



NOMS DE DIEUX!

Exploration Seminar of the ERC Advanced Grant project

Mapping Ancient Polytheisms.

Cult Epithets as an Interface between Religious Systems and Human Agency

(MAP / 741182)



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Maison de la Recherche, Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès
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The project MAP « *Mapping Ancient Polytheisms. Cult Epithets as an Interface between Religious Systems and Human Agency* » aims to build up a cartography of Greek and West Semitic polytheisms between 1200 BC and 400 CE using cult and literary epithets of the gods. Supported by ERC funding (Advanced Grant 741182), the project started on the 1st of October, 2017, and will provide, in five years of research: a new database of Greek and Semitic epithets and epiclesis; a network analysis of divine names in both cultural areas; a better understanding of the modes of addresses to the gods and of ritual agency by different sorts of worshippers; and finally a set of maps tracing the connections between gods, men, and contexts. The team leading the project is, for now, constituted of Pr. Corinne Bonnet (Principal Investigator) and five postdoctoral researchers: Élodie Guillon (team manager, and vice-director for 2017-2018), Miriam Bianco, Thomas Galoppin, Sylvain Lebreton and Fabio Porzia.

Divine powers honoured in Ancient polytheistic religions cannot be classified into static lists or into canonical genealogies as they frequently are in modern dictionaries. Their names and characters are potentially as diverse as cult places and ritual occasions, and a plurality of relational networks can be observed between cults, texts, and images. The process of naming the gods is at the heart of this dynamic construction of the divine and, therefore, of this relational network. More specifically, the use of epithets (so-called *epiclesis* in cultic context) as well as any other way of multiplying specific aspects of the gods, is testimony of the plurality of the divine and gives us a clue to understanding the complex unity and plurality of each superhuman power that Greeks and West Semitic people use to pray.

An inspiring publication gave way to our project: contributions in *Nommer les dieux: théonymes, épithètes, épicleses*, eds. Nicole Belayche, Pierre Brulé and Gérard Freyburger (2005), have shown how epithets and *epiclesis* functioned as structural and empirical markers in the organisation of a divine “landscape”. The *BDEG* database (*Base de données des épicleses grecques*), supervised by Pierre Brulé in Rennes, has cut the path for a new approach regarding the epithets through digital humanities and data analysis. From now on, MAP will collect divine epithets within vast literary and epigraphic documentation, observe and analyse them, in order to explain the fabric of the denomination systems, the construction and evolution of the pantheons, and the diverse forms of human agency in their historical and geographical dimensions. We will focus on comparing Greek and Semitic worlds, from c. 1000 BCE to c. 400 CE. Contrary to the history of ancient Greek religion, the study of the epithets and designation processes of the gods is still under-developed in the Semitic field.

The database we are building is intended to become a tool for all historians of both disciplines, but we are well aware that it may also serve as a model for other fields of study. We began our reflexion on a collective ground in order to build up the database and we acknowledged a need for a deeper understanding of what *epiclesis*, epithets, theonyms, or even other forms of declination of the divine powers actually are. What categories are involved in an *emic* perspective? What are the uses of the names and epithets? In which rituals? What are the agents concerned (or not)? How do the epithets function with iconography? We have to take into account the differences between Greek and Semitic languages. But, moreover, we wish to expand our views and learn about the particularities of the societies we study from other disciplines. These are the reasons for opening and sharing our reflexion with a larger scientific community by means of a seminar with a duration of six months, starting in January, 2018. This meeting will happen twice a month in Toulouse, Maison de la Recherche.

Our goal in this seminar is to broaden our view on the names of the gods and on strategies of designation in the very fabric of the divine. Invited speakers received the following questions to join our own prospects:

1. In your field of research, what kinds of designation and declination of the divine can be found?
2. To what extent are each of the kinds you may find used?
3. What contexts require, ease or imply the use of “epithets” in order to identify the gods?
4. What exactly are the epithets and the epiclesis? Is that a relevant distinction? Should we mark a difference between literary and ritual contexts? Does your documentation show different notions, categories or concepts that might prove to be useful for a cartography of the divine?
5. What are the peculiarities of the ritual use of epithets? Who are the human agents involved? What are the performativity and the results expected?
6. What are the effects of time and space on these systems of designation and declination of the divine?
7. To what extent can epithets be seen as the clues for links between gods, between men, between places? How should we interpret the absence of any link?
8. What kind of images and discourses can be produced thanks to, or because of, the epithets? And vice versa, what are the images and discourses that create or give birth to a new epithet?
9. What roles do tradition, normativity, innovation, or creation play in the use of epithets?
10. What would you expect from a database of the epithets? What kind of information should be implemented? How would you search such a database?

The seminar will be open to the public and invites two guests at a time from diverse disciplines: Greek and Semitic Studies, of course, as well as Biblical Studies, Egyptology, Anthropology... There will be no publication but, in order to interact in what is to be considered a workshop, invited speakers are asked to introduce ideas, documents, questions from their own field of study during 30 minutes before opening up to discussion. Speakers will also provide us with a one-page summary accompanied by a bibliography, to be published in our HAL collection.

Team MAP
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