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Introduction

Greek religion—and Graeco-Roman culture more broadly—is preoccupied by the need not only to cultivate dynamic relationships with the gods, but also to call attention to demonstrations of their presence in and communication with the mortal sphere (such as epiphanies), which confirm the validity and efficacy of these relationships. A wide range of evidence from antiquity reveals human actors in the process of constructing and negotiating relationships with the gods; ordering and interpreting signs of divine presence and communication; and reflecting upon the nature and significance of divine incursions into mortal experience. In short, Greek religious actors were deeply invested in making contact, both through ritual communication with the gods, and through the active, imaginative construction of human-divine relationships. How then, as modern scholars and religious outsiders, might we address the Greeks' one-sided construction of a conversation that was fundamentally understood as two-sided and mutually-inclusive?

While recent scholarship has explored the theme of human-divine communication in relation to ritual practices initiated by human agents, such as sacrifice (e.g. Christopher A. Faraone, F.S. Naiden (ed.), *Greek and Roman Animal Sacrifice: Ancient Victims, Modern Observers*. Cambridge 2012), oracles (Julia Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi: Religion and Storytelling in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge; New York 2016) and divination (Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (eds.), *Mantikê. Studies in Ancient Divination*, Brill, 2005), less attention has been paid to phenomena which locate agency more fully in the realm of the divine, such as epiphanies. These offer a particularly interesting challenge to historians of religion, as an arena in which human worshippers creatively harness the imaginative potential of their own religious systems, attributing agency to their gods through the internal construction of elaborate patterns of external manifestation. As 'proofs' of divine presence and communication that are taken seriously by religious insiders, yet nevertheless culturally constructed, epiphanies are necessarily ambiguous and elusive, posing cognitive and hermeneutic challenges that are the subject of a complex cultural and theological discourse.

This collection of papers explores the diverse ways in which human actors constructed dynamic relationships with their gods in Greek and Roman religion. It examines the complex cultural discourses by which divine presence and communication was acknowledged, ordered and interpreted by religious insiders; and brings a wealth of literary, epigraphic and visual evidence together to explore patterns of communication and representation across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Greek and Roman religious actors were deeply invested in making contact with the gods and experiencing their presence, both through ritual communication and through dynamic encounters such as epiphanies. These occur in specific cultic contexts but also form part of a sophisticated cultural discourse that extends beyond the sanctuary and is richly attested in Graeco-Roman art, literature and epigraphy.

Evidence for cult practice in antiquity demonstrates the degree to which human worshippers are concerned with creating ideal conditions for communicating with the gods, responding appropriately to divine presence, and shaping relationships between gods and their worshippers. In this sense, ritual serves not simply as a set of rules for communicating with the divine (a form of ‘orthopraxy’) but as an ongoing and perpetually unfolding *conversation* between gods and their worshippers, through which social groups and individuals develop and review effective strategies for making contact with the gods, whether by rigorously analysing manifestations of divine disposition, or mapping relations with the divine onto sacred landscapes.

The difficult question of how to communicate with a deity that one might prefer to keep at arms’ length is explored by Diana Burton, who explores the strategies by which the cult of Hades at Elis and Triphylia managed the ambiguous status of a god associated with both fatality and fertility. Verity Platt and Georgia Petridou, on the other hand, focus on literary texts explore the nature and significance of divine epiphanies and their relationship to ritual practice, while themselves constructing and influencing their audiences’ conception and experience of the gods; in this sense, they can be both performative and discursive. Literary narratives of epiphany demonstrate a profound understanding of the cognitive and hermeneutic difficulties posed by human-divine relations and offer a sophisticated commentary on forms of divine manifestation which is often highly self-conscious about the text’s own status as a form of cultural mediation. The vertical relationships between gods and humans that were demonstrated, cultivated and celebrated through spectacular religious phenomena such as epiphany were afforded a potency that was eagerly adopted in other cultural spheres, whether through the device of ‘simulated epiphany’ (as argued by Platt), or the more subtle blend of ritual and performance that characterised political pageantry, from Archaic appropriations of epiphanic spectacle, such as Peisistratus’ Phye, to the adoption of the title *Epiphanês* and epiphanic self-presentation of Hellenistic kings, as argued by Renée Koch-Piettre.

The four papers included in this volume address in their individual ways the complex question of how to interpret the ancients’ one-sided construction of relationships that were understood and experienced as two-sided and mutually-inclusive. They all focus upon the creative acts of story-telling and depiction by which divine presence was experienced, represented and understood by ancient worshippers. The dynamics of human-divine encounter are explored across a broad range of cultural artefacts, in relation to a variety of religious cults. In many ways, they complement recent development in Greek Religion that have emphasised the importance of phenomenological and cognitive approaches to religion (as opposed to a concentration on ritual *praxis*, social identity and power), such as Julia Kindt, *Rethinking Greek Religion* (Cambridge 2012); Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods* (Cambridge 2011); Georgia Petridou, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford 2015) and Esther Eidinow and Julia Kindt (eds.), *Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 2016). They also keep with recently completed research projects such as *FIGVRA. La représentation du divin dans les mondes grec et romain* (2008–2011, European Re-

search project directed by Nicole Belayche) at EPHE, Paris, and the *Lived Ancient Religion* (2012–2016, ERC-funded project led by Jörg Rüpke) group at the University of Erfurt.

