



Publié sur *La Vie des Classiques* (<https://96.ip-213-32-20.eu>)

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## CORINNE BONNET, LAURENT BRICAULT - QUAND LES DIEUX VOYAGENT: CULTES ET MYTHES EN MOUVEMENT DANS L'ESPACE MÉDITERRANÉEN ANTIQUE. HISTOIRE DES RELIGIONS

19 Juin 2017

Corinne Bonnet and Laurent Bricault's recent monograph can be added to a growing list of works that now take the concepts of mobility and interconnectivity as a given for Mediterranean and Near Eastern history. Focusing on the movement of individual gods around the ancient world in their mythological, ritual, and broader socio-political manifestations, *Quand les dieux voyagent* answers not only to the now-entrenched paradigm of Mediterranean interconnectivity but also to parallel scholarly shifts in the subfield of

ancient Mediterranean religions. Whereas, for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religion was studied as a phenomenon rooted in the mentalities and institutions of the polis, scholars in the last decade have moved to articulate ancient religion on new levels, from the personal, lived experience of religion to large-scale, pan-Mediterranean religious networks that stretch far beyond the physical and conceptual reach of any one city. In short, religious belief and practice have been set free from the tyranny of the polis.

So too, it seems, have the gods: Bonnet and Bricault start from the premise, articulated by Plato, but attributed to Thales of Miletus, that gods are everywhere. And they are everywhere by virtue of the needs and actions of humans. Accordingly, the authors, in a series of vignettes separated into 12 chapters, attempt to illustrate the complex movements of various gods and the effects these inventive and colourful mobilities exert upon both the deities themselves and the humans who compel them to move. This approach, the authors assert, of juxtaposing multiple histories of gods who travel, allows us "d'accéder, à travers la polyphonie des voix récitantes, à une réflexion sur les usages du religieux dans les sociétés antiques et sur son imbrication profonde avec les registres du politique, du social, de l'économique" (p. 17).

In placing side-by-side a series of 12 divine journeys from Mesopotamian Ishtar's descent to the Netherworld to the role of the Torah in uniting the Jewish diaspora, the authors aim to move beyond the traditional divisions of monotheism and polytheism inherent in the study of ancient religions: "Sont-elles utiles, adéquates, fécondes pour parler des religions de l'Antiquité et en comprendre les logiques?" (p. 11) The question of false dichotomies and the obstructions they create when it comes to grasping some of the more fundamental aspects of ancient religions is a worthy one to ask, and is consequently one of the strengths of this work.

Following their short introduction, Bonnet and Bricault progress through their case studies, shunning artificial chronologies and instead taking a *longue durée* approach to allow the

reader to view how history shapes religious exchanges (p. 18). They begin, in Chapter 1, with one of the more classic cases of divine movements, that of the Phoenician Melqart, whose worship originated in Tyre and flourished beyond the Pillars of Hercules. In Melqart the authors locate the intersection of Tyre's far-reaching prosperity with the sovereignty and protection offered by this tutelary deity in overseas foundations, from Tyre to Carthage to Gades and many locales in between.

Chapters 2 to 4 visit several deities whose movements are spurred—directly or indirectly—by the political machinations of Rome. A fascinating blend of literary and numismatic sources, in Chapter 2, follows the journey taken by the young emperor Bassianus and his tutelary god Elagabalus (whose name the emperor would take as his own) from Emesa to Rome in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. Chapter 3 focuses on the role of relics (Greek *aphidryma*), specifically those of Artemis as she journeyed from Ephesus to Massalia to Rome through the migrations of the Phokaeans and the later alliance established between Massalia and Rome. In particular, Bonnet and Bricault emphasize the role of the relic as a “cordon ombilical invisible” (p. 78) between overseas settlement and mother city, and as a symbol of affiliations, whether real or imagined, that later communities like Rome would establish with the illustrious gods like the Ephesian Artemis to sanction their supremacy amongst surrounding peoples. Finally, Chapter 4 examines the case of the Romans' outright appropriation of a foreign deity into their city during the Second Punic War, none other than the Anatolian Cybele.

Chapters 5 to 8 shift the focus to the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. In Chapter 5 the authors present a fascinating examination of the fraught installation of a cult to Serapis on Delos through the dedicated actions of a priestly Egyptian family, as contained on an inscribed marble column discovered in Serapeion A by French excavators in 1912. The true extent of this god's travels, as recounted in Tacitus, Plutarch, and Clement of Alexandria, contextualize Serapis' movements under the Ptolemies from Sinope to Alexandria (or more likely, as the authors rightly suggest on p. 123, from Memphis to Alexandria) and, finally, to Delos. Chapter 6 turns to the famous journey of Ishtar to the Netherworld, recorded in Sumerian and Akkadian texts, examined as a cipher through which to explore the limits of divine and earthly power and the prescriptive rites of mourning. Chapter 7 recounts the navigations of Isis via her dizzying array of interrelations, from Hathor to the Lady of Byblos to Demeter to Aphrodite. At the forefront of discussions are the economic and political mechanisms that fuel these associations and movements, from Egypt's commercial and diplomatic ties with Byblos (p. 163) to Arsinoe II's role in the creation of the Ptolemaic thalassocracy and the elevation of a maritime cult to the Lagid queen by Callicrates of Samos (p. 166-170).

In Chapter 8 the authors move away from the close reading of singular deities to consider the broader category of “godnapping” in Mesopotamia, an act during which the gods, usually through imperial conquest, were physically and conceptually removed from their home cities. Bonnet and Bricault follow several examples, including that of Hammurabi's law code, taken from Sippar to Susa by the Elamites (and finally ending up in Paris in 1902): “Plus qu'un simple butin de guerre, l'objet confisqué est un gage de continuité, de transfert du pouvoir, de la souveraineté territoriale et de l'emprise exercée sur les populations” (p. 182). Chapter 9 continues the “godnapping” theme with the case, recounted in Diodorus Siculus, Quintus Curtius, and Plutarch, of the Carthaginian capture of Gela in 406 BCE and the deportation of the bronze cult statue of Apollo, subsequently sent to Tyre and reclaimed by Alexander.

Chapter 10 presents a new category to the reader through Aphrodite and Dionysus, namely the divine “epidemic”. The authors introduce this concept as an analogy for characterizing “un surgissement” of worship of a deity, who either leaves and returns annually, as with Aphrodite at Eryx, or is (re)introduced suddenly, as with Dionysus in Thebes, “qui a un impact sur la population” (p. 226). The analogy of the epidemic serves to underscore the forcefulness of the deity’s presence (*parousia*), made manifest through substances (e.g. wine), sensations (e.g. smells), and actions (e.g. mania).

The final chapters bring the reader into the world of monotheism, traditionally separated from the rest of antiquity. Bonnet and Bricault use the case of the Torah in Chapter 11 as an opportunity to examine how deities moved alongside cultural groups who shunned physical images, as was the case with the Jews: “C’est donc par le texte et dans le texte que les Juifs vont assurer la ‘transhumance’ du culte de Yahvé” (p. 250). In Chapter 12, the authors highlight the conceptual voyage the nascent Christian religion had to undertake into the world of polytheism via Paul’s mission in Athens recounted in Acts 17.16-34.

Following the introduction and 12 chapters, there is a map of the Mediterranean followed by indices of names and places, a brief thematic index, a list of figures by chapter, and a table of contents. A short (5-12 sources) bibliography follows at the end of each chapter.

Bonnet and Bricault present an evocative piece of work, one that seeks to rise above more traditional categorizations of ancient religions, whether made through geography, time period, or belief system. There is much to be gained by dissolving these (often artificial) boundaries through the focus on movement and exchange. Especially strong is the variety of sources Bonnet and Bricault carefully scrutinize in each case study, meticulously considering which scenarios were more likely when it came to a particular deity’s peregrinations.

Another strength of this monograph can be summarized by Fritz Graf’s statement in his contribution to a volume edited by Sarah Iles Johnston: “Political geography is not irrelevant for the history of religion.” While earlier accounts of Mediterranean interconnectivity have been criticized for advancing a static, unchanging sense of “Mediterraneanism”, devoid of any short- and medium-term features wrought by political entities like states and empires, Bonnet and Bricault show, at various points, how the movements of gods followed the contours of empires and answered to the realpolitik of state institutions. Their account is not one that takes interconnectivity as the final explanation for these rambling divinities: interconnectivity is a backdrop; the real reason(s) the gods are so frequently on the move must be found by digging deeper into the social, political, and economic histories of the myriad cultural groups who spurred these Olympian jaunts.

Yet this strength also begets a criticism: upon reading the last paragraph, of the ultimate failure of Paul’s mission in Athens, one is left at the finish line of a work that stretched from Sumer to Spain, that touched the Early Bronze Age and traversed through to Late Antiquity. It is a grandiose endeavour, and one that necessitates a concluding chapter, an epilogue that attempts to tie together for the reader the major themes of this broadly comparative approach: for instance, how does the reader square the first steps taken by the Christian god in Athens with Sennacherib’s godnapping of Marduk? A slight consolation might be gained by flipping to the thematic index in order to see these themes crystalized: words such as “Commerce”, “Déportation”, “Guerre”, “Navigation”, and “Traduction” might jump out.

To be fair, Bonnet and Bricault include, at the start of each chapter, several paragraphs’ worth of introduction to the particular theme under discussion, and these introductions are

certainly overarching and even theorizing at times (e.g. p. 176: “Les empires – . . . dans la longue durée de l’histoire mondiale – utilisent le ou les dieux comme un levier pour légitimer, asseoir, promouvoir leur emprise et pour gérer la distance, un de défis que l’espace pose au temps”). Yet a summarizing chapter is sorely needed, particularly given the broader aims of the monograph series to which this volume belongs. Indeed, a work of such scale, despite its service paid to political events and *conjonctures*, ultimately calls into question the location of the conceptual limits, however fluid, of ancient (Mediterranean?) religions.

Other issues in this volume also work against the reader: the use of footnotes is slim throughout. While this is not automatically negative, there are certainly many instances where the reader could have benefited from citations. For example, on p. 190, the authors note “les spécialistes ont dénombré dans les textes plus de cinquante cas de deportation de statues par les Assyriens.” Who conducted this survey and where is it? On p. 136, in discussing both the destabilizing and unifying power of sexuality, they note that Aphrodite was often the patron of magistrates. Once again, a note directing readers to further information (*IG* numbers, articles) would be helpful. There are other instances throughout the volume where ancient authors are quoted without reference to specific line numbers (e.g. p. 218 – Diodorus’ account of the Geloan Apollo at Tyre). On the whole, however, more general typological errors are minimal. One last, but crucial point: while the map at the end is certainly helpful, individual maps germane to the topic of each chapter would have been useful to readers traversing a range of locales and time periods.

Overall, Bonnet and Bricault’s volume is an ambitious and illuminating feat. The authors demonstrate the necessary familiarity with and sensitivity towards the varied source material to accomplish the Herculean task of working across boundaries not normally crossed by archaeologists and historians. The focus is certainly more literary and iconographic than archaeological, but scholars and students working on any aspect of ancient religion as it relates to long-term history and interconnectivity, not to mention topics related to the specific case studies covered, will benefit from this book.

**LABOR ET FIDES**, 29€

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