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Interpretatio

The previous chapter has given an outline of the “inherited conglomerate” of Greek ways of naming and addressing the divine. The next will consider the fortunes of those linguistic conventions when applied to gods encountered outside Greece. But first must be considered the practice that provided the indispensable bridge between cultures. Let us approach it via something magnificent, the resonant opening to Alexander Pope’s translation of Homer’s *Iliad*.

Achilles’ wrath, to Greece the direful spring
Of Woes unnumber’d, heavenly goddess, sing!
That wrath which hurled to Pluto’s gloomy reign
The Souls of mighty chiefs untimely slain;
Whose Limbs unbury’d on the naked Shore
Devouring Dogs and hungry Vultures tore.
Since Great Achilles and Atrides strove,
Such was the Sov’reign Doom, and such the will of Jove.

I quote it for the substitution that Pope makes in the last line whereby the Greek “plan” or “will” of “Zeus” becomes the “will of Jove.” No translator today would dream of replacing the Greek god by the Roman, but for Pope nothing could have been more natural, indeed inevitable. Pope and his contemporaries inherited the tradition going back to the Romans themselves of substituting Roman divine names for their supposed Greek equivalents, a tradition that has long died out in scholarship but lives on at lower levels: most of us were probably told at an early age that Minerva was the Roman Athena, that Neptune equaled Poseidon, and so on. I recall those early experiences because, when told of such an equivalence as a

child, one did not question its basis, one accepted it; and it is very important that many ancients too were very probably exposed to such identifications early in life or in other situations which did not encourage reflection on how they were justified. They were just part of common speech, of the world one was born into.

In one of the rare passages where an ancient author makes the process explicit, Tacitus says of an ancient sacred grove in east Germany that “a priest who wears female clothing presides, but they call the gods in a Roman rendering (*interpretatione Romana*) Castor and Pollux: that is their efficacy, but their name is Alci [or Alcis].”¹ In consequence of that well-known passage the process of identification has come to be known as *interpretatio*; the term occurs in this application here only, but serves usefully to name a practice that is pervasive. Such identification was applied by the Romans, as before them by the Greeks, to the gods of almost all the nations that they encountered. One can ask which of the two English derivatives from the verb *interpretari* more nearly catches Tacitus’s sense: is he referring to the work of an interpreter, someone who merely translates from one language to another (but how does one “translate” the name of a god?), or is the process rather one of interpretation, the attempt to bring out the meaning of an expression in different words? A glance at a Latin dictionary shows that the question cannot be answered, since both *interpretari* and *interpretatio* are regularly used with both forces.² This ambiguity that inheres in the Latin word inheres, as we shall see, in the whole process.

Georg Wissowa, in a classic study of *interpretatio* within the Roman empire, confined himself to the Latin West, on the grounds that in terms of both sources and historical realities the situation in the Greek East was quite different.³ So even within the Roman world no single framework of analysis was possible; even within the Roman West substantial differences are visible between what happens in Gaul and Germany on the one side, and in Africa on the other.⁴ If one extends one’s view to *interpretatio* throughout the ancient world, the relevant differences multiply greatly. An even more important difference than the regional, one might argue, is that between native speakers of Greek and Latin, giving Greek and Roman names

1. Tac. *Germ.* 43.4: *Apud Naharvalos antiquae religionis lucus ostenditur. Praesidet sacerdos muliebri ornatu, sed deos interpretatione Romana Castora Pollucemque memorant . . . ea vis numini, nomen Alcicis. Nulla simulacra, nullum peregrinae superstitionis vestigium; ut fratres tamen, ut iuvenes venerantur.*

2. For the latter view, see Bettini, *Elogio del politeismo*, 66–67, stressing the element of uncertainty so often present.

3. Wissowa, “*Interpretatio Romana*,” which built on the work of his pupil Richter, *De interpretatione*. For recent bibliography, see *Interpretatio Graeca/Romana/Indigena*, 13 n. 1.

4. In Europe juxtaposition of the different theonyms is the norm, while in Africa the Latin name often appears alone: Wissowa, “*Interpretatio Romana*,” 18–19; more generally, *interpretatio* is commoner in Africa: Cadotte, *Romanisation des dieux*, 9–10. Different Roman gods prevail in the two places: Richter, *De interpretatione*, 41, 51–4.

to the gods of foreign nations, and the indigenous worshippers of those gods, adopting or not adopting the imported designations; and there is a subdivision within the former group between historians and ethnographers writing from a distance, and travelers and settlers meeting the foreign gods at first hand. But there was a historical continuity in the practice of *interpretatio* within that world which it is important to recognise; this was a central feature of a partially shared religious culture. The learned *interpretationes* to be found in the pages of a Dionysius of Halicarnassus are not a completely distinct phenomenon from the Phrygian villager's veneration for gods he calls Zeus and Apollo; arcane identifications do occasionally enter actual cult practice. In what follows I shall take examples from any quarter that seem to shed light on the central issues, while trying to acknowledge essential differences.

SOME HISTORY

I begin with a brief historical survey. The phenomenon is most familiar in the Greco-Roman context, but it has much earlier origins. The Egyptologist Jan Assmann has stressed the willingness of peoples of the ancient Near East to identify their gods with one another's; it forms a plank in his controversial contrast between the supposed tolerance of ancient polytheist religions and the intolerance of Mosaic monotheism.⁵ The Ugaritic scholar M. S. Smith has recently surveyed the phenomenon in a monograph strikingly entitled *God in Translation*. An unfortunately fragmentary text from Ras Shamra in northern Syria lists Sumero-Akkadian, Hurrian, and Ugaritic gods in three columns, evidently identifying them on the basis of functional similarities; there are similar monolingual lists in different languages which are virtual translations of one another. An Akkadian document known from its opening line as An:anu ša ameli identifies Sumerian with Akkadian deities; it reduces their number by treating numerous Sumerian deities as subspects of a single Akkadian god.⁶ These texts and their many congeners are learned works, products of scribal schools and needs, but An:anu ša ameli

5. J. Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung: Oder der Preis des Monotheismus* (Munich, 2003); cf. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 44–54, “Counter-Religion and Religious Translatability in the Ancient World.” The contrast goes back at least to David Hume (*The Natural History of Religion*, ed. A. Wayne Colver, Oxford 1976, 58–62), though he grounded pagan “tolerance” not in *interpretatio* but in the willingness to accept foreign gods; Voltaire in *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763) spoke of ancient religions as “comme des noeuds qui les unissaient tous ensemble” (cf. C. Bonnet, *CRAI*, 2012, 503–4); Gibbon too credited the Romans with a “Universal spirit of toleration” (opening pages of vol. 1, chap. 2, of *Decline and Fall*). For J. G. Droysen, by contrast, universalism in religion emerged only in the Hellenistic period (Moyer, *Limits of Hellenism*, 145–46).

6. See Smith, *God in Translation*, 45–48 (Ras Shamra), 42 (An:anu ša ameli), though on the latter note the reservation of Allen, *Splintered Divine*, 98 n. 7 (citing Rubio).

is a reminder that identifications between Sumerian and Akkadian deities could scarcely be avoided, so thorough and durable was the interpenetration of their religious cultures.

Also relevant is the practice of transferring logograms for deities, no differently than for ordinary objects, from one language to another, so that (for instance) a Sumerian, an Akkadian, and a Hittite god of vaguely similar function would all be represented in writing by the same symbol. These identifications existed only on the tablet, not in utterance, since when read out the name of the relevant local deity would be the one pronounced. But the scribal practice could scarcely have existed without the presumption that deities could be assimilated, a presumption that it must in turn have reinforced. In a prayer, gods could be identified across national barriers, as when the Hittite queen Puduhepa reminds the sun-goddess of Arinna that though that is her name in the Hatti country, “in the land which thou madest the cedar land thou bearest the name Hebat.”⁷ In diplomatic contexts identification was not the norm: on the contrary, in treaties, the gods of both parties were listed separately, and in correspondence one often finds a distinction between one’s own gods and the gods of one’s “brother” (a foreign king).⁸ An Amarna letter shows the Hurrian goddess Šauška being sent on loan to Egypt, and thus becoming, in the language of diplomatic politesse, also the god of the Egyptian king.⁹ Here therefore the gods of different nations were treated as separate, though of equal worth. But crossovers could occur even in contexts such as these. In the Egyptian version of the treaty between Ramses II and the Hittite king Hattusilis I the divine witnesses even on the Hittite side are largely Egyptianized: thus the Sun-goddess of Arinna who appears so often in Hittite texts becomes “the Re of the town of Arinna,” accompanied inter alios by a Seth of Hatti and a Seth of the town of Arinna. One must, however, add the essential qualification that such identifications had no effect on ritual practice: gods so identified retained their separate names and cults.¹⁰

What part the Greeks of the second millennium B.C. may have played in this general east Mediterranean willingness to assimilate deities is not demonstrable on the basis of direct evidence. It is not proven, though highly plausible, that the

7. *ANET*, 393; cf. an address to Ninurta in the Standard Babylonian version of the Epic of Anzu, tablet 3.131–32 (trans. B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses*, 3rd ed., Bethesda 2005, 576): “In Elam they gave you the name Hurabtil, in Susa they speak of you as Inshushinak . . .”

8. So, e.g., Tušratta of Mitanni writing to Nimmureya of Egypt, *Amarna Letters* 20.23–27.

9. Tušratta to Nimmureya, *Amarna Letters* 23.31–32: “Is Šauška for me alone my god(ess), for my brother not his goddess?”

10. Egyptian version: *ANET*, 201. Conversely, Smith, *God in Translation*, 52, notes that in the same text the Hittite “thousand god” scheme is applied also to the gods of Egypt (*ANET*, 200–201). Essential qualification: so, for instance, Puduhepa’s assimilation of the sun-goddess of Arinna and Hebat, cited in the text, was not reflected in cult: Allen, *Splintered Divine*, 74.

“great king” of the Ahhiyawa who belonged to the “Great Powers’ club” of the fourteenth century B.C., and thus was inevitably drawn into high-level diplomatic exchanges with brother kings, was a Greek.¹¹ But, whether he was or not, Mycenaean overseas contacts were extensive and encounters between Mycenaean and foreign gods inescapable; it is likely that the process of Greek *interpretatio* of ancient Near Eastern gods (and ancient Near Eastern *interpretatio* of Greek gods?) was already in full swing centuries before it first becomes visible. The first explicit instance of *interpretatio* in our literary sources is perhaps a fragment of Hecataeus early in the fifth century which boldly speaks of a temple of Leto and an island of Apollo, Greek gods both, at Bouta in Egypt;¹² *interpretatio* is then pervasive in the pages of Herodotus, and is conducted as if nothing could be more natural. But already in the *Iliad* Greeks and Trojans are shown as worshipping the same, Greek gods: is this simply the same epic disregard for realism that effaces linguistic difference between the two sides, or is it *interpretatio*?¹³

Archaeologically, Greek offerings in non-Greek sanctuaries and vice versa are commonplace at least from the eighth century, and plausible cases have been identified of transculturally appropriate dedications, such as an Egyptian mirror showing Mut (the “Egyptian Hera”) found in the Heraion of Samos.¹⁴ An explicit document of the sixth century is a dedication made by one Melanthios in Egypt on a statue base of thoroughly Egyptian aspect to “Zeus Thebaieus,” Zeus of (Egyptian) Thebes, a common Greek designation for the Egyptian god Amun-Re.¹⁵ Ptolemaic Egypt was dotted with towns such as Hermopolis and Panopolis named from Egyptian gods translated into Greek. Herodotus already speaks of two examples of

11. See, e.g., J. Latacz, *Troy and Homer*, trans. W. Windle and R. Ireland (Oxford, 2004), 121–28.

12. *FGrH* 1 F 305, quoted verbatim in Steph. Byz.

13. This paragraph depends largely on W. Burkert, “Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen,” in *Hérodote et les peuples non-grecs*, Entretiens Hardt 35 (Geneva, 1990), 1–39. Burkert suggests that the Aphrodite of *Hymn. Hom. Aphr.* is an interpretation of Kybele/Kubaba of Mount Ida. For *interpretatio* in other cultures at this date (ca. 720), see, above all, the great Luvian-Phoenician bilingual from Karatepe, Hawkins, *Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions*, 1.1:48–58, with such equivalences as Tarhunzas/Baal, Runzas/Rešeph of the goats.

14. See S. Ebbinghaus, “Begegnungen mit Ägypten und Vorderasien im archaischen Heraheligtum von Samos,” in A. Naso, ed., *Stranieri e non cittadini nei santuari greci* (Udine, 2006), 187–229 (with much other relevant material), at 197. J. E. Skinner, *The Invention of Greek Ethnography* (Oxford/New York, 2012), strongly emphasises contacts and mutual interest between Greeks and non-Greeks in the archaic period.

15. Jeffery, *LSAG*² 358, no. 49 (supposedly from Memphis, 550–525); for the base, see Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 159, fig. 17. Cf. for the god Hdt. 1.182.2, 2.42.1, 2.54.1, 4.181.2; another dedication to him is *SB* 1.2463 (Naukratis). (Herodotus, however, always calls the god of Siwa Ammon, though associating his cult with that of Zeus Thebaieus: 2.55, 4.181.2.) Vlassopoulos compares G. Roeder, *Aegyptische Bronzefiguren* (Berlin, 1956), 208, no. 2458 (Saqqara, ca. 400), as read in *SEG* XXVII 1107, a bronze statuette of Osiris dedicated by a Greek to Selene, on the basis apparently of a gender-crossing identification of Selene with Osiris in his lunar aspect.

the kind, Heliopolis and Hephaistopolis; these names were evidently not invented by him but already existed in the speech of Egyptian Greeks. Everything suggests that archaic Greeks detected their own gods very freely all round the Mediterranean; one of the most fixed and long-standing equations, that of Herakles with Phoenician Melqart, is there by implication in Herodotus (2.44.1) and may well go back much earlier.¹⁶

We already find in Herodotus a by-product of *interpretatio* that has an interesting history of its own, the division of one god or hero into two or more (2.43–44). He endorses the position of those Greeks who distinguish between an ancient god named Herakles and a later-born Greek hero of the same name. The historical process leading to this conclusion must have been, first, identification of Herakles with a foreign god, followed, later, by a recognition of differences between them that required them to be distinguished. That recognition ought to have led to a total separation between the two figures, since the foreign god will not at home have been called Herakles; we saw above that the Phoenician Herakles was Melqart. But the power of the identification was such that the Greek name stuck to the foreign figure in Greek understanding, and it became necessary to explain how the Greek hero too came to bear it; thus Herodotus, who thinks the original god Herakles was Egyptian, points out that the parents of the Greek Herakles, Amphitryon and Alcmene, were both Egyptian by descent. Wherever Greeks went they encountered a new Herakles, and the process of identification followed by division was repeated again and again: Varro makes the spectacular claim that there had been forty-three different Herakleses, “since all those who were valiant were called Herakles.”¹⁷ Dionysuses multiplied too, partly for the same reason.

16. See Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes*, 206–7. Sophocles fr. 126 Radt from *Andromeda* speaks of “barbarians” performing human sacrifice to “Kronos,” i.e., Baal-Ḥamān, according to Allen, *Splintered Divine*, 231.

17. Varro ap. Serv. ad *Aen.* 8.564; Cic. *Nat. d.* 3.42 has only six; cf., e.g., Arr. *Anab.* 2.16.1–4; Macr. *Sat.* 1.20.6, and for the Indian Herakles, Arr. *Ind.* 5.13, 8.4; Diod. Sic. 2.39.1. But even a Herakles who is not the son of Amphitryon has an Iolaos as faithful companion (Eudoxus of Cnidus ap. Ath. 9.47, 392D; Bonnet, *Enfants de Cadmos*, 299). Multiple Dionysuses: e.g., Diod. Sic. 4.1.6–7; for the supposed Egyptian account of how Greeks appropriated (ἐξιδιάζεσθαι) all the best gods and heroes: Diod. Sic. 1.23.2, 1.23.8 (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 2.60.3: *Herculi, quem indigenae [of Egypt] ortum apud se et antiquissimum perhibent et eos, qui postea pari virtute fuerint, in cognomentum eius adscitos*). But Plutarch insists against Herodotus that there is only Herakles, *De Herodoti malignitate* 14, 857E–F; and Aristides predictably (*Or.* 40.10) assumes the same, to show the scope of his fame. The euhemerizing lists of homonymous gods and heroes found in Cic. *Nat. d.* 3.42, 3.53–60, and later sources are partly products of this process of conflation and division: the fourth Venus, for instance, is the one “Syria Cyproque concepta, quae Astarte vocatur” (3.59). (On their euhemerizing tendency, see W. Michaelis, “De origine indicis deorum cognominum,” PhD diss., Berlin, n.d., 59–68, who ascribes the original list to a grammarian influenced by the Peripatos and Euhemeros and who was active in Rhodes in the second century A.D.; W. Bobeth, “De indicibus deorum,” PhD diss., Leipzig, 1904, 14, dates the original to the first century A.D. but says little about its theological presumptions.)

Interpretatio began early and continued.¹⁸ When Alexander traveled far beyond the bounds of traditional Greek culture, he still, according to his historians, encountered Greek gods. Sightings of, say, Herakles and Dionysus in India may initially have been based on features of landscape and flora that evoked them, combined with the emergent myths that the gods themselves had traveled to these lands, but Megasthenes, who visited the court of Chandragupta late in the fourth century, was apparently identifying the Greek gods with their Indian counterparts.¹⁹ In the Hellenistic period the scale of the phenomenon becomes immense, and is not merely a matter of Greek observers describing the foreign gods they encounter by Greek names (what one might call external *interpretatio*). To a remarkable extent those names are adopted by the indigenous worshippers of those gods, along with the Greek language, when (but probably only when—a crucial reservation) they are using that language (accepted *interpretatio*). Not all external *interpretationes* were accepted or persisted,²⁰ nor were they attempted for every god, but many were attempted and accepted. In Lycia and Caria accepted *interpretatio* is already common in the fourth century, before the conquests of Alexander. The adoption of Greek names for the gods of non-Greek peoples is a crucial part of the history of what used to be called Hellenisation. It also became common for bearers of a theophoric name to “translate” their name via *interpretatio*: a Sidonian named in his own language “servant of Tinnit,” son of “servant of Shamash,” becomes in the Greek text of his bilingual tombstone in the Piraeus “Artemidoros son of Heliodoros” (KAI 53).²¹

Just as Greek divine names overspread the East, so did Roman divine names overspread North Africa and the West. In a minority of cases these were Roman gods worshipped in Roman form by expatriates; more commonly an indigenous deity had been renamed (with more or less adjustment to the cult practice).²² As in

18. In Pseudo-Scylax, *Periplous*, apparently of the 330s (G. Shipley, *Pseudo-Scylax's Periplous*, Bristol 2011, 19), see the “island of Ares” off the territory of the Mossynoikoi (86), Mount Karmel sacred to Zeus (104.3), the shrine of Athena Tritonis in Numidia (110.8), the altar of Poseidon at “Cape Soloesa” (112.4). For a late specimen, see the Greek/Parthian bilingual attesting the deposit of a statue of Herakles/Vahram in the temple of Apollo/Tir: P. Bernard, *JSav*, 1990, 3–68 (Greek text only in *IEstrOriente* 86).

19. On all this, see appendix C.

20. The goddess Perasia of Castabala in Cilicia is identified as Perasia Artemis by Strabo 12.2.7, C 537, but not in any inscription from the site: see Robert, in Dupont-Sommer and Robert, *Déesse de Hiérapolis Castabala*, 50. Cf. p. 93n71 on D(o)usares; p. 86 on the goddess of Komana. On unsuccessful *interpretationes* of Sandan in Tarsus, see Ehling, Pohl, and Sayar, *Kulturbegegnung in einem Brückenland*, 214. Zeus at Apamea in Syria mutated (reversion? or new identification?) in the second/third century A.D. to “greatest sacred (ἄγιος) god Belos” (*SEG* XLVI 1769; Millar, *Roman Near East*, 263).

21. See further appendix B.

22. For neo-Punic/Latin bilinguals which confirm the presence of *interpretatio Latina*, see Jongeling, *Neo-Punic Inscriptions*, 25, Labdah N 17; 48, Sabratha N 16.

the Greek East, examples come not in handfuls but in thousands, and the historical survey can end here with the phenomenon in full spate throughout the Greco-Roman world.

A MULTICULTURAL SYSTEM

Interpretatio is always potentially a two-way process. If a Greek identifies Mars as Ares, it becomes very natural for a Roman to identify Ares as Mars. A silver vase of Greek manufacture (early 4th c.) which depicts the judgment of Paris bears inscriptions in Lycian and was evidently intended for the Lycian market: Athena is here identified for the Lycian viewer as Maliya, a Lycian goddess. It has also been suggested that *Maliya wedrēñni* of two Lycian texts from Rhodiapolis is a simple translation of the familiar Greek cultic double name Athena Polias, “of the City,” which she actually bore in nearby Phaselis.²³ A Nabataean made a bilingual dedication on Cos to Aphrodite (in Greek) and Astarte (in Nabataean): since the dedication was doubtless made in a sanctuary of Aphrodite, the address to Astarte represents an *interpretatio Nabataea* (IG XII.4.546). The two-way traffic which we only glimpse in other cases is manifest between Greece and Rome. *Interpretatio* mediated the heavy influence of Greek cult on Roman. The Romans relied in many matters of cult on the Sibylline books, written in Greek, and so could not avoid *interpretatio* in applying their teachings to their own gods;²⁴ the presence of the Greek god Apollo in Rome, where he was early naturalized, made it all the more tempting to assimilate the two pantheons. A fragment of a large black-figure Attic crater depicting the return of Hephaistos has been found in what was apparently the archaic sanctuary of Vulcan in Rome; it is plausibly taken to show that, for a Roman, Hephaistos was already Vulcan (thus *interpretatio Romana*) in the sixth century.²⁵ On the other hand Greek writers on Roman institutions give Roman gods Greek names (thus *interpretatio Graeca*). There is asymmetry between those two forms of *interpretatio*, since the Roman adoption of elements of Greek cult practice that followed on the identification of gods has no Greek equivalent at least in the republican period. But Dionysius’s systematic use of Greek names for Roman gods is exactly paralleled by Livy’s use of Roman names for Greek: if one writes in Greek the gods have Greek names, if in Latin, Roman.

23. The vase: R. D. Barnett, “A Silver-Head Vase with Lycian Inscriptions,” in *Mélanges Mansel* (Ankara, 1974), 893–903. Maliya wedrēñni as Athena Polias: J. D. Hawkins ap. Barnett, 902–3, on TAM I.149.2–3, 12; 150.6–7; see further R. Parker, “Athena in Anatolia,” *Pallas* 100 (2016): 73–90, at 73. An equivalence Malis-Athena has now been detected in a Lydian-Greek bilingual dedication: A. Payne and D. Sasseville, “Die lydische Athene—eine neue Edition von LW 40, 2016,” *Historische Sprachforschung* 129 (2016): 66–82.

24. Wissowa, “Interpretatio Romana,” 6–7.

25. F. Coarelli, *Foro Romano* (Rome, 1983), 1:177.

Other Mediterranean polytheistic cultures were included.²⁶ There survives in Polybius a list of gods by whom Hannibal swore an oath to Philip V, containing both Greek gods and Carthaginian gods translated, presumably with Carthaginian approval, into Greek. He swore “before Zeus and Hera and Apollo, before the God/Fortune of the Carthaginians and Herakles and Iolaos,” as well as several further powers.²⁷ The position of Herakles and Iolaos here shows them to stand for Melqart and a Carthaginian equivalent of Iolaos. *Interpretatio* here is perhaps a matter of diplomatic politesse, part of the ability to communicate with a different state in that state’s language. The multiplicity of cultures potentially involved emerges from the case of the great temple at Pyrgi in Etruria. Greek writers differed as to whether it honoured Leukothea (perhaps joined with Apollo) or Eileithyia; characteristically they gave the goddess a Greek name, even though the temple was in Etruria.²⁸ But the gold tablets in two languages found in 1964 that record its dedication (or at all events a dedication) by the Etruscan king Thefarie Velianas speak of Uni in the Etruscan version and Astarte in the Phoenico-Punic.²⁹ In each case the goddess receives a name indigenous to the language that is being used; this really is god in translation.

A further twist may be present: how the Greek writers got from Astarte/Uni to Leukothea or Eileithyia is at first sight puzzling, and it has been suggested that there was an intermediate Roman stage: Uni was first identified as either Juno Lucina or Mater Matuta; the two Roman goddesses will then have been identified respectively as Leukothea and Eileithyia, as we know they often were.³⁰ That process of *interpretatio* by stages or through intermediaries is one that is known to occur: Baal of North Africa, for instance, becomes Kronos, who then becomes

26. How Achaemenid Persia stood in relation to Greek gods is hard to say. The Achaemenid rulers are now generally held to have tolerated/supported the cults of their subject peoples (P. Briant, *Histoire de l’empire Perse*, Paris 1996, 66–72, 559–71); but this does not entail that they recognised similarity/identity, and the “Zeus of Bag/radates” (p. 114) may be a Greek Zeus, not an interpreted Ahura-Mazda (Briant, 1026). Greek authors, by contrast, despite recognition that Persian theology differs radically from Greek (Hdt. 1.131), are happy to speak of Ahura-Mazda as Zeus (Hdt. 1.131.2, 7.40, 8.115.4; Xen. *Cyr.* 8.3.12); in the Lydian-Greek environment Anahita becomes Artemis Persike (p. 99).

27. Polyb. 7.9.2–3; ἐναντίον Διὸς καὶ Ἡρας καὶ Ἀπόλλωνος, ἐναντίον δαίμονος Καρχηδονίων καὶ Ἡρακλέους καὶ Ἰολάου. “Official wording, probably of a Greek translation produced in Hannibal’s chancellery,” says F. W. Walbank in his commentary ad loc. On the gods, see S. Lancel, *Carthage, a History*, trans. A. Nevill (Oxford, 1995), 208; and n. 69 below.

28. Arist. [*Oec.*] 2.1349b34; and Polyaeus, *Strat.* 5.2.21 (Leukothea); Ael. *VH* 1.20 (Apollo and Leukothea); Strabo 5.2.8, C 226 (Eileithyia).

29. *Corpus Inscriptionum Etruscarum* II.1. 4, nos. 6313–16; KAI 277. G. Colonna’s many relevant studies are collected in his *Italia ante Romanum Imperium*, vol. 4 (Rome, 2005). For dedications to Aphrodite and Etruscan Turan from the same building at Gravisca, see Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 95.

30. R. Bloch, “Figures divines de Pyrgi,” in Bloch, ed., *Recherches sur les religions de l’Italie antique* (Geneva, 1976), 1–9; but doubted by Colonna, *Italia ante Romanum Imperium*, 4:2267–68.

Saturn.³¹ Another interestingly complicated early case is the fourth-century Lycian/Greek/Aramaic trilingual from Xanthos.³² Since the sanctuary is in Lycia, the presumption is that the Lycian version should indicate its original owners: “the pñtrennu mother of the sanctuary here and her children and the Eliyana” (Lycian), of which the Greek “Leto and her offspring and the Nymphs” will be an *interpretatio*. (But a doubt remains: Greek Leto was famously a mother, but the same is not known of pñtrennu; it is possible that it was already through assimilation to Leto that the Lycian goddess acquired her “children.”) The Aramaic by contrast borrows from the languages of the nonindigenous cultures that were influential in the region, to give “Leto (and) Artemis (and) ḤṢTRPTY and ḤWRNYŠ.” It transcribes the names Leto and Artemis (strangely, the goddess’s offspring, anonymous in Greek and Lycian, are here individualised and named) into Aramaic, and apparently adopts Persian equivalents, roughly translatable as “Lord of Power” and “the Ladies,” for Apollo and Eliyana/the Nymphs.³³ The eclecticism reflects the situation of someone translating into an official language, Aramaic, which is not the vernacular of his own culture.³⁴

FORMS OF INTERPRETATIO

Interpretatio had several forms, more than one of which might be applied to the same god.³⁵ The simplest and most drastic was simple substitution of one theonym

31. Wissowa, “Interpretatio Romana,” 34–39, also with the example of a Dalmatian god who becomes Silvanus via Pan. For Babylonian names given to gods of Syria and Cilicia, some of whom in turn received Greek names, see H. Seyrig, *Syria* 20 (1939): 302 n. 5, with the example of Δι Βηλέω θεῶ Ἄδαδθελα (the god of Adadthela becomes Bel becomes Zeus); O. Casabonne, *La Cilicie à l’époque achéménide* (Paris, 2004), 70, 126–29, 178.

32. H. Metzger et al., *Fouilles de Xanthos*, vol. VI: *La stèle trilingue du Létôon* (Paris, 1979).

33. ḤṢTRPTY in the Aramaic is generally recognised as an Aramaic rendering of the Iranian divine title *xšaθrapati- signifying lordship. ḤWRNYŠ (as Elizabeth Tucker advises me) is most plausibly taken as another Iranism, *ahurānīš*, a feminine from the masculine stem *ahura-* (“lord”), rather than as first proposed, Aramaic ḤWRN “others”; once in the old Avesta, waters are spoken of as *ahurānīš*, “ladies,” of the Lord (Mazdā); see R. Humbach, “Die aramäischen Nymphen von Xanthos,” *Die Sprache* 27 (1981): 30–32. The dominant view (cf. A. Dupont-Sommer, “L’énigme du dieu ‘Satrape’ et le dieu Mithra,” *CRAI*, 1976, 648–60) has been that *xšaθrapati was primarily, and we must assume for the argument recognisably, a title of Mithra, who is then identified with Apollo; for a different view, see M. Schwartz, “Apollo and Khshathrapati, the Median Nergal, at Xanthos,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 19 (2010): 145–50. The Phoenician god Shadrappa (in Greek Σατράπη) is distinct: Bonnet, *Enfants de Cadmos*, 194–95.

34. Elsewhere too we find divine names simply transcribed into Aramaic: A. Abou-Assaf, P. Bordreuil, and A. R. Millard, *La statue de Tell Fekherye et son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne* (Paris, 1982), probably of the ninth century A.D.; *KAI* 267 (*TADAE* 4, D.20.3), a bilingual tombstone for an Egyptian from Saqqara of 482 B.C.; and unfailingly in monolingual Aramaic texts from Egypt (e.g., *CIS* II.123, 128 [*TADAE* 4, D.20.1, D.22.17], and often).

35. See further pp. 92–95.

for another, as often seen in Herodotus: Ptah becomes Hephaistos. Whereas Herodotus confidently identifies gods between cultures on a one-to-one basis, later authors, as we shall see, sometimes introduce doubt not about the process but about its application: is goddess A of a foreign culture the equivalent of X or Y or Z of our own? Lucian even treats the “Assyrian Hera” as betraying traces of many different goddesses;³⁶ but this is an abnormal position.

Another regular possibility was juxtaposition, to give Zeus Ammon; in such cases, the god of the language in which the text is written normally comes first,³⁷ and the added name operates rather like an epithet in a typical cultic double name. This modality was extremely common in Roman Gaul and Germany,³⁸ the Greco-Roman Near East and Egypt, and rather less so in Africa, Thrace, and Anatolia; the earliest instance seems to be Herodotus’s description of the god of Babylon as Zeus Belos. (He here diverges from his usual practice of simple substitution of one name for the other.³⁹) When two divine names are juxtaposed in this way, it is not self-evident how the connection between the two was understood, and the possible relations were in fact various. The second name might restrict or define the scope of the first, as in cases internal to Greek such as Artemis Eileithyia. Or one can allow in theory (though it is hard to prove empirically) that the two names might combine as a new entity with the powers of both.⁴⁰ Such may, for instance, have been the intention of Antiochus I of Commagene’s ambitious though unsuccessful attempt to synthesize Greek cult with Persian in the first century B.C., through composite figures such as Zeus Oromasdes, Apollo Mithras, and so on.⁴¹ But the possibility that is relevant here is simple identification or equivalence, as in Herodotus’s “translations” and in a variant that occurs in dedications from Egypt where Egyptian and Greek theonyms are linked by the “also known as” (ὁ καί) formula

36. See p. 47 below.

37. But for exceptions in Roman provincial inscriptions, see Richter, *De interpretatione*, 25.

38. Cf. Richter, *De interpretatione*, 31, on proportions of different types of *interpretatio*. But the status of many supposed Celtic divine names as true theonyms or as epithets (and, if the latter, as originally Celtic or as translations of Greek or Roman epithets) is problematic: see, e.g., P. Y. Lambert, “Le statut du théonyme gaulois,” in A. Hofeneder and P. de Bernardo Stempel, eds., *Théonymie celtique, cultes, interpretatio* (Vienna, 2013), 113–24; cf. Lambert, in *Keltische Götternamen*, 69–76; the translation theory is advocated by P. de Bernardo Stempel in several studies (see, e.g., the bibliography to her “Method in the Analysis of Romano-Celtic Theonymic Materials,” in *Celtic Religion*, 19–27, or *Keltische Götternamen*, 35–36). On the problem of discovering theonyms in the non-Indo-European “Iberic” language, see J. Velaza, “Salaeco: Un teónimo ibérico,” *ZPE* 194 (2015): 101–7.

39. Hdt. 1.181.2; 3.158.2 (but the statue is of plain Zeus, 1.183.1).

40. Bonnet, *Enfants de Cadmos*, 507–8, says of ID 2132 (a dedication to “Isis Soteira Astarte Aphrodite Euploia Epekoos” and a similar male composite): “This ad hoc assemblage embodies a cumulative and interactive logic rather than one of fusion.”

41. Cf. C. Crowther and M. Facella, “New Evidence for the Ruler Cult of Antiochus of Commagene,” *AMS* 49 (2003): 41–80; for its failure, 65–68.

familiar from humans bearing two names;⁴² in the Latin West the two names can be joined by an “or” (*Vertumnus sive Pisuntus*),⁴³ while at Dura-Europos on the Euphrates we meet “the goddess Artemis called Azzanathkona.”

The commonest form of all is the combination of a divine name with a geographic epithet: the epithet can be local, as with the Thebaian Zeus mentioned earlier and innumerable further instances, or less frequently national, as with “Persian Artemis.” Or the Greek theonym might be combined with a functional epithet, whether one imported from old Greece or newly coined. Some combinations of a divine name and an ordinary descriptive adjective appear first or exclusively outside the homeland of the god in question and seem to represent *interpretationes* of an indigenous god: Zeus Megistos, “Greatest Zeus,” for instance, first appears at Iasos in Caria, where he apparently represents τρῳδ, the Carian descendant of the old Anatolian storm god Tarhunt. On Delos, the Syrian goddess Atargatis becomes consistently for her Athenian worshippers Aphrodite Hagne, “Reverend Aphrodite”; on the same island, a single instance of Herakles Halios, “of the Sea,” may be a Greek rendering of Melqart.⁴⁴

One might suppose a priori that the implications of these different modalities were different. Simple substitution of the Greek name for the indigenous equivalent effaces the latter completely; an expression such as Persian Artemis, by contrast, signals explicitly that this is the goddess in a non-Greek form; combination with a local toponym falls somewhere between these two limits. But it would be hard to prove empirically that the more thorough the assimilation of a god in name to a Greco-Roman standard, the more thorough also was the assimilation in cult practice. The cult of the god styled simply “Saturn” in Roman Africa remained distinctively African.

42. *OGIS* 111.3–6, 130.7–11. The order is [Greek deity] also known as [Egyptian deity] in *OGIS* 111, the reverse in *OGIS* 130, but in both, strangely, Ammon has come to count as Greek (as also in double names such as Ἀμμωνία ἢ καὶ Σεμνίνις; Nock, *Essays*, 429 n. 95). Note too “the festival of Prometheus, whom they [the Egyptians] call Iphtimis,” *PHib.* 27.85–86. The simple Zeus Ammon type of juxtaposition later becomes quite common both within Egypt (see, e.g., Mueller, *Megas Theos*, nos. 215, 219, 230; but cf. 228 with καὶ) and for Egyptian gods outside Egypt (see the index to *RICIS* s.v. Harpokrates Apollo, Isis Aphrodite, etc.). Conflated names (Hermanoubis) occasionally occur. On the “also known as” formula and its variants, see R. Calderini, *Aegyptus* 21 (1941): 221–60.

43. P. de Bernardo Stempel and M. Hainzmann, “Sive in the Theonymic Formulae as a Means for Introducing Explications and Identifications,” in *Celtic Religion*, 28–39 (who show, however, that this is only one, and not the commonest, use of the *sive* formula). Dura: *Dura V*, 142, no. 453.

44. Zeus Megistos/Tarhunt: cf. p. 107. Aphrodite Hagne: cf. pp. 163–64. Herakles: G. Siebert, *BCH* 112 (1988): 765, publishing a thymiaterion found in the “Maison des sceaux” on Delos, inscribed with a dedication to Zeus Pasios, Poseidon Asphaleios, Apollo Prostates, Herakles ἄλιος; cf. Bonnet, *Melqart*, 482, index s.v. “navigation, dieu de la”; Bonnet, “Héraclès en orient,” 177 n. 44.

AVOIDANCE OF INTERPRETATIO

Greek and Latin authors typically use the divine names of their own language even when speaking of foreign gods;⁴⁵ in particular, as noted earlier, Greeks writing of Rome and vice versa constantly apply the standard Greco-Latin equations such as Artemis-Diana. Less often authors allow the foreign name to enter their text in a bilingual version such as “Enyo, whom they call Ma” (Strabo 12.2.3, C 535) or “Zeus whom the Babylonians call Belos” (Diod. Sic. 2.8.7). But though *interpretatio* was pervasive, even in literary texts it was not universal. Occasionally a foreign name appears on its own, though often within a phrase that acknowledges its unfamiliarity: a “temple of Anaitis and her altar-sharers Omanos and Anadates, Persian *daimones*” (Strabo 11.8.4, C 512); “a temple most famous among those tribes which they called Tanfana’s.”⁴⁶

As for dedications in Greek and Latin, they reveal to us numerous uninterpreted foreign gods, though the frequency varies greatly from region to region.⁴⁷ Even in the Lycian trilingual from Xanthos quoted above, the Lycian (?) god Αρββζυμα is not interpreted but enters the Greek text in a puzzlingly imprecise transliteration, as Arkesimas. Many gods appear both partially interpreted and uninterpreted in dedications from the same region and even the same site, as, for instance, Mars Belatucadrus alongside plain Belatucadrus; in Britain the single indigenous name is much more common than the Romano-British doublet.⁴⁸ The god Elqônerâ, “god who possesses the earth,” is interpreted as Poseidon in one bilingual Palmyrene dedication but elsewhere transcribed as Κόνναρος or Connarus. A single dedication may be addressed both to interpreted and to uninterpreted gods. Three merchants from Iamneia in Judaea made a dedication on Delos to “Herakles and Hauronas, the gods who hold Iamneia.”⁴⁹ Evidently an established

45. J. H. Mordtmann, *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 32 (1878): 552, long ago spoke of barbarian divine names being avoided with “ängstliche Scheu.”

46. Tac. *Ann.* 1.51.2; cf. 4.73.7: *lucus quem Baduhennae vocant*. A rare epigraphic example of such an apologetic formula is *Dura V*, 112, no. 416, the god called (λεγομένως) Aphlad of the village Anath. Tacitus also names the primeval German god Tuisto and his son Mannus: *Germ.* 2.3; cf. *Hist.* 2.78, Carmelus: *ita vocant montem deumque*. Some other untranslated gods: Polyb. 10.27.12, temple said to be of Aine (i.e., Anaitis) in Media; Strabo 11.14.14, C 531, temple of Baris on road to Ecbatana—accepted by Radt, though unique; 16.1.4, C 738, temple of Anaia (?) near Arbela. Dio Cass. 36.48.1 speaks of a territory Anaitis as “consecrated to a certain god of the same name.” From over a hundred Celtic theonyms known from inscriptions, ten appear in literary texts: A. Hofeneder, in *Keltische Götternamen*, 123–54.

47. They are rare in Africa (and for different reasons in the Balkans) but numerous in the Iberian Peninsula: J. B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2007), 71, 76, 80–81. For Anatolia, see appendix D.

48. See Zoll, “Double-Named Deities.”

49. *ID* 2308: Ἡρακλῆ καὶ Αὐρώνα, θεοῖς Ἰάμνειαν κατέχουσιν, Ζηνοδόωρος, Πάτρων, Διόδοτος Ἰαμνίται. Elqônerâ: see *IGLS XVII.1.318*, with J. B. Yon’s note ad loc. (At Baalbek, Konnaros is named on a relief ὁ καὶ Βριαρῆς, “also called mighty,” a new formation evoking the Giant Briareos: J. P. Rey-Coquais,

interpretatio existed for one of the gods whom they wished to honour but not the other: the issue is not one of preference for one or the other form of naming, rather of the expressive resources that were available at that date to the three merchants (who doubtless will not have seen it as their job to attempt speculative identifications). At Gerasa in Jordan we meet “Pakeidas and Hera” (*IGerasa* 17). Not long after Melanthios had made his offering, mentioned above, to Amun-Re under the name Thebaian Zeus, another Greek in Egypt dedicated “an image of Isis”;⁵⁰ the Egyptian deity might, or might not, undergo *interpretatio*. Much later, in a Palmyrene bilingual dedication, Ḥertâ becomes Hera probably by resemblance of sound, Nanaî becomes Artemis in accord with a standard equivalence, but Rašaf remains Rasaphes.⁵¹ In Greece itself, an extraordinary new text that reveals an imported cult in second-century B.C. Thessaly gives us four hitherto unknown Semitic gods (Mogga, Lilla/aia, Alaia, Adar[a]), one explicit product of *interpretatio* (“Pan whom the Syrians call [. . .] PLEN”), and one figure with a Greek name, Moira, whose role is so unusual that she too may be a Semitic figure in Greek dress.⁵²

THE BASIS FOR IDENTIFICATIONS

On what basis were identifications made?⁵³ Familiarity should not disguise the difficulties that the enterprise faced, the bold disregard for apparent counterevidence that it often imposed. Lucan writes: “There [in Libya] stands oracular Juppiter, as they say, but not hurling a thunderbolt or like ours, but Hammon with twisted horns.”⁵⁴ Hammon may be Juppiter, then, but does not look much like him! One

“Connaros le puissant,” *Syria* 55, 1978: 361–70: a hint of *interpretatio* reappears.) Conversely, in the Phoenician part of a bilingual dedication at Arados by a Phoenician to Hermes and Herakles of the gymnasium, Herakles becomes Melqart, but Hermes is transliterated 'RM (*IGLS* VII.4001). A neo-Punic text written in Greek letters (*KAI* 176) combines Kronos with Tinnit face of Baal; Hatran bilinguals from Dura-Europos may either transcribe or interpret (T. Kaizer, in *Religious Identities in the Levant*, 24 nn. 27 and 29).

50. *SEG* XXVII 1115; the contrast is noted by Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 160. *SEG* XXVII 1116 is another dedication by a Greek in Egypt of similar date to “Panepi” (?), another uninterpreted figure; cf. *SEG* XX 644 and XLIV 1484 (“c. 400”), dedications to Osiris and Isis by the couple Alexiades and Tabo.

51. *IGLS* XVII.1.177.

52. See Jean-Claude Decourt and A. Tziaphalias, “Un règlement religieux de la région de Larissa: Cultes grecs et ‘orientaux,’” *Kernos* 28 (2015): 13–51, with, on Moira, R. Parker and S. Scullion, *Kernos* 29 (2016): 217–18.

53. Cf. Smith, *God in Translation*, 46.

54. Lucan, *Pharsalia* 9.512–14: *stat sortiger illic / Iuppiter, ut memorant, sed non aut fulmina vibrans / aut similis nostro, sed tortis cornibus Hammon*. Ammon was perhaps worshipped as Zeus κεραός, “horned Zeus,” in the Syrian Decapolis: Schwabl, “Nachträge,” 1461.

has only to juxtapose in one's mind the image of Athena with that of the hippopotamus goddess Thueris with whom she was sometimes identified to appreciate the chasm over which the practitioner of *interpretatio* often had to leap.⁵⁵ Herodotus repeatedly makes that leap, evidently following established practice, without ever pausing to offer an explanation of the rationale.⁵⁶ But, as far as we can judge, different criteria were applied, here and elsewhere, to different cases and sometimes to the same. As criteria governing different instances of Greco-Egyptian identifications in Herodotus there have been suggested prominence within the pantheon, function, roles in myth, partial theriomorphism, ithyphallicism, family relation to male deities, and similarity of sound: among these, similarity of function would account for the most cases. Tacitus is explicit that the German Alci were not identified with Castor and Pollux on the basis of similarities in appearance but of the "power of the deity": there were no representations of the Alci, but they were honoured as brothers and young men.⁵⁷ Caesar writes of the Gauls (*BGall.* 6.17.1–2):

Among the gods they chiefly worship Mercury. There are very many images of him, they call him the inventor of all skills, they call him guide over roads and routes, they think he has the greatest power in the acquisition of wealth and in trade. After him they worship Apollo and Mars and Minerva. About them they have much the same views as other peoples: that Apollo drives away diseases, Minerva conveys the elements of works and crafts, Juppiter holds sway over the heavens, Mars controls battles.⁵⁸

The criterion is again here one of function: he ascribes to the Gallic Mercury all the familiar spheres of activity of the Roman, and assigns a single power to each of the other four gods. Such was probably the commonest basis for identification, especially where iconography was absent or unusable. The difficulties of iconographic *interpretatio* are brought out (perhaps with malicious intent) in Lucian's account of the image of the Dea Syria at Hierapolis: whereas Zeus, he notes, is unambiguously Zeus, Hera's form is complex: "Taken as a whole she is certainly Hera, but she has touches of Athena and Aphrodite and Selene and Rhea and Artemis and Nemesis

55. Cf. Wissowa, "Interpretatio Romana," 24–25, on the aspect of Gallic gods. Thueris/Athena: *POxy.* 579 (by a partial supplement). On Thueris, see Bernand, *Fayoum*, vol. 1: note on no. 2.

56. See K. S. Kolta, "Die Gleichsetzung ägyptischer und griechischer Götter bei Herodot" (PhD diss., Tübingen, 1968); and now Lieven, "Translating Gods"; both these careful studies show how the cases range from obvious to difficult, and to us obscure, identifications. On Perseus/Min, see A. B. Lloyd, *JHS* 89 (1969): 82.

57. *Germ.* 43.4, quoted in n. 1 above.

58. *Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt. Huius sunt simulacra plurima, hunc omnium inventorem artium ferunt, hunc viarum atque itinerum ducem, hunc ad quaestus pecuniae mercaturasque habere vim maximam arbitrantur. Post hunc Apollinem et Martem et Iovem et Minervam. De his eandem fere quam reliquae gentes habent opinionem: Apollinem morbos depellere, Minervam operum atque artificiorum initia tradere, Iovem imperium caeleste tenere, Martem bella regere.*

and the Moirai"; he goes on to specify those iconographic touches (*Syr. D.* 32). Lucian also has a discussion of the bizarre way in which the Celts depict Herakles, "whom they call Ogmios."⁵⁹ But even Lucian's play with its paradoxes implies the possibility of iconographic *interpretatio*, and it is hard to doubt that, say, the possession of shared attributes could bring gods together: Arrian says of "the Phasian goddess" "to look at, she is Rhea." It may by contrast have been similarity of sound that at Palmyra caused Ḥertâ to become Hera (as noted above), Arsu to become Ares.⁶⁰

The range of possibilities emerges from Tacitus's comments on Serapis:

Many infer (*coniectant*) the god to be Aesculapius, since he heals the sick, some Osiris, the most venerable deity of those peoples, very many Jupiter, as controller of everything, most of all Dis pater on the basis of emblems visible upon him or by complicated interpretation (*insignibus, quae in ipse manifesta sunt, aut per ambages*).⁶¹

Here we have *interpretationes* in terms of a specific power ("since he heals the sick"), of standing within a particular community ("the most venerable deity of those peoples") or general mythology ("controller of everything"), and of iconography ("on the basis of emblems visible upon him") all juxtaposed, with a hint too of allegory ("by complicated interpretation"). Lucian illustrates the difficulty of iconographic *interpretatio*, Tacitus that of conflicting criteria. Functional identification was in itself highly approximate and subjective, since the powers of, say, a Roman and a Gallic god would never overlap precisely, and even the underlying presumption that the Gallic pantheon consisted of functionally distinct powers like the Roman may have been mistaken. A Roman would very seldom have a detailed knowledge of what a Gallic god could do (nor a Gaul of a Roman) any-

59. Lucian 5.1. On the problem of Lucian's Ogmios, see *Neue Pauly* s.v. Ogmios; W. Spickermann, "Lukian und die Götter der Fremden," in J. Rüpke, ed., *Antike Religionsgeschichte in räumlicher Perspektive* (Tübingen, 2007), 147–51, at 149–50 (very sceptical). In *Syr. D.* 35 Lucian similarly discusses the unique Syrian representation of Apollo as dressed and bearded.

60. Arr. *Peripl. M. Eux.* 9.1; but Zosimus 1.32.3 speaks of what is probably the same goddess as "Phasian Artemis." Ares-Arsu: so in the Palmyrene bilinguals, *IGLS XVII.I.150* and probably 127; Ḥertâ-Hera: *IGLS XVII.I.177*. Cf. G. W. Bowersock, in E. Gabba, ed., *Tria Corda* (Como, 1983), 45, for Ares at Areopolis (Rabbathmoba) south of Amman as deriving from the eponymous deity of the town, Ar (and then entering local mythology as father of Lycurgus [below, nn. 70–71]; Nonnos, *Dion.* 19.149; cf. 188–222).

61. *Hist.* 4.84. Just before (4.83) he has used the proximity of a statue "quam plerique Proserpinam vocent" as explanation for the identification as Jupiter Dis (note the variation in naming). The association with Plouton, on the basis of (sometimes allegorised) attributes, is common: Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 28, 362a; Porphyry, *De imaginibus* fr. 359 Smith (p. 424.59) ap. Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 3.11.28; J. E. Stambaugh, *Sarapis under the Early Ptolemies* (Leiden, 1972), 27; on grounds not stated, Archemachus and Herakleides Pontikos ap. Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 27, 361E; "some people" in Diod. Sic. 1.25.2; Artem. 5.93.

way.⁶² Though some identifications were easy and universal (though doubtless still simplistic), others were variable and contested.

Given the importance in cult practice of correct naming of gods, one may feel that the problem of achieving accurate *interpretatio* ought to have been a source of great anxiety to the ancients.⁶³ But in instances of *interpretatio* imposed by an observer there was nothing practical at issue: the Syrian goddess remained the Syrian goddess, Sarapis remained Sarapis, for their worshippers, whatever guesses outsiders might choose to make about their real identity. Similarly, when Plutarch tells how (*Sull.* 9.7) Sulla had a vision of “the goddess whom the Romans have learnt from the Cappadocians to honour, whether she is Semele or Athena or Enyo” (Strabo had more decisively called her Enyo; 12.2.3, C 535), Sulla had experienced the goddess, regardless of her name.⁶⁴ Precision was only needed where an *interpretatio* was accepted and employed by a worshipper. But even in these circumstances unease is not visible. The many uncertainties and imprecisions did not bring the whole enterprise into question.

Herodotus translates fifteen Egyptian gods into fifteen different Greek gods and heroes, and the range of standard Greco-Roman equivalences was extensive too (though Greek writers on Roman antiquities were often defeated by minor figures; Janus too was apparently too singular ever to find a partner).⁶⁵ But the palette varied from region to region, and in some parts was much more restricted: Mercury, Mars, and Hercules dominate in Gaul and Germany, Zeus and Apollo in Anatolia; it is widely held that in the Near East the name of Zeus lost specificity to the extent that an expression such as Zeus Marnas signifies “supreme god Marnas” rather than any strong association with the great Greek god.⁶⁶ The relative standardisation of Greco-Roman equivalences did not apply in other contexts: an indigenous

62. Wissowa, “Interpretatio Romana,” 23–27; cf. Touléc, “Images de Silvanus” (below, n. 148), 37 n. 1.

63. As argued by C. Ando, *The Matter of the Gods* (Berkeley, 2008), 43–58.

64. Similar is Plut. *Artaxerxes* 3.2, where Anahita is described as “a warlike goddess, whom one might conjecture to be Athena (ἦν Ἀθηνᾶν ἄν τις εικάσειεν).”

65. Ovid, *Fast.* 1.89–90: *quem tamen esse deum te dicam, Iane biformis? nam tibi par nullum Graecia numen habet*; cf. Plut. *Num.* 19.10: ὁ γὰρ Ἴανὸς ἐν τοῖς πάνυ παλαιοῖς εἶτε δαίμων εἶτε βασιλεὺς; Herodian 1.16.2, where Janus is described as “the god of Italy”; in Dio Cass. 1 fr. 6.7 (p. 14 Boissevain) he is an ancient hero who entertained Kronos. Minor figures left without Greek equivalents in Plutarch include Terminus, *Quaest. Rom.* 15; Lares, *ibid.*, 51; Rumina, *ibid.*, 57; Moneta, *Rom.* 20d; Bona Dea, *Quaest. Rom.* 20 (τῆ γυναικεῖα θεᾶ, ἦν Ἀγαθὴν καλοῦσιν). Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.50.3 ends a list of gods (given in Greek form): καὶ ἄλλοις θεοῖς, ὧν χαλεπὸν ἐξεῖπεῖν Ἑλλάδι γλώττῃ τὰ ὀνόματα. The Greek version of the *Res Gestae* of Augustus, however, finds a rendering for everything, even such untranslatables as Ianus Quirinus (13), Lares and Penates (19 and app. 2; the rendering of Penates varies). The normal practice with deified abstractions was simply to translate, though M. Aurelius made such a dedication which baffled Dio Cass. (72.34.3), who speaks of a temple to benefaction (εὐεργεσία) called by a very strange name (Wissowa suggested the Latin was *indulgentia*).

66. Cf. Parker, “Zeus Plus,” 330.

deity could become a different Greco-Roman god in different places; the same Greco-Roman god could cover many different indigenous figures.⁶⁷ Some Greco-Roman divine names were used in some regions but not in others as equivalents of indigenous gods: Asclepius, it is claimed, is always himself, an imported Greek god, when he is worshipped in Anatolia,⁶⁸ but in the Phoenician world is a cover for the indigenous healer Eshmun.

Lesser Greek gods and heroes make rare and surprising appearances. Herakles' charioteer Iolaus accompanies him in the list of Carthaginian oath gods translated into Greek preserved in Polybius: he must stand for a Punic deity associated with Melqart, ʕid, or Eshmun.⁶⁹ Leukothea is quite widely honoured, in company occasionally with her son Melikertes, roughly in the area of modern Lebanon: the explanation lies, it is plausibly argued, partly in perceived similarities between Ino/Leukothea's leap in the sea with her son and episodes in the myths of local deities such as Atargatis/Derketo, partly in the eagerness of Tyre and Sidon to assert their genealogical connection with Thebes via Ino/Leukothea's father Kadmos.⁷⁰ Most surprising of all at first sight are several dedications from the Roman province of Arabia to a Lycurgus. But Lycurgus the enemy of Dionysus had already

67. For many examples of both possibilities, see Cadotte, *Romanisation des dieux*, 385; Richter, *De interpretatione*, 41–42, 51. For Cocidius's different partners, see Zoll, "Double-Named Deities," 37; W. Spickermann, *Germanische Superior* (Tübingen, 2003), 8, speaks of "the dynamic and undirected process of *interpretatio*." For the multiple Egyptian interpretations of Herakles, see Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:208, of Hera: Bernand, *Inscriptions d' Alexandrie*, note on no. 32; for Aphrodite covering various Semitic deities, see Aliquot, *Vie religieuse au Liban*, 150. K. Rigsby, "A Greek Dedication at Sidon," *Tyche* 22 (2007): 143–50, argues that Eshmun at Sidon was first interpreted as Apollo, only later as Asclepius. Smith, *God in Translation*, 254, points out that Philo of Byblos in different places makes Chousor both Hephaestus and Zeus Meilichios. F. Solmsen, *Isis among the Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 20: "If we try to visualize the environment where Greeks and Egyptians mingled, we may easily understand how some people considered Io and Isis as one and the same figure, while at other times the same men and women, or some other group, looked at Isis as Demeter married to Dionysus-Osiris." There were anomalies even in Greco-Roman equivalences (Wissowa, "Interpretatio Romana," 8): writers and sculptors might find different Greek equivalents for the same Roman figures; Greek writers seeking a name for Consus called him Poseidon Seisichthon, "Earthshaker" (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.31.2–3); Consus, however, was not a subspect of Poseidon's normal Greek counterpart Neptune.

68. L. Robert, in Gagniers, *Laodicée*, 291–92. An exotic product of *interpretatio* by contrast is Ἀσκληπίος λεοντοῦχος of Askalon; Marinus, *Vita Procli* 19.

69. See Bonnet, *Melqart*, 179–80; on ʕid, see Bonnet, in *Religio Phoenicia*, 217–22; and A. Roobaert, *ibid.*, 336–38, on ʕid in Sardinia (an island not coincidentally associated with Iolaos; Diod. Sic. 4.29.1, 4–6: this connection makes me favour ʕid over Eshmun for the oath).

70. See Aliquot, *Vie religieuse au Liban*, 164–71, with full details of the cult attestations. It is a delicate question whether the dedication to Mater Matuta at Deir el-Qalaa by a Roman lady honours the traditional patroness of Roman matrons, or rather Leukothea with whom Mater Matuta was sometimes identified, or a combination: T. Kaizer, *Syria* 82 (2005): 199–206; Aliquot, 167. Bonnet, *Enfants de Cadmos*, 350, thinks the cult may in different places represent an importation and an *interpretatio*.

been made a king of Arabia, no longer Thrace, by Antimachus of Colophon, and cities such as Damascus took up the theme; it might have resonated particularly during the war in the 80s B.C. between Antiochus XII “called Dionysus” and the “king of the Arabs.” Nonnos in a late telling of the myth has Lycurgus eventually honoured among the Arabs with libations of blood;⁷¹ and it is an intriguing suggestion (certainly, no alternative theory is available) that he is none other than a tribal god of the region, Shai ‘al Qaum, of whom it is said that he “doesn’t drink wine.”⁷² The myth came, as it seems, to reflect the cultural difference between wine-drinking cities and abstemious nomads, and the name from the myth even entered cult. Here then myth underlies the identification, and the gap between learned and “on the ground” *interpretatio* vanishes.

What might seem an obvious difficulty for *interpretatio* is the embedding of an individual god within a network of family relationships and myth. One can easily identify god X with god Y, but ought this not to mean that X’s relatives ought to be identified also with Y’s, and their myths combined? That would have been an impossibly complex task, and the normal solution seems to have been simply to ignore the problem. When Herodotus tries to tell an Egyptian myth while substituting Greek theonyms (2.156.4–6), the genealogical consequences are in Greek terms, as he admits, unique.⁷³ Partial accommodations may sometimes have been sought. Pausanias tells of a conversation with a Sidonian who agreed that the father of Asclepius (long identified with Eshmun) was Apollo but denied that his mother was a mortal woman; Pausanias then appears to claim that certain Greek traditions also allow this possibility.⁷⁴ But it is rare that we can see such intercultural discussion in action.

Diverging *interpretationes* of the same god also raise an issue. Hermes according to many authors was Thoth, but there is also a composite figure Hermes Anoubis or Anoubis Hermes or even Hermanoubis. The rationale is easy to see: Hermes as god

71. Dedications: *IGLS* XV.2.311, with note. Antimachus: ap. Diod. Sic. 3.65.7–8. Antiochus’s war: Joseph. *BJ* 1.99–102; *AJ* 13.387–91. Nonnos: *Dion.* 21.158–61. Damascus: Dam. *Isid.* ap. Phot. *Bibl.* cod. 242.200 (fr. 136b in P. Athanassiadi, *Damaskios: The Philosophical History*, Athens 1999); Steph. Byz. s.v. *Damaskos*; cf. Aliquot, *Vie religieuse au Liban*, 191–94.

72. See M. Gawlikowski, in *ANRW* 18.4.2669; E. A. Knauf, “Dushara and Shai ‘al-Qaum,” *Aram* 2 (1990): 176–83; Healey, *Religion of the Nabataeans*, 146; J. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity* (London, 2003), 610–14; Aliquot, *Vie religieuse au Liban*, 187–94; doubts in Sourdel, *Cultes du Hauran*, 83–84. Arab teetotalism is mentioned (too generally) by Diod. Sic. 19.94. “Who doesn’t drink wine”: Healey, *Aramaic Inscriptions*, no. 42 (for the god, cf. 16).

73. Similar bizarreries occur occasionally in Greco-Egyptian texts, such as Asklepios/Imouthes son of Hephaestus and Hermes son of Horos in *POxy.* XI 1381 (Totti, *Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion*, no. 15) 228–31 (for the former, cf. *PPar.* 19.6); on the issue, cf. n. 129 below. Bonnet, “Héraclès en orient,” 177, stresses that the genealogies of Greek Herakles and Herakles of Tyre were always kept separate.

74. Paus. 7.23.7–8; for claims about the parentage of a “Phoenician Asclepius,” see Philo of Byblos, *FGrH* 790 F 2 (ap. Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 1.10.25 and 38); Dam. *Isid.* ap. Phot. *Bibl.* cod. 242.212 and 302 (fr. 142 B Athanassiadi).

of writing and communication is Thoth, as “guider of souls” Anubis. The second name in a combination such as “Isis Aphrodite” may work in the same way, picking out one aspect within Isis’s multiple personality while allowing that there are other aspects too. Lucian’s division of the Syrian goddess among eight goddesses or clusters of goddesses exaggerates the same issue on the level of iconography.⁷⁵ The underlying logic, if spelt out, would no longer be that the gods of two cultures have coextensive powers, but rather that different cultures divide the powers among gods in different ways, so that a god of culture A may overlap with several gods of culture B, or may need to be broken down into several gods of culture B, and vice versa. But the underlying logic never was spelt out. As was noted above, the simple juxtaposition of two theonyms did not commit the speaker to any defined view of the relation between the two powers. Implicit models of the relation that saw it as one to one and as one to many coexisted without conflict, the former still dominant.

RATIONALE

I come now to the three central questions about *interpretatio*: *why*, *who*, and *with what effect*. I begin with *why*. It is extraordinary how little discussion of the rationale for *interpretatio* is found. Explanations are, as we have seen, occasionally found at the narrower level of why god X should be identified with god Y (shared powers, shared appearance, or whatever), as also surveys of a range of possible identifications.⁷⁶ But the question of whether and how the gods of different peoples relate to one another at all is not raised in these contexts. It can be suggested that the names of particular gods in particular places have changed over time or been corrupted;⁷⁷ but the suggestion is ad hoc, not related to a general theory. The academic Cotta in

75. The element Osiris in Phoenician theonyms can become either Dionysus or Sarapis in Greek equivalents: Bonnet, *Enfants de Cadmos*, 290.

76. In addition to Plut. *Sull.* 9.7 and Tac. *Hist.* 4.84, cited above, see, e.g., Plut. *Num.* 12.2: ἐξαιρέτως δὲ τὴν προσαγορευομένην Λιβητινᾶν, ἐπίσκοπον τῶν περὶ τοὺς θνήσκοντας ὀσίων θεῶν οὖσαν, εἶτε Περσεφόνην εἶτε μᾶλλον, ὡς οἱ λογίωτατοι Ῥωμαίων ὑπολαμβάνουσιν, Ἄφροδίτην; *Crass.* 17.9–10: τὰ χρήματα τῆς ἐν Ἱεραπόλει θεοῦ . . . ἦν οἱ μὲν Ἀφροδίτην, οἱ δ’ Ἥραν, οἱ δὲ τὴν ἀρχὰς καὶ σπέρματα πάντων ἐξ ὑγρῶν παρασχούσαν αἰτίαν καὶ φύσιν νομίζουσι καὶ τὴν πάντων εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἀρχὴν ἀγαθῶν καταδειξασαν; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.31.2–3 (different views of Consus); Diod. Sic. 1.25.1–2: Καθόλου δὲ πολλὴ τις ἐστὶ διαφωνία περὶ τούτων τῶν θεῶν. τὴν αὐτὴν γὰρ οἱ μὲν Ἴσιον, οἱ δὲ Δήμητραν, οἱ δὲ Θεσμοφόρον, οἱ δὲ Σελήνην, οἱ δὲ Ἥραν, οἱ δὲ πάσαις ταῖς προσηγορίας ὀνομάζουσι. τὸν δὲ Ὅσιριν οἱ μὲν Σάραπιν, οἱ δὲ Διόνυσον, οἱ δὲ Πλούτωνα, οἱ δὲ Ἄμμωνα, τινὲς δὲ Δία, πολλοὶ δὲ Πᾶνα τὸν αὐτὸν νενομίκασι. λέγουσι δὲ τινες Σάραπιν εἶναι τὸν παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλησι Πλούτωνα ὀνομαζόμενον.

77. Steph. Byz. s.v. Γάζα: ἔνθεν καὶ τὸ τοῦ Κρηταίου Διὸς παρ’ αὐτοῖς εἶναι, ὃν καὶ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἐκάλουν Μαρβᾶν; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 197, *Venerem, quae postea dea Syria appellata est*; Agathias, *Hist.* 2.24, claiming that Persians before Zoroaster worshipped the familiar Greek gods except that their names were not properly preserved; they called Zeus “Belos,” and so on. Agathias cites Berossos (*FGrH* 680 F 12) and others for the identifications; but the point about getting the names wrong may be Agathias’s own.

Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods* notes that the names of gods, unlike those of humans, vary from place to place,⁷⁸ but there does not follow a discussion of the proposition that the same god underlies the different names; had such a debate existed specifically in relation to *interpretatio*, it would certainly have left echoes in our sources. The great mathematician Eudoxus of Cnidus claimed to be puzzled as to why Isis, but not her supposed equivalent Demeter, ruled over love, and why Dionysus, unlike Osiris, did not make the Nile rise or rule the dead. He pointed therefore to the lack of fit between the powers of deities who were commonly assimilated.⁷⁹ This was potentially a sharp challenge to the convention of *interpretatio*, but not one that we see taken up. More often, where a fit was imperfect, the issue was fudged by saying that it was unclear whether god A was really X, Y, or Z.

Habit and familiarity were undoubtedly powerful preservatives of the convention of *interpretatio*; every Greek and Roman was born into a world in which the translatability of gods' names was taken for granted. But the convention could not have survived, and found constant new applications, if it was based on implicit assumptions that in a Greco-Roman context were absurd. Since the ancients do not explain their practice, we must attempt an explanation for them. Two rationales seem to be possible. According to one, the gods of different peoples would be distinct, but functionally similar; in the words of the most eloquent advocate of this understanding, Elias Bickerman,

The statement of Herodotus that Pan is called Mendes in Egyptian is on a par with such statements by modern writers as that the Japanese bonze signifies the clergy, or that the Hebrew mishpaha denotes a clan, or that Arabian jinn are totems. What is apparently an identification is rather an explanation or interpretation of a foreign phenomenon.⁸⁰

We can call this the similarity or equivalence model. The other rationale would be, very simply, that gods are the same throughout the world, but names for them differ: the identity model.

A first approach to choosing between the two might be through the language with which *interpretationes* are introduced. In literary texts, the commonest method, as we have noted, is simply to use the divine name belonging to the writer's own language without explanation. Stylistic purists, it is argued, classed foreign theonyms along with foreign words as things to be shunned by the fastidious writer;⁸¹ a conception of the divine must, however, underlie that stylistic choice.

78. *Nat. d.* 1.84, *quot hominum linguae tot nomina deorum*; cf. Pliny, *HN* 2.15, *nomina alia aliis gentibus et numina in iisdem innumerabilia invenimus*. I am not clear what the younger Pliny means when, in *Ep.* 8.24.3, he advises the administrator of Achaëa "reverere conditores deos et nomina deorum."

79. Eudoxus fr. 298 Lasserre ap. Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 64, 377A; cf. Diodorus's recognition of only approximate fit in 1.13.5, mentioned below.

80. Bickerman, "Anonymous Gods," 188.

81. Wissowa, "Interpretatio Romana," 4–5, 11.

Simple substitution of the Greek name for the foreign is Herodotus's practice in many passages; but sometimes he adds a note on the lines of "In Egyptian Apollo is Horos, Demeter Isis, Artemis Boubastis" (2.156.5), or retains a native name such as Osiris and offers a translation into Greek, or an explanation: "Osiris is Dionysus in Greek,"⁸² "the Assyrians call Aphrodite Mylitta" (1.199.3); once he gives the supposed Assyrian, Arab, and Persian names for Aphrodite (1.131.3). Similar "biliguals" occur from time to time in later historians; Caesar was unusual in succeeding in keeping his text completely pure of foreign names.

A rare variant is Herodian's reference to a "local god [at Aquileia], whom they call Belen and reverence greatly and claim to be Apollo," where the identification is ascribed but not endorsed; in the subsequent narrative, however, Herodian speaks of this god simply as Apollo, and Roman soldiers equate him with Apollo in the account of the same incident in the *Historia Augusta*.⁸³ Unusual too is Strabo's statement that Cleon, a bandit by origin, among other undeserved successes became "priest of Zeus Abrettenos, a Mysian god" (12.8.9, C 574). This seems to deny the universality of Zeus Abrettenos and reduce him to a Mysian level: perhaps Strabo's distaste for Cleon has spilt over onto the god. These two passages are outliers and contrast with the norm, which is simple substitution of one name for the other, or mention of both. That norm appears to take the interchangeability of the names in question for granted; it seems therefore to favour the identity model.

But other passages recognise that a process of translation (ἐρμηνεύω and its compounds; μεταφράζω) is required which might be problematic; such language is found particularly in Greek writers, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch, who discuss lesser figures of the Roman divine world for whom agreed *interpretationes* were lacking. Dionysius writes:

The Romans call these gods Penates. Among those who translate the name into Greek some call them Patrooi ["Ancestral"], some Genethlioi ["of Descent"], some Ktesioi ["of Property"], others Muchioi ["of Recesses"], others Herkeioi ["of the Courtyard"]. Each seems to be choosing the title in accord with one of their characteristics, and they all seem to mean roughly the same.⁸⁴

82. 2.144.2; cf. 2.42.5, 2.46.3, 2.59.2, and especially the six Greek-Scythian translations in 4.59.2 (where note his approval for Papios as a rendering of Zeus).

83. Herodian 8.3.8: τοῦ ἐπιχωρίου θεοῦ . . . Βέλεν δὲ καλοῦσι τοῦτον, σέβουσι τε ὑπερφυῶς, Ἀπόλλωνα εἶναι ἐθέλοντες; SHA *Max.* 22.1–2: adverse oracles of *deus Belenus* are reported, *unde etiam postea Maximiniani milites iactasse dicuntur Apollinem contra se pugnasse [debere]*. Dedications are made both to Belenus and to Apollo Belenus, e.g., *ILS* 4866–74.

84. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.67.3: τοὺς δὲ θεοὺς τούτους Ῥωμαῖοι μὲν Πενάτας καλοῦσιν· οἱ δ' ἐρμηνεύοντες εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα γλώσσαν τοῦνομα οἱ μὲν Πατρώους ἀποφαινουσιν, οἱ δὲ Γενεθλίους, εἰσὶ δ' οἱ Κτησίους, ἄλλοι δὲ Μυχίους, οἱ δὲ Ἑρκείους. ἕοικε δὲ τούτων ἕκαστος κατὰ τινος τῶν συμβεβηκότων αὐτοῖς ποιεῖσθαι τὴν ἐπικλήσιν κινδυνεύουσι τε πάντες ἀμωσγέπως τὸ αὐτὸ λέγειν.

The uncertainty here is not quite the same as to whether, say, Cappadocian Ma is Semele or Athena or Enyo. There the assumption is that Enyo is one of the three, though we cannot be sure which; in the Dionysius passage the suggestion is that all the suggested equivalences are partial and imperfect. Elsewhere Dionysius speaks of “a particularly venerable shrine jointly honoured by the Sabines and the Latins of a goddess called Pheroneia; some translators into Greek call her ‘Flower-Bringer,’ some ‘Garland-Lover,’ some ‘Persephone.’”⁸⁵ The first two suggestions are epithets, the third a familiar divine name: the challenge for the translator seems to be not to identify the known Greek power of whom Pheroneia is the Roman form, but to find a way of suggesting in Greek, if necessary by invention, the nature of a distinctive Italian deity.⁸⁶ A casual phrase in Diodorus points up the problem of exact “translation”: Osiris translates as Dionysus, he writes (1.13.5), whereas the “nearest equivalent” (ἔγγιστά πως) of Isis is Demeter. Here then we find support for the “equivalence without identity” model.

The approach via the language used in the context of *interpretatio* proves inconclusive. A broader approach involves a larger, indeed almost the largest possible, theological question: in ancient thought, did the same gods rule the whole world, or did different nations have different if comparable gods?

Explicit statements that the gods of different peoples are separate are late to emerge in theoretical or reflective contexts; they depend on the Stoic-influenced conception of a supreme and universal god under whom the others serve as provincial governors. The point could then be brutally simplified in Christian polemic: “Each province and city has its own god.”⁸⁷ But in practical religion, and not the comic fantasy of Aristophanes in *Birds* alone, usages implying that view abound at

85. 3.32.1: ἱερόν ἐστι κοιτῆ τιμώμενον ὑπὸ Σαβίνων τε καὶ Λατίνων ἅγιον ἐν τοῖς πάνυ θεᾶς Φερωνείας ὀνομαζομένης, ἦν οἱ μεταφράζοντες εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα γλώσσαν οἱ μὲν Ἀνθοφόρον, οἱ δὲ Φιλοστέφανον, οἱ δὲ Φερσεφόνην καλοῦσιν. Translation language also, e.g., in 2.31.2–3 (with a contested identification), 2.70.4 (where Dionysius is clear that the identification of Salioi with Kouretes is correct); Diod. Sic. 1.25.7.

86. One might compare the combination of transliteration and translation to which Philo of Byblos has recourse in translating old Phoenician theonyms into Greek: cf. A. I. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos* (Leiden, 1981), 144–46, 152, and *passim*.

87. “Each province and city has its own god: Syria has Astarte, Arabia Dusares, Noricum Belenus, Africa Caelestis, Mauretania its own princes”: Tert. *Apol.* 24.7; and other texts cited by MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, 185 n. 31; in Min. Fel. *Oct.* 6.1 the concept of *dei municipes* is put in the mouth of the pagan spokesman by the Christian author. On the pagan side, see Artem. 1.8; Marcus Aurelius to Fronto (p. 47 Naber; p. 50 in the Loeb Fronto, vol. 1): *omnes omnium populorum praesides deos*; Celsus ap. Origen, *C. Cels.* 5.25–26 (cf. A. Fürst. in *One God*, 91–92); Iambl. *Myst.* 5.25; Julian, *Against the Galilaeans* 143A (καθ’ ἕκαστον ἔθνος ἐθνάρχης τις θεὸς ἐπιτροπεύων); Symmachus, *Relat.* 3.8: *ut animae nascentibus, ita populis fatales genii dividuntur*; and the astrological variant in Manilius 4.710 (*alias aliud terras sibi vindicat astrum*). Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 45, contrasts “ethnocentric” tribal religions with the universalising ancient polytheisms; but the two things coexist.

all dates. Different parties to treaties swear by their own gods: such is the rule in the treaties of the ancient Near East (despite the many instances of translation in other contexts noted above), and such continued to be the practice in the Greco-Roman world; one swore the “local oath” (ἐπιχώριος ὄρκος),⁸⁸ or by a mixture of gods from both sides (as in Hannibal’s oath to Philip V quoted above). The gods of both parties are as a collective functionally equivalent, since both serve as adequate sanctions against violation, but remain distinct. There are “gods of the Greeks” and of other nations,⁸⁹ and “foreign gods,” expressions which do not readily invite reinterpretation as meaning “universal gods worshipped according to the particular cultural understandings of the people concerned”; such was certainly not the understanding of the Kaunians, of whom Herodotus reports (admittedly he finds their behaviour eccentric): “All the Kaunians of military age donned their armour and followed beating the air with their spears as far as the boundaries of Kalynda, and said that they were expelling the foreign gods” (1.172.2).

Herodotus himself once speaks of Apis as “the god of the Egyptians” (3.64.3). Alexander supposedly swore an oath by “Zeus of the Greeks and Ammon of the Libyans,” despite often treating them as identical (Arr. *Indica* 35.8). Gods felt particular love for particular cities, which, however, they would abandon in the event of sack; in Etrusco-Roman usage they could be lured from one to another by the ritual of *evocatio*.⁹⁰ Then there are the innumerable further subdivisions among gods introduced by the “god plus toponym” combination, which at the limit imply that not just each people and each city but almost each village has individual gods. And though one can in principle understand expressions of “Zeus plus village name” type as “Zeus as active in a particular village,” we find in historians and geographers the concept of the “local” god or power: Herodotus speaks in this way of Kybebe at Sardis and Pleistoros in Thrace (5.102.1; 9.119.1); according to Dionysius, Faunus, Sangkos, and Janus were “local powers” (*epichōrioi daimones*) of the

88. ἐπιχώριος ὄρκος, Thuc. 5.47.8; cf. A. J. Bayliss, in A. H. Sommerstein and Bayliss, *Oath and State in Ancient Greece* (Berlin, 2013), 160–67; Polyb. 3.25.6 (different oaths of Carthaginians and Romans). Dio Chrysostom, urging Nicomedia to be friendly with Nicaea, says: “I pray to your gods and to theirs” (38.9; but in 38.22, cf. 46, they worship the same gods). Nero tells the Greeks that he is grateful for the favour “your gods” have shown him (*IG VII.2713.21–22*; cf. 36, “our gods” in the Greek response).

89. Versnel, *Coping with the Gods*, 102–10; even the measure of universalism (i.e., common to all Greece) in that expression is untypical according to Polinskaya, “Shared Sanctuaries.” A hymn to Telepinu reminds him that he is honored only in Hatti: E. Laroche, *Catalogue des textes hittites* (Paris, 1971), 377; trans. in I. Singer, *Hittite Prayers* (Leiden, 1902), no. 9.

90. As described by Livy 5.21.1–3 and 22.3–7 (Veii); Furius as quoted by Sammonicus Serenus in *Macr. Sat.* 3.9.6–9 (Carthage); cf. A. Blomart, in *Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion*, 99–101. But Apollo, stolen from Gela to Tyre, remained hostile to the Tyrians: Diod. Sic. 13.108.2–4, 17.41.7–8, 46.6: the *interpretatio* of Apollo as Reshef apparently did not occur in this case (C. Bonnet, *CRAI*, 2012, 513–14).

Romans;⁹¹ above we met Herodian's description of Belen as a local god; Adranos is for Plutarch "a certain god (*theos tis*) honoured much in all Sicily" (*Tim.* 12.2); Strabo tells (17.2.3, C 822) how the people of Meroe in Egypt worship Herakles, Pan, Isis, and another "barbarian god"; such instances could no doubt be multiplied. The perspective is that of an outsider, who sees a particular god as known or operative within a confined region. "In spite of *interpretatio*, foreign gods were foreign gods, for Cicero and Lucian alike," writes A. D. Nock.⁹² Their entry into a state might therefore be resisted, we must add. Again, in spite of *interpretatio*, foreign gods such as Ammon and Isis entered the Greek world under their own names; the argument "We have Zeus already, what need of Ammon?" was not used.

The first explicit statement of the other view comes in the Roman senate's criticism of Fulvius Flaccus's behaviour in 173 as reported in Livy: by stripping an Italian temple to adorn a Roman one he was "exposing the Roman people to religious danger, building temples from the destruction of temples as if there were not the same immortal gods everywhere, but some gods ought to be honoured and adorned with spoils taken from others."⁹³ As a statement of general principle this remains crucial even if there are problems in reconciling it with actual Roman behaviour in other contexts. Late though this testimony is, it has been strongly argued that this must be the assumption that underlies Herodotus's whole treatment of foreign religion. In his remarks on the naming of gods, Herodotus implies a process whereby different cultures learnt by stages to identify and name gods who had always been present, there and everywhere.⁹⁴ These gods are worshipped according to different cultural conventions in different places, but this does not mean that they are different gods: forms of worship fall within the category of customs, a familiar variable of human society that implies nothing about the gods themselves. Since these differences in convention are satisfactory to the gods, they should with some exceptions be respected; acknowledging that the gods are the same everywhere does not entail that forms of worship should be standardised.

91. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.31.2, 2.49.2, 3.22.7 ("or god"); in 1.57.4 an *epichōrios daimon* appears to Latinus in a dream. The concept of ἐγχώριοι θεοί (Polinskaya, *Local History*, 36–41) is slightly different, since they were not necessarily exclusive to the place concerned.

92. Nock, *Essays*, 558.

93. Livy 42.3.9: *obstringere religione populum Romanum, ruinis templorum templa aedificantem, tamquam non iidem ubique dii immortales sint, sed spoliis aliorum alii colendi exornandique.*

94. J. Rudhardt, "Les attitudes des Grecs à l'égard des religions étrangères," *RHR* 209 (1992): 219–38. Rudhardt stresses that Herodotus's belief is not based on diffusionism. Cf. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 47, summarising what he takes to be the common conception underlying translatability in the second millennium: "Cultures, and political systems, may be different. But as long as they have a religion and worship some definite and identifiable gods, they are comparable and contactable because these gods must necessarily be the same as those worshipped by other nations but under different names. The names, iconographies and rites—in short, the cultures—differ, but the gods are the same."

The god(s) of the philosophers had almost necessarily been universal from the beginning, certainly since Xenophanes had attacked the blue-eyed, red-haired gods of the Thracians (F 16 Diels-Kranz) as shaped in their own image; if it is hard to find texts in the philosophers that say as much in so many words, that is presumably because for them the point was too obvious to need making. Plutarch is heir to the philosophical tradition when he insists that all the world has always known the power of Isis and the gods associated with her, even if some regions have only recently learnt their names; for gods are not

different among different peoples nor barbarian and Greek nor southern and northern, but just as sun and moon and heaven and earth and sea are common to all but are differently named by different people, so too, for the one reason which orders all this and the one providence that supervises it and the subordinate powers set over everything, different forms of worship and of address have arisen among different peoples according to their customs.⁹⁵

A dedication probably of the first century A.D. from the Asclepieum at Pergamum is addressed, uniquely, θεοῖς τοῖς πανταχοῦ, “to the gods everywhere.”⁹⁶ These genuinely universal claims are to be distinguished from myths and theories that treated the gods of one country as borrowings or transformations of those of another: a Greek myth told how the Greek gods fled from Typhoeus to Egypt and there assumed animal disguise, that is, became Egyptian gods; for another myth, Io on reaching Egypt became Isis and her son Epaphus was the sacred bull Apis;⁹⁷ it was the conviction of Dionysius of Halicarnassus that the Romans were Greeks by origin and their language a dialect of Greek, their gods too therefore Greek; there were also theories of diffusion from the most ancient culture, Egypt.⁹⁸ These

95. *De Is. et Os.* 67, 377D-378A: οὐχ ἑτέρους παρ’ ἑτέροις οὐδὲ βαρβάρους καὶ Ἑλληνας οὐδὲ νοτίους καὶ βορείους· ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη καὶ οὐρανὸς καὶ γῆ καὶ θάλασσα κοινὰ πᾶσιν, ὀνομάζεται δ’ ἄλλως ὑπ’ ἄλλων, οὕτως ἐνὸς λόγου τοῦ ταῦτα κοσμοῦντος καὶ μιᾶς προνοίας ἐπιτροπεύουσης καὶ δυνάμεων ὑπουργῶν ἐπὶ πάντα τεταγμένων ἕτεραί παρ’ ἑτέροις κατὰ νόμον γεγόνασι τιμαὶ καὶ προσηγορίαι; cf. *Artem.* 1.8, p. 175-8 Pack. In late antiquity, arguing for tolerance, Themistios claimed (*Or.* 5.70a) that “the originator of everything” (ὁ τοῦ παντός ἀρχηγέτης) desired different regions to have different social systems (πολιτεύεσθαι); the implied reference is to different forms of worship for the same gods.

96. Habicht, *Asklepieion*, no. 133.

97. Flight from Typhoeus: e.g., *Ant. Lib. Met.* 28, and already apparently Pind. fr. 91 S/M ap. Porph. *Abst.* 3.16; for its aetiological character, Lucian, *De sacrificiis* 14. Io renamed Isis: Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.1.3; and J. G. Frazer’s note (*Hdt.* 2.41.2 merely notes the iconographic resemblance); the equation is pervasive in Latin poetry, and the theme is mocked in Lucian 78.11.2. Epaphus is already identified with Apis in Aesch. *Supp.* 41-48; *Hdt.* 2.153; Egyptians reject the equation on chronological grounds according to Ael. *NA* 11.10. Cf. Hippolytus’s reappearance in Italy, renamed as Virbius (*Verg. Aen.* 7.765-77), or Medea’s as Angitia (*Serv. ad Virg. Aen.* 7.750; for related traditions, see Ogden, *Drakon*, 207-8).

98. Most clearly expressed for us in Diod. Sic. book 1: see, e.g., 1.23.8. Dionysius: the theory is pervasive in *Ant. Rom.*; on the gods, see, e.g., 7.72.13-14.

myths and theories are (except perhaps the last) more specific, relating only to connections between particular cultures; but they certainly did not conflict with the impulse to identify gods more generally.

One can ask which of the models better fits cases where *interpretatio* is not attempted, or is qualified in some way, or where doubt exists about an identification. If the gods of different peoples are separate, but comparable (the similarity or equivalence model), these things would occur when no satisfactory fit with the god of a different culture was possible: Vulcan is like enough to Hephaistos to receive his name, but there is no equivalent of Janus.⁹⁹ The possibility of introducing a foreign god would obviously pose no difficulty to this model. On the other view, problems of translation would arise because, though the gods are always the same, apprehensions of them differ: some gods have not yet been discovered by some peoples; every people's understanding of them is different and, very probably, in some measure imperfect. A supposedly foreign god might be identical with one of one's own without that identity being obvious to mortal knowledge. The powers of a foreign god might always have been available, but unrecognised, in one's own country;¹⁰⁰ the introduction of a foreign god would represent not in fact its introduction but the introduction of its cult, the activation of a neglected potential. There would indeed be no point in importing a foreign god if that god were truly local, powerful only within its place of origin.

Expressions such as Artemis Persike and Zeus Ammon might seem to imply the similarity model: Anaitis is the Persian equivalent of Artemis, not the same goddess. But she could be understood as "that aspect of Artemis which is emphasized in Persia," or as "Artemis as worshipped according to ancestral Persian tradition." Zeus Ammon similarly might be "that aspect of Zeus which is emphasized under the name Ammon," or more simply, "Zeus also known as Ammon." As for "divine name plus local adjective" and all the other "divine name plus qualifier" combinations, their proliferation in *interpretationes* is exactly comparable to their proliferation in domestic contexts: Zeus Thebaieus (i.e., Amun-Re) at a formal level is no more distinct from all the other forms of Zeus than is say Zeus Hymettios, Zeus as worshipped on Mount Hymettos in Attica. If Zeus Hymettios is both different from Zeus Parnesios, "of Parnes" (atop another Attic mountain) and also the same, at a linguistic level the same ambiguity applies to the relation between Zeus Olympios and Zeus Ammon or Zeus Belos.

99. See for Gaul C. Letta, *Rivista Storica Italiana* 96 (1984): 1005–7.

100. As Arnobius 2.73 argues against the Romans, using examples from their own acceptance of "foreign" gods; for progressive learning of gods' names, see, e.g., Hdt. 2.146.2. Diod. Sic. notes in Arabia "three altars of gods unknown to the Greeks but greatly honoured by the natives" (3.45.2). The willingness of the Hittites to incorporate foreign gods en masse is cited as exceptional, an oddity (Allen, *Splintered Divine*, 71–93, esp. 72), but it is exceptional only in its extremism.

What of rejection of foreign gods and abuse of the religious practices of other peoples? Neither phenomenon is very common, but both, it must be acknowledged, occur. But the objection seems essentially to have been to rites deemed barbarous and forms of worship deemed socially disruptive, or to offensive conceptions about the nature of the gods (the standard objection to the supposed Egyptian worship of animals). The gods so worshipped and conceived in such misguided ways might nonetheless have existed.¹⁰¹ So the issue with a foreign god who is resisted is no different from that discussed above with one who is accepted. Notoriously, many foreign gods were resisted by some sectors of society just because they were enthusiastically accepted by others.

So the modalities of *interpretatio* provide no decisive criterion, though the identity model perhaps has to work harder to account for them. Authors who introduce *interpretationes* never justify their practice, as we noted. But where Caesar deploys them the implicit model is that of identity. About the Gauls, as we have seen, he says: "Among the gods they chiefly worship Mercury. . . . After him they worship Apollo and Mars and Minerva. About them they have much the same views as other peoples" (*BGall.* 6.17.1–2); and of the Germans: "They count among the gods only those they can see and those by whose resources they are visibly benefited, the sun and Vulcan and the moon; as for the rest, they have not even heard of them."¹⁰² Different peoples may hold different opinions about the gods, though in fact there is considerable convergence, and primitive peoples may not even have heard of the gods whose power is less readily perceptible; but expressions such as "Among gods, they worship Mercury most of all" and "They have not even heard of the other gods" suggest that everywhere the same gods exist, waiting for mortals to gain a sense of them. The view that I detect in Caesar is the same as that ascribed explicitly to Roman senators by Livy, and suggests a consensus of the educated elite at Rome. Very similar expressions are already found in Herodotus. Of the Massagetai he writes that "among the gods, they honour Helios alone," and of the Arabs, "among the gods, they believe only in Dionysus and Ouranie."¹⁰³ Bickerman explained formulations such as "Pan is Mendes in Egyptian" by arguing: "What is apparently an identification is rather an

101. Cf. J. P. Davies, *Rome's Religious History* (Cambridge, 2004), 80–81: "The designation of a god as foreign or non-Roman has no bearing on its existence or power. . . . Where Livy differentiates people in religious terms, it is predominantly with respect not to deities but to rites." Offensive conceptions: note, e.g., Augustus's respect for Sarapis but contempt for Apis: Dio Cass. 51.16.4–5.

102. Caesar, *BGall.* 6.21.2: *Deorum numero eos solos ducunt quos cernunt et quorum aperte opibus iuvantur, solem et Vulcanum et lunam, reliquos ne fama quidem acceperunt.*

103. Hdt. 1.216.4, 3.8.3, cited by Rudhardt, *RHR* 209 (1992): 228. "The acceptance of such identifications depended not on any Kulturpolitik but on assumptions which were axiomatic to Greeks and Romans and which were accepted as such by the new peoples who came within the orbit of their intellectual world": Nock, *Essays*, 752. Cf. Max. Tyr. 11.5a: the one subject on which all people agree is that there is one top god and his offspring, who corule with him.

explanation or interpretation of a foreign phenomenon.” But that suggestion does not account for the universalising assumptions that underlie these expressions in Herodotus and Caesar. And “apparent identifications” between gods of two peoples occur throughout antiquity:¹⁰⁴ is it right to explain away this form of speech into which ancients slipped so easily as being not what it seems?

The identity model could also be applied by historical agents. According to the Greek sources, when Alexander asked permission to enter Tyre in Phoenicia to sacrifice to Herakles, the presupposition, not disputed by the Tyrians despite their refusal to admit him, was that the Tyrian Herakles (whom they called Melqart) and the ancestor of the Argeads were the same. In the many regions of the archaic Mediterranean where Greeks and Phoenicians rubbed shoulders, the same equation between Herakles and Melqart must have provided a cultural “middle ground,” even if at too early a date to leave unambiguous traces in our sources.¹⁰⁵ In Alexander’s dealings with Ammon, that god and Zeus are in the main treated as interchangeable (though we have recently learnt that it was as Ammon that he dedicated to him in Egypt¹⁰⁶). Antiochus I, it has been argued, in the cylinder from Borsippa near Babylon exploits the identification of Apollo with Nabû to give his piety a Janus-faced aspect. Some believe that attention paid by the Romans to gods with Roman names during the Hannibalic war period was designed to propitiate gods friendly to Carthage, thus Tanit under the guise of Juno, Melqart as Herakles, Eshmun as Apollo, Ba’al Hammon as Saturn, Astarte as Venus of Eryx. If so, the identity model was powerfully influential at Rome in that time of crisis; but the *interpretationes* in this case are owed to modern scholarship.¹⁰⁷

The assumption of identity conflicts drastically, as we have seen, with the many contexts and locutions which treated the gods of different nations as distinct, and also, if less drastically, with language sometimes used in reference to the problem of “translating” the names of lesser deities. Possibly some authors worked with a largely unconscious two-tier model whereby great gods were universal, but there also existed “local powers,” who would be resistant to *interpretatio*; one may

104. I could readily list fifty.

105. For a strong cumulative case, see I. Malkin, *A Small Greek World* (Oxford, 2011), chap. 4; he notes, e.g., the “shrines honoured by Greeks” in Phoenician Motya (Diod. Sic. 14.53.2). On Alexander and the Herakles of Tyre, see Bonnet, *Enfants de Cadmos*, 66–80, 94–97, esp. 95 n. 186 (the postvictory games in his honour).

106. SEG LIX 1764. At Cyrene he was always Ammon, and probably worshipped in a separate temple from Zeus: see F. A. Mohamed et al., in L. Gasperini and S. M. Marengo, eds., *Cirene e la cirenaica nell'antichità* (Rome, 2007), 20–22; SEG LVII 2004.

107. See, above all, R. E. A. Palmer, *Rome and Carthage at Peace* (Stuttgart, 1997), 53–72; for Venus Erycina also, I. Stark, in *Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion*, 24–33; cf. L. Rawlings, in Rawlings and H. Bowden, *Herakles and Hercules* (Swansea, 2005), 162–63. Antiochus and Nabû: P. Kosmin, “Seeing Double in Seleucid Babylonia,” in A. Moreno and R. Thomas, eds., *Patterns of the Past: Epitêdeumata in the Greek Tradition* (Oxford, 2015), 173–98.

wonder how such “local gods,” who certainly appear in texts, were understood—real gods of restricted scope, gods mistakenly believed in (but were there false gods in ancient polytheism?) by certain peoples?¹⁰⁸ But these complications and contradictions can be added to the long list of those inherent in ancient practical theology: there are many different Zeuses and there is one Zeus, there are many different gods, and there is “the god” or the divine, the gods are present everywhere but you have to visit their temples to contact them all the same: this is one more to add to the list, the gods of different peoples are different and the same. We can appeal here to the distinction between theoretical and practical theology drawn by the cognitive science of religion: while believers on their best behaviour deny that God is (for instance) anthropomorphic, restricted in space, and vengeful, in practice they treat him as having just those qualities.¹⁰⁹ *Interpretatio* was lived, not discussed; there was neither any possibility of imposing a common understanding nor any need to do so. So in our case, in theory the gods of all nations are perhaps the same. But in practice an individual worshipper was still free to distinguish Isis from Demeter, to see Zeus Thebaieus or Mercurius Visucius or whoever as a distinct entity especially powerful over a particular region. There might at one level be no need for Isis, if she was merely Demeter under another name. But the ritual in her cult, the experience of participation, and the hopes attached to it were so different from Demeter’s as to give Isis a separate aura. Where the cultic double name was used, it provided a perfect way of fudging the issue: Zeus made Zeus Thebaieus universal and international, Thebaieus restored local particularity: Zeus Thebaieus was a glocalised god.¹¹⁰

One crucial qualification is needed with respect to what has been said thus far. Evidence in favour of the identity model comes from Greek and Roman authors, not from any of the Gauls and Germans and Phrygians and Syrians and Nabatae-

108. Some texts which raise such questions: Plut. *Amat.* 13, 756C: Eros isn’t a foreign god derived from barbarian superstition like Attis and Adonis; Lucian 24.27: “Pan and the Korybantēs and Attis and Sabazios, these immigrant and questionable gods” (τοὺς μετοίκους τούτους καὶ ἀμφιβόλους θεοὺς: foreign gods also 21.8); Strabo 13.1.12, C 587: Priapus was unknown to Hesiod but revealed as a god (ἀπεδείχθη) by later generations; Dio Cass. 40.47.3, 53 B.C.: the senate voted to destroy privately established shrines of Sarapis and Isis: “for for a long time they did not accept (οὐκ . . . ἐνόμισαν) these gods, and even when it came to their being honoured publicly, they located them outside the pomerium.” No false gods in polytheism: J. Scheid, *HSCP* 97 (1995): 18.

109. See, e.g., J.L. Barrett, “Theological Correctness: Cognitive Constraint and the Study of Religion,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999): 325–39; T. Tremplin, *Minds and Gods* (Oxford, 2006), 169–96.

110. For another fudge, see the argument in Lucian 11.5 that gods are universal but also have local preferences: χαίρουσι καὶ θεοὶ πατρίσι καὶ πάντα μὲν, ὡς εἰκός, ἐφορῶσι τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, αὐτῶν ἡγούμενοι κτήματα πᾶσαν γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν, ἐφ’ ἧς δὲ ἕκαστος αὐτῶν ἐγένετο, προτιμᾷ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπασῶν πόλεων. Cf. Polinskaya, *Local History*, 514: gods are “neither essentially local or panhellenic, but can be either in a given context.”

ans and Egyptians and all the others who in some measure accepted the practice of *interpretatio* when using Latin or Greek. The homogenizing effect of the acceptance of Greco-Roman *interpretatio* is an important fact of cultural history, but we cannot assume that the recipients shared the assumptions of philosophers, Herodotus, and the educated elite of Rome. One might think here of the simplifications noted above whereby in some regions a small selection of Greek or Roman theonyms was used to cover a wide range of local deities, or “Zeus” and “Jupiter” became signifiers for “greatest god.” This broad brush application of *interpretatio* differs from the much more thoroughly worked-out equations between Greek and Roman gods, even if the difference is in part due to the character of the pantheons to which it was applied.

Can we escape from the Greco-Roman perspective? We have some evidence for attitudes ascribed by Greek authors to non-Greeks. When Herodotus speaks of “Osiris, whom they [the Egyptians] say is Dionysus,” he is crediting the Egyptians with the same identity model that governs his own writing. Lucian presents a Gaul who cheerfully accepts that the god known to him as Ogmios, and depicted in ways alien to the Greco-Roman Herakles, is Herakles nonetheless, but argues that it is the conception of Herakles revealed in the Gallic iconography and not the Greco-Roman that is correct.¹¹¹ Herodotus and Lucian take it for granted that their interlocutors (real or imagined) saw things as they did. But the unreliability of such evidence is obvious. The closest we can come to an authentically external perspective may be that of two learned men originating in what once had been Phoenicia: Philo of Byblos, who in the first century A.D. wrote a cosmogony and prehistory of the world which mingled euhemerism with Phoenician legends; and the anonymous Sidonian who discussed the genealogy of Asclepius with Pausanias in the second.

Both assert Phoenician traditions against Greek, the former extensively and aggressively. But when the Sidonian seeks to correct the Greek genealogy of Asclepius from the Phoenician, he is assuming that a single god common to both cultures is at issue. Philo too is full of equations between supposed gods (for him as a euhemerist in fact dead men), such as “Kronos, whom the Phoenicians call El,” and regularly speaks of Phoenician gods by Greek names. It is true that Philo cannot carry through this policy consistently, since he cannot find existing Greek equivalents for all the Phoenician deities he refers to and is often reduced to transliteration or ad hoc translation.¹¹² But his approach is diffusionist (Greeks appropriated and distorted Phoenician traditions), and he cannot be supposing that

111. Herodotus: see, e.g., 2.42.2: Ὀσίριος, τὸν δὴ Διόνυσον εἶναι λέγουσι; 2.123.1: ἀχηγετεῦειν δὲ τῶν κάτω Αἰγύπτιοι λέγουσι Δήμητρα καὶ Διόνυσον. Lucian: Hercules (cf. n. 59 above).

112. See n. 86 above. An instance of translation is *FGrH* 790 F 2 ap. Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 1.10.16, Δαγών, ὃς ἐστὶ Σίτων: this sounds like an equation between existing theonyms, but Dagon is a common noun meaning “corn” as well as a theonym, and Siton is an ad hoc translation.

different nations had distinct sets of supposed gods. To this extent the assumptions ascribed by Lucian to his perhaps imaginary Gaul are also those of actual (neo-) Phoenicians: both the Gaul and the Phoenicians accept the identity model, but insist that their own local understandings of the shared god are correct in contrast to the Greco-Roman tradition. And this no doubt was what mattered to them most. It was natural for the Sidonian and Philo, themselves products of the Greco-Roman culture which they partially resisted, to take over the practice of *interpretatio* along with the Greek language in which they conversed or wrote. It was also easy to understand *interpretatio* as a claim of identity between gods, simply because an opposite view was never formulated. And it was positively desirable to accept the identity model if it made it possible not merely to assert the validity of local traditions—the crucial issue—but also to use them to correct (in thought and word at least) those of the imperial culture.

WHO DOES IT?

The second great question after the *why* of *interpretatio* is *who*. Who made the identifications, who propagated them, who accepted and used them? The agents easiest to identify are unfortunately also the least interesting. Scholars were evidently responsible for some identifications found in some contexts.¹¹³ But in historical terms what is interesting is *interpretatio* as a form of cultural interaction, not as a product of antiquarian study. To take the Roman case first, Tacitus in the famous passage about the German gods Alci quoted above (43.4) writes that “they call them in an *interpretatio* Romana Castor and Pollux.” But who are the unspecified subject of Tacitus’s verb, these “they”? *Interpretatio Romana* in the West, it used to be supposed, was initially the work of such Romans as first came into contact with Gauls and Germans and their gods, thus merchants and soldiers and their like; natives then in various measure took over the imported names along with the imported language.¹¹⁴ More recently, scholarship on the Roman West has transferred responsibility to the local elites, if not necessarily for the first identifications, at least for the form in which they persisted in cult practice.¹¹⁵ We have

113. See Wissowa, “*Interpretatio Romana*,” 7, on “learned ingenuity” (“gelehrte Tüftelei”).

114. So Wissowa, “*Interpretatio Romana*,” 23–28. J.G. Anderson in his commentary on the *Germania* passage makes such people subject of Tacitus’s verb, whereas Nock, *Essays*, 752, has no doubt that they are the Naharvali. J. Webster, “Translation and Subjection: *Interpretatio* and the Celtic Gods,” in J.D. Hill and C.G. Cumberbatch, eds., *Different Iron Ages* (Oxford, 1995), 175–83, still ascribes responsibility to the colonial masters.

115. C. Letta, *Rivista Storica Italiana* 96 (1984): 1002–5; T. Derks, “The Perception of the Roman Pantheon by a Native Elite: The Example of Votive Inscriptions from Lower Germany,” in N. Roymans and F. Theuvs, eds., *Images of the Past* (Amsterdam, 1991), 235–65, esp. 254–55 (in 237 n. 13 he cites other scholars who have taken that view); Cadotte, *Romanisation des dieux*, 11–12, 419.

been reminded that if a community gained colonial or municipal status, the first *decuriones* were required to choose its gods; here leading natives might have sought the advice of public slaves well versed in Roman religious antiquities.¹¹⁶ An issue of perspective arises here, since a Roman surveying the gods of Gaul would not necessarily find the same equivalences as a Gaul surveying those of Rome. Are we dealing with an invader's attempt to interpret an alien environment in terms of familiar divine powers, or with a conquered people seeking among the conquerors' powerful gods those most adapted to its own habits and needs?¹¹⁷

It is doubtless impossible to say from which side a particular *interpretatio* first came. But two things that matter more are clear. First, the process was not imposed top down from Rome, or the *interpretationes* in different regions would not have varied as they do, native gods would not have been left untranslated, and Romans of high status would not have been happy (occasionally) to make dedications to untranslated native gods.¹¹⁸ It was simply not a concern of central policy at Rome to regulate the gods worshipped in the provinces.¹¹⁹ Second, the majority of dedications to translated (e.g., Mars) or part translated (e.g., Mars Lenus) indigenous gods were made by their original worshippers: the system did not primarily serve the needs of Romans abroad seeking a god to honour under a familiar divine name, but of provincials accommodating their old gods to new circumstances. It was by local decision that figures such as Lenus Mars, Mars Mullo, Mars Camulus, and many like them became the main civic gods of important groupings in the Three Gauls.¹²⁰

If one attempts to nuance these broad propositions further and differentiate between urban and rural, rich and poor, more and less Romanized Gallo-Romans (or Spanish Romans or African Romans . . .), in their respective commitment to (a) wholly translated, (b) partly translated, and (c) untranslated gods, many

116. J. Scheid, in M. Dondin-Payre and M.T. Raepsaet-Charlier, eds., *Cités, municipes, colonies* (Paris, 1999), 418. But for the later role of subaltern elements, see R. Hauessler, "Religion and Individualisation in Southern Gaul," in *Keltische Götternamen*, 185–211.

117. See Wissowa's striking pages on the Roman perceptions and expectations underlying *interpretatio*, "Interpretatio Romana," 23–28, whence his conclusion, 28, that *interpretatio* teaches us more about Rome than about the realities of pre-Roman cult. Derks (n. 115 above), arguing the opposite, must distinguish the kind of *interpretatio* already found in Caesar (and presumably of Roman origin) from that attested in cult, though Wissowa stressed their continuity. Woolf's comment, *Becoming Roman*, 217, is sensible: "It will never be possible to reconstruct all the preliminary exchanges, conversations, requests, hints and negotiations that preceded the establishment of these cults in the form in which we first see them. . . . But the active participation of both sides in remodelling Gallic religion is evident."

118. Wissowa, "Interpretatio Romana," 23; T. Derks, *Gods, Temples, and Ritual Practices* (Amsterdam, 1998), 100–101.

119. See C. Ando, "Die Riten der Anderen," in *Interpretatio Graeca/Romana/Indigena*, 31–50.

120. Van Andringa, *Religion en Gaule romaine*, 141–49.

complications arise.¹²¹ I shall not pursue them here, but turn back instead to the Greek East. The same problem over first *interpretationes* arises here as in the West, though the contacts between Greece and Near Eastern cultures were so extensive and varied from so early that it becomes still more intractable: some *interpretationes* might—who knows?—go back to the Bronze Age. What cannot be mistaken is the extraordinary extent to which, in Anatolia, Greek theonyms swept the board. Whereas many non-Roman gods' names are found in Latin inscriptions of the West, in the Greek inscriptions of Anatolia non-Greek names are a rarity, whether as freestanding items or even as the second element in a double name. From Caria one can quote, for instance, Sinuri, the obscure Kanebos, and Zeus Osogo; from Lycia, Eleuthera and Kakasbos and a cluster of occasionally attested figures; from Cilicia, Perasia; in Lydia, Men and Mother defy assimilation (but they had already entered Greek cult under those names), Anaitis is only sometimes linked with Artemis, while a taste for anonymity in the form of *theos/thea* plus epithet combinations can be observed; and the list can be extended within these regions and across others.¹²²

But against all this must be set the innumerable instances of Zeus, Apollo, Artemis, Herakles, and (if in lesser numbers) the rest. Here too then the essential point is that the Greek names were adopted by Anatolian peoples.¹²³ A precise chronology cannot be established—we cannot, for instance, know whether when Herodotus speaks of the Carians as worshipping “Zeus Stratios” early in the fifth century this is his *interpretatio*, or theirs (5.119.2)—but probably in the main, Greek names came in along with the use of Greek language. That at all events is what is suggested by the Xanthos trilingual of 337 B.C., where, as we saw, Lycian theonyms in the Lycian text become “Leto and her children and the Nymphs” in Greek. Various Greek gods had already appeared in the poems composed for Lycian dynasts late in the fifth or early in the fourth century.¹²⁴ (In Lydia, some Greek divine names occur in Lydian language texts even earlier, but they presumably refer to gods

121. It has been noted that in southern Gaul dedications to plain Mars are characteristic of persons of high status and of towns; poorer and rural Gauls dedicate to Mars plus a local divine name or epithet, or simply to an uninterpreted indigenous god (H. Lavagne, “Les dieux de la Gaule narbonnais: “Romanité” et Romanisation,” *JSav*, 1979, 155–97, esp. 164–65; for further nuances on the region, see R. Carré, “Cultes et idéologie religieuse en Gaule méridionale,” *Memorias de Historia Antigua* 5, 1981, 131–42). But the same pattern is not observable for Mercury (Lavagne, 175–76, and on indigenous gods in towns, 193–94), nor as noted in the text in the Three Gauls, where Mars Mullus-type figures are of central importance (on Gallia Belgica, see too E. Wightman, *ANRW* 18.1.583). Woolf writes, *Becoming Roman*, 228: “The Gallo-Roman élite were among the most active syncretizers.” For “little people” dedicating to Diana (*frugifera*) in Spain, see G. Alföldy, “Das Diana-Heiligtum von Segobirga,” *ZPE* 58 (1985): 139–59, at 157.

122. For details, see appendix D and chapter 3.

123. D. Piras, in *Hellenistic Karia*, 233, speaks of “self-hellenisation undertaken with a view to political compensation and social advantage.”

124. *CEG* 178 (ML 93), 888.

perceived by the Lydians as Greek, not to Lydian gods who had already received Greek names.¹²⁵) At all events, crucially, in western Anatolia the process antedated Alexander's conquests. Gauls worshipped Roman gods, it is sometimes argued, because these had bested their own in battle. That argument will not be transferable to the Greek East, and thereby is brought into question. Zeus and Apollo invaded Anatolia before Alexander did.

In Syria, it has been argued, *interpretatio* came initially from the Greek side only; only later, perhaps not before the Roman period, did native Syrians adopt the Greek theonyms.¹²⁶ Sometimes in the Middle East one can draw geographical ("not beyond X") or chronological ("not before") limits to the intrusion of a Greek theonym.¹²⁷ In Egypt, Greek travelers and settlers were certainly interpreting Egyptian gods by the sixth century, as we have seen, and had very likely already been doing so earlier. In the Ptolemaic period, traces have been sought of a centrally promoted *interpretatio*.¹²⁸ A cluster of formal dedications from roughly the same region of Upper Egypt from roughly the third quarter of the second century B.C. are of interest here. Two from the same site and with the same chief dedicator (though a few years apart) are dedicated to the royal family and to pairs of Greek and Egyptian gods; the pairs are linked by the "also known as" (ὁ καί) formula which is regularly applied to mortals who bear two names. The earlier contains four pairs in which the Greek god precedes ("Ammon also known as Chnoubis, and Hera also known as Satis, and Hestia also known as Anoukis, and Dionysus also known as Petempentis"); the later lists the same four pairs in the same sequence but reverses the order within the pair to put the Egyptian god first, and adds two more pairs. A similarly formal dedication from Elephantine lists the four same gods, again in the same order, but gives their names in one language only; the languages, however, alternate, to give Chnoubis and Hera and Anoukis and Dionysus. A very similar text from the same place adds Isis between Anoukis and Dionysus; she can perhaps be considered common to both languages. There is a self-consciousness about all this that might suggest policy, though it is one of coexistence rather than replacement.¹²⁹ Earlier, the trilingual Rosetta stone had to

125. See p. 78n6.

126. M. Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome*, trans. C. Porter et al. (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 306.

127. "Zeus" is common in northern Hauran, but "in the South does not pass Bostra and Salkhad": Sourdel, *Les cultes du Hauran*, 21; an altar of Zeus Manaph is of the fourth century A.D., which explains the easy assimilation of Manaph to Zeus (85).

128. Otto, *Priester und Tempel*, 2:267–68, followed by Rübsam, *Götter und Kulte in Faijum*, 5–8.

129. Bernand, *De Thèbes à Syène*, nos. 302 (= OGIS 111), 303 (= OGIS 130), 242, 243 (with the last, cf. 246 [SEG XXXIX 1697]). Bernand, no. 188 (OGIS 114), from the same area and period, addressed to Aroeres and Apollo (Ἀροῦρει θεῶι μεγάλω Ἀπόλλωνι καὶ τοῖς συννάοις θεοῖς), is probably an instance of identification by juxtaposition (for Aroeres and Apollo, see Bernand, *Pan du désert*, no. 59, with ὁ καί; Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 12, 356A); for another such juxtaposition, see Bernand, *Delta*, 926:

some extent applied the “to each language its own gods” principle, though some Egyptian theonyms were allowed in the Greek text (where inconsistently both Hephaistos and his double Phtha appear). What we see in the *ὁ καί* dedications might look like an attempt to preserve even-handedness in monolingual texts. The self-presentation of Antony as Osiris and Dionysus, of Cleopatra as Selene and Isis, can be seen as a conscious facing in both directions.¹³⁰

But such suggestions of policy are isolated. An astronomical calendar written in Greek and dated by its editors “301–240” includes what are apparently traditional Egyptian festivals of the Saite nome but mixes Egyptian (Osiris, Phthorais, Edu [?], Bubastis, Anubis, Isis) and Greek (Athena, Hera, Apollo) theonyms for the gods honoured, and once provides a translation (“festival of Prometheus, whom they call Iphthimis”). This is far from systematic. It shows, as does much further evidence, that a plain Greek theonym can be used even where in all appearance the cult will have followed traditional Egyptian norms.¹³¹ The *ὁ καί* formula continues to appear spasmodically, as does a variant X “called” (καλούμενος) Y.¹³² Simple juxtapositions of the divine names from the two cultures are commoner, to give such double names as Hermes Pautnouphis; the same pairing of names will occur both with and without the “also known as” linking, and such couplings are often uncoupled to give, for instance, dedications to both Hermes and Pautnouphis at the same site.¹³³ The long papyrus that recounts the healing miracles of Imouthes appears to call him that and Asclepius indifferently.¹³⁴ The same Greek theonym covers for different Egyptian gods in different places, but there remain huge num-

Σαράπιδι Διονύσωι, Ἴσιδι Ἀφροδίτῃ, θεοῖς σωτήρσι καὶ πολυφόροις (cf. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:197–98: “probably mid 3rd c B.C.”). A dedication by two high Ptolemaic officials of 133 B.C. (SEG XLIX 2251: Διὶ Σωτήρι Σαράπιδι, Ἴσιδι Μεγάλῃ Μητρὶ Θεῶν, Ἀρποχράτει, Πανὶ Εὐδόδωι, Κρόνῳ, Διονύσωι, Διοσκοῦροις, Ἡρακλεῖ Καλλινίκωι) is made with a mixture of juxtaposition (the first two items), probable *interpretatio* (Πανὶ Εὐδόδωι, Κρόνῳ, Ἡρακλεῖ Καλλινίκωι [?]) and non-*interpretatio* (Ἀρποχράτει).

130. Otto, *Priester und Tempel*, 2:267 n. 2, on Dio Cass. 50.5.3. Rosetta stone: OGIS 90.

131. Otto, *Priester und Tempel*, 1:7–9. The calendar: Προμηθέως ἑορτὴ ὄν καλοῦσιν Ἰφθίμιν (PHib. 27.85–86).

132. See SEG XL 1560 (52 A.D.), “Ammon who is also Chnoubis”; Bernand, *De Thèbes à Syène*, 171, 106–7 A.D., “Zeus called greatest Nephotes”; *PLeid.* I, p. 124.14–16, “the one called Onourei in Egyptian and Ares in Greek”

133. There are many examples of separate naming of these gods in E. G. Ruppel, *Der Tempel von Dakke* (Cairo, 1930), but Gr. 67 (p. 52) combines them, Gr. W (p. 1) links them with *ὁ καί*. Isis Demeter, a familiar concept to art historians, first as it seems appeared in an inscription, by supplement, in SEG LII 1775. SEG XLIX 2251 (Koptos, 133 B.C.) blends Greek, Egyptian, and juxtaposed names.

134. *POxy.* XI 1381 (Totti, *Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion*, no. 15). A. Lajtar, *Deir el-Bahari in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Warsaw, 2006), 46–49, takes the “Asclepius” (always so named) worshipped with Amenothēs at Deir el-Bahari as Imouthes (Grecized form of Imhotep), but, as he observes, this Asclepius is called “son of Phoebus” and associated with Hygieia; if Imouthes does underlie him, then Imouthes has acquired family associations from Asclepius. Lajtar also notes that at the centre of his cult in Memphis Imhotep remains Imouthes, son of “Hephaistos” (i.e., Ptah).

bers of Egyptian gods who appear in Greek texts only under their own names. A cheerful disorder prevails, which appears to confuse or embarrass nobody.

HOW DOES IT MATTER?

What difference did the practice of *interpretatio* make? A drastic and disastrous one, for scholars interested in indigenous pantheons before the advent of the Greco-Roman gods: there is usually no way of telling how many different gods in a given region may all have been relabeled Mars or Apollo or Herakles, still less of recovering their original names and perhaps distinct¹³⁵ identities; only in Egypt can most originals (not all) be identified. It may be impossible to tell whether a given “Apollo” has succeeded a native or is in fact a wholly imported god.¹³⁶ But for the ancients the practice was much less problematic. It is a striking fact that from the whole of antiquity there survives, as we have seen, no single text that discusses the rationale for *interpretatio*, and barely any that express disquiet about it or question or problematise it in any way. Scholars sometimes seek traces of cultural resistance in, say, the decision to address a dedication to Leherennus and not to Mars Leherennus. But in such cases persons apparently of similar background and social position may go either way: the feeling may rather have been that the choice mattered little, since the same god was being addressed under whatever name.¹³⁷ One situation where a differential pattern in naming can be observed is in the cult of the Syrian goddess on Delos during the Athenian occupation of the island after 166: Syrian worshippers tend to address the goddess as Atargatis, Athenians by the name she bore when the cult was officially adopted by Athens, Hagne (“Reverend”) Aphrodite.¹³⁸ But exceptions occur, and there is no reason to think that the matter was politically sensitive. We noted earlier that Philo of Byblos and Pausanias’s Sidonian asserted Phoenician traditions against Greek, but apparently in regard to gods whom they accepted, via *interpretatio*, to be common to the two cultures.

One case needs to be mentioned, and set aside as exceptional. The festival Hanukkah still commemorates the overthrow of the edict supposedly sent to

135. So, e.g., Sourdel, *Cultes du Hauran*, 17.

136. This problem seems to me acute in Thrace, where arguably most indigenous gods live on under their own name preceded by Hero (cf. p. 93n70), while most gods with Greek names are indeed imports (who may, however, be assimilated to indigenous traditions iconographically): but for a small number of “Zeus Ammon”-type formations from Thrace, see p. 93n70; and there may be intrusion of Greek gods on hitherto anonymous gods, p. 87n39.

137. Van Andringa, *Religion en Gaule romaine*, 151–52, notes that at Saint Placard private dedications are addressed indifferently to Sutugius, Sutugius deus, and Mars Sutugius, even by citizens. In Ardiège there are eleven dedications to Leherennus, nine to Mars Leherennus, almost all by *peregrini*. On Roman Britain, see the tables in Zoll, “Double-Named Deities.”

138. See pp. 163–64 below.

Jerusalem by Antiochus IV in 167 requiring, among other attacks on Jewish religious traditions, the god of the great temple to be worshipped under the name Zeus Olympios (2 Macc. 6.2). The circumstances leading to that governmental intervention have been much discussed. That it was a response to Jewish disloyalty (actual or suspected) to the Seleucid state is agreed. Bickerman contended that Antiochus was encouraged to it by an opportunistic appeal by a Hellenising faction of Jews, who wished to end the isolation of the Jews from the rest of the Hellenistic world (but by a change of name, not of actual cult practice). There were certainly some Jews who would have accepted the view that they worshipped the same god as the one known to Greeks as Zeus.¹³⁹ (Some Greeks thought the same, and most supposed that the Jewish god was, at bottom, one they also knew; a surprisingly popular candidate was Dionysus.) But there is no evidence that it was they who provoked Antiochus's intervention.¹⁴⁰ Ma has argued that the measure follows attested Seleucid patterns of behaviour toward rebellious cities, which included depriving them of religious autonomy: the temple was taken out of Jewish control and attached to a (somewhat hypothetical) new Greek city of Antiocheia at Jerusalem; the renaming was a necessary consequence, particularly given Antiochus's (supposed) standardising promotion of the cult of Zeus Olympios throughout the empire. On this view, "the "abomination of the desolation," the interdiction of the Mosaic Law, and the obligation to participate in "pagan" cult were matters of administrative history. They were not religious."¹⁴¹ What is clear is

139. As is explicitly stated, e.g., in the letter of Aristaeas, 16; cf. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1:264–67 (also documenting the opposite view); for the pagan converse, see Julian, *Ep.* 89, 454a Bidez/Cumont: the Jewish god as "the very powerful and excellent god, who controls the sensible world, and whom we ourselves revere . . . under other names." On one view of a problematic passage of Valerius Maximus (1.3.3), Jews sought to introduce the cult of Jahwe to Italy under the name of Zeus Sabazius: so Bickerman, *Studies*, 2:601–6; for the other view, see E. N. Lane, "Sabazius and the Jews in Valerius Maximus," *JRS* 69 (1979): 35–38. On Greek *interpretationes* of the Jewish god, see Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 2:175 n. 47; Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 4.6 asks, "Who is the Jewish god?" and the main speaker answers, "Dionysus."

140. See F. Millar, "The Maccabean Revolution," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 29 (1978): 1–21 (also in his *Rome, The Greek World, and the East*, vol. 3, *The Greek World, the Jews, and the East*, Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002, 67–90), dissenting from Bickerman, *God of the Maccabees*, and Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1:267–309.

141. J. Ma, <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/re-examining-hanukkah/> (July 9, 2013), summarising his "Relire les institutions des Séleucides de Bickerman," in S. Benoist, ed., *Rome, a City and Its Empire in Perspective: The Impact of the Roman World through Fergus Millar's Research* (Leiden, 2012), 59–84; and Ma, "Notes on the Restoration of the Temple," in R. Oetjen and F. X. Ryan, eds., *Seleukeia: Studies in Seleucid History, Archaeology, and Numismatics in Honor of Getzel M. Cohen* (forthcoming). The evidence for the supposed promotion of the cult of Zeus Olympios, apart from Antiochus's financing of continuing work on the temple at Athens, is numismatic (see references in Ma, "Relire," 82 n. 71). One must ask what precisely is envisaged: New cults? (so explicitly Robert, in Dupont-Sommer and Robert, *Déesse de Hiérapolis Castabala*, 96–99; Zeus introduced as *paredros* to Perasia) Renaming? Or just coin types? If the last, the parallel with Jerusalem is much weakened.

that the attempt to impose an *interpretatio* by compulsion was unique, and formed part of a much broader attack (whether designed as such, or a by-product of standard Seleucid responses to disloyalty) on Jewish particularity. It provoked from the Samaritans an equally unique reaction. According to Josephus, wishing to distance themselves from the troubles of their neighbours, they sought permission from Antiochus to rename what they called the “anonymous” shrine of Gerizim as “of Zeus Hellenios.”¹⁴² No other petition to a ruling power on such a matter is known. *Interpretatio* was here politicised as never before or afterward.¹⁴³

I revert to more normal situations. If one presses the strict logic of the identity model of *interpretatio*, there was no reason why the local conception of a god should be affected by a change of name, since the two names were merely different descriptions of the same god. A strong tradition of scholarship assumes that, all over Anatolia and the Near East, local gods lived on essentially unchanged even though redescribed (in the Greek texts available to us) in the form of Greek divine name plus local, usually toponymic, epithet.¹⁴⁴ The point, it is sometimes said, was precisely to allow the cult to persist in its traditional form beneath this superficial Greco-Roman veneer.¹⁴⁵ In relation to the Latin West one sometimes finds the same phenomenon—supposed predominance of the (e.g.) Gallic essence over the

142. So Joseph. *Ant. Jud.* 12.261–63 (but “Zeus Xenios” in 2 Macc. 6.2.). On the temple at Gerizim, see J. Kirkpatrick, “How to Be a Bad Samaritan,” in T. Kaizer, ed., *The Variety of Local Religious Life in the Near East* (Leiden, 2008), 155–78, esp. 167–72; for two dedications from it to Zeus Olympios, see R. J. Bull, “Er-Ras, Tell (Mount Gerizim),” in M. Yonah and E. Stern, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (London, 1978), 4:1015–22, at 1018.

143. In antiquity, that is: the permissibility of using Chinese terms to indicate the Christian God formed part of the bitter Ricci or “Chinese rites” controversy in the seventeenth century, and the relation of God to Allah is controversial today: see in brief Bettini, *Elogio del politeismo*, 60–62, 63 n. 8.

144. This belief is common in, e.g., Laumonier, *Cultes indigènes*; Paz de Hoz, *Die lydischen Kulte*; R. Lebrun, “Les permanences culturelles louvites dans la Lycie hellénistique,” in *Asie mineure dans l'antiquité*, 379–88; and to a large extent even in L. Robert.

145. “The representation of non-Greek deities in Syria and Phoenicia with some Greek attributes is agreed to be a mechanism by which the character of local cults could be maintained”: Kuhrt and Sherwin-White, *From Samarkhand to Sardis*, 147; Macmullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, 117: “Underneath the worshipper of Mars is a worshipper really of Lenus or Segomo”; more cautiously, Otto, *Priester und Tempel*, 2:221: change of name has no necessary effect on practice. Contrast Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:190: “The adoption of Greek speech was an external expression of a personal readjustment of cultural standards and religious beliefs,” though Fraser concedes variability from case to case “both in belief and practice”; Aliquot, *Vie religieuse au Liban*, 139 (endorsed by Bonnet, *Enfants de Cadmos*, 145 n. 116): “The Greek and Roman *interpretatio* of Balmarcod, far from being formal, brings with it also a redefinition of the activity of the god.” In the claim of Kuhrt and Sherwin-White quoted above, “mechanism” is presumably a mechanism of the indigenous peoples; but RübSam, *Götter und Kulte in Faijum*, 5–8, postulates that the Ptolemies promoted *interpretatio* to encourage Greek settlers to worship Egyptian gods.

Roman name—described, confusingly, as *interpretatio Gallica* or *Celtica*.¹⁴⁶ It was the supposed irrelevance, in practical terms, of a change of name that led Bickerman to support the similarity against the identity model of *interpretatio*.¹⁴⁷ He came to it via his argument that Jahwe could have been renamed Zeus Olympios without the cult practice being affected one jot. But the conclusion was not a necessary one: there was no reason why believing that god A was the same as god B also entailed that the rituals by which the two were honoured should be the same; ancestral tradition, doubtless pleasing to the god in question, retained its validity. Customs differ and should be respected, but metaphysical reality is the same everywhere.

There is a danger also of being blinded by particular continuities observable in a particular cult. The persistence of certain elements should not be confused with thoroughgoing continuity. Scholars who have taken a broader view of religion in, say, Roman Gaul have argued that there emerges a new religious system with a newly structured pantheon in which few preexistent elements persist completely unchanged.¹⁴⁸ Conditions in the East were certainly very different, not least because there Roman imperialism had been preceded by Persian and Macedonian: nonetheless, it is hard to doubt that here too there emerged a new mixed religion or rather a series of regionally varying mixed religions.¹⁴⁹ The question is what part *interpretatio* played in these processes.

A name is only a small part of that elusive thing, a divine personality, of which Sourvinou-Inwood writes:

146. So, e.g., A. Grenier, "La triade Capitoline en Provence," in *Studi . . . Calderini* (Milan, 1956), 1:139–42. Confusingly, because, by analogy with *interpretatio Romana*, *interpretatio Gallica* ought to refer to a speaker of Gallic giving a Gaulish name to a Roman god, not a Gaulish essence to a god with Roman name.

147. See p. 60 above. The same considerations lead F. Dunand to speak in relation to Herodotus's identifications of "a procedure of equivalence, intended to 'make comprehensible' to his Greek readers what the goddess is": F. Dunand, "Syncretisme ou coexistence: Images du religieux dans l'Égypte tardive," in *Syncretismes religieux*, 97–116, at 99. The nuance is different in Baslez, *Religions orientales à Délos*, 247: because the nature of gods is unknown, *interpretatio* can have free rein as long as the rites remain unchanged.

148. See, e.g., M. Clavel-Leveque, "Le syncretisme gallo-romain: Structures et finalités," in F. Sartori, ed., *Praelectiones Patavinae* (Rome, 1972), 92–134; D. Touléc, "Images de Silvanus dans l'Occident romain," in C. Auvray-Assayas, ed., *Images romaines* (Paris, 1998), 37–60; Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 206–29; W. Van Andringa, "New Combinations and New Statuses: The Indigenous Gods in the Pantheons of the Cities of Roman Gaul," in *Religious History of the Roman Empire*, 109–38; Van Andringa, *La religion en Gaule romaine*, 135–41; M. Sartre, "Les signes du changement: Réalités et faux-semblants," in *Religious Identities in the Levant*, 11–18 (an excellent nuanced summary).

149. As is well shown for Lebanon by Aliquot, *Vie religieuse au Liban*, especially chap. 6, "La voie romaine." When more than one god was identified with Zeus, the question must arise whether those gods could retain their separate identities: cf., e.g., Sourdel, *Cultes du Hauran*, 20, on the convergence of Baalshamin and Hadad in Zeus.

The (interrelated) spheres in which a divine personality manifests itself are the following. The sphere of divine name with its subordinate sphere of epithet, that of Bildvorstellung including the attributes, the sphere of myth, the sphere of cult, involving a deity as a recipient of worship, that of theology in the sense of sets of beliefs about the functions and areas of activity of the deity, and finally, the sphere of “ideology,” derivative from the previous one, primarily through the agency of literature, involving the deity as an embodiment of certain ideas and concepts.¹⁵⁰

To this useful list perhaps one should add the architectural form of the sanctuary, which can powerfully shape the worshipper’s relation to the deity.¹⁵¹ Change then can occur or fail to occur at many different levels (to say nothing of changes in the structures within which religious activity occurs and by which it is controlled). This is one main reason why the concept of “syncretism” is such a blunt instrument; another is that it obscures the crucial question of who is doing the “blending” that most of us hear in the word (though its real origin is quite different).¹⁵² The phenomenon at issue is the selective adaptation by one culture of its religious system to that of another culture: an adaptation self-generated, not imposed, through constant interaction with members of the other culture, who are involved in the process of assimilation.

Perhaps the only safe general formula is that *interpretatio* creates the possibility of further changes. Iconography,¹⁵³ myths, and powers at once become in principle transferable. It was said above that renaming a local god Apollo did not need to entail any change in the conception of his nature, since ex hypothesi they were both the same god. But the local conception of Apollo’s nature might have been

150. C. Sourvinou-Inwood, “Reading” *Greek Culture* (Oxford, 1991), 181 n. 3 (from *JHS* 98, 1978, 101 n. 3).

151. Bickerman, *God of the Maccabees*, 1099–1106.

152. The only occurrence in antiquity is in Plutarch, *De frat. amor.* 19, 490B, where συγκρητισμός is used of the coming together of the Cretan cities for common purposes (an odd idea in itself, since they did so so seldom). When first introduced into Europe, apparently by Erasmus, the concept retained this sense of “cessation of hostilities between warring (theological) factions,” but the origin seems to have been forgotten and the connection with συγκράνωσις later assumed: see U. Berner, “Synkretismus,” in H. Cancik et al., eds., *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* (Stuttgart, 2001), 5:143–52, at 144. The concept obscures other important differences too: between internal assimilations of gods within a culture, and cross-cultural assimilations; within the latter, between assimilation between individual gods, and partial blending of whole panthea: cf. Berner, “Synkretismus,” 144; R. Gordon, in Brill’s *New Pauly* s.v. Syncretism. For critique of the concept, see, e.g., Lightfoot, *Syrian Goddess*, 82; Healey, *Religion of the Nabataeans*, 14–15; Moyer, *Limits of Hellenism*, 151–53; and already Peterson, *EIS ΘΕΟΣ*, 586–87 (from an unpublished essay of ca. 1927).

153. See, e.g., J. Quaegebeur, “Cultes égyptiens et grecs en Égypte,” in E. van ’t Dack et al., eds., *Egypt and the Hellenistic World* (Leuven, 1983), 303–24, at 308–11, on Neith coming to be represented as Athena. On coins, iconographic transfer is extremely common, even where cult practice has probably not changed: see, e.g., F. Duyrat, “Interpretatio graeca et identité sémitique,” in N. Belayche and J. D. Dubois, eds., *Loiseau et le poisson* (Paris, 2011), 329–67.

partial and inadequate. Once identification between two gods has occurred, the possibility arises for a worshipper of enriching his original understanding of a god's nature with the traits associated with its new alter ego. It is at this point that power relations and cultural prestige enter the picture, since traffic seems to be one-way: it would be hard to show that, say, conceptions of Apollo's nature were reshaped for Greece or Rome by Gallic or Anatolian conceptions of the gods identified with him,¹⁵⁴ whereas the Greco-Roman Apollo became familiar throughout the Mediterranean. But traffic did go the other way in the form of the numerous "foreign gods" taken up in the Greco-Roman world.

I will give just two examples out of thousands to illustrate the idea of *interpretatio* as a bridge over which ideas can pass.¹⁵⁵ A decree survives of the Tyrian Herakleistai on Delos in which they resolve to "send an embassy to the Athenian people so that they may be granted a site on which to found a precinct of Herakles, he who was responsible for the greatest of blessings to mankind, and is the founding father of their homeland."¹⁵⁶ The founding father of the Tyrians' homeland is the Tyrian Herakles, that is, Melqart, but the figure generally credited with responsibility "for the greatest of blessings to mankind" is the Greek Herakles. Another example: a Greek (we assume) gives thanks to "Pan Euagros and Epekoos" ("of Good Hunting and Harkening to Prayer") probably late in the third century at the sanctuary of Pan at El-Kanaïis in Upper Egypt for "saving him from the (land of the) Troglodytes." Pan is a far more prominent figure in Egypt, where he is often designated Euodos, "of Fair Journeys," than he ever was in Greece, and we assume that an indigenous figure, Min, underlies him; the way in which he helps the dedicant, sending a fair wind when his ship was "driven astray" in the Red Sea, is also unusual for Pan. But the way in which he sent the fair wind, *συρίζων λιγυρούς πνεύμασιν ἐγ δονάκ[ων]*, "whistling with shrill breath from his pipes," is thoroughly Greek.¹⁵⁷ The cultural transfer, it may be objected, has not gone very far in these two cases: there are clear tactical reasons why the Tyrians, seeking a favour

154. This is not to deny that an Anatolian "Zeus" or Gallic "Silvanus" might differ very profoundly from their Greco-Roman originals, nor that the new image might be accepted by people of Greco-Roman origin. And for two-way traffic on Delos, see Baslez, *Religions orientales à Délos*, chap. 4, "L'orientalisation des figures divines"; note, e.g., the statue of a god on the back of an animal that accompanies the dedication to Zeus Kynthios and Athena Kynthia, good Greek gods, *ID* 2428 (see *ID* ad loc.). Note too the *enkōmion* of Isis from Maroneia (Totti, *Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion*, no. 19) which, though written from a Greek perspective, makes Isis responsible for the "revelation of crops," the traditional benefaction of Demeter.

155. For its influence on Balmarcod, see Aliquot, *Vie religieuse au Liban*, 139.

156. *ἐξαποστείλει πρεσβείαν πρὸς τὸν δῆμον τὸν Ἀθηναίων ὅπως δοθῆ αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν ὧ κατασκευάσουσιν τέμενος τοῦ πλείστων [ἀγαθ]ῶν παρατίου γ[ε]γονότος τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἀρχηγού δὲ τῆς πατρίδος ὑπάρχοντος*; *IDelos* 1519.12–16. On the force of *archēgos* in relation to Melqart, see Bonnet, *Enfants de Cadmos*, 487.

157. A. Bernand, *Le Paneion d' El Kanaïis* (Leiden, 1972), no. 8; Page, *FGE*, CL.

from the Athenian authorities on Delos, claim for their god the great deeds of the Greek benefactor of mankind; it is a Greek, not an Egyptian, who hears an Egyptian god piping like the Greek Pan. But the point is that the transfer can occur: the Tyrians are not weakening their appeal by a ridiculous claim; the Greek believes that the familiar god has helped him in a distant place.

The concept of *interpretatio*, it can be argued, is too blunt an instrument to capture the oscillation between assimilation and recognition of difference, the raft of different possible attitudes and understandings, that can be observed in contexts where one god receives the name of another. In different places and situations, "*interpretatio* brings together or separates, hierarchises or juxtaposes; it is adopted, rejected, imposed, played with, countered. . . . To speak of *interpretatio* as if it was a question of a single and easily defined process, a kind of norm inherent in the intercultural mechanism of polytheisms is certainly a delusion."¹⁵⁸ That warning is very apt. Melqart does not cease to be Melqart, does not lose all the traditions associated with him, because he is sometimes termed Herakles. The new name may enhance him; it does not efface him. "A god never siphons off another."¹⁵⁹ But this does not mean that one should fall back, with Bickerman, to seeing the apparent identification between two entities created by *interpretatio* as always a mere comparison (even if it may have been that for some agents in some contexts). Melqart when known as Herakles has ceased to be exclusively rooted in Phoenician tradition, has become exposed to change.

THE UNIVERSAL POLYTHEISM

Thus there is no general answer to the third central question about *interpretatio* posed above: one must proceed on a case-by-case basis.¹⁶⁰ I leave it therefore and revert to the contrast drawn by Jan Assmann between the easygoing attitude of polytheisms and the difficulty experienced by revelation-based monotheisms in living with alternatives. Assmann's thesis has been sufficiently influential to draw a response from the scholar who later became Pope Benedict.¹⁶¹ It is important to take some of the heat out of the debate by stressing that it ought not to be about a supposed moral superiority of polytheisms, grounded in liberal tolerance. Ancient polytheisms were not tolerant, except by default; those who have searched for an

158. C. Bonnet, "Comme des noeuds qui les unissaient tous ensemble (Voltaire): Le processus d'interpretatio en Phénicie à l'époque hellénistique," *CRAI*, 2012, 503–15, at 512–13.

159. Bonnet, *Enfants de Cadmos*, 514; cf. 484, 533.

160. So Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 147.

161. J. Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, trans. H. Taylor (San Francisco, 2004), 210–31: Ratzinger observes that many ancient polytheisms were warlike, and that there could be conflicting values (symbolised by warring gods) within a single polytheism. But the question is whether religion in itself led to war between polytheisms or repression within a polytheism.

ideal of religious freedom or tolerance in mainstream ancient thought have failed to find it until, late in antiquity, pagans faced by triumphant Christianity took up arguments earlier developed by persecuted Christians.¹⁶² In particular, polytheisms are not tolerant of monotheism; Roman persecution of Christians in the second and third centuries finds its parallel in Japanese persecution of Christian missionaries from the late sixteenth century onward,¹⁶³ and no doubt there are many other examples. But what does appear a defensible claim is that ancient polytheisms, though not committed to religious toleration, found it very easy to get on with one another. I know no instance in the ancient Near Eastern or classical worlds of intercommunal violence between polytheist groups based on religious difference.¹⁶⁴ The grounds for this easy coexistence are doubtless various; the absence of doctrine based on revelation is one; the loose link in polytheisms between religion and the moral code is another; but a third is surely the shared assumption, grounded in *interpretatio*, that at bottom the gods you worship are also the gods I do or might worship. Think how different, for instance, relations between Greeks and Romans would inevitably have been without the easy acceptance of the other's gods as the same as one's own. Perhaps it is a mistake to speak of ancient polytheisms in the plural at all. From an actor's perspective the world was divided between different countries and tribes and political systems, but it was not divided between different gods: there was only one ancient polytheism,¹⁶⁵ one set of gods ruling the entire world.

162. See P. Garnsey, "Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity," in W.J. Sheils, ed., *Persecution and Toleration* (Oxford, 1984), 1–27; cf. G. G. Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice*, trans. S. Emanuel (Chicago, 2009), 105–6.

163. The issues, it is true, were far from purely theological: see J. Elisonas, "Christianity and the daimyo," in J. W. Hall, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge, 1991), 4:301–72.

164. So too Bettini, *Elogio del politeismo*, 43. But Dio Cass. 42.34.2 claims that there were internal religious conflicts within Egypt based on differences in cult; notable here is *PGiss.* 99 (cf. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:280–81), a petition complaining that the Idumaeans worshippers of Apollo (taken to be their Kos) at Hermoupolis use a foreign language and sacrifice [sheep] and goats in ways "most opposed" to local norms.

165. Rudhardt, *RHR* 1992, 230, speaks of "a single religion, even if scarcely open to definition" ("une religion unique, serait-elle mal définissable"). This position is firmly rejected by Bonnet, *Enfants de Cadmos*, 419 n. 17: "One must . . . enter within the extreme variety of practices, representations, beliefs, which shatter the pretended unity and which alone permitted men to handle the complexity of relations with the divine world." Of course; but there is also great permeability between the rites and representations and beliefs of different peoples; and the idea that Herakles is Melqart is theirs, not ours. The great differences that certainly existed were not perceived as unbridgeable.