

GILBERT-CHARLES PICARD (1913-1998) ET LES
RELIGIONS DE L'AFRIQUE ANTIQUE

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Abstract

This article analyses, from a historiographic perspective, the most important aspects of Charles-Gilbert Picard's work on the religious world of the populations inhabiting the Maghreb during the Punic and Roman periods, with special emphasis on his *magnum opus* on the subject, *Les religions de l'Afrique Antique*. In do-

Résumé

Cet contribution se propose analyser, d'un point de vue historiographique, les aspects les plus pertinents des travaux de Charles-Gilbert Picard relatifs à l'univers religieux des populations qui ont habité le Maghreb à l'époque punique et romaine, avec un accent particulier sur ce qui fut son opus magnum sur le sujet, *Les religions*

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ing so, I have attempted to explain the evolution in thought of an author who was one of the most prominent scholars of the ancient religions in North Africa between the end of the Second World War and the process of decolonisation of the Maghreb.

Keywords

Ancient religion, Gilbert-Charles Picard, historiography, Punic, Roman.

de l'Afrique Antique. J'ai ainsi tenté d'expliquer l'évolution de la pensée d'un auteur qui fut l'un des plus importants spécialistes de l'étude des religions anciennes en Afrique du Nord entre la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale et le processus de décolonisation du Maghreb.

Mots-clés

Gilbert-Charles Picard, historiographie, punique, religion ancienne, romain.

GILBERT-CHARLES PICARD (1913-1998) was one of the most prominent historians of the 20th century engaged in the study of the peoples who lived in North Africa in antiquity. His monumental legacy includes more than 120 published works on the subject. He was especially interested in archaeology and art, in which he became an authority on iconography and stylistic trends. His analysis was characterised by remarkable methodological sophistication, stepping beyond mere description and instead seeking to uncover the political, economic, social, or religious motivations underlying the creation of a sculpture, painting, or mosaic work¹. This gave Picard's *oeuvre* a multi-faceted and interdisciplinary dimension, the core of his work being developed within the historiographic trends that had emerged among the second generation of the *Annales* school.

His work encompassed many of the economic, social, religious, demographic, urban, material and artistic aspects of Roman and Punic society. In his *thèse d'Etat*, completed in 1954, he analysed the evolution of Roman trophies and presented a supplementary thesis on his archaeological work in the *Civitas Mactariana*, published in the journal *Karthago*. In the former he displayed an impressive ability to interpret artistic documents – in this case, the Victories – in their historical context and to analyse their stylistic and iconographic evolution over long periods, putting him at the forefront of what would become one of his main lines of research, the study of the classical plastic and figurative arts.

Although it would be inaccurate to classify Picard as a pure historian of religions, he did explore various religious elements of the societies of Punic and Roman Africa in order to provide answers to problems he encountered throughout his career. It was this that led him to publish in 1954 *Les religions de l'Afrique Antique*, his most significant work on the religions of ancient North Africa.

In this article I will focus exclusively on Punic and early Imperial Roman religion. Those aspects of his work that relate to the Christianisation of North Africa cannot be encompassed within the confines of this study.

1. N. Chaisemartin, “Gilbert-Charles Picard (15 octobre 1913 – 21 décembre 1998)”, *Antiquités Africaines*, 35, 1999, 4-8.

1. The Tunisian Period. Les *Religions de l'Afrique Antique*

Picard's interest in the study of the ancient peoples of North Africa began to take shape at the end of the 1930s, when after a stay at the *École française* of Rome, his thesis advisor and director of the *École*, Jérôme Carcopino, put his name forward to direct the excavations of *Castellum Dimmidi* (Algeria).

His career in North African studies was consolidated in January 1942, when he became interim director of the Tunisian Department of Antiquities, a position made permanent a few years later (1946). In addition to the bureaucratic and administrative tasks required in relation to the various excavations and museums dotted throughout the country, the appointment also enabled him to embark upon a productive and wide-ranging academic career in which he studied various aspects of the societies of ancient North Africa, including the analysis of the evolution of the cities of Maktar and Carthage, where Picard carried out his main archaeological work.

One of his first studies on religion was published in 1945 as a result of the archaeological excavations that Pierre Cintas conducted at “the sanctuary of Tanit in Carthage” (later called “the Tophet at Carthage”) from July 1944². In this paper, Picard offered a description of the findings and carried out a brief analysis of the most relevant material, including a sculpture of Baal, another of Baalit and a set of *cippi*. The stratigraphy and material remains allowed him to distinguish two phases of occupation. The latter (6th-5th centuries BCE) contained a series of small rectangular buildings with a cavity inside where jars had been placed, which he interpreted as *bothroi* intended to receive libations.

In a work published in 1946 on the iconography of a mosaic representing Venus found in a Roman villa in Ellès, Picard demonstrated both his skill as an art historian and his encyclopaedic knowledge of mythological matters, while at the same time delving more deeply into the interpretative models of *Religionsgeschichte* by proposing that the mosaic in which Venus appeared alongside the centaurs Polystephanus and Archeus had a prophylactic function due to the apotropaic signification both of the goddess and of the tripartite schema of the iconography³. Many of these North African mosaics constituted, according to Picard, a “grand talisman” that protected the owner of the house and his family from various evils.

In the same year he published a work entitled *Le mysticisme africain*. Here, taking advantage of the recent discovery of three funerary monuments, he synthesised some of the ideas he had developed (perhaps under the influence of his teacher Carcopino and the reading of Franz Cumont's *chefs-d'œuvre*)⁴ in order to argue that “mystery cults” proliferated in

2. G.-Ch. Picard, “Le sanctuaire de Tanit à Carthage”, *Comptes Rendus des Séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1945, 443-452.

3. G.-Ch. Picard, “Le couronnement de Vénus”, *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Antiquité*, 58, 1941-1946, 87.

4. F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, Paris, 1929 (4th ed.); J. Carcopino, *Aspects mystiques de la Rome païenne*, Paris, 1942. There was regular correspondence between Carcopino and Cumont, and it was in fact Picard's teacher who encouraged Cumont to publish his last work (*Lux Perpetua*)

Carthaginian and Roman Africa. Picard argued that the divinization of the dead was a practice typical of Punic culture, reflected in literary episodes such as the ritual sacrifice of Dido or Amilcar, with the aim of securing the prosperity of the community and evidenced by the immolation of children carried out in the tophets. This practice was continued in modified form throughout the Roman period and reinforced through the influence of Pythagorean groups arriving from southern Italy⁵. One of the three monuments he analysed, the sarcophagus of *Uccubi* representing an individual identified by Picard as Endimion, Selene's lover, was taken to demonstrate how deeply rooted these mystery cults (many of them related to Caelestis) were in North Africa. In this case, following Cumont's theories on the iconography of the sarcophagi of neo-Pythagorean doctrines of immortality (which guaranteed the eternal rest of the soul in a lunar or luni-solar dominion), Picard interpreted the love between Selene (the moon) and Endimion as symbolizing the power of attraction that the moon exercised on the souls of those initiated into the mysteries of Tanit-Caelestis who aspired to eternal rest in the astral realm⁶. According to Picard, the influence that the *doctrines grecques* exerted on the Punic world led to the transformation of this religion. Traces of Eleusinian cult that took root in African soil from the 4th century BCE could be detected in the testimony of Diodorus Siculus (XIV 77, 5), in the proliferation during the same period of Dionysian symbols on the stelae of the tophet of Carthage, or in the numerous funeral tablets displaying the attributes of Demeter and Persephone⁷. This resulted in the integration of North Africans into that *courant mystique* (to paraphrase our author)⁸, which flowed throughout the Roman Empire from the end of the 1st century CE. Influenced by Stoic, Pythagorean and Neoplatonic philosophical doctrines, it played a fundamental role in the development of funeral rites that sought to ensure the perpetual rest of the dead not within the realm of the *dii inferi*, but on the astral plane⁹. Picard applied the same interpretative approach, to give one example, to the Mactarian stele of *Iulia Mo(desta?) Benenata*, whose epitaph wished her eternal rest in the Elysium of Proserpine¹⁰.

based on lectures he had given at Yale and published under the title *After Life in Roman Paganism* (see B. Rochette & A. Motte, "Introduction historiographique", in F. Cumont, *Lux Perpetua*, volume édité par Bruno Rochette et André Motte avec la collaboration de Bastien Toune, Turin, 2009, XXXIV).

5. G.-Ch. Picard, "Le mysticisme africain", *Comptes Rendus des Séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1946, 443-444.

6. G.-Ch. Picard, "Le mysticisme africain", *op. cit.*, n. 5, 445-451. See F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des romains*, Paris, 1942, 209-212.

7. G.-Ch. Picard, "Le mysticisme africain", *op. cit.*, n. 5, 452-459.

8. G.-Ch. Picard, "Le mysticisme africain", *op. cit.*, n. 5, 459.

9. G.-Ch. Picard, "Le mysticisme africain", *op. cit.*, n. 5, 464. For the development of this interpretative background Picard was deeply influenced by Cumont, *Recherches ...*, *op. cit.*, n. 6.

10. *ICMactar II 18*. Cf. more recently *AE 2005*, 161: *Si quis honos vitae / est testis post mune/ra fati mortis sorte / cluet cum iam s(u)b fine / supremo aspicit infe/rnorum Acherusia te/mpla deorum secure/que videt strepitum / Acherontis avari na/mqu(e) egomet quod pio se/mper in corpore vixi Ely/sios teneo mites Proserpin/ae campos / lege deum solemq(ue) / super ac sidera novi Iulia / Mo(desta?) Benenata h(onesta) f(emina) vix(it) annis / in pace LXXXIII menses X / h(ic) s(ita) e(st).*

In an article published in 1948, Picard continued his investigation into the issue of child sacrifice in the Punic world. Based on the archaeological data from the tophets of Carthage and *Hadrumentum* (Sousse), he argued that child sacrifice continued until 146 BCE and that after the Roman conquest it was replaced by animal sacrifice. The word *molchomor* found on a stele in Malta was taken to allude precisely to this substitution. Picard also briefly analysed a fragment of the *Passio Perpetua*, which mentions a group of Christians condemned to death in the amphitheatre, who were dressed up as priests of Saturn and priestesses of Ceres, and concluded that this represented an actual substitute human sacrifice in the guise of an execution. According to Picard, the term *sacerdos* used in relation to Saturn was a synonym for *sacratus* and alluded to an adherent of the god who had been initiated into his mysteries¹¹.

Several of the lines of research that Picard had taken up in these early papers were developed in his most significant work on the religions of the peoples of North Africa: *Les religions de l'Afrique Antique* (1954). In this book he analyses the historical evolution of religious practices in the Maghreb from protohistory to the 3rd century CE, drawing on the study of archaeological, iconographic, epigraphic, and literary sources. The author himself acknowledged that an “étude d'ensemble sur les religions anciennes de l'Afrique” had not previously been undertaken, so this was an ambitious work in which he attempted to cover such diverse topics as the religious structures of the protohistoric peoples, the genesis of what he termed “Punic religion” or “African religion” (the origins of which he located between the period of Phoenician colonisation and the 4th century BCE), and the evolution of this religious system after the integration of these territories into the Roman Empire. The book is divided into eight chapters.

The first is dedicated to the study of the religious structures of the Libyans prior to Phoenician colonisation. Since the data available for analysis was practically non-existent, Picard based his approach on anthropological and sociological studies on the protohistoric peoples of the Mediterranean, with Roger Caillois' theories as one of his main sources of inspiration. These studies, deeply embedded in colonial thought, conceptualized the religious systems of protohistoric peoples as a “primitive” form of religiosity grounded in the idea of “the sacred” (*le sacré*)¹². According to this concept, which was developed in the work of Caillois *L'homme et le sacré*, these peoples believed that there existed in nature a kind of “genie” that sacralized, temporarily or permanently, everything they possessed, and Picard maintained that the religious practices of the Libyan peoples were based on the veneration of just such entities. He argues that some of the cultic practices documented for certain African peoples from prehistoric times to the present day, such as the cult of stones (*mzarras*), whose “magic” essence gave rise to the baetylic cults¹³, or the cult of water, which formed the basis

11. G.-Ch. Picard, “Les sacerdotés de Saturne et les sacrifices humains dans l'Afrique romaine”, *Recueil des Notices et Mémoires de la Société Archéologique de la Province de Constantine*, 66, 1948, 117-123.

12. He already anticipated this in the introduction, p. X: “On verra en effet que les Libyens ne semblent pas avoir été capables de s'élever au-dessus de conceptions religieuses tout à fait élémentaires, et qu'ils ont aisément accepté les conceptions théologiques et la liturgie que leur proposaient les colons orientaux”.

13. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions de l'Afrique Antique*, Paris, 1954, 5-6. These cults would have evolved autonomously, rather than being a practice imported from Phoenician cities.

for the development of healing cults in Roman times, originated in such mental constructs. Likewise, from the remotest times the “sacred” would have been the determining factor in the worship of certain animals, such as rams (as documented in the Neolithic cave paintings or in the Berber beliefs of 10th century CE Morocco), and even in human beings, as evidenced in the cult of the dead or in the veneration of certain Numidian kings (notwithstanding the strong Hellenistic influence of these practices)¹⁴.

The second chapter focuses on the genesis of Punic religion. Picard assigns a central role to the priesthood of Carthage, who were responsible for developing a religious system that was adopted not only by the colonists of all the coastal cities, but also by the Libyan-Phoenicians of the hinterland and most of the independent western Libyan cities¹⁵. The most compelling archaeological evidence he was able to recover for this “Punic religion” was the tophet at Carthage. Picard interpreted this space as a place of worship dedicated to Tanit, where child sacrifices and chthonic cults were supposed to have taken place since the 9th century BCE. According to Picard, the oldest level of the sanctuary was a building called the “Cintas Chapel”, a kind of *heroon* that housed the worship connected to the legend of the foundation of Carthage in which Dido-Alyssa immolated herself to ensure the prosperity of the community¹⁶. At some point in its development, Punic “theology” determined that the sacrifice of the monarch could be avoided by offering a substitute victim, normally his own son, and this ritual substitution was ultimately institutionalised in the immolation of infants. Picard, following René Dussaud, found documentary support both in the Bible (the classic example being that of Jephthah’s daughter) and in classical literature¹⁷. Archaeology, which uncovered the remains of numerous children in the tophet, and the iconography of its stelae, which seem to represent the immolation of children, seemed to confirm this ritual practice. However, Picard does add the qualification that not all those sacrificed had to be royal infants immolated in extraordinary situations, but could have been regular rites whose purpose was to *rénover la divinité*, to promote the fertility of nature and the prosperity of the community in general¹⁸.

In the third chapter Picard analyses Phoenician divine genealogies to explore the mythological origin of the two primary gods of the Punic “pantheon”, Tanit Pene Ba’al (*TNT PN BOL*) and Ba’al Hamón (*BOL HMN*), to whom many of the inscribed monuments found in the sanctuaries were dedicated. He argues that Ba’al and Tanit were epithets of the two great

14. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 10-21.

15. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 26-27.

16. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 34-35. Picard turned to anthropology to explain this system of thought. The sacrifice of the King of Nemi, which Frazer analysed in the same terms, provided the basis for studies linked to these practices.

17. Diodorus Siculus tells how, after the defeat of the Carthaginians in Africa by Agathocles in 310 BCE, the most distinguished families offered their children as a sacrifice to Ba’al Amon. At that time Carthage was an aristocracy and the children of the city’s nobles would be equivalent to the infants of the founding kings. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 44-45. Cf. R. Dussaud, *Les origines cananéennes du sacrifice israélite*, Paris, 1941, 287-288.

18. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 48-49.

gods of the Phoenician “pantheon”, El and Asherat, which were consolidated as theonyms in the Punic world¹⁹. Picard also formulated the theory of a “spiritual revolution” that took place within Carthaginian religion during the 5th century BCE, and that resulted in the reception of a series of influences from Magna Graecia, including the introduction of the cult of Demeter in Carthage in the 4th century BCE, or the “assimilation” between Hera and Tanit²⁰. It was in this context that Tanit, considered by Picard to be the Punic goddess, a refraction of the great mother-goddess of the western Mediterranean and typologically akin to the south-italic Hera, underwent a process of consolidation as both a chthonic and a celestial deity (lady of the moon), whose field of action was fundamentally related to fertility and prosperity²¹.

This brings us to the fourth chapter, which discusses the Hellenization of Punic religion. According to Picard’s account, from the 5th century BCE, Carthage was immersed in the process of Hellenization that had spread throughout the coastal regions of the Mediterranean, as a result of which elements of Greek mystery cults took root in North Africa. These trends will have had a greater impact on the underprivileged classes, who found in the *thiasos* a way of coping with earthly hardships and the prospect of a pleasant life in the hereafter²². Picard, following authors such as Franz Cumont and Herni Galliot, argues that these mystery cults were introduced by merchants, craftsmen and foreigners arriving in the ports of North Africa²³. The deities directly imported were Demeter and Persephone, eschatological and agrarian goddesses whose worshippers conducted mystery rites, such as those of Eleusis, in which the initiates aspired to achieve eternal happiness after death²⁴. The existence of sanctuaries dedicated to these deities, such as that of Bordj Djedid (Carthage), and the discovery of statuettes of Demeter with her daughter in some Punic tombs from the 3rd century BCE, confirm the adoption of these new forms of worship in North Africa from the 4th century BCE²⁵. Picard then argues that the introduction of these religious strategies was a consequence of “*le sentiment d’infériorité que ressentait les Puniques en présence de leur religion traditionnelle et le besoin impérieux qu’ils éprouvaient de la transformer, pour lui permettre de répondre aux aspirations individualistes, aux inquiétudes métaphysiques, dont la contagion les avait gagnés à la suite de l’absorption spirituelle de leur ville par le monde hellénistique*”²⁶. This brought about a dramatic

19. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 58-59.

20. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 60-64. According to Picard, the embargo on imports from Greece was part of a policy of retreat under the threat of Athenian imperialism that sought to position the Athens as the hegemonic power in the Mediterranean.

21. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 64-65. On the iconography associated with Tanit and the Roman Caelestis see pp. 65-78.

22. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 85-86.

23. Franz Cumont attributed the introduction and spread of mystery cults in the Roman West to soldiers, merchants and slaves of Greek-Eastern origin: F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales...*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, 29-31. See also H. Graillot, *Le culte de Cybèle, Mère des Dieux, à Rome et dans l’Empire Romain*, Paris, 1912, 412-420.

24. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 86-88.

25. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 89.

26. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 98. Sixteen years later Picard pointed out that these factors, together with Himilcon’s failures and widespread impiety after the plague that devastated the city,

change in Carthaginian funerary customs: cremation, which had until then coexisted with inhumation, became predominant after the Punic Wars, and the iconography of Carthaginian stelae from the *tophet* was modified through the introduction of Greek eschatological elements and Dionysian symbols, including craters, cists and even ithyphallic satyrs²⁷.

In chapter five, Picard addresses the religious consequences of Romanisation by analysing the main gods documented for Roman Africa. Employing concepts such as *synchrétisme* or *équivalence*, he explores characteristics of some of the deities worshipped during the period of Roman rule. While acknowledging that gods such as Mercury had been co-opted into the cults of some North African cities with little if any modification to their Italic origins, others were assimilated, as Aesculapius was to the Punic healing god Eshnoun, while the two main divinities of the Carthaginian “pantheon”, Tanit and Baal, retained their original essence despite being “decked out” in Greco-Roman garb (Tanit-Caelestis, Baal-Saturnus). As such, “African religion” in the Imperial period assumed an Italic appearance, but its religious and cultural background was different from that of Rome and remained true to many of its Punic traditions²⁸. According to Picard, the processes of “assimilation” that took place in the cult of Caelestis-Tanit/Hera-Juno and Ba’al-Saturnus did not consist simply of a mechanical substitution of the name of one god for another, but was a gradual process informed by a profound reflection upon the nature of the gods that led to theological reforms such as those that allowed Tanit to be linked to that “great mother” who in Italy was Juno-Hera²⁹. In that sense, Caelestis was, as Tanit previously used to be, a uranian deity (one of her most distinctive symbols is the crescent moon), atmospheric, chthonic, and queen of heaven, earth and the dead, *la toute-puissante maîtresse de l’univers*³⁰. Saturnus, on the other hand, also established himself as a god of a celestial nature – in iconography he is associated with the sun and the moon – but with an agrarian dimension. His rule over the earth placed him on a similar level to the god of the dead and the underworld, thus characterising him as a chthonic deity³¹. He concludes this chapter by pointing out that the African gods had their own characteristics that differed from those of these same gods in other regions of the Empire, and argues that the “pantheon” of Roman Africa was presented as an independent, complex and highly hierarchical one, closer to Hellenised Phoenician “theology” than to Roman religion, in whose organisation the minor gods appear as ministers – sometimes as hypostases – of the “major” gods.

In the sixth chapter, Picard analyses two of the most primordial and authentic elements of what he called *la religion africaine*: the sacrifices and the sanctuaries. While acknowledging that from a formal point of view the sacrifices of the Roman-African world were analogous to

were responsible for the religious change: G.-Ch. Picard and C. Picard, *Vie et mort de Carthage*, Paris, 1970, 144-146.

27. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 92-93.

28. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 102.

29. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 108-109.

30. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 111 and 117.

31. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 118-123.

Italic ritual³², Picard argues that their conceptual basis was a legacy of Canaanite religion, in which the animal did not constitute food for the gods, but was a substitute for the body of the offerors themselves, appropriating their sins and thereby absolving them³³. For this reason, the Carthaginians did not wholly abandon the practice of human sacrifice even during Roman imperial times, as Tertullian testifies in the 2nd century CE³⁴. The Roman authorities would have turned a blind eye, while the Africans would have taken advantage of acts such as executions in the amphitheatre to dress them up in the style of a ceremony of sacrifice to the infernal gods³⁵. However, they routinely appeal to the offering of substitute animal victims to safeguard the life of what would have been the main object of immolation in the Punic world: the infant. The word *molchomor*, which appears in some inscriptions, is taken to allude to this substitution³⁶. In order to carry out the replacement rite, Picard determined that the (human) victim had to be consecrated (*sacratus*), and for this it was necessary to complete a rite of initiation whose aim was, firstly, to guarantee the prosperity of the initiate and, secondly, to introduce him *dans le mond du dieu* and thus ensure his divinisation, or *heroisation*³⁷. To clarify the nature of these rites, he utilises the iconography of the stelae, which depict symbols similar to those associated with Eleusinian cult (such as the cist that contains the *sacra*), and concludes that ritual baths, grooming rites (*rites de coiffure*) and ceremonies related to clothing (shoes) were carried out. The initiation introduced the individual into a private community in the service of the god, governed by an internal hierarchy, whose priesthoods were elected and of fixed term³⁸.

The places in which the most authentic rites of this “African religion” were carried out were the tophets, which in cities such as Hadrumetum, Carthage and Thugga remained in

32. See some examples in G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 131.

33. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 131.

34. *Apol. IX: Infantes penes Africam Saturno inmolabantur palam usque ad proconsulatum Tiberii qui eosdem sacerdotes in eisdem arboribus templi sui obumbraticibus scelerum votivis crucibus exposuit teste militia patriae nostrae quae ad ipsum munis illi proconsuli functa est. Sed et nunc in oculo perpetratur sacrum hoc facinus.*

35. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 134. One of the classic examples provided by the author is that of the martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicity, who were executed together with other Christians in the amphitheatre of Carthage at the beginning of the 3rd century CE, dressed as priests of Saturnus and priestesses of Ceres, as if they were sacrificial victims. Cf. G.-Ch. Picard, “*Les sacerdotess...*”, *op. cit.*, n. 11, 118-119.

36. *AE* 1931, 59. Others even specify the replacement of an *agnus pro vicario* (*CIL* VIII 4468; *AE* 1931, 60). See also G.-Ch. Picard, “*Les sacerdotess...*”, *op. cit.*, n. 11, 118.

37. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 142-143.

38. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 150-152. Some lists have been preserved, such as that of the community of worshippers of *Silvanus Barbarus*, composed of 12 *sacerdotes* and presided over by a *mater sacrorum*. In relation to the mysteries of Saturnus, inscriptions include terms such as *ministri* or *cultores* of the god that, according to Picard, would be equivalent to “initiates”. The leader would hold the title of *magister* or *antistes*.

use until the 2nd century CE³⁹. Yet, according to Picard, there was a whole series of sanctuaries whose architectural characteristics, although close to the classical models, had exceptional elements that made them ideal to satisfy the problems of the *liturgie africaine*⁴⁰: the large porticoes housed imposing courtyards, allowing religious processions to take place inside them, away from the eyes of the profane; the numerous adjoining rooms of these temples were used to celebrate communal rites; and the digging of crypts allowed the storage of the *sacra*, which were only displayed on the occasion of solemn celebrations⁴¹. It is also for reasons of privacy that, according to Picard, some African sanctuaries were located in outlying areas of the city (such as the temple of Saturnus in Thugga or the temple of Apollo in Maktar), while the traditional Roman gods or the *dii patrii* of the cities would occupy privileged places in the forum⁴².

Uncommon sacrifices and irregular places of worship would demonstrate how the “African religion” retained many of its original elements during the Roman period, and how this religion, relegated to private and marginal places of worship within the urban landscape, was sustained by individuals belonging to the lower classes until the end of the 2nd century CE.

This latter issue is analysed in the seventh chapter. For Picard, the elite were the first to be interested in disowning the popular, “barbaric” and “mystery” cults of their ancestors, and to adopt the religious forms of the invader in order to monopolise administrative and military office⁴³. Consequently, they would have cultivated the worship of the Roman deities at the expense of their local gods and have favoured the imperial cult and its Roman priesthood

39. Picard acknowledges that, despite their longevity, tophets underwent changes in cult practice: in the 1st century BCE the urns contained only animal remains. The iconography of the stelae also began to be “latinised”: the abstraction characteristic of the Punic period was replaced with more naturalistic images, including the anthropomorphic representation of gods (one monument even depicts a *capite velato* priest) and Latin was more widely used. In the levels dated to the 2nd century BCE only reused stelae from previous levels appear, and the more elaborate ones contained the image of an animal in an aedicula, but the remains of the victim were no longer buried. Finally, in the same century, the tophets disappeared, such as the one in Thugga, where the old sanctuary was replaced by a temple of the “classical African” type (cf. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 104 and 111-115).

40. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 153-156. Picard was so convinced that the characteristics of the Roman-African temples owed their form to local traditions that he claimed that those sanctuaries with a tripartite *cella* took their models from the baetylic triad patterns that appear in the iconography of some stelae (G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 158-160). Another example of architectural typology in which Picard identifies elements adapted to the development of “African” cults is that of the temple of Hator Miskar (*à crypte*) in Maktar (G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 160-161).

41. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 161. See, E.g. the temple complex of Thinissut or that of El Kenissia, both comprised of several courtyards in which the temples were built where the divine statues were located, dedications such as stelae and altars were made, or vessels were deposited with the remains of the immolated victims, accompanied by statuettes and other offerings.

42. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 162.

43. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 162-163 and 167.

par excellence, the flaminiate, the prerogative of citizens and magistrates⁴⁴. Elites also used funerary practice as a means of marking themselves off from the underprivileged. According to Picard, *le bourgeois romain* desired a luxurious afterlife on the model of his earthly *modus vivendi*, and therefore paid for expensive tombs (such as the turreted mausolea excavated in the necropolis of Haïdra) together with funerary *elogia* whose purpose was to keep his memory alive and thus guarantee his immortality. The lower classes, however, had to be content with an urn containing their ashes, a limited number of offerings and a simple stele recalling their “initiation” into the “African mysteries”⁴⁵. The priests of Caelestis and Saturnus would be humble people with no interest in engaging in public life, and their worshippers would be individuals from a low social background who, in most cases, did not enjoy Roman citizenship, and in these “African cults”, heirs to those of the Carthaginian period, found their spiritual refuge⁴⁶.

From the end of the 2nd century CE, when Africa appears to have played an increasingly important role in the imperial administration, the situation changed, “*comme si cette promotion les avait délivrés d'un complexe d'infériorité à l'égard de leurs traditions ancestrales*”. As a result, classical architecture and Latin became widespread, which in turn intensified the degree of religious “Romanisation” in terms of sacred space and divine nomenclature⁴⁷; and yet on the other hand the aristocracies, which had begun to fall under the influence of the spiritualist currents that were spreading throughout the Empire in the wake of Neoplatonic thought, rediscovered the African *religion nationale*, which now permeated all strata of society, as it could meet the needs of a mystical spirituality that Roman society began to demand but rationalist philosophies could not deliver. However, Picard thought that in this process the *religion africaine* had already been deprived of much of its essence, diluted in a vast “syncretism” that merged the Punic traditions with Greco-Roman “spiritualism” and Eastern influences⁴⁸.

One of the most successful cults in the Maghreb was that of the goddess Ceres. According to Picard, the goddess of agriculture was imported from Egypt or Sicily, gradually giving rise to a *Ceres punica*, worshipped with rites derived from those of Eleusis. The iconography of numerous stelae, such as the one found at Sidi Ali Madiouni, depicting the caduceus and the spike, symbols of the Eleusinian mysteries, testify to how widespread these ritual practices were, adapted to the situation in North Africa⁴⁹. The appropriation by the aristocracy of these “mystery cults” did not bridge the social gap, as there were notable differences between

44. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 168-176. Picard seems unaware that individuals of servile origin, such as the *seviri Augustales*, were also members of the priesthood responsible for organising the cult activities of the *domus imperatoria*.

45. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 177-180. The same idea in G.-Ch. Picard, *La civilisation de l'Afrique romain*, 1959, 252-253.

46. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 162-163.

47. See also G.-Ch. Picard, *La civilisation de l'Afrique...*, *op. cit.*, n. 45, 37-38 and 41-42.

48. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 164.

49. Further examples in G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 186-196.

the public Bacchic cults financed by the aristocracy, in which the elites met in sumptuous, richly decorated *collegia* to enjoy the *felicitas temporum* and celebrated the granting of one of the main gifts given to mankind (wine), and the cults of the underprivileged classes, who continued to celebrate Bacchic festivities through uninhibited orgiastic gatherings⁵⁰.

In short, the “mystical revolution” of the 3rd century CE allowed the North African territories to preserve, to some extent, their religious identity, because the mystery cults postulated for the Punic period were revitalised by Neoplatonic *milieu*. According to Picard, these cults were more in keeping with Eastern than Western practices and were comparable to those disseminated by the “missionaries” of Isis, Mithra or Mater Magna. All this, together with the identification of Cybele/Mater Magna with Caelestis or Isis with Demeter, explains the success enjoyed by some of these “Oriental gods” in Africa⁵¹. However, Picard maintains that the underprivileged were never conversant with the philosophical content of these 3rd century CE mystical doctrines, their religious beliefs instead being underpinned by irrational ideas of witchcraft and magic⁵².

This brings us to the eighth chapter. For Picard, magic and superstition were prophylactic strategies on the periphery of religion. He saw magic as a resource used mainly by the lower classes to gain protection from divine entities against harmful supernatural elements and to secure certain benefits. In both Punic and Roman times, North Africans used all kinds of movable and immovable amulets – sculptures, paintings, mosaics – to protect their owners from evil spirits⁵³, and Picard regularly interprets symbols represented on mosaics (vines, laurels or fishes) in terms of magic. Picard’s distinction between magic and religion was based on the ideas of Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert: “*La magie se différencie de la religion en ce que celle-ci essaie de réaliser l'accord entre l'homme et le dieu par la soumission du premier au second, tandis que la magie a pour but d'asservir le dieu et de le contraindre à exécuter les ordres du magicien*”.⁵⁴ Magicians mediated with the dead using the *tabellae defixionis* which they deposited in tombs and which invoked Hebrew (*Iao Sabaoth*) or Egyptian deities. According to Picard, these practices had already been current among the underprivileged classes during the first two centuries of the Common Era, but the development of Neoplatonism and mysticism in the 3rd century CE led to their spreading among the more educated. Neoplatonism had a cosmogony conceptualised in terms of a pyramidal structure with a supreme deity at its

50. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 200-203.

51. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 220-221 and 226-227. While Picard does to some extent attribute the “success” of Isiac cults in the Maghreb to Egyptian influence in the Punic period, he concedes that in Roman times gods of the *gens isiaca* had to be assimilated to their African counterparts, where the syncretism of Isis with Ceres would have been a common phenomenon. On the links established between Isis and other deities such as Aesculapius or Hermes through analysis of the iconography of sarcophagi or funerary mosaics, see pp. 228-232.

52. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 232-233.

53. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 237-238.

54. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 242. Cf. M. Mauss and H. Hubert, “Equisse d’une théorie générale de la magie”, *L’Année Sociologique*, 7, 1902-1903, 1-146.

summit and a series of entities below it, and this framework would to a large extent promote the use of magical practices to act upon these intermediate beings⁵⁵.

Les religions de l'Afrique Antique concludes with a discussion of the establishment of Christianity in the Maghreb. According to Picard, its triumph was neither sudden nor violent, and he even acknowledges that there were points of contact between “traditional” religions and the new faith. He explained the rapid spread of Christianity in Africa by reference to the existing idea of an almost unknowable supreme god whose providence acted upon the world by means of hypostases emanating from its essence. This paved the way for the acceptance of the dogma of the Trinity as formulated by Augustine, while the ancient Canaanite idea of the sacrifice of union and redemption, where the *sacratus* was immolated to be reborn united to the god, facilitated the understanding of the Eucharistic sacrifice⁵⁶.

In this work, Picard summarises some of the most important aspects that had previously been discussed about the religious practices and institutions of the peoples of North Africa. He masterfully details what was known at the time about the Punic tophets, conceived as ancestral spaces in which child sacrifices were carried out. He presents the theory that what he called “African religion” underwent a “spiritual revolution” in the 4th century BCE, which was consolidated by the introduction of mystery elements – mainly Bacchic and Eleusinian – from the Hellenic world that were merged with the cult of Ba'al Hammon and Tanit. This would then have given rise to a distinctly “mystical religion”, the essence of which remained substantially unchanged until the 3rd century CE. He also postulates the existence of a kind of polarisation within Roman society in North Africa in which the aristocracy, wishing to be integrated into the new political order, adopted Italic religious practices, and later joined the mysteries under the influence of the philosophical currents of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, while the lower classes continued to adhere to their ancestral Punic traditions.

Picard was a historian influenced by the principles of the first generation of the *Annales* school, which sought to endow the discipline of history with a totalizing value in which the other social sciences could be combined. He eschewed the customary political history to develop a narrative in which economic, demographic, geographical and psychological factors could help to explain the development of North African societies⁵⁷. To this end, he analysed a series of archaeological, artistic and literary sources from the perspective of historical anthropology, ethnography, cultural-historical psychology and geohistory, just as Lucien Febvre and, in particular, Marc Bloch and Marcel Granet had applied in their work⁵⁸.

Since Picard's research was carried out between the first and second generation of the *Annales* school, it is informed by the underlying postulates of the *longue durée* approach to historical processes that Fernand Braudel would champion in 1958⁵⁹. This accounts for some

55. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 251.

56. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 256-257.

57. For an overview of the impact on historiography of the new theoretical framework of the *Annales* school see F. Dosse, *L'histoire en miettes. Des "Annales" à la "nouvelle histoire"*, Paris, 1987, 54-94.

58. Cf. F. Dosse, *L'histoire en miettes...*, *op. cit.*, n. 57, 77-84.

59. F. Braudel, “Histoire et sciences sociales. La longue durée”, *Annales*, 1958, 725-753.

of his theories relating to the prehistoric origins of the baetylic cults and to the child sacrifices in the Punic tophets whose genesis he situates in the myth of the sacrifice of Elisa-Dido and the foundation of Carthage. It also explains his search for the origins of this Punic or African religion, which he saw as developing in the 5th century BCE, and preserved among the lower classes until the 3rd century CE, ultimately surviving in fossilised form in some practices supposedly still present in the Maghreb area in his day.⁶⁰

Despite the originality of some of his ideas, Picard, entrenched as he was in colonial thought, nevertheless, maintained that the religious mysteries imported from the Hellenic world in particular were more civilised and so superior to those of the Punics, and that the indigenous population, aware of this and oppressed by a *sentiment d'infériorité* in respect to the “savagery” of their own religious practices, ended up adopting religious elements from Greek culture⁶¹. As part of this discourse, Picard conceptualised different *stades d'évolution religieuse* in ancient peoples categorised by a) the relative complexity or degree of primitiveness in their practices, in which the “mystery” or “salvation” cults counted as the most complex religious forms, and the previous systems as lower stages, and b) their ethnic-geographical origin and cultural substrata, in which the heritage of the Hellenic-European culture was viewed as more advanced than that of the Punic-Africans⁶². In this respect, the monumental work of Franz Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, had a significant impact on Picard's work. The Belgian *maître* analysed the religious practices in antiquity from an evolutionary and diffusionist perspective. In this framework the so-called mystery cults, distinguished by an inherent spirituality that focused on the salvation of the soul, would have occupied a higher stage of religious evolution that transformed the merely juridical nature of Roman state religion. The mysteries gave this religion a *vigueur nouvelle* whose success paved the way for the triumph of Christianity⁶³. It thus emerges that Picard's thought, typical of colonialist historiography, was underpinned by the Hegelian ideology of

60. For example, his suggestion that certain religious practices relating to the braiding of hair or the use of fish symbols to ward off the evil eye have survived to the present day in popular rites, the former in parts of Morocco (p. 138), the latter in Tunisia (p. 239).

61. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 98 and 163. Surprisingly, and contrary to his interpretation of the process of religious Hellenization, Picard underestimated the impact of Romanisation, which he argued was almost exclusively limited to elites interested in occupying positions in the administration. This can be explained through the influence of Cumont's work on Picard's thinking, as the Belgian author considered the Romans as a culture with an “enfantine” religion (see C. Bonnet and F. Van Haepere “Introduction historiographique”, in F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain. Volume édité par Corinne Bonnet & Françoise Van Haepere avec la collaboration de Bastien Toune*, Rome, 2006, LVIII).

62. See, e.g. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 25 and 164. It is likely that he was influenced by the work of Mircea Eliade when explaining the religious “type” or “stage” that characterised e.g. the populations of Libya and Tunisia before the Phoenician colonisation. On the categorization of Punic religious practices as “barbarian”, cf. G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 99.

63. For an excellent historiographical analysis see C. Bonnet and F. Van Haepere “Introduction historiographique”, *op. cit.*, n. 61, XIX-XXII.

progress still current in the first half of the 20th century, in which historical development was conceived as a linear progression from more primitive to more advanced levels, and which tacitly assumed the civilising role played by “European” (in this case, Hellenic) peoples over other cultures since antiquity⁶⁴. This vision is particularly marked in Picard’s *oeuvre*. For whereas Cumont had conceived the oriental mystery cults from Persia, Asia Minor, Egypt or Syria as superior in terms of spirituality, and underplayed the role of the Greek world as a conduit to Rome in the transformation and diffusion of these cults, Picard attributed the success of African mysticism to the influences of the Greek world (especially the Eleusinian mysteries), not the East. These theories, with their linear and teleological view of history, were to be superseded within the context of decolonisation by the rise of structuralism under Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the development of a *nouvelle histoire* which favoured ethnological discourse and rejected the conception of history in evolutionary and Eurocentric terms⁶⁵.

The works on the history of religion that most influenced Picard’s book were, for the Phoenician-Punic religious context, René Dussaud’s study, from which he adopted several theories pertaining to the sacrificial rites of the Phoenicians derived from the findings in Ugarit⁶⁶, and the monumental work of Stéphane Gsell, who analysed various elements of Punic religion, most prominently the nature of its divinities, its iconography, its rites, its priest-hoods and its funeral customs⁶⁷. For the religious context of Roman Africa, Jules Toutain’s work was important for the discussion of certain aspects relating to the cult of a number of Roman gods, such as Mercury, Liber, Hercules, Apollo, Minerva or Ceres⁶⁸. But in relation to religious analysis, Franz Cumont’s theories undoubtedly had a greater impact in Picard’s *oeuvre*, not only because of the aforementioned teleological approach to the religious phenomenon, but because it was Cumont who formulated the idea that the mysteries were counter-cultural cults and practised in opposition to the official religion. Their adherents, coming from marginal social groups and not integrated into the social, political and religious structures of the Roman state, established an intimate relationship with the deity, which guaranteed salvation. This contrast with official state religion, and its social milieu was precisely why these practices were considered “popular”⁶⁹. On the contrary, the eschatological thought of

64. R. Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*, New Brunswick, 1980, 297-316.

65. F. Dosse, *L'histoire en miettes...*, *op. cit.*, n. 57, 163-164.

66. R. Dussaud, *Les religions des Hitites et des Hourites, des Phéniciens et des Syriens*, Paris, 1945.

67. St. Gsell, *Histoire ancienne de l'Afrique du Nord*, 1-8, Paris, 1913-1928 (esp. vol. 4). Also A. Audollent, *Carthage romaine*, 1901.

68. J. Toutain, *Les cultes païens dans l'empire romain ; Ière partie, Les provinces latines ; T. III, les cultes nationaux et locaux ; fasc. 1. Les cultes africains – Les Cultes ibériques*, Paris, 1917. Although Picard only superficially analyses the Oriental mystery cults, he argues, like Toutain, that the cult of Mithras had a marginal impact on the African provinces. He differs, however, in arguing that the Isiac cults were much more popular (especially in Tripolitania), as were the Metroac cult, whose establishment in Africa can only be explained by the supposed assimilation between Cybele and Caelestis (G.-Ch. Picard, *Les religions...*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, 220-225). See n. 51.

69. F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales...*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, 37-56.

the elites was based on an intellectual view of immortality, informed by gnosis and metaphysics, and constantly stimulated by Neopythagoreanism and Neoplatonism. Indeed, one of the main analytical approaches used by Picard to defend the presence of a mystical and philosophical element in beliefs about the afterlife was the interpretation of specific iconographic motifs and mythical scenes in funerary monuments and stelae, just as Cumont had done: as a symbol of the deceased's beliefs, articulating the hope of heroization or divinization predicated on the immortality of the soul⁷⁰.

Picard supplied an arsenal of new archaeological, artistic, anthropological and ethnographic data – the tophefts, for instance, was virtually unknown in Gsell's work, since the most significant discoveries of the Carthage tophefts were made between 1921 and 1947 –. He made full use of this new evidence to buttress existing interpretations or to launch new approaches, in which he attempted to trace a long drawn out evolutionary progression for the most authentic religious ideas and practices of the African peoples, from their origins to the end of Antiquity. It was undoubtedly an ambitious project that would generate intense debate in the years to follow.

2. Decolonisation and Return to France

Picard's Tunisian period ended in 1955, during the process of Tunisian independence, and he went on to obtain a position as professor of Roman History at the University of Strasbourg. Yet his interest in ancient North African studies was undiminished. In the following five years, he published works such as *Le Monde de Carthage* (1956), *Civitas Mactaritana* (1957), *La vie quotidienne à Carthage au temps d'Hannibal* (1958) with his wife, Colette, and *La civilisation de l'Afrique romaine* (1959). That same year, as a result of the creation of a chair of Roman archaeology at the *Institut d'Art et d'Archéologie* of the Sorbonne, Picard moved to Paris, where he would continue his teaching and research career.

In this new phase, Picard began to take an interest in the world of Gallo-Roman archaeology, which had been recognised as an independent discipline at the Sorbonne Institute of Art. As *directeur de la Circonscription archéologique du Centre*, he promoted archaeological excavations at Argentomagus (Argenton sur Creuse) and dealt with aspects related to the Romanisation of the Gallic countryside. But his interests in the North African world did not cease: in 1967 he took charge of an archaeological mission in Tunis, first on the hill of Byrsa, and then in Maktar, where he led a Franco-Tunisian team for fifteen years.

During this time he continued to publish, on a more modest scale, works relating to the religions of North Africa, in which he reaffirmed some of his previous ideas. In an article published in 1962, he proposed that there was a style of art linked to “mystery” or “popular”

70. Picard was profoundly influenced by Cumont's exegesis of the funerary monuments and by his theories on mystery cults and the afterlife with reference to neo-Pythagorean or Neoplatonic eschatology, summarised in his last work *Lux Perpetua* (see the analysis in B. Rochette & A. Motte, *op. cit.*, n. 4, LVI-LXIII).

cults with conventions and characteristics that differed from those of official Roman art. This artistic style would come to be appropriated by the North African elites in the 3rd century CE in the same way that they took over these “popular mystery cults” during the Neoplatonic “spiritual revolution” that occurred in that century⁷¹.

In 1965 he published a work that dealt with the artistic and iconographic evolution of the monuments of the tophet in Salambó, in which he associated the introduction of iconographic and artistic innovations during the different stages of use of the space with changes in religious practice. In this respect, Picard argued that the replacement of the *cippi* of the first phase (8th century BCE) with the stelae of the second phase (from the 4th century BCE) reflected the religious reform that led to the Hellenization of Punic religion and that established Tanit as the most important deity of the Carthaginian “pantheon”⁷².

Four years later, following the discovery of a pedestal dedicated to Apollo by the local aristocrat Sextus Iulius Possessor in the temple of Apollo at Maktar, he linked an inscription dedicated to Diana by the same Iulius Possessor and an epigraph consecrated to Leto found in the *tetrastylum* of Trajan’s Forum to the same temple. Based on this connection, Picard argued that in the temple of Apollo a divine triad composed of Apollo, Diana and Leto must have been worshipped. The association of Apollo with other *synnaoi theoi* was a phenomenon documented for cities such as Carthage, where the god cohabited with Liber and Ceres, or in Bulla Regia, where he shared a sacred space with Ceres and Aesculapius⁷³. But the triad composed of Apollo, Diana and Leto was unique in North Africa. According to Picard, this triad of Italic origin must have been introduced into the city by Iulius Possessor on the occasion of his statutory promotion. By doing so the aristocrat would have wanted to maintain Maktar’s original Punic cult, while at the same time renewing it by introducing these gods, present in the sanctuary of the Palatine since Augustan times. His aim was to integrate the religious structures of the city within *Romanitas*⁷⁴.

In 1970 Picard and his wife Colette published the book *Vie et mort de Carthage*, in which they dealt with all the known aspects of the city of Carthage from its foundation to its destruction in 146 BCE. In the sections dedicated to religion, the Picards took up and developed ideas that Charles-Gilbert had already put forward in several of his works, such as that the supreme deity of the original Carthaginian “pantheon” was Ba’al Hammon, to whom the Carthaginians immolated their infants; that the mythical origin of this ritual can be detected in the legendary sacrifice of Dido⁷⁵; and that in the 4th century BCE a religious reform

71. G.-Ch. Picard, “L’art religieux populaire dans l’empire romain”, *Information d’Histoire de l’Art*, 1, 1962, 135-143.

72. G.-Ch. Picard, “Les influences classiques sur le relief religieux africain”, in *Le rayonnement des civilisations grecque et romaine sur les cultures périphériques*, Paris, 1965, 237-238.

73. G.-Ch. Picard, “Un témoignage sur le commerce des objets d’art dans l’Empire romain: la statue de bronze de l’Apollon de Maktar offerte par S. Tulios Possessor”, in *Études de sculpture antiques offertes à Jean Charbonneaux*, Paris, 1968, II, 303.

74. G.-Ch. Picard, “Un témoignage...”, *op. cit.*, n. 73, 297-304.

75. G.-Ch. Picard and C. Picard, *Vie et mort...*, *op. cit.*, n. 26, 46-50.

took place that led to the Hellenization of Punic religion, as evidenced in the introduction of new deities such as Demeter and Persephone, in the development of a new iconography of stylistically Hellenic stelae from the tophet, in the ascent of Tanit (conceived as a universal mother goddess) to the apex of the “pantheon”, and in the proliferation of animal sacrifices as a substitute for the immolation of infants⁷⁶.

During the 1970s Picard published numerous studies on mosaics and archaeological discoveries derived from his fieldwork in Maktar and Cherchell. The main work dealing with religious issues was an article in which he analysed a passage from Silius Italicus describing Hannibal’s oath to destroy Rome⁷⁷. The Roman poet set the scene in a temple dedicated to members of the dynasty of Belus (Dido’s father), describing it as a place where over a hundred altars were erected and a priestess invoked the powers of the heavenly and infernal gods. Picard identified in the description of this space possible correspondences with the tophet of Carthage. The reference to the hundred altars – interpreted as the stelae littered throughout the Tophet – and the allusion both to heavenly gods – taken to refer to Tanit – and to infernal gods – and so Ba’al and the Demeter-Persephone-Pluto triad – was a heady enough cocktail to suggest that the description of Silius Italicus derived from an actual visit by the poet himself to the Carthage tophet in the 1st century CE⁷⁸.

3. The Impact of Postcolonial Historiography

During the 1980s and 1990s, Picard produced two types of work on religious studies. The first was a series of archaeological publications full of descriptive elements in which he analysed the historical development of some of Maktar’s sacred spaces – mainly the temple of Hathor Miskar and the *temple du Musée* – whose excavations he had directed for years⁷⁹. The second relates to the problem of the *résistance* to religious Romanisation, which he saw as proliferating in some areas of the Maghreb until the 3rd century CE. In an article dealing with the debate on “assimilation” between Ba’al Hammon and Saturnus, Picard concluded that in certain regions of the hinterland of Tunisia and Libya, especially in cities such as Maktar and Leptis Magna, Punic culture remained well entrenched until the 2nd century CE. Ideological support

76. G.-Ch. Picard and C. Picard, *Vie et mort...*, *op. cit.*, n. 26, 144-151.

77. *Sil. Ital.*, I 81-98.

78. G.-Ch. Picard, “Le tophet de Carthage dans Silius Italicus”, in *Mélanges de philosophie, de littérature et d’histoire ancienne offerts à P. Boyancé*, Rome, 1974, 569-577. Some awkward elements in the description of Silius Italicus were glossed over by Picard, such as the reference to the cult statues representing different members of the Belus dynasty (no sculptures have been found in any tophet), or the location of the sanctuary in a central place of the city (whereas the tophets were sited in peripheral locations).

79. G.-Ch. Picard, “Le sanctuaire de l’acropole à Maktar”, *Karthago*, 20, 1982, 5-10; *id.*, “Essai d’interprétation du sanctuaire de Hoter Miskar à Maktar”, *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques*, 18.B, 1982 [1988], 17-20; *id.*, “Le temple de Hoter Miskar à Maktar”, *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques*, 18.B, 1982 [1988], 21-25; *id.*, “Le temple du musée à Maktar”, *Revue Archéologique*, 1, 1984, 26-27.

would come from those African intellectuals attached to the cultural legacy of Carthage who did not accept the invader's strategies of acculturation, which included the transformation of Ba'al into Saturnus (as Marcel Bénabou maintained)⁸⁰. Picard supported his argument by drawing upon the material record, especially the stelae from the tophet of Maktar. He noted that throughout the 1st century CE, the dedicators depicted on the stelae wore a tunic rather than a toga, and that the theonym of Saturnus was completely absent, demonstrating that it must have been those from the urban lower and middle classes who were most attached to the Phoenician tradition⁸¹.

The process of colonisation and municipalisation that spread throughout African territories during the 3rd century CE destroyed the few elements that remained from the old tradition. This explains why not a single tophet survived the 2nd century CE⁸². According to Picard, it was precisely the African aristocracy, keen to integrate themselves into the Empire's social networks, who embraced the Italic cults and financed the development of classical-style sanctuaries (as occurred in Maktar). This resulted in the abandonment of the old Punic sacred spaces, antiquated as they would have seemed in comparison to the new arrivals⁸³. As a result, the lower classes, deprived of their old mythical beliefs, embraced Bacchic cults and converted *en masse* to Christianity from the end of the 2nd century CE onwards, as Christian theology, which proclaimed the existence of a series of *médiateurs* emanating from the essence of an absolute divinity, was a theological construct familiar to them⁸⁴.

In these works Picard attempted to identify those *adversaires du syncrétisme* who opposed what came to be known as *imperialisme culturel romain*, in which Saturnus had come to be seen as an auxiliary of the invader⁸⁵. In doing so, he abandoned some of the theories he had previously defended (as he himself acknowledged), including the hypothesis that Saturn's worshippers were individuals truly attached to the Punic tradition and devoted to its mysteries, or the idea that the process of Romanisation was widely accepted by Africans in order to integrate them into a universal political, economic and religious utopia which would have placed "*les dieux d'Hannibal [...] parmi les protecteurs de Rome*"⁸⁶.

80. G.-Ch. Picard, "Ba'al Hammon et Saturne dans l'Afrique romain", in *Hommages à Maurice Sznycer*, vol. 2, *Semítica* 39, 1990, 90-91. Cf. M. Benabou, *La Résistance africaine à la romanisation*, Paris, 1976, 370-375.

81. G.-Ch. Picard, "Le temple du musée...", *op. cit.*, n. 79, 26.

82. G.-Ch. Picard, "Ba'al Hammon et Saturne...", *op. cit.*, n. 80, 92.

83. G.-Ch. Picard, "La religion punique, originalité et vitalité", *Les Dossiers de l'Archéologie*, 69, 1983, 47.

84. G.-Ch. Picard, "La religion punique, originalité...", *op. cit.*, n. 80, 48; *id.* "Ba'al Hammon et Saturne...", *op. cit.*, n. 80, 97.

85. G.-Ch. Picard, "Ba'al Hammon et Saturne...", *op. cit.*, n. 77, 92; *id.*, "La religion punique, originalité...", *op. cit.*, n. 83, 47. Note here the influence wielded by M. Benabou, *La Résistance africaine...*, *op. cit.*, n. 80.

86. G.-Ch. Picard, *La civilisation de l'Afrique...*, *op. cit.*, n. 45, 37-38. See also p. 44: "La transformation des populations libyco-puniques, l'adhésion profonde de leur majorité à l'ordre impérial n'a pas été imposée par la contrainte administrative ou militaire [...]. La paix romaine repose, non sur la force, mais sur le consentement des hommes encadrés dans la république urbaine et convertis par elle à l'humanisme civilisateur. Mais cette grande révolution n'a pu être mue seulement par une attraction spirituelle ; il a fallu qu'elle fasse appel aussi à

But even though Picard reformulated some of his former arguments⁸⁷ in light of the post-colonialist historiographical approaches promoted by Bénabou's work in the study of religion in Roman Africa⁸⁸, he continued to uphold many of the ideas he had developed throughout his career. He continued to argue that, starting from the process of Phoenician colonization, the Punic religious world was characterized by a mysticism in which child sacrifice was the supreme expression of fulfilling Ba'al Hammon's wishes and guaranteeing his benevolence⁸⁹. He also maintained the position that the changes that occurred in the Carthaginian political system in the 4th century BCE brought about a religious revolution⁹⁰, and that Christianity spread rapidly among the underprivileged precisely because of the prevalence among them of this mysticism, the underlying principles of which converged with a number of Christian theological propositions. However, in his final works Picard argued that the masses converted to Christianity also as a form of resistance to Roman imperialism, since they took a position *consciemment, dans l'illégalité*⁹¹.

4. Picard's Legacy

Gilbert-Charles Picard was a multidisciplinary scholar who sought to transcend positivistic description and the mere cataloguing of facts, and in his search for deeper explanations was willing to venture upon theoretical propositions of a historic-religious nature, which he developed through the analysis of epigraphic, literary, archaeological and artistic documents.

He was deeply influenced by the theoretical approaches of Cumont in relation to mystery cults and applied them independently to the situation in North Africa as he saw it, in which the protagonists were not the worshippers of Mithras, Isis or Cybele, but adherents of the indigenous "Punic religion" who, from the 5th century BCE to the period of Roman rule, placed their hopes in Tanit (Caelestis) and Ba'al Hammon (Saturn). Over time these adherents developed a mystical rituality combined with elements of the Eleusinian cults of

l'intérêt ; les sujets de l'Empire n'auraient pas été des hommes s'ils avaient sacrifié leur bien-être matériel à la séduction d'une utopie".

87. E.g. his self-criticism in relation to certain aspects of the nature of Ba'al Hammon derived from the study of P. Xella (1991), in G.-Ch. Picard, "La transcendance de Ba'al Hammon et l'indépendance de Carthage", in *Actes du IIIe Congrès international des Etudes phéniciennes et puniques (Tunis, 11-16 novembre 1991)*, vol. 2, Tunis, 1995, 326-333.

88. M. Bénabou, *La Résistance africaine...*, *op. cit.*, n. 80.

89. See the article he wrote on the occasion of the exhibition held in Paris between 1982 and 1983, "De Carthage a Kairouan: 2000 ans d'art et d'histoire en Tunisie", where he synthesizes many of the key elements of his previous work on Punic religious world. The same idea is also found in the last article he published on a religious theme: G.-Ch. Picard, "La transcendance...", *op. cit.*, n. 87, 327-328.

90. G.-Ch. Picard, "La transcendance...", *op. cit.*, n. 87, 327-328.

91. G.-Ch. Picard, "La religion punique, originalité...", *op. cit.*, n. 83, 47.

Demeter and Kore, to which only a few initiates, recruited mainly from the middle and lower classes, would have had access⁹².

Some of these hypotheses were broadly contested. For example, Marcel Le Glay did not see the cult of Saturnus as a *religion à mystères*, but simply as a cult with a certain degree of initiation⁹³. Nor did he accept the idea that there was a “spiritual revolution” instigated by the priesthood of Carthage in the 5th century BCE which placed Tanit at the head of the Punic “pantheon” and led to the development of Eleusinian cults in the Maghreb, although he did concede that during this period the Punic world would have been widely exposed to Greek philosophical currents, leading to the introduction of new eschatological conceptions⁹⁴. Likewise Paolo Xella in his work on Ba’al Hammon denied that Tanit had become the predominant Punic deity during the 4th century BCE. Instead, he argued that her pre-eminence on the iconography of stelae should be explained by her role as mediator between the devotee and Baal, a hypothesis that Picard accepted⁹⁵.

Among Picard’s most successful theories was that it would have been the underprivileged who retained the closest attachment to Punic traditions and therefore were responsible for maintaining the cult of an “African” Saturnus with a degree of “indigenism”⁹⁶. The combination that emerged from both this argument and the view that Punic religious structures remained substantially unchanged until the 2nd century CE informed many of the ideas that post-colonial historiography would develop for its theories relating to the *résistance a la romanisation*. In this respect, some of the thesis that Picard formulated on the basis of historical anthropology and which postulated the existence of a relatively constant *esprit religieux des Africains* gained considerable influence. They were later adopted by scholars such as Jean Bayet, who argued that the “mystical” thought of Africans was characterised by “*un esprit d’exaltation et de transcendance très différent de la mentalité grecque et latine*”, as well as by Le Glay⁹⁷, among others.

As to the interpretation of the tophets as sanctuaries in which child sacrifice was carried out, Picard’s work was largely in agreement with other historians of the 1950s, 1960s and

92. Cumont did not include Bacchic rites among the “Oriental” mystery cults until the fourth edition of his work *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, published in 1929, where they were included as an appendix. They were dealt with more extensively in his book F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des romains*, Paris, 1942. Picard drew extensively upon Cumont’s iconographic exegesis of funeral monuments to support his explanation of the success enjoyed by what he termed “Eleusinian cults” in North Africa since the Punic period.

93. M. Le Glay, *Saturne africain. Histoire*, Paris, 1966, 366 and 377-392. See A. Gavini’s contribution in this volume, 289-307.

94. Cf. M. Le Glay, *Saturne africain...*, *op. cit.*, n. 90, 444-446.

95. G.-Ch. Picard, “La transcendance...”, *op. cit.*, n. 87, n. 10. See P. Xella, *Ba’al Hammon. Recherches sur l’identité et l’histoire d’un dieu phénico-punique*, Rome, 1991.

96. Cf. M. Le Glay, *Saturne africain...*, *op. cit.*, n. 90, 402-406 and 481-482.

97. J. Bayet, *Histoire politique et psychologique de la religion romaine*, Paris, 1957, 205; M. Le Glay, “Les syncrétismes dans l’Afrique ancienne”, in *Les syncrétismes dans l’Antiquité*, Leiden, 1975, 123-151.

part of the 1970s who worked on Punic religion, most prominently Pierre Cintas, René Dus-sand, James G. Février or Giovanni Garbini. Indeed, authors such as Le Glay were inspired by some of their arguments when he claimed that child sacrifice in tophets should be understood as a rite whose purpose was to please the deity, guarantee the prosperity of the community and deify the immolated infant⁹⁸. However, Picard's anthropological theories, with their Frazerian roots based on the *longue durée*, and from which he conceptualised the origin of the sacrifice of the son of kings or of the ruling aristocrats as an allegory for the sacrifice of Dido, the aim of which was to guarantee the prosperity of the community, were wholly rejected by subsequent historiography. For its part, the hypothesis of child sacrifice as the nucleus of Phoenician-Punic religious ritual and the interpretation of the tophet as the site in which these rituals were carried out only began to be critiqued in the 1980s, by authors such as Sabatino Moscati and Sergio Ribichini, Piero Bartoloni, Hélène Bénichou-Safar, Michel Gras, Pierre Rouillard and Javier Teixidor⁹⁹. Even now the issue has not been satisfactorily resolved, with the debate between supporters and detractors of the practice of human sacrifice as a distinctive element of the Phoenician-Punic world continuing to this day¹⁰⁰.

Finally, Picard maintained the tendency, following authors such as Alfred Merlin and Louis Poinssot,¹⁰¹ of attributing magical and apotropaic signification to various iconographic elements of mosaics, many of them with mythological themes. Their interpretation as protection against the evil eye would, with the passage of time, come into question¹⁰². With regard to magic, as previously noted, our author was heavily indebted to Frazer, and also influenced by Mauss and Hubert, whose theories were influential among historians of magic in the classical world well into the 1990s¹⁰³. These theories conceptualised magic as a marginal practice located on the periphery of religion (Picard often calls it *occultisme*), which by invoking a

98. M. Le Glay, *Saturne africain*, *op. cit.*, n. 77, 327-331.

99. See B. D'Andrea, *Bambini nel "limbo". Dati e proposte interpretative sui tofet fenici e punici*, Roma, 2018, 68-76. See also B. D'Andrea's contribution in this volume, 149-175.

100. B. D'Andrea, *Bambini nel "limbo"...*, *op. cit.*, n. 95, 76-98.

101. See M. Fernández Portaencasa's contribution in this volume, 177-217.

102. These were images with a bacchic motifs of animals such as peacocks, horses, and fish, or plants such as laurel, rose and garlands, to which Picard attributed a prophylactic value. His interpretation is questioned by A. Alvar Nuño, *Envidia y fascinación: el mal de ojo en el occidente romano*, Anejos de ARYS, III, 2009, esp. 254, who examines the two dominant prophylactic elements in mosaics of the imperial period, the *gorgoneia* and phalluses, to which Picard also attributed a high apotropaic value.

103. For a critique of this entire theoretical framework, including the refutation of the traditional standpoint that magical practices were on the periphery of religious norms, and the deconstruction of the term "magic" as a useful heuristic category, see H.S. Versnel, "Some reflections on the relationship magic-religion", *Numen*, 38, 1991, 177-197; M. Marvin and R. Smith (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic. Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, San Francisco, 1994; M. Marvin and P. Mirecki (eds), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, Leiden, 1995; and most recently, with bibliography of previous scholarship, J.E. Sanzo, "Deconstructing the Deconstructionists. A Response to Recent Criticisms of the Rubric "Ancient Magic", in A. Mastrocinque, J.E. Sanzo and M. Scapini (eds.), *Ancient Magic: Then and Now*, Stuttgart, 2020, 25-46.

series of daimons, was able to secure the assistance of the underworld deities in order to obtain wealth, to triumph in love or to obtain justice.

Gilbert-Charles Picard was, as Nathalie de Chaisemartin said in the biography of him published in 1999, a multi-faceted and tireless researcher who maintained an active academic output right up until the end of his life¹⁰⁴. At times controversial in his approach, he was also self-critical and did not hesitate to revise many of his arguments to adapt them to the changing times.

104. N. Chaisemartin, "Gilbert-Charles Picard...", *op. cit.*, n. 1, 7-8.