
Editorial

The theme section “New Perspectives on Mesoamerican Polytheism” is connected to the celebration of the Bicentennial of Mexican Independence and falls one hundred years after the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. In the context of the worldwide celebrations focusing on Mexican history in 2010, our journal wishes to give its contribution with a monographic section devoted to Mesoamerican religions. The Dipartimento di Studi Storico-Religiosi (today transformed into a section of the new Dipartimento di Storia, Culture, Religioni) started the project and asked Sergio Botta (Sapienza Università di Roma) and Guilhem Olivier (Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) to coordinate the international group of collaborators. The purpose is both to contribute to the reception of a new field of research relevant to the history of religions as a discipline and to embrace an international perspective that is rarely considered in the theoretical and methodological tradition of «Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni».

Indigenous polytheism has always been a question of great importance in Mesoamerican studies and in recent decades the study of this subject has been reinvigorated thanks to the development of archaeological excavations and studies, to the deepening of critical studies on colonial sources, and, since the XIXth century, to the progress of a *longue durée* perspective on the transformation of Mesoamerican religious tradition. During the last few years, polytheism has also attracted the interest of scholars working on the history of religions, for its especial relevance not only for ancient European societies, but also for cultures in other parts of the world. Consequently, it seems important to sketch briefly a methodological perspective that makes it possible to propose a comparison between the general notion of polytheism and the specificity of an autonomous historical and geographical context. On the one hand, it will be possible to investigate the problem of the nature of gods in Mesoamerica, to analyse the ways of expression of the divine forces and the structure of these elaborate pantheons within this cultural context. On the other hand, we hope that our comparative effort will prove useful for the methodological and theoretical reflections of historians of religions about polytheism *tout court*.

The application of the notion of polytheistic divinity is reviewed in the first essay of the theme section, wherein Claude-François Baudez

examines the religious experience of Teotihuacan, an important centre of cultural influence within Mesoamerica during the Classical Period. Baudez proposes to abandon the traditional concept of polytheistic divinity since there is a clear need to replace the notion of a pantheon with that of an important polysemic figure in the context of Teotihuacan. Simultaneously a rain god, a storm god, a fertility deity, and a god of terrestrial waters, maize, and yet other crops, the figure of Tlaloc shows how Teotihuacans were less interested in distinct deities rather than in specific forms able to express their complex vision of the universe.

Basing her research on both iconography and myths, Elodie Dupey Garcia offers an original analysis of the chromatic metamorphosis of Post-classical Mesoamerican gods. Besides being a method of classification for supernatural beings, polychromy reveals the complexity and dynamism of Mesoamerican gods, whose identities and functions diverge in accordance with mythical and temporal cycles.

While these first two essays show the various expressions of Mesoamerican polytheism – on the basis of iconographic materials –, there follows an examination of the different historical processes leading to the birth and development of the interpretative models that Mesoamerican scholars inherited from early colonial sources. Elizabeth Hill Boone focuses on European categorization of knowledge and on the way it has influenced the representation of deities that Novohispanic chroniclers used in their «cultural encyclopedias», as is the case with Bernardino de Sahagún and Diego Durán. Boone connects Novohispanic encyclopaedias to older European traditions and shows how the latter influenced the quality of our understanding of Mesoamerican cultures. In the same perspective, Guilhem Olivier examines the comparison between Mexica's gods and Roman deities outlined by *fray* Bernardino de Sahagún. The author highlights the different models of classification of “pagan deities” used by the Franciscan friar – particularly the ones proposed by Augustine of Hippo. Since many studies even to this day are vitiated by a lack of interest in the ways in which indigenous populations structure their pantheons, Olivier seeks to set forth a new path for investigating autochthonous forms of classification. In this same perspective, Sergio Botta's essay points out the evolution of missionary interpretations of a Mesoamerican god belonging to the Post-classical Period – Tlaloc, a water and earth god – not only examining polytheism as an autonomous category but also as product of a colonial discourse. Polytheism appears also as a subject of negotiation born from the encounter of different religious systems. Patrick Lesbre investigates a specific aspect of Mesoamerican religion during the early colonial history. The encounter of two different notions about divinity – the Native and the Christian – resulted in the search for religious legitimation by

colonial indigenous nobles. This process produced an interpretation of the Pre-Hispanic past that interacts with Christian monotheism and tries to reappraise the Acolhua tradition and the figure of their most important king, Nezahualcoyotl.

The essay section offers two articles devoted to Apocalyptic studies in different historical contexts. The first is by Ezio Abrile (*Apocalittica orfica. Nuove prospettive sulle interferenze greco-iraniche*) and investigates the connections between Greek and Iranian religious phenomena; Luca Arcari's essay (*L'apocalittica giudaica e proto cristiana tra «crisi della presenza» e «crisi percepita». Il testo apocalittico e la pratica visionaria*) examines the concept of «apocalypticism» within the intellectual debate of the XIXth and XXth century, using the work of Ernesto de Martino and the concept of shamanism. The following section contains two «forums» that will offer a space for discussion and research in the next issues. The first one is devoted to the relation between *Science and Religions* and it is opened by Fabio Scialpi (*Conoscenza scientifica e fede religiosa. Il caso del Buddhismo*), who explores this particular debate within Buddhist Studies. The second forum is devoted to *Religions and Film*. It starts with a brief note by Arduino Maiuri and continues with an essay by Domitilla Campanile (*Ethan, Rodrigo, Conan: per una genealogia degli eroi in Conan the Barbarian*).

Sezione monografica / Theme Section

*Nuove prospettive sul politeismo in
Mesoamerica*

*New Perspectives on Mesoamerican
Polytheism*

