

Introduction

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REVISTA DE HISTORIOGRAFÍA HAS GENEROUSLY AGREED to host this volume, which brings together, under the auspices of the *Lived Ancient Religion in North Africa* project¹, original contributions by twenty authors on the subject of Historiography of Religion in ancient North Africa.

The papers collected here represent viewpoints from a diverse range of countries, including Canada (Vancouver), France (Bordeaux, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Paris, and Toulouse), Germany (Erfurt), Italy (Pisa, Rome, and Sassari), Spain (Madrid), Tunisia (Tunis and Sousse), the United Kingdom (Leicester and London), and the United States (Oklahoma City). We are pleased to present here studies from scholars working in both universities and research groups, with the latter including the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS), the *Institut National du Patrimoine* of Tunis (INP), the *École Française de Rome* (EFR), and the *Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Cartagine* (SAIC).

Some of these centres of research have a long history of work on the religious life of North Africa while others come to the subject fresh. All of these centres have been eager to survey new vistas, to bring new methods to bear, and to provide a non-traditional vision and a methodological approach capable of accounting at a historiographical level – through the analysis of archaeological, epigraphic, iconographic, and literary documentation – not only for cultural elements that we might call “micro-historical”, but also for underground currents that re-emerge forcefully in the *longue durée*, starting from the “Libyan” and Phoenician-Punic cultures (Matthew M. McCarty and Bruno D’Andrea), through Jewish and Christian communities (Thomas Viley, Alden Bass and Andy Merrills), and finally into the early Islamic epoch (Mohamed Benabbès and Anis Mkacher).

The common starting point of the contributions in this volume is an awareness of the complexity of a mosaic which has its main focus in today’s Maghreb. As a result of this complexity, any analysis of the history of this geographical region requires a careful interdisciplinary point of view capable of transversally retracing a rich series of different eras, trans-regional contacts, and cultural stratifications. That is, we need to be able to pinpoint short- and long-term religious changes, the transformation of ritual practices in local or broad spaces, and the construction and de-construction of cultic habitus by both individuals and institu-

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tions. From the layering and intertwining of these various strands emerges the ramification of a problem that still echoes in the politics of our current era and that continues to call into question relationships between European and Arab countries. The addressing of these problematic relationships, without omissions and without falling into an instrumental use of religion or ancient religions, has become even more urgent following the attack on the Bardo Museum and the conflicts related to the Arab Spring, which has not yet concluded. A great deal of methodological caution is thus needed to properly evaluate the kinds of “survivals”, “permanence”, “resilience”, and “archaisms” at issue here. This obviously also applies to modern festivals and ethnographic traditions, as Azedine Beschaouch has demonstrated for the *fons Mocolitanus* in Dougga and the Mokhola spring festival², an annual event that still amazes anthropologists, who are often more interested in studying the present than in plunging into the dizzying chasm of History.

This volume is inspired by the desire to initiate a sensitive but critical rethinking of the controversial and difficult issue of the birth of colonial and post-colonial archaeology (Andrew Gardner). In pursuit of this goal, we have sought to overcome old prejudices and ancient commonplaces, presenting important (often unpublished) documents and also drawing on numerous sources in Arabic (Mohamed Benabbès and Anis Mkacher). Without neglecting a past that still continues to have its own meaning for each of us, this volume offers an opportunity to look from a distance at the problem of religious life, avoiding the distorting lens of current events. It provides a chance to study the history of the archaeological discoveries in the Maghreb while highlighting the errors, compulsion, and exploitation of the past. At the same time, the contributions here also seek to recover the figures of those pioneering European and Arab *maestri* who have left testimonies of sincere curiosity and passion which must be understood in the context of the historical frame in which they lived, often encompassing times of bloody wars.

2. A. Beschaouch, “Épigraphie et ethnographie. D’une fête populaire de Dougga, en Tunisie, à la dédicace de l’aqueduc de Thugga, en Afrique romaine”, *Comptes Rendus des Séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 144.4, 2000, 1173-1182.

Our goal in this volume is to start from a historiographical appraisal, critically re-reading the work of generations of intellectuals, courageous explorers, and travellers who have been interested in North Africa from antiquity (Michèle Coltelloni-Trannoy), through the medieval period (Chiara Ombretta Tommasi), and down to the modern era (Hernán González Bordas). In writing this book, we have been confronted with the challenges involved in building a network of relationships that is not rooted in the guilt complexes of the one party or the resentments of the other. To avoid such entanglements, it seemed necessary to move forward in a way that recognizes the diversity, the complexity, the multifariousness, the alterity, the kaleidoscopic differences that ultimately represent (in time and space) a formidable source of intercultural richness.

First, we faced the problem of the appropriate method to use when approaching ancient religion. We believe that it is necessary to reconceptualize, in line with the new perspective offered by Jörg Rüpke, the controversial themes of (individual and collective) identity, of religious life as a monolithic social phenomenon that only functions as an institutionalized praxis, and of the sharp distinction between *urbes* and *rura*. Marco Tangheroni, citing the aphorisms of Gómez Dávila, wanted to restore complexity to History by putting the individual at the centre of the debate in the hope that this would overcome schematic and superficial interpretations dominated by appeals to easily identifiable forces. History is, rather, the result of several concomitant and distinct causes intertwined in a complex web of influence. It is inextricably linked to the environmental context and responds to multiple logics and dynamics, often activated and triggered by single individuals. Tangheroni sums up the position in an ironically concise manner, writing, “What is not complicated is false”.

Secondly, we are convinced that more respect is due to that “restlessness” which must always, in our opinion, be a companion of historians who do not wish to misrepresent the reality that is the subject of their studies. This sense of anxious searching has the potential to give this profession an artisanal, if not an artistic, character, and makes fundamental the apprenticeship phase in which students learn from their masters. Let us then remind ourselves of the rich legacy bequeathed to us in the form of research on religious life in Africa by – in addition to many others not discussed here for one reason or another – Julien, Louis, and Claude Poinssot (María Fernández Portaencasa), Lucien Bertholon (Ridha Kaabia), Louis Carton (Jean-Louis Podvin), Paul Gaukler (Hamden Ben Romdhane), Gilbert-Charles Picard (José Carlos López Gómez), and, finally, Marcel Le Glay (Alberto Gavini). Of the last of these, we remember with great fondness the lessons on Saturn, the Goddess Africa, and Serapis delivered at the *Academie des sciences, des lettres et des arts Beit el Hikma* in Carthage, as well as in Paris and, on several occasions, in Sardinia. This spirit of gratitude towards those who preceded us pervades Paola Ruggeri’s closing chapter in this volume, which collects the results (obviously from the point of view of the History of Religions) of over thirty years of studies and meetings of the *L’Africa Romana* between 1983 and the 21st Conference in December 2017 in Tunis.

We are very proud of the results presented here and of the participation of all involved in this project. We are also very grateful to María Fernández Portaencasa for her invaluable collaboration, to Corinne Bonnet for agreeing to write the conclusions, and to the Direc-

tor of the *Revista de Historiografía*, Jaime Alvar Ezquerra, as well as to its anonymous peer reviewers for helping us to significantly improve the content of the volume.

Finally, we cannot conclude without recalling that the “biography” of this book – conceived in August 2018, launched during 2019, and completed during 2020 and 2021 – coincided with the months tragically marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. This difficult time not only made the psychological and practical (especially bibliographic) dimensions of the research undertaken by the authors much more difficult, but it sadly also took one of them from us. This book is dedicated to our colleague Abdelfattah Ichkhakh.