INTERPRETATIO ROMANA

CLIFFORD ANDO

AMONG SCHOLARS OF CLASSICAL RELIGION, the terms *interpretatio Graeca* and *interpretatio Romana* commonly refer to the "broad identification among Greeks and Romans of a foreign godhead with a member of their own pantheons." These identifications are generally studied at the level of naming—not least because most easily collected evidence for them is linguistic, namely, the epigraphically attested use of "theonyms as appellatives." What is more, many argue that the central interest of *interpretationes* lies more or less exclusively in the act of naming, and not in the act of identification, and that *interpretatio* itself is "therefore a phenomenon in the linguistic-conceptual realm."[1] This seems to me shortsighted. It is my object in this article to suggest that an inquiry into *interpretatio Romana* might well reveal as much about Roman gods as it does about Roman language. Indeed, the currency of these terms in religious historiography today is all the more striking for their rarity in ancient usage, in which they functioned largely within discourses on linguistic and cultural translation. It is, in fact, precisely and paradoxically the import of *interpretatio* in problems of language that, I wish to suggest, reveals most clearly what *interpretatio* does not reveal in problems of theology.

We might start with *interpretatio Romana* itself. The phrase occurs in extant Latin literature only once, in a famous passage of Tacitus' *Germania* (43.4):

> apud Naharvalos antiquae religionis lucus ostenditur. praesidet sacerdos muliebri ornatu, sed deos interpretatione Romana Castorem Pollucemque memorant. ea vis numini, nomen Alcis. nulla simulacra, nullum peregrinae superstitionis vestigium; ut fratres tamen, ut iuvenes venerantur.
>
> Among the Naharvali is shown a grove, the seat of a prehistoric ritual. A priest presides in female dress, but the gods commemorated there are, according to *interpretatio Romana,* Castor and Pollux. That, at least, is the power manifested by the godhead, whose name is Alci. There are no images, no trace of any foreign superstition, but nevertheless, they worship these gods as brothers and young men. (trans. after Hutton/Warmington)

What did Tacitus mean by *interpretatio Romana*? Did he, for example, assume that the gods in question were *both* ontologically prior to human language *and* everywhere the same, and that their names in different languages arose arbitrarily? In which case, does he intend no more by *interpretatio*

1. Graf 1998, 1042–43.

Classical Philology 100 (2005): 41–51
 0009-837X/05/10001-0003$10.00

Romana than the identification of a referent by its Roman sign? Or did he assume that names arise organically, in which case Castor and Pollux were in some as-yet-to-be-determined sense different at Rome and among the Naharvali, and yet still the same? In which case, does *interpretatio Romana* refer not simply to the translation of natural signs, but to the intellection necessary to recognize the identity of their referents?

This development of Tacitus' diction takes us in a rather different direction from traditional scholarship on the passage and its context. *Interpretatio Romana* has generally been studied not for what it reveals about a specifically Roman form of polytheism, or in particular about its epistemic and linguistic premises, but rather as a phenomenon of religion in the provinces of the Empire. To such scholars, Tacitus has provided a name for—and is often taken by them to have intended no more by that name than—a simplistic form of translation, kindred to contact syncretism, by which Romans and Germans, in this case, recognized some identity between the *vires* of the *numina* of gods whom they knew by different names.[2] (I note in passing my own astonishment that this mode of understanding the divine has not provoked more reflection than it has; it seems to me an extraordinarily perilous way of being in the world.[3]) And scholars subscribing to such a reading of Tacitus have compiled vast catalogues of correspondences between Roman and provincial gods, drawing on both epigraphic and literary evidence.[4]

My concern with this body of scholarship lies not with its aims or achievements, but with the unreflective way in which Tacitus is made to serve them. For what few scholars other than Georg Wissowa have respected are the very different origins whence ancient evidence for the theory and practice of *interpretatio Romana* derives. It is hardly a distortion to say that extant theoretical reflections on *interpretatio* are universally Roman, while the vast majority of evidence for its practice is provincial.[5] And while it might therefore be salutary to suggest that a certain caution is in order before aligning Roman theory with provincial practice, it is surely time that we placed Tacitus'

2. This is the usage foregrounded by Graf 1998.

3. Perilous, that is, because the processes of recognizing a god on the basis of some exercise of its power and then naming it properly were so fraught with difficulty and simultaneously so essential. For an interpretation of Roman cult along these lines see Ando 2003b, 1–15 and 141–46.

4. For two recent studies of *interpretatio Romana* along these lines, see Webster 1995 and Spickermann 2001, each of whom uses the term more or less with the meanings it has acquired in twentieth-century usage. The principal development of recent years in scholarship of this kind has been an effort to situate translation and naming in postconquest societies and so redescribe them as forms of power relations. Derks 1991 is an exemplary study in this vein, harmonizing with efforts then commencing to view Romanization as a form of competitive performance among local elites. But translation is more than that: "In this chapter and the next I want to say: (1) that translation is an art of recognition and response, both to another person and to another language; (2) that it carries the translator to a point between languages, between people (and between peoples), where the differences between them can be more fully seen and more nearly comprehended—differences that enable us to see in a new way what each one is, or, perhaps more properly, differences in which the meaning and identity of each resides; (3) that it involves an assertion of the self, and of one's language too, that is simultaneously a limiting of both; and (4) that in all these respects it is a model of law and justice, for these two are at their heart also ways of establishing right relations, both between one person and another and between a mind and the languages it confronts" (White 1990, 230).

5. Indeed, Wissowa 1916–19 is practically alone in recognizing in any systematic way how far modern inquiry into provincial forms of *interpretatio* has developed, indeed, has distanced itself from its theorizing at Rome.

remark in its Roman context and situated Roman theories of *interpretatio* alongside other Roman writings on religion, language, and knowledge.

To start with, Tacitus' *interpretatio Romana* is perhaps most easily aligned with a glib but long-lived ancient tradition of remarking upon the names of gods (Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.83–84):

> age et his vocabulis esse deos facimus quibus a nobis nominantur? at primum, quot hominum linguae, tot nomina deorum; non enim ut tu, Velleius, quocumque veneris, sic idem in Italia Volcanus, idem in Africa, idem in Hispania.
>
> Come now: do we really think that the gods are everywhere called by the same names by which they are addressed by us? But the gods have as many names as there are languages among humans. For it is not with the gods as with you: you are Velleius wherever you go, but Vulcan is not Vulcan in Italy and in Africa and in Spain.

Thus situated, Tacitus finds his place alongside Greeks from Herodotus to Ammianus and Romans from Caesar to, well, Ammianus, in rendering barbarian religions intelligible to the educated elite of the Mediterranean basin by, in effect, eliding problems of cultural and theological difference altogether.[6] (I say this despite some misgiving that Greeks and Romans based their practices of identifying and naming gods on very different grounds and gave them expression in very different arenas.)

This reading of Tacitus finds support in other uses of *interpretatio,* both within and without ethnographic literature. Pliny, for example, explained that the Druids held nothing more sacred than mistletoe and the tree on which it grows—provided that tree is an oak. Indeed, he says, the Druids perform no rite without the foliage of those trees, so that it might seem that the Druids might well have, or might seem to have, gotten even their name *interpretatione Graeca*.[7] Presumably what Pliny meant is that the Druids got their name from the Greek word for oak. More specific to religion and akin to its usage in Tacitus is the use of *interpretatio* by Varro, who denominates *interpretationes physicae* or *physiologicae* the allegorical identification of gods with natural forces that constitute one important doctrine of so-called natural theology.[8]

But there is a further problem. It is not simply that words rarely map precisely the semantic fields of other words, even in the same language. The Romans knew that and remarked frequently upon it: the emperor Tiberius urged senators to speak only Latin in the *curia,* and himself apologized for using "monopoly"; on another occasion, he requested that the word ἔμβλημα be replaced in a *senatus consultum* either with a Latin equivalent, regardless whether that took one word or several, or with a periphrasis—I mean, circumlocution (which Suetonius calls an *ambitus verborum*).[9] Quintilian

6. Richter 1906, 5–11; Wissowa 1916–19, 2–18; Pease 1955, 1:426–27. On Herodotus in particular, see now Harrison 2000, 251–64.

7. Plin. *HN* 16.249: *iam per se roborum eligunt lucos, nec ulla sacra sine earum fronde conficiunt, ut inde appellati quoque interpretatione Graeca possint Druidae videri* ("[The Druids] even choose groves of such oak for their own sake, nor do they perform any rite without the foliage of those trees, so that they could seem to have been named 'Druids' by *interpretatio Graeca*").

8. August. *De civ. D.* 7.5: see Varro *Ant. Div.* frag. 225 and cf. frags. 206 and 23.

9. Suet. *Tib.* 71.

acknowledged this difficulty when writing about "rhetoric": the standard translations *oratoria* and *oratrix,* he complained, were no less ugly than the Plautine coinages *essentia* and *queentia;* what is worse, they were inexact.[10]

The problem is rather one of cultural difference, of which language difference is but one index. Polybius' narrative of the negotiations between the Aetolians and Manius Acilius Glabrio exemplifies the pitfalls that confronted Greeks in their early encounters with Roman magistrates, in which cultural differences were problematically masked by the apparent ease with which each side supposedly translated what the other was saying.[11] In 191 B.C.E. the Aetolians decided to ask the consul Glabrio for his pardon and resolved to commit themselves "to the faith of the Roman people" (εἰς τὴν Ῥωμαίων πίστιν), not knowing, as Polybius writes, the import (δύναμις) of the phrase. In fact, a Roman understood surrender *in fidem* as unconditional; the Aetolians, Polybius explains, were deceived by the word "faith" into believing that their action would obtain a more complete pardon (ὡς ἂν διὰ τοῦτο τελειοτέρου σφίσιν ἐλέους ὑπάρξοντος). After granting the Aetolians an audience, Glabrio began to dictate the terms under which they could act in the future. The Aetolians cried out in surprise: "What you demand is not Greek [Ἑλληνικόν]." Glabrio responded coldly: "Are you still going to run around acting Greek [ἔτι γὰρ ὑμεῖς ἑλληνοκοπεῖτε], even after you have given yourselves εἰς τὴν πίστιν? I will throw you all in chains if I want to."[12]

The jurist Gaius reflected rather more self-consciously on this issue when treating verbal obligations, which are created by formulae of question and response. The particular *verborum obligatio* "*dari spondes? spondeo*" ("Do you promise conveyance? I promise"), he writes, was peculiar to Roman citizens. Other obligations, he allows, are part of the *ius gentium,* and so are valid among all people, citizens and aliens alike. Did he mean that the one formula could only be employed by Roman citizens, and only in Latin, while all others were available to both citizens and aliens? And could those formulae be uttered in any language? And if Gaius indeed draws that distinction, on what basis did he do so? Gaius goes on to list Greek formulae valid between Roman citizens—provided they understand Greek; and he concedes that Latin formulae are valid between aliens, provided they understand Latin (3.92–93): "But the verbal obligation *dari spondes? spondeo* is so peculiar to Roman citizens that it cannot even be rendered in Greek in an accurate interpretation [*ut ne quidem in Graecum sermonem per interpretationem proprie transferri possit*], even though the word *spondeo* is said to derive from a Greek word."

The specific connection here established between language and political identity merits further study; it is in many ways peculiar, and peculiarly

10. Quint. 2.14.1–4.

11. For preliminary remarks on Roman attitudes to language difference in diplomatic and provincial contexts, see Dubuisson 1982 and Eck 2000; for some further remarks on dissonance between Greek and Latin political vocabularies and on the "effectiveness" of translation, see Ando 1999, 7–18.

12. Polyb. 20.9–10. The accounts of this episode have generated an enormous bibliography that is not immediately relevant to my purposes here, since I cite this episode merely as an example of a larger phenomenon that is not itself in doubt. For bibliography and a thorough reading see Gruen 1982; on *fides* in international relations see Hölkeskamp 2000, esp. 234–48.

Roman.[13] For now, I want to work my way back to religion and to Tacitus. For what Quintilian, Polybius, and Gaius draw our attention to is the contingent particularity and cultural specificity of concepts and the terms used to represent them. In other words, they draw our attention to translation as a historical problem, one we should seek to locate not simply in place and time, but from place to place, and time to time.

Within the sphere of religion, constructing an identity between gods through naming will have elided differences in iconography and theology that must have been negotiated at levels other than the language of prayer, for example. This much is already visible at moments when an *interpretatio* was contested. So, for example, Tacitus concludes an extended meditation on the origin of Serapis by allowing that (*Hist.* 4.84.5)

> Many identify the god himself with Aesculapius, because he heals the sick; some with Osiris, a very ancient divinity of those peoples; many again identify him with Jupiter, for his power over all things; but most identify him with Dispater, from the emblems that are manifest in him, or through arcane reasoning.[14]

We can perhaps trace something of the intellectual energy involved in these processes of identification in Pliny's remarks on the god who permits the harvesting of cinnamon: for it can only be culled *non nisi permiserit deus,* "if the god allows it." "Some *understand* [*intellegunt*] this god to be Jupiter; the Ethiopians call him Assabinus."[15] The identification evidently required more than merely instantaneous recognition.

The slippery nature of such identifications was never more evident than when those identifications were based on iconography, for the ancient world had itself already developed a sophisticated critical tradition on action and representation in the practice of cult.[16] This emerges with particular clarity—or particular complexity—in Lucian's remarkable ethnographic travelogue regarding the temple of Atargatis at Hieropolis. Of its inner chamber Lucian writes (*Syr. D.* 31–32):

> ἐν δὲ τῷδε εἴαται τὰ ἕδεα, ἥ τε Ἥρη καὶ τὸν αὐτοὶ Δία ἐόντα ἑτέρῳ οὐνόματι κλῃίζουσιν. . . . Καὶ δῆτα τὸ μὲν τοῦ Διὸς ἄγαλμα ἐς Δία πάντα ὁρῇ καὶ κεφαλὴν καὶ εἵματα καὶ ἕδρην, καί μιν οὐδὲ ἐθέλων ἄλλως εἰκάσεις. ἡ δὲ Ἥρη σκοπέοντί τοι πολυειδέα μορφὴν ἐκφανέει· καὶ τὰ μὲν ξύμπαντα ἀτρεκέϊ λόγῳ Ἥρη ἐστίν, ἔχει δέ τι καὶ Ἀθηναίης καὶ Ἀφροδίτης καὶ Σεληναίης καὶ Ῥέης καὶ Ἀρτέμιδος καὶ Νεμέσιος καὶ Μοιρέων.
>
> In it are two images, one Hera, the other Zeus, whom they call by another name. . . . Certainly the image of Zeus resembles Zeus in all respects—his head and cloak and throne—so that you would not willingly liken him to anyone else. But Hera will reveal to you as you look at her a form of diverse appearances. Taken all together, to be sure, she is Hera, but she also has something of Athena and Aphrodite and Selene and Rhea and Artemis and Nemesis and the Parcae.

13. For the present see Adams 2003 and Ando 2004.

14. *deum ipsum multi Aesculapium, quod medeatur aegris corporibus, quidam Osirin, antiquissimum illis gentibus numen, plerique Iovem ut rerum omnium potentem, plurimi Ditem patrem insignibus, quae in ipso manifesta, aut per ambages coniectant.*

15. Plin. *HN* 12.89.

16. For references and bibliography see Ando 2005.

Lucian's text is rife with such play on the identity of gods and statues. Here it is perhaps sufficient to note the irony that Hadad can be confidently identified as Zeus on the basis of iconography, despite the fact that the god was there addressed by another name, while the identity and name of Atargatis, or Hera, are not explicitly problematized, despite the enormous caveats Lucian must then issue about the form she assumes in the temple.[17] It is, however, precisely to the question of form or appearance that Gaius Aurelius Cotta addresses himself in his dismissal of Epicurean anthropomorphism at the end of *De natura deorum* 1:

> What are you thinking? That Apis, that bull sacred to the Egyptians, does not seem to the Egyptians to be a god? He is as much a god to them, I'll wager, as that Sospita of yours is to you. Nor do you ever see her, even in your dreams, but that she is dressed in a goat skin with a spear, small shield, and little shoes turned up at the toe. But such is not Argive or Roman Juno. Therefore Juno has one form among the Argives, another among the Lanuvians. Indeed, the form of Jupiter is that of Capitolinus among us, but that of Ammon among the Africans. . . .[18]

The difficulties raised by Cotta, of sheer iconographic heterogeneity, on the one hand, and of the appearance of Roman gods in foreign lands on the other, were often discussed, and Cicero's comments deserve placement in that long tradition.[19] What demands our attention here is not, once again, the fact of any given correspondence. Rather, Cicero through Cotta dramatizes the dynamics of naming and interpretation in two ways.[20] First, as part of an overall assault on anthropomorphism, he draws attention to the paradoxical power and contingency of representations. Velleius *always* sees Juno as Juno Sospita, and yet others see Juno in radically different forms, and will, presumably, *always* see her in those forms. And yet, Cotta asks, must we believe that Jupiter himself always has a beard, or that Apollo is in fact beardless?[21]

The second problem to which Cicero draws our attention is that such identifications, once made, must be made to work in and over time. Having identified Ammon with Jupiter through *interpretatio Romana,* short of repudiating the identification, one would have the ongoing challenge of recognizing in Ammon with his horns the essence? the person? of Jupiter brandishing his thunderbolt.[22] Hence what might have appeared a simple

17. On this passage see Elsner 2001, 136–38.

18. Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.82: *quid igitur censes? Apim illum sanctum Aegyptiorum bovem nonne deum videri Aegyptiis? tam hercle quam tibi illam vestram Sospitam. quam tu numquam ne in somnis quidem vides nisi cum pelle caprina, cum hasta, cum scutulo, cum calceolis repandis. at non est talis Argia nec Romana Iuno. ergo alia species Iunonis Argivis, alia Lanuinis. et quidem alia nobis Capitolini, alia Afris Hammonis Iovis.*

19. See, e.g., Kleve 1963, p. 98, n. 2, suggesting that Cotta's argument might be an adaptation of a sophistic argument against belief in gods altogether.

20. On the probability that Cotta distorts Epicurean disquiet about the naming of gods see Kleve 1963, 100–101; for a positive treatment of the Epicurean position see Obbink 1996, 427–29.

21. *Nat. D.* 1.83 (cf. 1.101–2): *isto enim modo dicere licebit Iovem semper barbatum, Apollinem semper inberbem. . . .*

22. Cf. Luc. 9.511–14: *ventum erat ad templum, Libycis quod gentibus unum / inculti Garamantes habent; stat sortiger illic / Iuppiter, ut memorant, sed non aut fulmina vibrans / aut similis nostro, sed tortis cornibus, Hammon* ("He arrived at the temple, which one alone the uncivilized Garamentes maintain for the races of Libya; Jupiter the dealer of lots stands there, so they say, but neither brandishing lightning bolts nor as before us, but as Ammon, with twisted horns").

problem of translation stands revealed as but one moment in a complex nebula of personal accommodation and cross-cultural dialogue whose implications reach far beyond the merely lexical. Or perhaps I should say, *translation* is here so revealed.

The most attentive ancient reader of Cicero and Varro did not fail to perceive the logical instability of this system, even at the level of cult within a single state. Writing about Jupiter, Augustine complained (*De civ. D.* 7.11):

> dixerunt eum Victorem, Invictum, Opitulum, Inpulsorem, Statorem, Centumpedam, Supinalem, Tigillu, Almum, Ruminum et alia quae persequi longum est. haec autem cognomina inposuerunt uni deo propter causas potestatesque diversas, non tamen propter tot res etiam tot deos eum esse coegerunt.
>
> They called him Victor, Invictus, Opitulus, Inpulsor, Stator, Centumpeda, Supinalis, Tigillus, Almus, Ruminus, and other names that it would take long to enumerate. They have assigned these *cognomina* to one god for different reasons, on account of different powers; nevertheless, they did not compel him to be as many gods as they had justifications for names.

We should be careful to observe first what Augustine for once does *not* seize upon, and that is the classical Roman tendency to atomize godheads and individuate divine powers and personalities at the level of cult.[23] Indeed, the power of his critique here partially rests upon his magnanimous concession that gods normally have single powers and are known by virtue of them: in other words, that one can identify a god by the *vis* of its *numen,* to adopt the terminology of Tacitus.[24]

The object of Augustine's scrutiny here is thus not Varro's *Divine Antiquities,* but his *De lingua Latina,* a fact made clear by attention to the niceties of Augustine's diction.[25] In reading that work, we are, alas, constrained by the loss of its first four books, and especially of the second, third, and fourth, in which Varro discussed the science of etymology in general, as well as arguments for and against it (*Ling.* 5.1). But beyond whatever he will have said there about etymology—he will, for example, have had to consider whether names are natural or arbitrary—he turns in his fifth book to case studies and there admits a further object of study, namely, semantics. As he there asserts (5.2), "every word has two innate features: from what thing and in what thing it is assigned as a name" (*cum unius cuiusque verbi naturae sint duae, a qua re et in qua re vocabulum sit impositum* [trans. after Kent]).

Varro's first case study is the body of terms used to describe places and the things that are connected to them (5.10); his second subject is immortal

23. Scheid 1999; Ando 2003b, 141–46.

24. Cf. Caes. *B Gall.* 6.17: *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 caelestium tenere, Martem bella regere* ("After him, [they worship] Apollo and Mars and Jupiter and Minerva. Concerning them [the Gauls] have practically the same opinion as other races do: Apollo wards off disease, Minerva teaches the principles of works and crafts, Jupiter holds the rulership of the heavens, and Mars reigns in warfare")—a list of *potestates* if ever there was one.

25. Cf. Varro *Ling.* 5.1: *in his ad te scribam, a quibus rebus vocabula imposita sint in lingua Latina*; 5.58: *Terra enim et Caelum, ut Samothracum initia docent, sunt dei magni, et hi quos dixi multis nominibus*; and 5.62: *utrique testis poesis, quod et Victoria et Venus dicitur caeligena.*

and mortal things, which he discusses in such a way that he treats things concerning the gods first (5.57). At an etymological level, some gods' names are clearly arbitrary, as others are natural: otherwise, they could not derive from their powers, as Saturn is from *satus,* "sowing" (5.64); nor could their names or the names of their powers be specific to Latin.[26] It might then seem quite natural for Varro to supply foreign names for gods. But that task—which is not, I should acknowledge, a dominant feature of his project—involves more complicated problems of theology and language than it might seem to at first glance.

Take, for example, the gods to whom he devotes the most space, Caelum and Terra*,* Heaven and Earth. These, it turns out, are also Serapis and Isis of Egypt, and Saturnus and Ops in Latium. Varro uses many different phrases to establish or describe these identities; indeed, he himself allows that he can call Heaven and Earth *multis nominibus,* by many names (5.58).[27] We may or may not, as ancient readers might or might not, find the arbitrary nature of gods' names troubling. But there is still a further difficulty, and that is one of semantics. It is not simply that as Varro allows Latin names to point to gods who are known by other names in other cultures, so he must also allow that gods' names are subject to the processes of coinage and borrowing and the vagaries of usage that he so meticulously documents regarding everyday words.[28] Among many examples, he cites the currency of Pollux, which not only derives from Greek, but is itself a departure from old Latin Polluces (5.73–74).

Rather, the semantic problem rests with the naming of gods in the first place, and with the epistemic foundation upon which practices of naming must rely. For even as Varro refuses to qualify his equation of Caelum with Serapis with Saturn with Jupiter, he nevertheless debates the appropriateness of any given name. Ennius calls Jupiter *pater,* "Father," writes Varro, because Jupiter *patefacit,* "makes evident" the seed: "for then it is evident that conception has taken place, when that which is born comes out. . . . This same thing is shown more clearly by Jupiter's ancient name: for he once was called Diovis and Diespiter, which is to say, 'Father Day' " (5.65–66). (I note in passing that Tac. *Hist.* 3.84.5, cited above on p. 45, seems to reject precisely the identification of Jupiter and Dispater that Varro here assumes.)

If some names are more appropriate than others, and if naming normally proceeds from the perception of an exercise of power on the god's part, then both naming and identification must remain subject to the uncertainties inherent in any religious system that relies upon an empiricist epistemology.[29]

26. I take the emphatic focus on *vocabulorum impositio in lingua Latina* at the start of Book 5 to be decisive in this regard (*Ling.* 5.1).

27. See also *Ling.* 5.57: *principes dei Caelum et Terra.* ***hi dei idem*** *qui Aegypti Serapis et Isis. . . .* ***idem*** *principes in Latio Saturnus et Ops*; 5.64: *quare quod caelum principium ab satu est dictus Saturnus, et quod ignis, Saturnalibus cerei superioribus mittuntur. Terra Ops, quod hic omne opus et hac opus ad vivendum, et ideo dicitur Ops mater, quod terra mater*; and 5.65: ***idem hi dei*** *Caelum et Terra Iupiter et Iuno. . . .*

28. See the abstract discussion at *Ling.* 5.3 and 5.5–6.

29. Ando 2003b, 1–15.

"Luna, Moon," we are told (*Ling.* 5.68), "is so named because she alone shines at night." And if one does not so neglect the stars? "Some call her Diana, just as they call Sol Apollo" (5.68). But why do those who do not call Luna Diana act as they do? Whom do they call Diana? What if the moon is not Diana? And what if she is?[30]

In light of these concerns, we should return to Varro's assertion of a simple identity between Terra and Isis and Ops and Juno, and Caelum and Serapis and Saturn and Jupiter, for what Varro asserts about them is precisely what Cicero could not allow regarding Vulcan (*Nat. D.* 1.84, p. 43 above). It is, of course, possible, even likely, that Cicero meant no more than that Vulcan was not *called* Vulcan in Africa or Spain; likewise, it is possible that Cicero meant no more than that Jupiter is not always *represented* as bearded, any more than Apollo is always *depicted* as beardless. But how would we know? We run afoul here of that tendency in ancient literature to refer to cult statues as though they *were* the gods whom they seem to represent.[31] I say "*seem* to represent" both because ancient theorists often deplored the representational capacity of plastic images and their power "over the affections of the miserable," and because what is at stake in Cicero's diction might not be representation at all.[32]

There remains in any event the problem that the identity of the gods turns out to be distressingly and disconcertingly labile. It is not simply their names and forms, but the gods themselves who are πολυειδής and *multiplex.* On this point, cult practice diverges strongly from philosophical theology, for it was Plato who set the terms for virtually all traditions of Hellenistic theology, and they believed in gods whose identities were fixed and unchanging. The ontological presuppositions of cult were quite different. How should one then name a god? And how did one recognize another's god as identical to one's own, not least in light of their radical difference?

Gods were not alone in defying the reductive taxonomies of the semantic urge. Of the oak Pliny the Elder wrote (*HN* 16.17): "It is not possible to distinguish the types of oak by their names, which are different in different

30. Cf. *Ling.* 5.69: *quae ideo quoque videtur ab Latinis Iuno Lucina dicta, vel quod et Terra, ut physici dicunt, et lucet; vel quod ab luce eius qua quis conceptus est usque ad eam, qua partus quis in lucem, luna iuvat* ("She appears therefore to be called Juno Lucina by the Latins, either because she is also Earth, as natural scientists maintain, and 'shines' [*lucet*]; or because from that light of hers in which someone is conceived, until that light in which someone is born into the light, the moon [*luna*] helps"). See also 5.71: To be sure, gods are named *a fontibus et fluminibus et ceteris aquis*. But how do the waters get their names, and what is the nature of the connection between god and river?

31. Gordon 1979; cf. Ando 2001a and 2003a. For a valuable survey on the representation of gods in cult, see Funke 1981.

32. See August. *Enarratio in Psalmos* 113.2.6: "But, it will be said, we have many instruments and vases made of materials of this kind or from metal, for use in celebrating the sacraments, which, being consecrated by this function, are called holy, in honor of him who is worshipped for our salvation. And what are these instruments or vases, except the works of human hands? But do they have mouths, and not speak? Do they have eyes, and not see? Do we pray to them, because through them we pray to God? This is the chief cause of that impious insanity: the form resembling a living creature has such power over the affections of the miserable that it arouses prayers to itself, even though it is clear that it is not alive, so that it ought to be despised by the living. The images have more power to distract an unhappy soul because they have mouths, eyes, ears, noses, hands, and feet, than they have power for correcting such a soul because they do not speak or see or hear or smell or argue or walk," quoted and discussed in Ando 2001b. On the classical critique of idolatry see Ando 2005; cf. Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.84, on the sheer multiplicity of gods.

places, for while we see the *robur* and *quercus* growing all over, we do not see the *aesculus* everywhere, while a fourth member of the oak family, which is called the *cerrus,* is unknown even to a large part of Italy. We will therefore distinguish them by their characteristic properties and natures and, when compelled, by their Greek names." What then of the Druids, whose name, you may recall, Pliny not only proposed to derive from δρῦς, Greek for oak; he seems to have suspected that it might *actually* have come from Greek? But a druid was not an oak, nor, it seems, did Pliny necessarily believe that Gallic oaks were, in fact, δρύες, to the extent that he associated that word with a specific kind of oak. In other words, *if* Druid did in fact derive from δρῦς by *interpretatio Graeca,* it did so despite being, in Varro's terms, etymologically and semantically untrue. In other words, if it is true, it is false.

Which returns us, at long last, to Tacitus. If the Alci *were* Castor and Pollux by *interpretatio Romana,* I do not know how to construe that identity. I suppose, in the words of William Jefferson Clinton, "it depends on what the meaning of 'is' is."

This much at least is clear. In its enigmatic status, *interpretatio Romana* resembles many of the other mechanisms with which Romans and their subjects negotiated cultural difference, translation among them; it is likewise emblematic of the myriad problems besetting the study of cross-cultural contact in the ancient world.

I will close by asking one more question that I cannot answer. I turn once again to Tacitus *Germania* 43.4: "There are no images, no trace of any foreign superstition, but nevertheless, they worship these gods as brothers and young men." Foreign to whom?[33]

University of Southern California

33. This paper was first drafted for a colloquium hosted by the Institute for Antiquity and Early Christianity and the Claremont Consortium in Medieval and Early Modern Studies; I am grateful to Nancy van Deusen for that invitation. For comments and conversation along the way, my thanks to Andy Dyck, Sabine MacCormack, and Phiroze Vasunia.

LITERATURE CITED

Adams, J. N. 2003. *"Romanitas"* and the Latin Language. *CQ* 53:184–205.

Ando, C. 1999. Was Rome a *polis*? *ClAnt* 18:5–34.

_____. 2001a. The Palladium and the Pentateuch: Towards a Sacred Topography of the Later Roman Empire. *Phoenix* 55:369–410.

_____. 2001b. Signs, Idols, and the Incarnation in Augustinian Metaphysics. *Representations* 73:24–53.

_____. 2003a. A Religion for the Empire. In *Flavian Rome,* ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik, 323–44. Leiden.

_____, ed. 2003b. *Roman Religion.* Edinburgh.

_____. 2004. Review of T. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation. CP* 99:89–98.

_____. 2005. Idols and Their Critics. In *How to Talk about Religion,* ed. J. B. White. Notre Dame, Ind. Forthcoming.

Derks, T. 1991. The Perception of the Roman Pantheon by a Native Elite: The Example of Votive Inscriptions from Lower Germany. In *Images of the Past: Studies on Ancient Societies in North-Western Europe,* ed. N. Roymans and F. Theuws, 235–65. Amsterdam.

Dubuisson, M. 1982. Y-a-t-il une politique linguistique romaine? *Ktèma* 7:187–210.

Eck, W. 2000. Latein als Sprache politischer Kommunikation in Städten der östlichen Provinzen. *Chiron* 30:641–60.

Elsner, J. 2001. Describing Self in the Language of Other: Pseudo (?) Lucian at the Temple of Hierapolis. In *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire,* ed. S. Goldhill, 123–53. Cambridge.

Funke, H. 1981. Götterbild. *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 11:659–828.

Gordon, R. 1979. Production and Religion in the Graeco-Roman World. *Art History* 2:5–34.

Graf, F. 1998. Interpretatio, II. Religion. *Neue Pauly* 5:1042–43.

_____. 1999. Iuppiter. *Neue Pauly* 6:77–82.

Gruen, E. S. 1982. Greek ΠΙΣΤΙΣ and Roman *Fides*. *Athenaeum* 60:50–68.

Harrison, T. 2000. *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus.* Oxford.

Hölkeskamp, K.-J. 2000. *Fides—deditio in fidem—dextra data et accepta:* Recht, Religion und Ritual im Rom. In *The Roman Middle Republic: Politics, Religion and Historiography c. 400–133 B.C.,* ed. C. Bruun, 223–50. Rome.

Hutton, M., ed. and trans. 1970. *Tacitus: "Germania."* Rev. by E. H. Warmington. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.

Kent, R. G., ed. and trans. 1951. *Varro: "On the Latin Language" Books V–VII.* Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.

Kleve, K. 1963. Gnosis theon: *Die Lehre von der natürlichen Gotteserkenntnis in der epikureischen Theologie*. Oslo.

Obbink, D. 1996. *Philodemos: "On Piety," Part 1.* Oxford.

Pease, A. S. 1955. *Marcus Tullius Cicero: "De natura deorum."* Cambridge.

Richter, F. 1906. *De deorum barbarorum interpretatione Romana quaestiones selectae*. Halis Saxonum.

Scheid, J. 1999. Hiérarchie et structure dans le polythéisme romain: Façons romaines de penser de l'action. *ARG* 1.2:184–203. Translated as Hierarchy and Structure in Roman Polytheism: Roman Methods of Conceiving Action. In Ando 2003b, 164–89.

Spickermann, W. 2001. *Interpretatio Romana?* Zeugnisse der Religion von Römern, Kelten und Germanen im Rheingebiet bis zum Ende des Bataveraufstandes. In *Die frühe römische Kaiserzeit im Ruhrgebiet,* ed. D. Hopp and Ch. Trümpler, 94–106. Essen.

Webster, J. 1995. *Interpretatio:* Roman Word Power and the Celtic Gods. *Britannia* 26:153–61.

White, J. B. 1990. *Justice as Translation: An Essay in Cultural and Legal Criticism.* Chicago.

Wissowa, G. 1916–19. *Interpretatio Romana:* Römische Götter im Barbarenlande. *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 19:1–49.