



(Re)Ordering the Gods. The Mythographic Web through Times

25-26 November 2021: online workshop

Abstracts & Biographies

François Lissarrague: "Ordering Herakles" and Theseus deeds: two pictorial cycles'

The series of Heracles' works are methodically classified by historians or mythographers such as Diodorus or Apollodorus. However, from the 5th century onwards, we observe a desire to organise them into images. In addition to the scattered, segmented representations of this or that 'exploit', a series that would become canonical appears at Olympia on the metopes of the temple of Zeus. A similar (but not identical) cycle is found in Athens, in the temple of Hephaestus.

This phenomenon of 'ordering' is complemented, in the temple of Hephaestus, by the parallel series of trials that Theseus undergoes before his arrival in Athens and his recognition by Aegeus. To legitimise himself, Theseus, like Herakles, had to perform a series of exploits or labours. This is a recent tradition; as early as 580 BC, vase painters depicted the major episode of Theseus' life: the killing of the Minotaur. It was only from around 500 BC that they added the previous exploits into images, and they frequently did so in the form of a cycle. The accumulation of exploits is essential to express the value of the hero.

It was then, and only then, that Athenian painters in turn depicted the exploits of Heracles in cyclical form on vases, thus making the local hero Theseus the equivalent of the Panhellenic hero Heracles.

Biography

François Lissarrague has been trained as a classicist at the Sorbonne. He wrote his dissertation under P. Vidal-Naquet's supervision and became researcher at the CNRS in 1980, in the team created by Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet. From 1996 to 2015, he has been Directeur d'études at the EHESS (Ecole des Hautes études en sciences sociales) holding a chair on Anthropology and Images : the Greek experience. In 2014 he has been the Sather professor at Berkeley, giving a series of lectures entitled : *Panta kala. Heroic Warriors and the Aesthetics of Weaponry in archaic Greek art*. He is the author of several books on ancient Greek imagery, among them *A city of Images* (J. P. Vernant ed., Princeton 1986), *The Aesthetics of Greek Banquet* (Princeton 1990), *Greek Vases : The Athenians and their Images* (Riverside 2001) and more recently *La Cité des Satyres. Une anthropologie ludique* (Paris 2013).

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Charles Delattre: 'Mythography as visual art? From the compilation of data to their representation in the mythographic treatises of Palatinus Graecus 398'

The re-evaluation of the mythographic corpus since the 1980s has been based on the idea that it developed in contrast to traditional, oral poetic performances and came into being through the medium of writing. Mythography has thus been thought of and defined as a scriptural, archival and compilatory phenomenon, with the combination of data as its primary objective. In the last twenty years, the emphasis has been put on a dynamic conception of mythographic practices, where

innovation and interpretation combine with compilation to produce original, author-specific statements. I would like to extend this idea here by considering how some authors may have conceived of their utterance not as a 'text', in the modern sense, but as a *graphê*, that is, a mode of communication where the scriptural inscription, in its main architecture and in specific details, aims to produce a visual impression.

Biography

Charles Delattre is professor of Ancient Greek Language and Literature at the University of Lille, member of the UMR 8164 HALMA and associate member of the UMR 8210 ANHIMA. His research focuses on the narrative and iconographic practices that gave rise to what moderns label « ancient mythology », and on contemporary theories of myth.

His publications include an investigation of myth-making (*Le cycle de l'anneau*, 2009), the editing and translation of mythographic and paradoxographic texts (Ps. Plutarque, Antoninus Liberalis, Ps. Antigonos) and the study of Greek and Latin mythography and paradoxography, particularly in the imperial period. The works of J. R. R. Tolkien and Offenbach are also more occasionally part of his fields of investigation.

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Frank Coulson: 'Cataloguing the Medieval Latin Commentaries on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Problems and Perspectives'

In 1982, I began research for a projected catalogue of all extant medieval Latin commentaries on the *Metamorphoses* to be published as a fascicle of the *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum*. Given that Ovid was a medieval school author whose poetry was widely read, I anticipated that the initial research might be enormous and that the results might significantly alter our perception of the *fortuna* of Ovid. Some forty years later, the final copy of that article has gone to the printers. We have uncovered some 600 manuscript witnesses to the tradition; we have catalogued over 110 extant commentaries from late antiquity to 1620; and we have increased dramatically the known witnesses to previously known commentaries. The article has also revealed the quite varied nature of Ovidian interpretation in the Middle Ages, from paraphrase to mythography, from philological commentary to allegory.

In this "workshop presentation," I examine more fully the problems of conducting pioneering research on Ovid and the truly remarkable research results from this long-standing project. The workshop details how a researcher goes about finding the manuscript witnesses, a truly herculean task even in the internet age. We then move on to reveal through four case studies some of the research results. In the second half of this presentation, I focus more specifically on a French commentary on the *Metamorphoses* written in northern France about 1260 and outline more fully some of its strategies in interpreting the text. The Vulgate Commentary reveals the medieval scholar's extensive knowledge of myth and his relative sophistication in reading the poem.

Biography

Frank T. Coulson is Arts and Humanities Distinguished Professor of Classics at the Ohio State University where he also serves as Director of Palaeography for its Center for Epigraphical and Palaeographical Studies. His research interests are focused on the transmission of classical literature in the Middle Ages, particularly Ovid. He has published widely on the manuscript tradition of the *Metamorphoses* and on a Latin commentary on the *Metamorphoses* produced about 1260 in the Orleanais. His most recent books include *The Oxford Handbook of Latin Palaeography*, edited with Robert G. Babcock (2020), and *Le Commentaire Vulgate des Metamorphoses d'Ovide: livres I-V* from Classiques Garnier (2021). His catalogue of the medieval and humanistic commentaries on the

Metamorphoses is forthcoming in volume 12 of the *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum* (2022), and his translation of the *Ovidius moralizatus* of Pierre Bersuire will be published by Harvard in 2022. He is a member of the Comité international de paléographie latine.

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Lorenza Gay: "Selon l'istorial matière" Depictions and Interpretations of the Greco-Roman Gods in Late Medieval French Illuminated Manuscripts: Building Meaning(s) in Texts and Images from the *Ovide moralisé* to Christine de Pizan'

In the mythographic production of the Middle Ages the Graeco-Roman gods were often cast as pseudo-deities, as human beings who once were rulers, benefactors or inventors who, despite their earthly status were deified by their contemporaries. The deeds and stories of the pagan deities were also allegorised and interpreted by the medieval authors in the light of Christian thought.

From the early Christian period, the euhemeristic interpretation of classical mythology, which posited a human origin of the ancient gods, became a useful tool in the fight against polytheism. This tradition survived in the Middle Ages thanks to the *Chronicles* of Eusebius and Orosius and, in particular, Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, which in its turn influenced a wide range of literary sources in the following centuries.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the euhemeristic reading of myth manifested itself not only in the way the gods were described in the literary sources, but also in the way they were depicted in the illuminations that adorned these works.

My paper will address the way in which the euhemeristic interpretation is employed by the medieval authors in relation to the pagan gods and will illustrate how this interpretation was visualised in the French illuminated manuscripts of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

The literary works refer to the gods as once powerful rulers, and the purported royalty of the gods is expressed by the visual representations of the deities in the illuminations. I will outline the ways the devisers of the iconographic programmes chose to represent and convey this particular aspect of the gods to their readers, and address both the relationship between text and image and how the euhemeristic reading of mythology was related to the allegorical interpretations that it often accompanied.

Biography

Lorenza Gay is an art historian with a particular interest in iconography and iconology. She has a PhD from the Warburg Institute and her research focussed on the depiction of the pagan gods in French illuminated manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. She has an MA at the Warburg Institute in Art History, Curatorship and Renaissance Culture in collaboration with the National Gallery of London. Prior to this she received a MA in Art History (*summa cum laude*) and a BA in History from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan. Lorenza also has curatorial experience, having collaborated with UK and European museums and institutions. Most recently she assisted in the research and organisation of the Aby Warburg Mnemosyne Atlas Exhibition that took place at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (organised in collab with the WI) and with the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan on their latest exhibition *The Shape of Time*. She is currently working in the rare book trade for Symonds Rare Books Ltd.

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Elisa Sani: 'Feasting with the Gods: Ancient mythology on Italian Renaissance ceramics'

Around 1500 a new style of painted pottery become fashionable at the tables of the cultured elites of Renaissance Italy and beyond. Drawing deeply from the humanist tradition, elaborate painted scenes

soon covered the whole surfaces of vessels of all kind. This 'a figure' or 'a storie' painting on maiolica (tin-glazed earthenware) ultimately became known as istoriato. It was an important source for disseminating the myths of classical mythology, which were depicted on maiolica more frequently than in any other branch of Renaissance art.

The starting point of my talk will be the impact on pottery-painters from Urbino of the woodcuts of the first illustrated edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*) published in Venice in 1497, and reprinted several times, which became the most popular of all source books for istoriato maiolica.

How did maiolica painters illustrate myths?

While some probably merely used the images available to them in a mechanical way, others followed the recommendations of scholars in devising elaborate pictorial programs. Some, like the most talented of all maiolica painters, Nicola da Urbino (documented from 1520 to 1537/8), used the crude woodcuts as basic guidelines for his splendid depictions of myths on ceramics. Others went further than their contemporaries by writing the subject matter on the reverse of their dishes. Some had literary aspirations. Xanto Avelli (ca 1480/1500-1542), was unique in adding lines of poetry to his inscriptions which included references to Ovid and other classical writers. He was familiar with the texts and illustrated classical myths in his own unique cut and paste style. Some of the most revealing Ovidian subjects by Xanto will be illustrated and discussed. No mythographic list of the Renaissance can be without him.

Finally, who were the patrons who feasted with Ovid? Who ate off maiolica services painted with stories from Orpheus after having listened to Poliziano's play of the story staged by Leonardo da Vinci? Some of them had strange tastes. We will shed some light on the people who enjoyed eating off depictions of abductions, beheadings and descents to the underworld at the tables of their countryside villas.

Biography

The most important focus of my research is on the 'arts of fire' of the Renaissance, particularly Italian maiolica, Venetian Glass and Spanish lustreware. After studying Art history at Perugia and Siena Universities, I started my curatorial career at the Wallace Collection in London. I have subsequently served as assistant curator in the Department of Sculpture, Metalwork Ceramics & Glass at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Since 2017, I have been a Research Fellow at the Courtauld Institute Gallery, London, working on the catalogue of the collection of ceramics from the early modern period (Forthcoming, spring 2022).

Among the exhibitions I have curated, are *Italian Renaissance maiolica* at the Victoria and Albert museum (V&A Publications, 2012) and *Maiolica Before Raphael* at Sam Fogg Gallery (Paul Holberton books in Association with Sam Fogg, 2017).

Very recently I coedited, with John Mallet, the volume *Maiolica in Italy and Beyond, papers of a symposium held at Oxford in celebration of Timothy Wilson* (Ashmolean Museum Publications, Oxford, 2021).

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Françoise Graziani: 'La reconfiguration mythographique: un système complexe en acte'

In the tradition of Fulgentius' *Mythologies*, the mythographic reconfigurations of the Renaissance are thought of as systems of connections the coherence of which must be sought not in the search for a "truth of the myths", but precisely in the way in which the recomposition of divine figures and functions can still produce meaning. Thus, since Boccaccio, a system of dynamic relations has been constructed, designed to preserve their power of transformation and actualisation, and thus to

evolve: we move from a genealogical recomposition, which treats the divine families on the model of the kinship structures that link individuals and human societies, to a syntagmatic system that is more rational but is just as much part of a search for meaning based on the relativity of figurative representations. The mythographers of the Renaissance were aware that symbolic structures are only effective if they are recognised and transmitted in the long term as complex and variable systems, irreducible to any dogmatic simplification and requiring constant reinterpretation so that the articulation between form and meaning can be effectively adapted to new contexts.

Biography

Françoise Graziani, Docteur d'État in Comparative Literature (Univ. Paris-Sorbonne), is Professor Emeritus. A member of the UMR 6240 LISA (CNRS/University of Corsica), she has been responsible for the Paul Valéry Mediterranean Spirit Chair at the University of Corsica since 2013, and has directed the Environment and Society Research Federation (FRES-FR CNRS 3041) from 2018 to 2021.

In 2001, she founded with Jacqueline Fabre-Serris the international research network Polymnia, on the mythographic tradition Polymnia, as well as the associated Collection "Mythographes" published by the Presses du Septentrion.

She has edited several collective works and published numerous articles and translations on the mythographic tradition from Antiquity to the Renaissance, as well as on the history of ideas, the reception of ancient texts, poetics and the relations between literature, philosophy, arts and sciences in the 16th and 17th centuries.

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Agnès Guiderdoni: 'From mythography to iconology: images of the gods reordered by Jean Baudoin (Conti, *Mythologie*, 1627)'

This paper will study how the engravings inserted in the 1627 French edition of Conti's *Mythology*, edited by Jean Baudoin, are the result of an intensive *bricolage* and *montage*. We will try to identify the coherence of their internal organisation as well as the visual network they form between them. Finally, we will attempt to define the type of mythographic discourse they convey at a time when, in France, allegory and its visual expressions in the illustrated book were undergoing an important evolution.

Biography

Agnès Guiderdoni is a Senior Research Associate of the Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique (Belgium) and a Professor of early modern literature at the UCLouvain, where she is the co-director of the Centre for Early Modern Cultural Analysis (GEMCA). Originally a specialist of 17th century French literature, she more particularly studies emblematic literature and the field of figurative representations (*imago figurata*). She has published many articles on these topics, as well as on theoretical aspects of the relations between text and image. Among her publications: « Louis Marin's theories of representation between text and image : from visibility to figurability », in N. Saint et A. Stafford (eds), *Modern French Visual Theory*, 2013; in 2017, a co-edited special issue of the journal *La Part de l'Œil on Force de figures. Le travail de la figurabilité entre texte et image* ; "The Theory of Figurative Language in Maximilian Van Der Sandt's Writings", in K. Enenkel, W. Melion and W. De Boer, *Jesuit Image Theory, 1540-1740*, 2016. A volume on *Rethinking the Dialogue between the Verbal and the Visual* is in press with Brill. She is currently co-PI of the Schol'Art project, devoted to studying the impact of late scholasticism on the 16th- and 17th-century theories of arts and letters in France and Italy.