Animals in Greek and Roman Religion and Myth

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Edited by

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and Sophia Papaioannou

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EDITORS' PREFACE

This volume contains a selection of papers originally presented at the international conference on "The Role of Animals in Ancient Myth and Religion", which was held with great success in Grumento Nova, Italy, from June 3rd to 5th, 2013, bringing together seasoned scholars and young researchers of Ancient Religion. The production of a volume that involves the contributions of more than 20 scholars depends on many individuals' diligence, hard work, and promptitude. First and foremost, the editors of this volume wish to express their gratitude to the contributors themselves, who observed the various deadlines, willingly complied with the suggestions addressed to them, and were patient with delays that the editing of a ca. 500-page long volume brings with it.

A few preliminary comments might prove helpful. The abbreviations follow those listed in the Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Dictionary* 9th edition, *L' Annee Philologique*, or the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edition. For the sake of clarity the titles of little-known works mentioned in each paper, and the names of their authors, are recorded in full. There is no comprehensive bibliography at the end of the volume; instead, each chapter is followed by its own bibliography which includes the full citations to texts noted in the respective chapter. A comprehensive list of the illustrations discussed in several of the papers is included at the beginning of the volume after the note on contributors. All Greek and Latin passages quoted in the main text and the footnotes are followed by English translations. Longer quotations in the main texts are indented. Double quotes have been used only for quotations from modern authors or for special terms. To each of the museums and art collections, as well as to individual collectors, who have so kindly given their permission for the publication of material in their possession we extend our sincere thanks.

The volume approaches the scholarly study of Greek and Roman religion from many different disciplinary backgrounds. From the very beginning editors and contributors joined forces to produce a collection of original arguments in engaging and jargon-free prose, which would appeal to a broad community of readers, both professional students of the classical antiquity and the general educated public. Of course not every aspect of the role of animals in Greek and Roman religion was covered, but we hope that the questions raised and the arguments advanced in the following pages will inspire further study in a most promising area of antiquity.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Marie-Claire Beaulieu is an Assistant Professor of Classics at Tufts University. Her main research interests are in Greek religion and Digital Humanities. Her book, *The Sea in the Greek Imagination* (University of Pennsylvania Press), proposes that the sea marks the boundary between mortals, immortals, and the dead in Greek mythology and religion. In Digital Humanities, Marie-Claire Beaulieu is working on making the creation and dissemination of knowledge about the ancient world more accessible through online tools. She is the principal investigator of the Perseids Project and the Associate Editor of the Perseus Digital Library.

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In the past five years she has delivered several papers at international conferences on the cult of Artemis in Attica, as well as on cults of early Rome and their revival under Augustus.

Patricia A. Johnston has been Professor of Greek and Latin Languages and Literature at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, since 1975. Her research focuses on Vergil and Latin Poetry, as well as on the Ancient Mystery Cults. Her publications include studies of Vergil's Golden Age, Mystic Cults of Magna Graecia, and more recently a commentary on *Aeneid* VI and a translation of Vergil's *Aeneid* (2012). As past president of the Vergilian Society she established their annual Symposia Cumana, which she continued to organise, with Giovanni Casadio, for the next eighteen years. More recently she has been co-organizing, with Attilio Mastrocinque, Sophia Papaioannou, and László Takács, the annual Symposium Classicum Peregrinum, which has progressed from Grumento Nova to Verona to Budapest.

Françoise Lecocq, Lecturer in Latin at the University of Caen-Normandy, focuses her research on the ancient and contemporary phoenix. In about fifteen articles, she has reviewed the understanding of the myth in a variety of original approaches and conclusions. She studied in particular the legendary bird in its connections with Egyptian religion and the Roman Empire, and the building of the myth from Herodotus to Lactantius and Claudian, in the Greek novels and Christian religion, and in iconography. More recent publications focus on the modern metamorphoses of the phoenix in texts and images of the 20th and 21st centuries. She recently published two articles one entitled, *Le phénix et son Autre, Poétique d'un mythe*, L. Gosserez (ed.), University Press of Rennes, 2013, and one on the translations of the Bible: "Y a-t-il un phénix dans la Bible? À propos de Job 29.18" (*Kentron* 30, 2014).

Dimitrios Mantzilas studied Classics at the University of Athens. He obtained an MA (1996) and a PhD in Latin Studies (2000) at the Paris-Sorbonne University. His dissertation title was: *Les Divinités dans l'œuvre poétique d'Ovide* (Lille, 2002). From 2004 until 2013 he taught as Adjunct Lecturer in Latin language and civilisation at the Universities of Ioannina, Patras, and Thrace. Nowadays he is an Independent Researcher, text editor and translator, and also offers private tutoring. He has presented papers at International Conferences and has published articles on various themes related to Roman Religion and Magic, Medical Texts, Roman Music, Laevius, Ovid, Plautus, *Alcestis Barcinonensis*, Roman women, *Carmina*

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INTRODUCTION

SOPHIA PAPAIOANNOU

Throughout antiquity animals were an organic part of the human world. An animal sacrifice was a prime means of human communication with the divine, as well as a major social and political event—its abolition in the fourth century CE essentially became the ideological boundary between the ancient culture of paganism and the Postclassical world of Christianity. Although anthropomorphic, the deities of the Greco-Roman pantheon had their favourite animals and routinely communicated their will through them, and on occasion took for themselves the shape of animals when visiting the world of the mortals. The religions of the Mesopotamian kingdoms, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Levant honoured deities of hybrid—half-human, half-animal—physical identities, or worshipped animals as incarnations of the gods on earth. Priests were trained to discern meaning in the flight of birds, decode divine messages inscribed on the innards of the animals, and comprehend a variety of marvellous occurrences that involved animals as divine omens carrying some message from above. The foundation of the very city of Rome is contingent on the manifestation of avian omens to the Roman twins contesting for the title of founder, while the idea of Athenian autochthony is epitomised in the association of the two earlier legendary kings of the city, Cecrops and Erichthonius, with the snake.

In myth the aetiological origins of several kinds of animals are to be found in the world of humans: numerous animals were originally humans who underwent transformation as a punishment for some grave transgression or because they insulted, often involuntarily, some deity in one way or other. In monumental iconography rituals and cultic events involving animals predominate. Greek and Roman art abounds in representations that immortalise a univocal relationship between god and animal/victim—an artistic immortalisation made possible only because of the exclusiveness of the interdependency between a god and a particular animal. Divine displeasure is routinely communicated through prodigies manifested in the unusual behaviour or appearance of animals (cows that talk, births of animal monsters), which special professional religious

officers are expected to decode. The cryptically significant character of an animal is best celebrated in literature, specifically poetry, where animals become allegories for the revolutionary or the sublime, but also for what is held to be pedantic and old.

The diversity that distinguishes the relationship between the divine and the animal world has survived and come down to us either because it was deliberately recorded, in art and literature, or by accident, in the aftermath of archaeological discoveries that brought to light sacrificial spaces littered with animal remains. The incredible variety of the ways animals define human interaction with religion and culture communicated through myth inspired the organisation at Grumento Nova, in the Basilicata region of Italy, of the symposium entitled "The Role of Animals in Ancient Myth and Religion", in the summer of 2013, and generated the collection of the papers in the present volume. As the ancient sources, both literary and material, involve their audience directly in the act of interpreting, but not always explaining clearly, their interaction with animals, the role of interpreter falls upon the modern critic. The papers in this collection bring together various methodologies for assessing the presence of animals in ancient Greco-Roman myth and religion, as this presence is recorded in art, archaeology, and literature, across a period of several centuries, from Preclassical Greece to Late Antique Rome. Several of these papers are in close interaction with others in the volume (most conspicuously, for instance, there are three papers on the religious significance of the cock, by Cruccas, Cosentino, and Mastrocinque, which obviously interact, and are therefore sequentially arranged), and several arguments extend across individual papers. All discussions in their own particular ways enriched and expanded the umbrella theme of the conference. All in all, the twenty-three papers in this collection have been organised in thematically related sections, and each of them, both individually and as part of a complex unit, explores more or less prominent aspects of the contribution of specific animals to the political and cultural sides of human interaction with the divine in Ancient Greece and Rome.

Part I: Animals and Communication with the Divine

Part One of the volume includes papers that examine the many facets of animal sacrifice, approaching it as a cultural, political, and literary phenomenon. The first three papers discuss various issues of the culture and ideology of animal sacrifice in Republican Rome. **Dimitrios Mantzilas**, whose paper opens this collection, briefly gathers and

categorises the particular rules that, according to official Roman religion, governed animal sacrifices to individual deities. These rules dictated that each deity be honoured through sacrifice of an animal of the same sex and of a certain colour. Nevertheless, tradition records several occasions when these rules were not followed, and Mantzilas devotes the bulk of his paper to discussing those divergences from the pattern, which he attributes to the fact that "they originated from an ancient era before the gods had a specific gender and thus it did not matter what gender of animal was sacrificed to them" (p. 53). Mantzilas points out that the rules of sacrifice at Rome according to Greek tradition (*Graeco ritu*) were often responsible for the fact that on occasion the gender of the victim did not reflect the gender of the honoured deity, but this was justified by the fact that the particular deity had been imported from Greece, while for the purely Roman gods such a thing would never have been allowed. There are recorded occasions when the rule of the same sex of the proffered animal and of the deity being honoured was not followed, not even for deities of non-Hellenic origin—specifically Fons, Veiovis, or Robigo—without any reasonable explanation. Mantzilas suggests that the lack of an explanation can be attributed to the fact that Roman religion is characterised by complex cultural interactions, a process that involves the importation of rites from various cultures (Greek, Etruscan, Roman, Egyptian, Syrian, and other) and their amalgamation with traditional aspects of Roman religion.

The next paper in Part One discusses the intercrossing of politics and poetics in the treatment of animals in the philosophical epic of Lucretius, *De rerum natura*. Lucretius takes part in a broader discourse in the Late Republic that condemned the injuring of animals and urged against animal sacrifice. Similar views are recorded in Varro's *De re rustica* and in Cicero's works. For **Giampiero Scafoglio** ("Men and Animals in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*"), Lucretius' overall attitude towards animals is clearly positive. Lucretius, Scafoglio argues, often expresses a negative judgment about men, and the ambitions and passions that deprive them of freedom and dignity, but also exhibits admiration for animals, as they embody a simple and pure way of life, in accordance with nature. This is already stated in the opening of the *DRN*, in the invocation of Venus as the goddess foremost of sexual union and regeneration of nature, a deity primarily welcomed and followed by the animals which come together under the impetus of sexual desire and celebrate the triumph of spring. This celebration of nature and living according to the call of nature clashes with traditional religion, which is a source of anxiety and fear but also of violence and cruelty inflicted by men both upon other men (such as the

sacrifice of Iphigeneia) and upon animals (such as the sacrifice of a calf). According to Lucretius, animal sacrifice is a cruel act, and differs little from human sacrifice. The two are joined in the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, where a calf takes the place of the maiden, while Agamemnon's cruelty is contrasted with the moving agony of the heifer desperately searching in the fields for the calf sacrificed in Iphigeneia's place (2.352-66). In short, Scafoglio argues, animals provide examples of a lifestyle in accordance with nature, one that reflects ideals of inner balance, detachment from passions and freedom from troubles, i.e., the ideals advocated by Epicureanism. Scafoglio proves this by identifying and discussing a selection of passages from the Lucretian epic.

The philosophical understanding of animal life in the texts of the Late Republic, primarily in Lucretius but also in Cicero and Sallust, is the focus of the next paper, by **Fabio Tutrone** ("*Vox Naturae*: The Myth of Animal Nature in the Late Roman Republic"). Tutrone is inspired by the interpretation of animal life as a physiological condition allowing the understanding of the basic rules of the cosmos, and he acknowledges that the establishment of the dialectical opposition between nature and culture as a typical cultural feature of Western mentality, already present in Late Republican philosophical thought, is bolstered by the creation of a clear-cut distinction between man and animal. He then proceeds to study the articulation of this philosophical debate as recorded in the texts of leading authors and thinkers of the Late Roman Republic, namely, Cicero, Sallust, and Lucretius. He observes that, although Latin writers often appeal to conflicting doctrines (Epicurean hedonism, Stoic teleology, Platonic spiritualism, and so on), explicitly criticising rival theories, they all seem to share a fundamental point of classical cosmological reflections: the consideration of animal behaviour as the mirror or voice of Nature (e.g. Cic. *Fin.* 2.32, 3.62; Lucr. 5.1028-90). This age-old notion, according to Tutrone, dates back to Greek (and especially Hellenistic) philosophy, whose various traditions had interpreted the evidence offered by animals in significantly diverging ways. Tutrone, however, considers that it can be deceptive to see the texts of Latin authors as mere *sources* for earlier conceptions; instead he urges that they be seen as results of a process of *reception*, in the proper sense, emphasising their tendency to adapt the conceptual paradigms of philosophy to the inputs of cultural history.

The three papers coming next in Part One discuss the cultural context and politics of interpreting omens involving animals. **Daniele Federico Maras**, in his "*Numero Avium trahebant*: Birds, Divination, and Power among Romans and Etruscans", focuses on the Etruscan discipline of interpreting bird omens, which evidently dates from much earlier than the

Romans of the Late Republican and Imperial times believed. Maras' starting point is the information on divination recorded in Cicero's texts. Cicero regards as part of the *disciplina* of the Etruscan *haruspices* the divination through the reading of entrails (*libri haruspicini*), the interpretation of lightning bolts (*fulgurales*), and an assortment of various divinatory and ritual matters (*rituales*). However, Maras judges the reading of the flight of birds, the *libri augurales*, to have been a Roman specialty: Cicero having himself been an augur, his testimony has often been cited, even in the most recent literature, as evidence of the extraneity of *auspicium* (as part of the *augurium*) to the Etruscan lore and the haruspicine science. As a matter of fact, recent studies, Maras points out, have shown that divination through the observation of birds was effectively practiced by the Etruscans at least as early as the 4th century BCE (and probably earlier). And perhaps even the observation of birds on the occasion of the foundation of a town (hinted at by the myth of the twelve vultures of Romulus vs. the six vultures of Remus) could have been part of the foundation ritual *Etrusco ritu*, according to the *Etrusca disciplina*, as testified to by Classical authors. A careful analysis of the sources—literary as well as archaeological—, leads, according to Maras, to presumption of an Etruscan or possibly Roman-Etruscan context to accommodate myths, sacred rituals, and iconographic religious representations featuring birds, and so throws some light on the cultural context inside which the close relationship between the ritual practice of the *auspicium/augurium* and the exercise of power in the Roman tradition developed.

Giuseppina Viscardi's chapter, entitled "Between Gods and Men: The Role of Animals in Human Creation and God Representation", moves from Roman to Greek religion and looks at how animals in a more abstract religious context were perceived either as an 'other' remote from oneself or as the 'other side' of oneself, and in any case, as an embodiment of the sacred force released from nature. Viscardi's case study of the way nature and the divine communicate their will to man through an animal-intermediary is the goat. In the context of Greek religion, from the Archaic period onwards, the goat, whose presence is commonly associated with the cults of Artemis and Dionysus, symbolises both death and re-generation. In relation to mystery and initiation rituals as well as propitiatory practices, the goat pertains both to the feminine, in terms of sexual energy out of control, and to the masculine, in terms of military power and conquest over one's enemy. This double symbolism of the animal in question is closely tied to its apotropaic function, and it is illustrated in the Hellenistic myth of the constellation of Amaltheia as related by ps.-

Eratosthenes (*Catasterismoi* 1.13). According to this myth Zeus, hidden inside a cave on Mount Ida of Crete, drank the milk of Amaltheia, a divine goat, daughter of Helios. Zeus' association with the goat continues: during the Titanomachy he wore the goat skin (hence his cult title Zeus Aigiochos), a weapon that made him unbeatable and terrifying because it featured on it the *Gorgoneion,* the head of a Gorgon, that petrified his opponents. Thus, Zeus appeared with a double nature (*diplasion*), both human-like (as baby) and divine (as warrior), in a myth that has been viewed also as relating to the transition from the monarchic rule to the new religious order of the polis.

The last paper of the first section by **Thomas Galoppin**, entitled "How to Understand the Voices of Animals", examines the ties of snakes with religion, more precisely divination and magic. Galoppin argues that the cooking and eating of snakes was employed as means of communication with the divine and learning the future. In Greek mythical discourse, Galoppin notes, it is possible for seers to acquire the ability to understand the languages of animals. In some texts concerning 'magical' practices, the seer can accomplish this either by having an animal, specifically a snake or a bee, touch his ears, or through the ingestion of all or part of an animal. A passage from Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* links the myth and the practice: the passage tells the story of Melampus, the *mantis* par excellence, whose ears have been licked by snakes to ensure his prophetic skill. Pliny also invokes a 'Democritus' who may have been ordered to eat the heart of a snake as a possible way to acquire the ability to understand the birds. Galoppin identifies the source of Pliny's information on the 'Democritus' anecdote with a collection of texts composed by the so-called *magoi*, authors of texts in which the animals are the objects of practices at the crossroad between medicine, religion, and wonder. These texts may also have influenced the author of the so-called Orphic *Lithika*. A particular passage from this poem (*Lithika* 691-747) details a ritual practice that describes the cooking of a serpent in order to make one understand the language of animals. Overall, Galoppin shows how the magical practice, by reshaping the model as recorded in myth, in the case of the cooking of the snake in the Orphic *Lithika*, defines anew the relationship between humans, gods, and beasts.

Part II: The Religious Significance of Individual Animals in Greece and Rome

The second part of the volume contains papers devoted to the religious significance of various animals, examining topics such as the animals'

special ties with a particular deity, special rituals, iconography, the importance and popularity of cults, and the depiction of animals on monumental iconography. The first group studied comprises the religious role of birds. The opening paper by **Emiliano Cruccas** centres on the cock and its association with the cult of the Thracian Kabiroi ("Ὁ περσικὸς ὄρνις: The Symbology of the Rooster in the Cult of the Kabiroi"). The cult of the Kabiroi and the Great Gods exhibits in its development through the centuries a great number of regional differences and syncretism with local cults. Cruccas aims at showing that birds of various kinds, and above all roosters, were important vehicles of symbolism within the Kabiric cult. The roosters were depicted as votive gifts on vases and terracotta figurines. Cruccas believes that the principal feature of these iconographic elements was the relationship, on the one hand, with the homosexual element often associated with the ephebic age, and, on the other hand, with the Hieros Gamos ritual. Further, the iconography of the roosters on the reliefs of the Heroon of Diodoros Pasparos in Pergamon shows features and structures which encourage connection with the cult of the Kabiroi and the Great Gods.

Augusto Cosentino in his "Persephone's Cockerel" examines the significance of the frequent depiction of the cockerel on specific collections of figurative representations of the goddess Persephone wherein she is depicted in the company of various animals. The cockerel is shown on the Locrian *pinakes* and on various statuettes, and evidently its presence was not accidental, but was in fact a real attribute of the goddess. Cosentino's investigation corroborates Persephone's particular link to this bird, and proposes to attribute it to the chthonic values of the bird (the cockerel of Persephone seems to be opposed to the meaning of the solar rooster, with whom a long list of solar deities were associated, from Apollo, his mother Leto and her sister Asteria, to the popular Roman-Persian Mithras and the Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda), but also to the idea of fertility, a theme incompatible with the domain of the chthonic gods. In addition, a specific cultic significance is highly probable in the depiction of Persephone holding a cockerel.

Attilio Mastrocinque's paper, "Birds and Love in Greco-Roman Religion", adds further details to the complex religious symbolism of the cockerel. After noting the prominence and frequency of the cock among the animals represented on Greek and Roman religious iconography (along with doves, geese, ducks, and other domestic avians), from the Archaic age onwards, Mastrocinque focuses on those representations of the cock that he considers to be tied to love. These are to be found on artefacts that were erotic offerings made as gifts by young people in preparation for, or

even celebration of, their marriage. Cocks are also featured on several objects connected to childbirth, or even denoting the involvement of erotic violence (i.e., rape). Mastrocinque argues that the erotic subtext of this iconography interacted with, or at least originally came from, the Egyptian tradition, where the goose is the hieroglyph signifying 'the child'. And even though the erotic element was not part of the Egyptian context surrounding the goose, Mastrocinque promptly identifies behind the artistic rendering of the cock on Greek iconography some distinct Egyptian cultural influences.

The next paper, by **Claudia Zatta** ("Flying Geese, Wandering Cows: How Animal Movement Orients Human Space in Greek Myth"), the last one on birds, moves on from the cock to birds more generally and the goose more specifically, and examines how these animals embody the coexistence of wilderness and civilisation, and offer a model for the study of this phenomenon in human nature. Zatta's study begins from the realisation that certain animals in antiquity developed complex roles as intermediaries between universes. They facilitated interaction between gods and humans, but served also a more practical role, for they directed men safely to reach foreign, previously unexplored lands. In those newly discovered places, men were to build new cities or even personally encounter the gods. Birds operated as scouts for the wilderness: they guided civilised humans from geographically specific and familiar places and into the wilderness, where nature rather than culture rules. Zatta further observes that, as a result of their immersion in a territory governed by nature, humans subconsciously behaved like animals themselves, thus proving that wildness, innate in all living creatures, never truly disappears but only stays dormant under the rule of civilisation. To outline the inherent presence of the uncivilised in the human soul, and its resurfacing when circumstances necessitate it, Zatta identifies certain Boeotian myths (associated with the sanctuary of Trophonius and the foundation of the very city of Thebes), which revolve around geese and cows. These ordinary domestic animals, nonetheless, under special circumstances regress to their wild status. In both instances, animals, the animate beings of the natural world, lead humans, the animate agents of culture, to the conquest of wilderness and creation of landscape anew.

Following these four papers on birds, Part Two continues with two papers on the religious significance of sea creatures. As in Zatta's paper, these two papers explore the animals as intermediaries. **Marie-Claire Beaulieu** discusses the presence of the dolphin in myth and religion. Beaulieu's thesis is that, in Greco-Roman antiquity, the dolphin was conceived as an intermediary that facilitated transitions between the