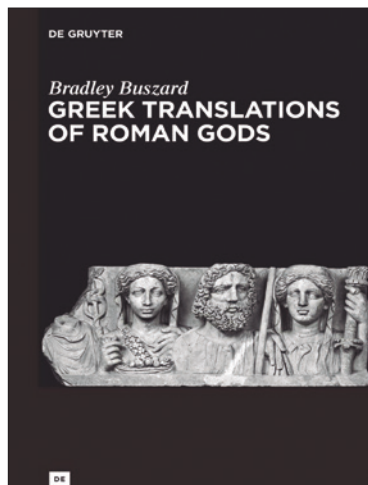


GREEK TRANSLATIONS OF ROMAN GODS



BUSZARD, BRADLEY (2023). *Greek Translations of Roman Gods*. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter. xii, 324 pp., 109,95 € [ISBN 978-3-11-107179-4]

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The names of the gods in the ancient Mediterranean constitute a hot topic which receives renewed attention in modern scholarship the latest years. Various monographs, collective volumes and even databases are concerned with the field of divine onomastics.¹ This ambitious book, written by Bradley Buszard, explores an inno-

1. For example, see Belayche *et al.*, 2006; Corinne, 2021; Galoppin *et al.*, 2022; Palamidis & Bonnet, 2024. An overview of the abundant historiography on divine names is provided in Bonnet, 2024.

vative field of study: the translation of Roman gods into ancient Greek through the ancient testimonies. The author acknowledges already from the beginning (p. 5) that literary translations are the volume's main focus and he comments almost exclusively on literary passages, setting epigraphic and papyrological testimonies and other sources on secondary place.

The structure of the monograph is rather simple. After a lengthy introduction (pp. 1-17), the author divides his material, the deities under question, into two parts. The first part is titled "Syncretized Roman gods", while the second "Unsyncretized Roman gods". Every Roman god/goddess and his/her Greek translations are classified in the relevant part according to this principle. For example, Pan is included in the first part, while Bona Dea in the second. A brief conclusion follows (pp. 267-269), as well as the bibliography and three indexes (index of Greek words, index of ancient authors and a general index). An index of Latin words would perhaps have been useful, while illustrations are absent from the book. The bibliography is extensive and up to date.

The reading of the "Introduction" is necessary, since the author presents the previous researches on Greek translations of Latin terms, for example on Roman magistracies and political vocabulary, the advantages of modern era thanks to the utilization of databases, and the ancient sources on which the monograph is based. Afterwards, the author discusses the history of Greek translation of Latin since the early years of the Roman Republic. It is also explained which ancient Greek authors are important for the volume (*e.g.* Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch) and which are not that much (*e.g.* Polybius) and a brief outline of their life and times is given. Of great interest are the remarks Buszard makes when he refers collectively to the attitude of the Greek authors towards Roman gods, their misunderstandings and their differences with Latin authors (pp. 16-17). That said, perhaps the author should have explained in the "Introduction" who he exactly considers as "Roman" gods. The reader is left to understand the deities who were venerated in the city of Rome and were part of the "Roman religion", but the question remains and causes further queries (see immediately below).

The division of the evidence into two broad categories ("Syncretized" / "Unsyncretized") follows the ancient Greek perception that some Roman gods were

A database of onomastic information, product of the ERC Project *MAP* can be found in: <https://map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr/ressources/map-database-tutorials/?lang=en>. See also: <https://epiclesesgrecques.univ-rennes1.fr/?lang=en> on a database of Greek Cult-Epithets.

analogous to their own and some were not (p. 18). Indeed, sometimes the parallels are clear, such as in the cases of Venus/Ἀφροδίτη or Iuppiter/Ζεὺς. However, the adoption of this methodology is simplistic and poses problems.² For example, the imperial cult is included in the first category, the emperors being considered as “syncretized Roman gods” (pp. 65-74). However, as it has been pointed out repeatedly in modern research, there was never a thing like ‘the’ imperial cult, but a variety of forms of homage to the emperors. To what extent, then, can the emperor be considered a “Roman” god, when the manner he received honours, *e.g.* in the communities of the Greek East included elements from the Hellenistic ruler cult? Even a goddess like Νίκη was not completely equated with Victoria by the Greek authors, as Buszard rightly acknowledges (p. 150). The *interpretatio graeca* often causes problems and can even mislead, such as in the equivalence of Libera with Persephone by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (pp. 97-98).

In this way, despite the fact that the author is based on the ancient Greek viewpoint, I think that the characterization of gods as “Greek” and “Roman” and the division of the latter into the seemingly clear-cut categories of “syncretized” and “unsyncretized” does not promote the complexity and variability of the Greek and Roman *panthea*. Perhaps a different methodology should have been followed or at least, more categories should have been added, such as “*Dubia / Incerta*”, which would have aided in the enhancement of the complex interactions between Greeks and Romans in the process of the translations of “Roman” gods in Greek.

The strength of the book lies on the abundant number of Greek testimonies on Roman gods that the author has assembled. It is aptly demonstrated that inconsistencies in the translation of a Roman god existed even in the works of the same author or between Greek authors. It is rightly pointed out in the “Conclusions” to the book (p. 268) that consistency was not a priority for the Greek writers: other elements mattered more in the shaping of their narratives. That said, more analysis would have been welcome, since the author rarely proceeds on synthetical remarks by combining the evidence from different ancient Greek authors (for example in pp. 16-18 and the brief “Conclusions”) or on remarks drawn from the analysis of Greek translation of Roman deities. In this way, the monograph sometimes gives the impression of a collection of Greek sources on the naming of certain Roman gods, rather than a synthetical volume.

2. Cf. Bonnet, 2024, p. 5: “(...) the [sc. divine] name cannot be reduced to one single category”.

Some remarks should have been formulated more carefully. For example, the author states that “[t]he indirect critique of Imperial cult that Buraselis has identified in Pausanias VIII 2, 4-6 is attached to that author’s denigration of contemporary morality, and not directed at Marcus Aurelius *per se*” (p. 72, n. 82).³ However, neither Pausanias, nor Buraselis referred specifically to Marcus Aurelius. The criticism of Pausanias addressed the exaggerations of the institution of the imperial cult in general, which must have disturbed the Greek intellectuals even before the Antonine period.

Lastly, some stylistic choices can be regarded as problematic, such as the exclusive use of “i” and “u” in Latin words. Though Buszard explains his choice from the very beginning of the monograph (pp. 1-2, n. 1), it leads to peculiar forms which cause the raising of an eyebrow, like “Seuerans” (pp. 2, 15, etc.), “Seuerus” (p. 15), “Uenus Uictrix” (pp. 142-144), “Minerua” (p. 115, etc.), “Uictoria” (p. 150, etc.), “Octauian”, “Ouid”, etc. Though the zeal of the author is clear, it would have been better if he had followed the standardized forms.

As a conclusion, I feel the need to state that these observations do not diminish the value of Buszard’s study and should not be perceived as criticism, but aim to help the many readers edge the monograph even closer to perfection. The author, specialized in Greek historiography as he is, knows his field well and has assembled a vast amount of evidence. The book is only the first in a series of monographs examining Greek translations of Roman concepts, since the author prepares a monograph focusing on the Greek translations of Roman magistracies (to be published by De Gruyter Brill). He is also responsible for the compilation of the *Greek Translations of Latin Database* (GRETL, <https://buszard.cnu.edu>, presented on pp. 3-4 of the monograph), in which the visitor can find references to Latin terms from Greek historiography. There was complexity and depth behind the process of translating the divine name of a Roman god into ancient Greek and both the book and the database allow us to get a glimpse of it through the fragmentary evidence from the Antiquity. Thanks to the patient and careful collection of the relevant evidence and its examination by Buszard, the reader can witness the exchange of ideas between ancient Romans and ancient Greeks and, in a final analysis, their understanding of each other. This monograph is a fine addition to the hot topic of divine names in Antiquity and offers interesting insights on the various ways the Greeks perceived Roman deities.

3. Buraselis, 2020, esp. pp. 2-3.

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