their own rules, limits and semiotics, strive to represent, communicate with and talk about the divine. Names, as part of the verbal language, are entirely a human construct, while images may seem closer, although far from being identical or neutral, to the reality that they seek to portray. Of course, this is only a superficial perception. However, more than being different languages, because they coexist in the same society and often act simultaneously, names and images are two different, but entangled registers.

When dealing with ancient societies which are, so to speak, out of reach, scholarly traditions play a fundamental role in the balance – or should one say imbalance – between these two registers. Curricular imprinting determines whether a scholar is more familiar with a text-oriented approach or with an image-oriented one. Passively relying on this imprinting, many scholars, even in the recent past, tended to oppose the two approaches, often arguing – when not simply taking it for granted – the supremacy of one over the other. Moreover, each one of us should avoid oversimplifications and stereotyped understandings of the evidence he/she is less familiar with:

[1] Julian, *Letters* 89b, 291b.
[2] For the terminology and approach developed by the MAP project, see BONNET *et al.* (2018).
[3] PORZIA (2021).

> People who have never concerned themselves with the unique possibilities of words and pictures usually think that pictures are vague and ambiguous, whereas words are precise and clear. It is easy to demonstrate that this judgment is rash.[4]

We intend here to go beyond disciplinary boundaries and put images and texts in dialogue. In particular, both oppressed by the bulky and heavy presence of written sources – be they a multifarious variety of epigraphic and literary records in Greek or the sprawling Biblical tradition – scholars dealing with the Greek and Western-Semitic worlds have long struggled to even only get closer to finding a balance between images and texts. Moreover, when it is not strictly speaking a question of establishing a hierarchy between the two approaches, one can identify an effort to establish a functional differentiation, or even a dichotomy. The archaeologist William G. Dever, for example, argues that the history of religion aims to reconstruct "belief through texts, cult through material culture".[5] Yet, as others pointed out, the creation of a hierarchy or even a dichotomy between texts and images "is artificial and cannot stand the test".[6]

Fortunately, we are increasingly aware that a unilateral approach is insufficient. Izak Cornelius, for instance, repeatedly emphasised that "a picture sometimes does say more than a thousand words",[7] while Laurent Bricault and Francesca Prescendi have stressed that the iconographic representation of the gods in a non-scriptural tradition constitutes a crucial component even of their theology,[8] disregarding the problematic notion of "theology" by echoing Franz Cumont. Taking for granted the necessity to study ancient religion through all the extent sources and encompassing all its dimensions, the papers presented during the fourth seminar of the MAP project aimed to take a step back from the "words vs. images" debate. Instead of reiterating the need to integrate the approaches and investigate their own potentials and/or limits, the challenge is to explore the question of divine names – given by ancient people or by scholars – through the interactions, overlaps and entanglements between the two registers.[9] Notwithstanding the possible coexistence of text and images (not necessarily visually or materially correlated), it is however worth mentioning that correspondences between iconographic and epigraphic information present on a same support are only occasional. This, for instance, has been clearly shown for the dedicatory

[4] KEEL, UEHLINGER (1998), 393.
[5] DEVER (1987), 210.
[6] KEEL, UEHLINGER (1998), 10.
[7] CORNELIUS (2008), 14-15; (1998), 174.
[8] BRICAULT, PRESCENDI (2009).
[9] A first attempt in this direction is BONNET (2021).

stelae found in the Punic tophets,[10] not to mention the case of "magical gemstones".[11]

2. An Epistemology for Naming

By integrating divine names and images in a dialectic approach, we also aim to strengthen the documentary foundation for understanding ancient religion. Although the materiality of religious practices orients our research today, both for images and names, caution is still needed in order to avoid the pitfalls of falling back into old habits. In particular, when dealing with divine designations, one of them seems dramatically resilient: a sort of scholars' compulsory temptation to identify "unnamed" divinities at all costs.

Before addressing this issue directly, it is worthwhile to reassess one of the more revolutionary shifts in perspective of the last decades. In the field of Greek religion, the so-called French School[12] – including scholars like Georges Dumézil, Louis Gernet, Jean-Pierre Vernant, and Marcel Detienne – started to emphasise that each god should not be regarded as a person but rather as a "system of notions"[13] or a "divine power" (*puissance divine*),[14] or even as a "mini-pantheon".[15] More recently, for Mesopotamian religion, the large spectrum of entities – animate and inanimate – that can be considered divine in cuneiform sources lead scholars to pose the notion of agency[16] as a central focus when defining gods, rather than that of personhood or anthropomorphism. According to this view, Beate Pongratz-Leisten, for instance, defined as "deity" each entity

[10] Oggiano, Xella (2009).

[11] Faraone (2011); Vitellozzi (2018).

[12] Hendrik S. Versnel qualifies it as "a 'Paris fashion' of constructing a divine world" (Versnel [2011], 77).

[13] Gernet, Boulanger (1932), 265-276.

[14] Vernant (1965), 79.

[15] Durand (1991). As Dominique Jaillard summarises: "Un dieu est déjà en lui-même un mini-panthéon, non seulement parce que son agir s'inscrit dans le champ d'autres puissances auxquelles il est lié, mais aussi parce que d'autres forces divines sont 'en lui' impliquées, susceptibles de former, notamment par le jeu des épiclèses, la figure d'une autre divinité, ou, à l'inverse, de se révéler, discrètement, à travers un attribut, un artefact, un végétal, un espace aux qualités suggestives..." (Jaillard [2007], 16).

[16] Many definitions of agency have been proposed recently but, on a general level, all of them concern the role of individuals when they act independently and make their own free choices. In this perspective, divine agency refers to the gods' free and effective power to change reality as acknowledged by their worshippers. From a sociological perspective, agency is defined as "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (Emirbayer, Mische [1998], 970).

that can (presumably) act with intention and is responsible for maintaining the cosmic order, an effective and "powerful" entity, as proposed by Jean-Pierre Vernant. Such a system not only includes the major (anthropomorphic) gods but also all kinds of cultic paraphernalia, statues, symbols, and celestial bodies: when defining a god, "agency is what counts."[17] On the other hand, Alfred Gell[18] shows how art objects embody complex intentionalities and produce social interactions, according to different patterns of perception and knowledge, drawing upon a diversity of traditions.

In the historiography of Greek and Mesopotamian religions, therefore, a shift took place from the study of gods "per se", as individuals or persons, to the apprehension of gods as dynamic relational systems of notions and effective powers. Within this background, our approach aims to reach beyond identification understood as "giving a name" or "assigning an image" to a deity.[19] The name, like the image, after all, is only one part of someone's identity: a very useful one, often – but not always! – providing information on gender (often), ethnic or social origin (occasionally), but barely more than that. The same can be said of gods: their character, competences and qualities are partly left aside by onomastics and iconography, or only generally condensed into a particular name, title, posture or gesture. On the contrary, once again, the multifarious realm of images is, at least at first glance, much more "eloquent" in this regard although it very often portrays unnamed deities. Names and images are only parts of the complex system of notions that each god is; they only shed partial light on the experimental bricolage, which remodels and recombines a diverse miscellany of elements, also known as "religion". Their indexicality needs to be explored with a large framework of contexts, intentions and performances.

Now, when historians and archaeologists eagerly proceed to give names even to nameless gods, they are actually challenging this methodological frame, reducing the potential of a whole system of notions into a clear-cut name. Examples are countless: in the field of epigraphy, one can bring to mind the multiple hypotheses to identify the Baalat Gubal as Anat, Astarte, Hathor, etc.,[20] or the Greek "Mother of gods", variously identified as Cybele, Rhea, Demeter or even the Virgin.[21] This does not mean that names and images should not be interpreted or that their meaning is sometimes not ambiguous, or better polysemic. In the field of iconography especially, the misuse of material culture is legendary.

[17] ALLEN (2015), 35.
[18] GELL (1998).
[19] On this topic, see also OGGIANO (2021).
[20] ZERNECKE (2013).
[21] BORGEAUD (1996).

O. Keel writes, "we constantly run the risk of reading these pictures too concretely, or having avoided that risk, of treating them too abstractly".[22] For instance, one can recall the hordes of so-called Astarte(s) from one shore of the Mediterranean to the other. Recently, the pitfalls of struggling with (mis)identifications have been highlighted by the mistaken conjecture proposed by Yosef Garfinkel to identify and recognise no less than "the face of YHWH", the most wanted divinity in the desperate research of a portrait, in a rather common type of figurine.[23] These examples, although only briefly evoked, are sufficient to warn us how tricky and risky it can be for scholars to put a label on a deity, and what a large part speculation plays in this decision.

One should, then, be aware of this biased tendency to give one definite name to a divine entity, and resist this trend. Such an "ascetic exercise" implies fully acknowledging at least two points. Firstly, the willingness to provide a specific deity with a proper name (besides the thorny issue of how to define a proper name in the first place)[24] is probably a consequence of an interiorized opposition between polytheisms and monotheisms. Since in monotheism there is only one god, there is (apparently, at least) no need for a proper name, God with a capital letter being enough. On the contrary, in polytheism, where there are many gods, according to our sensibility, largely shaped by a "monotheistic way of thinking", they must be differentiated by different names, in order to avoid confusion. Besides the problematic taxonomy of polytheism and monotheism,[25] the least one can say is that it is methodologically unfair to treat polytheistic divinities when moved by monotheistic assumptions. Moreover, the opposition between proper names in polytheisms and common names in monotheisms is an oversimplification to be rejected (one not only brings to mind the particular name of YHWH in the Hebrew Bible, but also the ninety-nine names of Allah in the Islamic tradition). Secondly, one should acknowledge that understanding gods as "systems of notions" means accepting overlaps, fuzziness and a continuously open networking between their components (names, images, genealogies, narratives, etc.). This approach can, furthermore, be connected with the "epistemology of respect" that should be applied not only by anthropologists of religions[26] but also by historians. Such an epistemology implies that, despite our perspective and our knowledge, the last word should be given to ancient people, although definitively lost. In other words, our reconstructions, as insightful, well-built and good-looking they may be, are definitely ours. If they are to stand a chance at

[22] KEEL (1978), 9.
[23] GARFINKEL (2020, 2021); KISILEVITZ *et al*. (2020).
[24] On this issue, see PORZIA (2020).
[25] FREVEL (2013); STROUMSA (2021).
[26] COMBA (2008), 38-44. See, in particular, the insider/outsider debate in religious studies, CHRYSSIDES, GREGG (2019).

being credible, one must be open to the possibility that they could be falsified (in Popper's terms) but also approach them with flexibility in terms of establishing boundaries, categories and taxonomies.

For these reasons, the approach presented here, while being focused on divine names, does not encourage attributing a name or clear-cut identity to ancient gods, nor does it claim the superiority of one communication system (the linguistic vs. the visual) over another. In particular, the MAP project's perspective is that gods must be studied "on the spot", taking into account all sorts of evidence other than simply their written or conjectured name. The semantic scope of divine names is broader than that: they condense different information, sometimes in unfathomable ways (for us), something that cannot be easily and fully grasped.[27] Here, the iconographic approach seems particularly helpful in broadening or correcting the perspective of how one identifies and understands ancient gods. With the famous distinction between iconography and iconology, it forces scholars to carry out a disciplined description and analysis, preventing them from sudden and, at times, purely intuitive interpretations. Ancient and modern observers have experienced this problematic resonance and enchantment of images seen and interpreted through the filter of the agent's cultural traditions. The well-known description of the Hierapolitan cult statues by Lucian, in the *De Dea Syria* 31-32, provides an eloquent insight on this issue:

> In it [the naos] are enthroned the cult statues, Hera and the god, Zeus, whom they call by a different name. Both are golden, both are seated, though Hera is born on lions, the other sits on bulls. Certainly, the image of Zeus looks entirely like Zeus in features and clothes and seated posture; you could not identify it otherwise even if you wished. But when you examine Hera, her image appears to be of many forms [πολυειδέα μορφὴν]. While the overall effect [τὰ μὲν ξύμπαντα] is certainly that of Hera, she also has something of Athena and Aphrodite and Selene and Rhea and Artemis and Nemesis and the Fates.[28]

What Lucian illustrates here is not only the well-known practice of *interpretatio Graeca*, whereby a divine name of another religious system is taken as a translation of one's own, but he also takes it one step further, highlighting the limits of this practice: a binary correlation is not enough to identify the goddess and her multifaceted image. Hera is not simply equivalent to this or that goddess; she looks globally like Hera while recalling other divine entities through some index. In other words, the famous verse by the poet Walt Whitman, "I am large, I contain multitudes"[29] can – and should – indeed also be applied to the study of

[27] PORZIA (forthcoming).
[28] Translation after LIGHTFOOT (2003), 269.
[29] *Song of Myself*, section 51.

ancient gods. Moreover, Lucian's notion of "overall effect" [ξύμπας] can be compared to the concept of "total iconography" emphasised by Izak Cornelius, according to which scholars' identifications should not be limited to only one single attribute or feature.[30] Polytheism does not only mean that we are dealing with many gods, but also that each god is, *per se*, a plurality. Consequently, it is the total characterisation, through different names and images, functions and relations that should be considered, according to which gods were recognised under a large umbrella of notions, including narratives and rituals.

Subsequently, the interfacing of texts and non-written materials plays a pivotal role, as long as said interfacing allows room for overlaps and gaps; in one word, a certain degree of fuzziness, which neither means chaos nor inconsistency, but rather complexity and a certain unpredictability. Lucian's description, in fact, points out the fuzziness and uncertainty of the ancient and modern ordinary experience, where, as observers, we often encounter doubt and change our opinions. The Ancient were perfectly aware of the ontological impossibility of developing a solid knowledge of the gods. Therefore, why not be more nuanced in our own research and introduce more plasticity into rigid taxonomies and clear-cut statements? As once remarked by J. Schwartz: "In academia fuzziness is anathema; in real life fuzziness is often a life-preserver in turbulent times and seemingly conflicting and perhaps even hostile ideas and ideologies can reside together in fuzzy harmony".[31]

3. To Explore the Unexpected

Until recently, scholars regarded the question of divine names according to a traditional view – proper name, theonym *vs.* epithet, epiclesis – and focussing, at the same time, on its limits. Since 2017, the MAP project has been developing a broader and more flexible approach, adapted to the complexity that permeates all aspects of polytheistic and monotheistic religions. Such complexity is first and foremost mirrored in the variety of ways the gods are called, giving rise to different naming strategies. By this expression, we mean that a god may be called in a variety of possible ways, where "proper names" (theonyms) are only the surface and often the less informative part. These naming strategies make use of numerous and different elements, such as adjectives, substantives, participles, which scholars define randomly as epithets, epiclesis or titles. However, a god can also be defined and called by more complex elements, encompassing relative sentences or entire phrases. In other words, gods are often not addressed

[30] Cornelius (2008), 17.
[31] Schwartz (2012), 59.

using simple names, but rather resorting to "onomastic sequences" composed of different "onomastic elements/attributes", according to a new and more flexible terminology adopted in the MAP project.[32] Understood in this way, divine names are open to a broader set of analysis and comparisons that this book aims to explore. Names, as well as images, are like windows opened wide onto the vast panorama of divinities, regarded as interconnected systems of notions.

As Euripides already affirmed in the *Bacchae* (1388-1391), "Many are the forms of divine things, and the gods bring to pass many things unexpectedly; what is expected has not been accomplished, but the god has found out a means for doing things unthought of". It is precisely the path of the unexpected that we wish to take, by working on the relation between names and images: names may give rise to images, which consist in both mental and material representations, the great diversity of which offers a range of semantic interpretations inherent to complex divine designations, such as Baal of the heavens, Zeus *Euryopa* or YHWH Sabaoth. At the same time, names and images generate narratives, exegeses and etiologies, which are intended to justify, explain and contextualise the use of this or that onomastic and/or iconographic attribute. Conversely, stories about divine names can inspire artists and give rise to new images. In short, narrating and representing names are two different ways of expressing their semantic potentialities, which are often and deliberately polysemous. Like a *telete*, creating images and narratives belongs to the register of accomplishment and revelation, providing, at least, fragments of knowledge and a set of hermeneutic conjectures. Given that in ancient societies the divine is fundamentally conceived as inaccessible to reliable human knowledge, its protean complexity defies comprehension. In what Robert Parker describes as an "archipelago",[33] images and stories offer useful compasses on the path of the unexpected divine.

In the various contributions to this collective volume, we will therefore gravitate around names, images and narratives in search of convergences (rather than correspondences), but also deviations, insofar as we are dealing with two different languages. In echo to the MAP project, particular attention will be paid to the relational significance of images and stories connected to divine names. After all, characterising a deity by means of one or more onomastic sequences does not imply isolating or essentialising it; rather, it is a matter of situating it within

[32] An exhaustive discussion of the terminology adopted can be found in BONNET *et al.* (2018).

[33] "We know too much, and too little. The materials that bear on it far outreach an individual's capacity to assimilate: so many casual allusions in so many literary texts over more than a millennium, so many direct or indirect references in so many inscriptions from so many places in the Greek world, such an overwhelming abundance of physical remains. But genuinely revealing evidence does not often cluster coherently enough to create a vivid sense of the religious realities of a particular time and place. Amid a vast archipelago of scattered islets of information, only a few are of a size to be habitable" (PARKER [2011], viii).

a given context,[34] a web, a network. It implies deciphering and interpreting a signal that another signal can echo, like lighthouses within an archipelago. These questions also invite us to reflect on the articulation between unity and plurality of the divine by addressing the many variants of names, images, and narratives present in the sources, apparently so close but nonetheless different, like the many shades of a painter's palette. Spiralling around the gods by developing various forms of discourse and action is ultimately an experimental approach that Ancients and Moderns have tirelessly developed, like skilful sailors in the onomastic ocean, endowed by Athena with the *metis* necessary for the art of cunningly dealing with the movement of the waves.[35]

4. *Nomen Ostendit*: Onomastic and Visual Messages

Athena, however, is not only at home on a ship; she is also a land power. In his article on "Le navire d'Athéna", Marcel Detienne refers to a passage in Servius' *Commentary on the Aeneid*.[36] It mentions a young Athenian woman, called Myrmix, from the Greek μύρμηξ meaning "ant". A friend of Athena, this young girl was so skilled with her hands that she finally aroused the hatred of the goddess. Servius explains the reason for this in these terms:

> Athena had seen Demeter invent wheat and she wanted to show the people of Attica how they could get wheat from the earth more quickly. So Athena invented the plough. But Myrmix, who knew of Athena's invention, had the audacity to steal the handle of the instrument and went to the people, declaring, to anyone who would listen, that Demeter's gift would only bear fruit if the men used her invention, which alone was capable of turning the earth and facilitating the growth of wheat.

As a result, Myrmix was transformed into an ant by angry Athena and condemned to steal a few grains of wheat to ensure her subsistence. This etiological and even etymological account underlines Athena's involvement in the field of agriculture, but, through the secondary figure of Myrmix, it highlights the specificity of Athena's skills, compared with Demeter: agricultural technique, tools and their handling. She is not, as Marcel Detienne writes, a fertilising power, as Demeter is, but rather a technical power, an agricultural engineer. The misadventures of her friend and competitor Ant serve to better define Athena's own domain. Just as she guides the captain of a boat holding the rudder of the ship,

[34] Galoppin, Bonnet (2021).
[35] Detienne (1970).
[36] *In Verg. Aen.*, IV, 102.

she patronises the farmer wielding the plough, capable of making straight furrows, like a sailor in the sea. It is interesting to find a trace of this analogy in Greek vocabulary. The substantive μύρμηξ, in fact, refers not only to the ant, but also to the sea reefs that the good sailor must avoid.[37] The Iambic poet Eschrion of Samos writes, in the fourth century BCE, that ναῦται θαλάσσης μύρμηκες, "sailors are the ants of the sea",[38] in the sense that they skilfully make their way through the waves. The name Myrmix conveys, relays and enriches a whole imaginary that reveals unsuspected semantic connections, between agriculture and seafaring, in this case.

Remaining on the topic of animals and in the company of Athena, let us examine a passage of Pausanias (I, 5,3), in which he evokes Pandion's tomb in Megara. It stands near a promontory occupied by Athena *Aithuia*, the onomastic attribute of which evokes a sea bird. Marcel Detienne recalls that Hesychios[39] explains the onomastic element *Aithuia* by the fact that the goddess would have taken the form of this bird to hide Pandion, chased out of Attica by the Metionides, and take him to Megara. Sometimes on land, sometimes at sea, with a sharp eye, ready to intervene to catch a fish or prey, this sea crow inspires the goddess' behaviour. Athena also adopts the bird's habitat, i.e. the rocks of the seashore. According to Aratos,[40] the crow is similar to nimble sailors diving into the hollow of the waves. Once again, by assigning the name *Aithuia* to Athena, people managed to highlight her perfect mastery of the sea environment and navigation technique. Moreover, as Marcel Detienne points out, in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, Artemidorus of Daldis mentions that "to dream of a sea crow presages a career as a navigator and a perfect knowledge of the marine element".[41]

We can see, through these few examples, how a name, with all the potential meanings it conveys, not only offers a portrait, but also opens up avenues of knowledge. *Nomen ostendit*, states Macrobius:[42] it expresses the gods' fields of competence and modes of action; it reveals mental structures and emic categorisations; it shows configurations of divinities and inextricable imbrications of *logoi* and *praxeis*, myths, cults and representations. In short, they provide access to the complex mapping of the divine. According to Herodotus (II, 53), who evokes the seminal contribution of Homer and Hesiod to the Greeks' knowledge of the gods and the intricate elements of it:

[37] Herodotus VI, 183; Lycophron, *Al.* 878; Plinius *NH*, V, 119. On representations related to ants, SVENBRO (1990), who studies a metaphor that associates the cicada with the voice and ants with the writing that hoards the word.

[38] Eschrion fr. 2.

[39] Hesychius 2748 Latte.

[40] Aratos, *Phaonomena*, 296.

[41] Artemidorus, *Oneirokriton*, V, 74.

[42] Macrobius, *Saturnalia,* I, 9, 7.

> It was they who worked out for the Greeks a theogony (θεογονίην), gave the gods names (ἐπωνυμίας), distributed among them honours (τιμάς) and skills (τέχνας), and indicated their figures (εἴδεα).

Ant or sea crow, the *eponumiai* carry all these coordinates of the map and therefore call for explanations, exegeses, etiologies, etymologies and representations. They are all facets of the same process that aims to explore the complex nature of the gods and the semantic scope of divine appellations forged by men. The various *logoi*, narratives or images, are all attempts to mediate the radical otherness of the divine.

While Pausanias is a staple when it comes to exegesis on the names and representations of the gods, many other authors provide stimulating insights; we just mentioned, all too quickly, Artemidorus of Daldis, who wrote, in the second century CE, a manual on the interpretation of dreams.[43] In order to deal methodically with an abundant – and also largely unexpected! – matter such as dreams, Artemidorus proposes a typology of dreams according to the gods involved. He generally, but not always, makes a distinction between seeing a god and seeing his statue, both of which are generally described in the treatise as anthropomorphised. Dreaming of a god or his effigy performing a specific gesture, uttering a particular word, requires an interpretation of the mental codes; as a dream specialist, Artemidorus develops a critical method, in the etymological sense of the term: he distinguishes, discerns and deductively interprets according to the "signals" present in the dream.

Thus, to begin with the most prestigious god of all, dreaming of Zeus without his traditional attributes is not positive at all, or more exactly, it invalidates the scope of the dream.[44] Deprived of the indexes that validate his identity and expresses his divine agency, the god is an imaginary *Ersatz*, an *eidôlon*, one might say, of which to be wary. In the same logic, the posture of the god or his statue is symptomatic of his capacity for action; thus, "it is always better to see the god immobile, standing or sitting on a throne, and not moving".[45] After all, Zeus is the god of cosmic foundations, stability and order. To dream of him moving, especially if he is moving towards the west (the gateway to the afterlife), is an anomaly just as disturbing as the absence of his traditional attributes.

Concerning Artemis, the goddess to whom Artemidorus owes his name, he writes: "Artemis is good for anxious people. Indeed, *to artemes*, which means being healthy, keeps them safe from fear".[46] And he adds, using the names as a hermeneutic key in terms of divine *dynamis*: "The goddess is also positive for

[43] DU BOULET, CHANDEZON (2012); PIRENNE-DELFORGE (2019).
[44] Artemidorus, *Oneirokriton*, II, 35.
[45] Artemidorus, *Oneirokriton*, II, 35.
[46] Artemidorus, *Oneirokriton*, II, 35.

women giving birth, for she is called *Locheia*. She is particularly useful to hunters, as *Agrotera*, and to fishermen, as *Limnatis*. She also indicates that runaway slaves and lost objects will be found, as nothing escapes the goddess. The Artemis *Agrotera* and *Elaphebolos* (Deer Shooter) is always more suitable for actions (*praxeis*) than the one forged in another way (*dedemiourgemenes*). In his translation of Artemidorus, André-Jean Festugière comments on Artemis' ability to act: "it is because of the well-known short petticoat of Artemis in hunting costume".[47] A funny explanation which combines both name and image! At the end of this development on Artemis, Artemidorus concludes: "There is no difference between seeing the goddess as we have imagined her or seeing her statue. Whether the gods appear to us as flesh and blood or as statues made of some material, they have the same meaning (*logon*)".[48] Artemidorus adds, however, that there is a tiny nuance between the gods and their statues: "seeing the gods themselves means that good and evil will come faster than if one sees their statues".[49] Images thus function as an effective, but deferred, mediation of the divine power. And Artemidorus finally draws attention to a famous mythological tradition – many of his exegeses are based on shared narratives: "Seeing Artemis naked benefits no one in any way".[50] Without explicitly mentioning it, he refers to Actaeon's destiny, transformed into a stag for having seen the naked goddess coming out of the bath, and then devoured by his own hunting dogs. Images (mental and material) and narratives are intertwined in Artemidorus' discourse, as are the names, forms and skills of the gods. Dreams and their interpretation reactivate the common and fragmented human knowledge of gods. Names are mobilised as "verbal images", and statues as "material images", but they belong to the same repository of human resources for grasping the gods' identity and action.[51] To quote Christoph Uehlinger, "images can indeed be considered as formalised visual messages very close to text or any other means of symbolic communication".[52] Nevertheless, it remains to be seen what the specificities of these two types of message might be and how they might be linked.

5. *Intermezzo*: The Delay of Semitic Studies

Before presenting an example from the ancient Near East, it should be stressed that addressing the divine from both a textual and iconographic perspective is a

[47] Festugière (1975), 82.
[48] Artemidorus, *Oneirokriton*, II, 35.
[49] Artemidorus, *Oneirokriton*, II, 35.
[50] Artemidorus, *Oneirokriton*, II, 35.
[51] de Hulster (2009).
[52] Uehlinger (2007), 186.

relatively recent approach for the Semitic side of our investigation. An old spectre has hung over this field like a sword of Damocles. Let's take a step back. In 1847, the jury of the Volney Prize of the *Institut de France*, following a proposal by the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, awarded the gold medal to an *Essai historique et théorique sur les langues sémitiques en général et sur la langue hébraïque en particulier*. The 24-year-old author was Ernest Renan, who published his essay in 1855 under a title that elucidated the scientific trend into which he aspired to insert his work: *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*. At the same time, the French Orientalist's interest was not limited to linguistic aspects; from language, Renan argued that it was possible to grasp the so-called *Volkgeist*, the spirit of a whole people, or even a "race" as was commonly said at the time. Let's have a closer look at some passages:

> La race sémitique se reconnaît presque uniquement à des caractères négatifs : elle n'a ni mythologie, ni épopée, ni science, ni philosophie, ni fiction, ni arts plastiques, ni vie civile ; en tout, absence de complexité, de nuances, sentiment exclusif de l'unité.[53]

> En toute chose, on le voit, la race sémitique nous apparaît comme une race incomplète par sa simplicité même. Elle est, si j'ose le dire, à la famille indo-européenne ce que la grisaille est à la peinture, ce que le plain-chant est à la musique moderne.[54]

> Je suis donc le premier à reconnaître que la race sémitique, comparée à la race indo-européenne, représente réellement une combinaison inférieure de la nature humaine.[55]

The reader will easily understand why the term "anti-Semitic" was coined in Austria in 1860 to qualify Ernest Renan's scientific achievements.[56] To return to our topic, when the author denounces the Semitic populations' extreme simplicity and lack of plastic arts, he conceives the Semitic world as a realm populated by words and orality, and not by images. Indeed, Renan and his colleagues considered the material culture of the Levant barely worthy of filling the rooms of the Louvre before moving on to those destined for the great civilisations of Antiquity – Egypt and Mesopotamia (Mesopotamia was not fully considered an expression of the Semitic world) and especially the Greco-Roman world.

[53] RENAN (1855), I, 155.
[54] RENAN (1855), I, 156.
[55] RENAN (1855), I, 145-146.
[56] BEIN (1990), 594.

Semitic studies only began to recover from this general disregard towards the end of the 1980s. From then onwards, they started to benefit from a more accurate and nuanced appreciation of the materiality of these cultures, which could also be linked to a reconsideration of the visual and iconographical aspects as a language in its own right. The reasons for such a delay are multiple but essentially come down to two factors. On the one hand, it should not be forgotten that Oriental Studies are a recent discipline, born only in the nineteenth century, whereas Classical Studies have their roots much deeper in the Renaissance and even before. On the other hand, as Ernest Renan also attests, the destiny of biblical studies and Semitic studies were intimately linked for many years, which explains a general reticence towards images, and even a polarization between "idolatrous" and "spiritual" cults. Only in the twentieth century were Semitic studies progressively emancipated, favoured by an increasingly intense archaeological activity in the Near East, which made it possible to study and understand the material culture of the Levant without systematically reducing it to biblical criteria.

For instance, the rediscovery of the Phoenicians, after Renan's *Mission de Phénicie* in 1861, a mission in which he also expressed his disappointment with a material culture that lacked scope and power (he ended his report with an Ode to Greek Art!), was the result of an ingenious exhibition at Palazzo Grassi in Venice in 1988. This great gathering of artefacts from the four corners of the Mediterranean was enough to finally convince specialists of the Ancient Near East of the prestige that should henceforth be attributed to and recognised in these populations of the Eastern Mediterranean, which had for too long been considered lacking in this or that, in comparison with the Greco-Roman world which was seen as a cultural "metre". From this operation, which highlighted the coherence and variety of a culture that was anything but "grey", to use Renan's terms, a whole generation (even several!) of researchers arose, as well as a scientific production that finally took seriously the art of the ancient Levant, its visual culture, and its way of representing the gods in particular. Generally speaking, one began to study Syro-Palestinian art without considering local artistic forms systematically dependent on either Egypt or Mesopotamia.

6. The Potential of Names in the *Dipinto* of Ashur

Let us come, finally, to our example. German excavators at the vast construction site of the Assyrian capital, Ashur, have discovered a large sherd of pithos

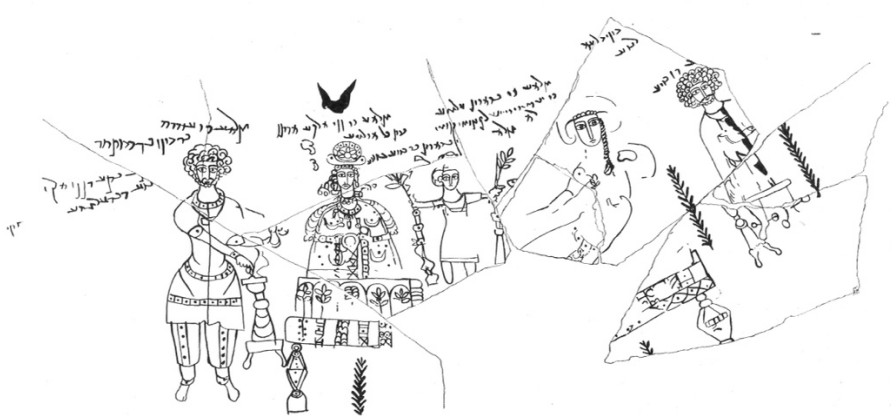

Fig. 1: *Dipinto* of Ashur.
From ANDRAE, LENZEN (1933), 109, fig. 46.

bearing images drawn in black ink in the southern part of the city.[57] Dating back to the Parthian period, this document, known as the *dipinto* of Ashur, combines six anthropomorphic figures and legends in Aramaic, all probably dating back to the third century CE (Fig. 1).

As we will see, the interpretation of many aspects remains controversial. The dipinto portraits a cult scene featuring people working for the goddess Nanay depicted as a campaniform figure posed on an ornate pedestal (a throne?), wearing a richly ornamented garment adorned with crescents, and a crown made up of a crescent and a sun;[58] above her the "legend" reads: "Image of Nanay King/ Queen Our Lady Daughter of Bel Lord of the Gods" (*ṣlmʾ dy nny mlkʾ mrtn brt bl mrlhʾ*). To her left, a standing figure, dressed in Parthian fashion, performs an incense offering; he is also identified by his name, genealogy, and function as intendant of Nanay. To the right of the image of Nanay stands a child figure with leafy branches in both hands; he is identified as the treasurer's son. To his right, on a decorated bed, lies a divine figure that the legend designates as "Image of Barmaren the God" (*ṣlmʾ dy brmrjn ʾlhʾ*) that the dedicant's father evokes "so that he may deliver him and his sons forever" (*dlpṣjhj wbnjhj lʿlm*). Then mes the image of the dedicant's father, a bearded figure, framed by two vegetal elements, performing a sacrifice on an altar on the ground.

The ensemble of images and texts is extremely rich in information about the deities, their names, their relationships, the human agency engaged in the ritual

[57] MILIK (1972), 344-325, with previous bibliography. See also AGGOULA (1985), 16-22, 37-41; BEYER (1998), A 15 a-f.

[58] WESTENHOLZ (1997), 80-81.

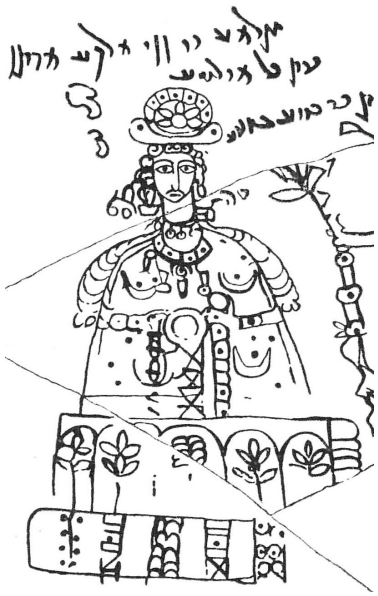

Fig. 2: Detail of Nanay.
From ANDRAE, LENZEN (1933), 109, fig. 46.

and the objects involved in this interaction. The main problem is how to link the inscription to the images, and vice versa. Is each inscription related to the image immediately underneath it or could it refer to another image nearby? Are they true "captions" or do texts and images recount unrelated stories? Jósef T. Milik proposes a three-dimensional reading of this two-dimensional composition imagining that it actually reflects the "statues" of Nanay and her *paredros* Barmaren facing each other in the temple. The inscriptions concerning the divine couple would have been engraved on the pedestals bearing their image. In his view, however, the order of images and texts needs to be arranged by the observer: the crowned figure would be a god, and the lying one a goddess. Given that different elements of his interpretation seem questionable, we have followed the general description and reading of the inscriptions given by Basile Aggoula. However, the idea that we are dealing with a ritual scene within the cult place is significant. In this respect, the divine onomastic sequences give birth to a figurative scenario, which deserves attention. Since its discovery, the initial problem of how to align texts and images has been the puzzling juxtaposition of a figure that seems to have a moustache and an inscription concerning the goddess Nanay (Fig. 2).

Walter Andrae saw the moustache, although thin, as an absolute marker of the figure's masculinity. Accordingly, the lying figure, without moustache and beard but with a long tress or curl descending over the shoulder and wearing an

extravagant hat, is regarded as undoubtedly feminine.[59] Despite the inscription mentioning a male divinity, Barmaren, the figure seemed extremely "girlish" to scholars working at the beginning of the twentieth century. While a renewed study of the document at the *Vorderasiatisches Museum* of Berlin would certainly be helpful, gender criteria are appreciated differently according to historical periods and societies.[60] In other words, Walter Andrae's or Jósef T. Milik's assumptions on what looks male or female should not be uncritically accepted. Neither can a moustache be regarded as an unequivocal attribute for establishing a clear-cut gender for our figure. A close analysis of all the available information seems to be illuminating in this regard.

In the inscription, Nanay, shortly after being described as "our Lady", using the feminine form Martan, is introduced as King (*mlk'*), instead of Queen (*mlkt'*). The option of a possible scribal error should be ruled out since the same expression is mentioned twice in our document, also in the first inscription on the left. The use of the masculine form instead of the feminine one has been explained – not to say normalised – as a particular form of the *status absolutus* of *mlkt'* by Jósef T. Milik, who linked the inscription to the lying figure with the tress, as we saw. However, without altering the emplacement of texts and images, there is no actual need to speculate on the morphological nature of the term *mlk'*. On the contrary, reading the description of Nanay King together with the moustached figure below, the same gender fluidity on both registers seems to appear.[61] Moreover, the same phenomenon is well attested in the Ancient Near East. In Egypt, for instance, not only the god Hapi, who brings the Nile flood as an ejaculation, has breasts, but also a king such as Akhenaten is often represented encompassing male and female attributes, or queens as Nefertiti and Hatshepsut can be "masculinized" in iconography.[62] As for the Mesopotamian world, Ishtar is for sure the best example of a goddesses overcoming boundaries, comprised those of gender.[63] Such a parallelism, however, should not be considered proof for an assimilation between Nanay and Ishtar, as often claimed; quite the opposite, "the common misconception that Nanaya was a manifestation of Ištar can

[59] ""Von den beiden großen Götterfiguren möchte man die linke für männlich halten, wiewohl sie keinen Vollbart hat. Ein dünnes Schnurrbärtchen kann man wohl kaum verkennen. […] Die rechte Figur ist zweifellos weiblich. Eine lange Schläfenlocke fällt an der linken Gesichtsseite herab. Das Gesicht ist gänzlich bartlos, in breitem Bogen ist Haartracht oder Kopfputz dargestellt beinahe wie ein ionisches Kapitell. Über der Stirn liegt eine Art Perlband" (ANDRAE, LENZEN [1933], 110).

[60] From a theoretical point of view, see NISSINEN (1998), 11 and NICHOLS, STUART (2020), 7.

[61] The choice of a moustache rather than a full beard might also be significant, since "what is manifest in men's beards – an important secondary sexual characteristic – is precisely their fully developed manhood" (WINTER [1996], 13).

[62] MATIĆ (2016), 175-178.

[63] AGGOULA (1985), 17-22.

be refuted".[64] Methodologically speaking, gender fluidity should then be regarded as a more frequent divine feature than one might think.

This is only one example of the hermeneutic potential of names, and the fertile entanglement of images and texts. Leaving aside human onomastics, which would complicate our scenario even more, the divine onomastic sequences underline the relations between the gods, namely the filiation between Nanay and her father Bel, designated as sovereign god ("Lord of the Gods"), but also between Nanay Martan ("Our Lady") and Barmaren ("Son of Maren"). They also create some sort of hierarchy among the gods, where, for instance, Nanay is richer in onomastic elements than Barmaren. Combining onomastic and iconographic attributes, however, while Nanay is rich in titles and visual elements, Bel, on the contrary, despite his nominal supremacy ("Lord of the Gods"), lacks any figurative representation, besides the improbable eventuality that he stood in the lost part of the pithos. Furthermore, if the use of the names Martan and Barmaren suggests the well-known triad Maran, Martan, and Barmaren,[65] the alleged main deity, Maran, "Our Lord", would then be completely missing in our document. According to this hypothesis, moreover, Nanay and Barmaren should not be regarded as a spousal couple, nor can they be identified with Ishtar and Nabu, the famous couple from Babylon, as suggested by the faction of "scholars naming the unnamed at all costs".[66] The *dipinto* would, on the contrary, portrait a divine mother-and-son couple, an interpretation eventually supported by the young-looking figure lying on the bed, and especially by his tress, a typical iconographic attribute of youth.[67]

Once again, one should resist unnecessary (mis)identifications. Our documentation is rich enough to deserve an attentive analysis of what we do have instead of dwelling on what we do not have or could have had. It is interesting to note, for example, that the sovereignty of the goddess described as "King" is reflected in her image and her clothing – she is enthroned, imposing and static, wearing a crown and a richly decorated garment –, but also in her genealogy. As for the god, he is lying on a bed, resting (after a battle?), somewhat following the model of Lysippus' *Epitrapezios* Herakles, celebrating the banquet of the victorious god. The plant elements in the centre of the scene and the offerings/sacrifices surrounding them disclose how humans interact with the gods by paying them material tributes, in addition to onomastic tributes, and bearing theophoric names.

Our purpose in this Introduction is not to propose a final interpretation of such a complex document, but rather to show an alternative use of the heuristic

[64] WESTENHOLZ (1997), 80.
[65] KUBIACK (2016). These deities are also attested in Palmyra and Dura-Europos.
[66] DRIJVERS (1980), 46-47.
[67] AGGOULA (1985), 18.

potential value of names. When images and narratives "translate" their semantic scope, as is the case here, names open a window onto the structure of pantheons, human agency and cultic practices that involve many different ingredients: pictures, postures, material devices, objects, spaces, gestures and symbolic elements that must be interpreted as a semantic network. They also challenge and resist scholars' hypotheses and cultural constructions.

7. Manipulating the Divine, Crossing Registers of Communication, Challenging Old and New Names

The contributions collected in this volume point to three main topics. First, they show how names can be constructed, adapted and transformed to shape divine characters according to specific contexts and needs. They also aim to coherently (re)organise assemblages of gods that we are used to calling "pantheons", a questionable notion, since we never deal with permanent and fixed sets of divine entities. In his essay on the God El and the Levantine Mythology, Jonathan Ben-Dov focuses on early Jewish apocalyptic literature and more specifically on the mythological scene of the divine assembly in the War Scroll (1QM) from Qumran. He shows how it is inspired, both lexically and theologically, by Levantine traditions from the second millennium BCE. Within the inclusive monotheism of Qumran, multiple minor divinities challenge the sovereignty of the One. The angelic war in 1QM finds convincing parallels in an Ugaritic theomachy and in Philo of Byblos.

Moving from Qumran to Carthage, the next paper, by Bruno D'Andrea, explores the relation between the naming systems and the iconographic representations of the gods in the tophets. Whereas Baal Hammon and Tinnit, in close connection, since the goddess is called "Face of Baal", are massively evoked by the dedicants, other deities are very rarely mentioned in the tophet inscriptions. This observation, combined with the scarce presence of Baal Hammon and Tinnit outside the tophets, still warrants an explanation, since temple sharing is well established and widespread in the ancient Mediterranean cult-places.

The dynamics and even manipulations of divine names through images and narratives involves both rituals and myths, which are frequently embedded. Charles Delattre provides a stimulating analysis of a literary piece from the vast mythographic corpus, namely the *Collection of Metamorphoses* by Antoninus Liberalis (second century CE?). His etiological narrative, centred on the names of Ctesylla and Hecaerge, shows a creative combination of anthroponyms and theonyms combined according to his intellectual and literary objectives.

The second issue that we explore in this book is how different registers of communication, namely images and narratives, are mobilised and compared to

shape a single or collective divine entity. The case of the Edomite god Qos is addressed by Juan Manuel Tebes. His starting point is the absence of the main Edomite deity in the Hebrew Bible, while other Transjordanian gods are mentioned. Could Qos be a so-called Yahweh's *Doppelgänger*, with similar characteristics or could he even be the same deity? A comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the history, imagery and onomastic characteristics of Qos within the wider context of the southern Levant provides new insights on the Edomite god and an excellent comparative case-study for Yahweh.

The plurality of onomastic elements associated to a single divine figure makes it complicated to build a clear-cut iconography able to express the diversity of his/her functions. However, it allows for sophisticated and dynamic interplays between names and images, like the ones analysed by Cécile Jubier-Galinier on Attic vases. How do painters invent discriminating signs to customise the gods? Do they play with these *semata* and do they use them in a systematic and coherent way? How do the iconographic attributes contribute to the narrative scope of images? The judgement of Paris is a brilliant case study for shedding light on the iconographic elements used (or not used) to distinguish the goddesses involved. Moreover, painted names are sometimes present on vases to make the scenario even more explicit. Like literary epithets, the combinations of multiple-choice signs aim to put the emphasis on both the specificity and the proximity of the Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite.

"Bricolage" and appropriation are relevant concepts when it comes to the construction of the polytheistic and even monotheistic divine in the ancient world. Ginevra Benedetti applies them to very specific and fascinating artefacts: the *Signa Panthea.* Moving from an epigram by Ausonius mentioning a Dionysus *Pantheus*, combining the attributes of "all the gods", she proposes a rich historiographic itinerary which reveals how and why the Greek and Latin *pantheios/pantheus* was (mis)interpreted as the "totality of the gods". Her paper reconsiders the idea of "divine totality" and focuses on its possible visualisations. The *signa panthea*, decorated with a whole set of divine attributes, undoubtedly imply complex visual and religious semantics.

The third issue raised by this book concerns the fact that names, be they old or new, are not static entities but rather change in space and time. Moreover, as their ideal referents, the understanding of names, notions and labels can constantly be challenged and improved. This part of the book presents four case-studies dealing with the reception and historiography of divine names, artefact categories, or even broader notions. In his paper, Christian Frevel addresses the historical and religious background of the famous but mysterious Baal-Zebub. He suggests understanding the apparently bizarre title "Lord of the Flies" in the context of seventh-century BCE Ekron, one of the major olive oil production

sites in the Southern Levant, where a deity protecting the plantation from flies makes perfect sense.

Not only ancient divine names that were favourably received deserve attentive inquiry, archaeologists' labels should be granted the same attention. This is Barbara Bolognani's task as she restudies the coroplastic type that, since 1967, has been called "Dea (Tyria) Gravida", after William Culican. The figurine, widespread in the Levant between the late Iron Age and the Persian period, representing an enthroned pregnant lady, is interpreted as an image of the main goddess of Tyre. However, as the author argues, to date, there is still little certainty about her true identity, dating and geographical origin.

Differently from Culican's nomenclature, Greek hermes seem to be firmly anchored in their own historical context. S. Rebecca Martin, however, revisits some outstanding questions about the origins of hermes statues. She explores how the Greeks perceived their origins in material terms, either as an outgrowth of early wooden images or as a formalisation of stone stacks and cairns. Instead of the common interpretation of the hermes as a product of an independent evolution in early Greek sculpture, the author regards them as a spontaneous invention of the Archaic period.

Finally, Astrid Nunn deals with the notions of "iconism" and "aniconism", often used as competitive and alternative "languages" in the ancient Near Eastern religious realm. The author presents a careful study of sanctuaries in Palestine and Syria attesting the coexistence, side by side, of iconic and aniconic objects, from the third millennium onwards, at the latest. Supported by archaeological and textual data, she argues that the opposition between the iconic and the aniconic is a scholars' construction. In Antiquity, these registers were neither fundamentally different nor incompatible. The double strategy, however, allowed the cult actors to enrich and differentiate their approach to the divine.

Before we embark on this journey to discover intertwined stories and images of gods, let us invoke the patronage of Simonides of Ceos, who reported an anecdote, quoted by Cicero, in his *De natura deorum*:[68]

> Inquire of me as to the being and nature of god, and I shall follow the example of Simonides, who having the same question put to him by the great Hiero, requested a day's grace for consideration; next day, when Hiero repeated the question, he asked for two days, and so went on several times multiplying the number of days by two; and when Hiero in surprise asked why he did so, he replied: "because the longer I deliberate the more obscure the matter seems to me."

[68] Cicero, *De natura deorum* I, 60.

Let's hope that the contributions gathered in this volume will help us in making the matter of the gods less obscure.

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