INTRODUCTION

In the Mirror of Vertumnus

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1590: At the Court of Rudolf II

Giuseppe Arcimboldo was born in Milan around 1527 and after 1562–1563, having completed his training in Lombardy, he became a court artist in the service of the Habsburgs, successively under the emperors Ferdinand I, Maximilian II and Rudolf II, probably in Prague and then in Vienna. As the royal family's portraitist, he assured his remuneration by producing completely classical canvases in the conventional style that reflected an official art form. At the same time, Arcimboldo produced some rather surprising works: composite heads and hybrid metamorphoses of the human face in which deception and illusion triumphed. With Arcimboldo blurring human perceptual reference points, his contemporaries referred to his canvases as *scherzi*, *grilli* and *capricci*, 'jokes', 'caprices' and 'grotesques', a marvellous and confusing mixture of genres. Still fascinated by these paradoxical, neither beautiful nor ugly, virtuoso and unusual portraits, our contemporaries call it 'Mannerism'. It is in fact difficult to categorise such an original and fantastic style. Yet nothing is left to chance in this humanoid assemblage of skilfully interwoven fruits, plants and animals, while one can identify numerous references to ancient sources, to certain predecessors and visual traditions. But beyond the strangeness of these faces, which are at the same time single and multiple, the painter encourages a game of hide-and-seek that requires us to scrutinise the portraits from different angles: head down, head to the side, close up, from afar, as a whole or by detailing their individual components. Both monstrous and splendid at once, we decipher them little by little, like a kind of hieroglyphic text, as they challenge our senses and our intelligence.

From 1563 onwards, having moved to the Habsburg court, Arcimboldo notably produced the famous anamorphic portraits entitled *Four Seasons* and *Four Elements*. Anamorphosis consists in transforming the elements and combining them in such a way as to blur human perception of them.

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Presented to the emperor in 1569 and accompanied by Giovanni Battista Fonteo's explicit panegyric poems, these works are read as political allegories of the prosperous reign of Maximilian of Habsburg. One might therefore assert, with Roland Barthes,[1] a rhetorical intention in these composite portraits consisting of a visual rhetoric that employs metaphor, metonymy, allusion, shift and allegory in order to elaborate a message and elicit an effect.

It is worth noting that Rudolf II, the Archduke of Austria, who is concealed behind the features of the god Vertumnus which Arcimboldo painted in 1590 and which adorns the cover of this book, was an esoteric enthusiast who was famous across Europe for his cabinet of curiosities that was abundant with objects of all kinds, some of them quite unusual. The accumulation effect in Arcimboldo's portraits, the visual exploration of the bizarre and the incitement to decode reality beyond appearances could therefore echo a 'bulimic' pre-scientific approach, a desire for all-round knowledge, nourished by incessant back and forth between the whole and the detail, the particular and the universal, the rule and the exception. Arcimboldo's virtuosity and his aesthetics of the paradox may have been a tool in his daring exploration of natural and cultural productions created by a diverse humanity. By combining *naturalia* and *artificalia*, which Rudolph had put in the spotlight of his cabinet of curiosities, Arcimboldo questioned in his own way the foundations of perception and knowledge, echoing the motley collection of objects that populated the royal *Wunderkammer*.

In 1590, three years after his return to Milan, Arcimboldo's choice to represent Rudolph II as the god Vertumnus was inspired by Propertius (*Elegies* 4.2).[2] Having become emperor in 1576, Rudolf surrounded himself with artists, alchemists and astrologers to whom he opened the doors of his *Wunderkammer*, one of the finest in Europe. Like other guests of the court, Arcimboldo visited the chimera room, the divination room, the room devoted to abominations and another to automatons, all of which provided possible inspirations for his composite portraits. If we take this into account, it is easier to understand the unusual choice of giving emperor Rudolph an anamorphic portrait of Vertumnus. But why precisely Vertumnus? Propertius' portrait sheds some useful light (*Elegies* 4.2)[3]:

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[1] Roland Barthes, 'Rhétorique de l'image', *Communications* 4, 1964, pp. 40–50.
[2] See Thomas Da Costa Kaufmann, 'Arcimboldo and Propertius: A Classical Source for Rudolf II as Vertumnus', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschicht* 48/1, 1985, pp. 117–123.
[3] Translation based on A. S. Kline, 2002, 2008 (with modifications), www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/PropertiusBkFour.php#anchor_Toc201112556 (accessed 17/07/2022).

Why marvel at the many shapes of my one body?
Learn the ancestral tokens of the god Vertumnus. . . .
I was named the god Vertumnus from the river Tiber's winding [*verso*]
or because I receive the first fruits of returning [*vertentis*] spring,
you believe them a 'return' for your sacrifice to Vertumnus.
The first grape changes hue, for me, in darkening bunches,
and hairy ears of corn swell with milky grains.
Here you see sweet cherries, autumn plums,
and mulberries redden through summer days.
Here the grafter pays his vows with apple garlands,
when the unwilling pear stock has borne fruit.
Be silent echoing rumour: there's another pointer to my name:
believe the god who speaks about himself.
My nature is adaptable to every form:
turn me [*verte*] into whatever you wish:
I'll be noble. Clothe me in Coan silk, I'll be no bad girl:
and when I wear the toga who'll say I am no man?
Give me a scythe and tie twists of hay on my forehead:
you can swear the grass was cut by my hand.
Once I carried weapons, I remember, and was praised:
yet I was a reaper when burdened by the basket's weight.
I'm sober for the law: but when the garland's there,
you'll cry out that wine's gone to my head.
Circle my brow with a turban I'll impersonate Bacchus's form:
if you'll give me his lyre I'll impersonate Apollo.
Loaded down with my nets I hunt: but with limed reed I'm the patron
   god of wildfowling.
I also have a charioteer's likeness,
and of him who lightly leaps from horse to horse.
Supply me with rod and I'll catch fish,
or go as a neat pedlar with trailing tunic.
I can bend like a shepherd over his crook,
or carry baskets of roses through the dust.
Why should I add, what is my greatest fame
that the garden's choice gifts are given into my hands?
Dark-green cucumbers, gourds with swollen bellies,
and the cabbages tied with light rushes mark me out:
no flower of the field grows that is not placed on my brow,
and fittingly droops before me.
Because my single shape becomes [*vertebar*]
all my native tongue from that gave me my name.
And Rome, you gave rewards to my Tuscans,
(from whom the Vicus Tuscus, the Tuscan Way takes its name today)
at the time when Lygmon came with armed allies,
and crushed fierce Tatius' Sabine soldiers.

It was thus a formative and versatile god that inspired Arcimboldo, a fluid and subtle divine power skillful and elegant, as defined by Maurizio Bettini.[4] The name of Vertumnus derives from the verb *vertere*, which can be translated as 'to turn, change, transform, translate'. It become clear that the punchline of Propertius' poem, the key to understanding the god's nature and functions, is literally *his name*! Vertumnus is also the god of *decus*, a term with a broad spectrum of meaning that can refer to ornamentation, adornment, beauty, charm, honour, virtue and glory. For Rudolph, Vertumnus is thus a perfect 'mirror of the prince': a cryptogram of his power, wealth and the many facets of his personality, a visual hymn to his intellectual curiosity, a pictorial representation of the mysterious link between microcosm and macrocosm, between *naturalia* and *artificialia*. This portrait is therefore an astonishing prodigy that transforms the emperor into a god of all seasons and elements, while at the same time representing him as a kind of chimera, a *monstrum* that is both fascinating and burlesque, reminiscent of certain aspects of Erasmus' thoughts in *The Praise of Folly* published in 1511.

In any case, Arcimboldo invites us to carefully consider the creative interaction between the prototype, the artist, the artefact, the viewer and the name, which appears to be the hallmark of this maze called 'art'.[5]

2020: To Toulouse for Gods' Sake!

The idea behind this collective work on the portraits of deities delineated by their names can be summarised in one sentence: in Antiquity, the gods were labelled by a multiplicity of names that shed light on the way in which (wo)men represented them and how they tried to interact with them. In the words of Macrobius (*Saturnalia* 1.9.7): *nomen ostendit*, 'the name shows'.[6] But what exactly does it show? Whether it is Athena *Glaukopis* ('with owl/gleaming eyes'), Baal Ṣur, 'Lord of Tyre/of the Rock', Dionysus *Lusios* ('Liberator') or Yahweh 'Creator of Heaven and Earth', the names express the gods' appearances, their functions, domains, modalities of action, the relationships between each other, and many more. It is thus

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[4] Maurizio Bettini, *Il dio elegante: Vertumno e la religione romana*. Turin, Giulio Einaudi, 2015.
[5] For further reading, see Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998.
[6] See Nicole Belayche, '*Nomen ostendit* (Macrobe): Rites et images, les supports des noms de Janus', in Nicole Belayche and Yves Lehmann (eds), *Religions de Rome: Dans le sillage de Robert Schilling*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2017, pp. 67–83, on the god Janus.

a gigantic exploration of divine names in Antiquity that a group of researchers from the Université Toulouse – Jean Jaurès, which make up the majority of the authors of this volume, have been engaging in between 2017 and 2023 within the framework of an ERC project (i.e. financed by the European Research Council).[7] In concrete terms, the aim is to examine the hundreds (even thousands) of names attributed to the deities in the Greek world and the West Semitic world (mainly Hebrew, Aramaic, Phoenician and Punic) over a period covering almost one-and-a-half millennia, between 1000 BCE and 400 CE, from the beginning of the Iron Age until Late Antiquity. The MAP team therefore investigates a plurality of contexts of enunciation, such as offerings, sacrifices, prayers, hymns, curses, oaths, swearwords, pilgrimages, priesthood sales and ritual norms, in which humans – individuals or groups – for whatever reason or intention, summoned the gods, be it in polytheistic or monotheistic contexts. The actors of these ritual interactions have frequently left more or less lasting traces of their 'trade' with a whole range of entities that are supposedly powerful and therefore capable of acting in the world and on humans. Having been entrusted to multiple types of media, such as stelae or commemorative plaques, statues, ornaments, architectural elements, terracotta figurines, 'magical' objects buried in graves or under the thresholds of dwellings, public monuments aimed at a wider publicity, or coins conveying the symbols of the identity of a place and/or community, all these traces are catalogued in specialised collections, epigraphic, papyrological and numismatic corpora, representing an ocean of data on the names of the gods that has so far been under-exploited. Within the framework of the MAP project, the data has now been systematically collected and recorded in a database which has been available to all potential users since 2021.[8] This extensive undertaking is sustained by our conviction that the modes of naming the gods provide insights into the ways the divine worlds of a vast Mediterranean Antiquity, which was rich in exchanges, cohabitations and interactions, were defined, organised and

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[7] This is the ERC Advanced Grant project entitled Mapping Ancient Polytheisms: Cult Epithets as an Interface between Religious Systems and Human Agency (MAP), directed by Corinne Bonnet and carried out with a team participating in this volume. Cf. https://map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr/. Hereafter referred to as MAP.

[8] For a first database project exclusively concerning the Greek world, see the Greek epicleses database (BDEG): https://epiclesesgrecques.univ-rennes1.fr/. For a presentation of the MAP database, associated with dynamic cartography, statistics and network analysis, see Sylvain Lebreton and Corinne Bonnet, 'Mettre le polythéisme en formules? À propos de la base de données Mapping Ancient Polytheisms', *Kernos* 32, 2019, pp. 267–296: https://base-map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr/.

functioned. To use an image that speaks to everyone, one could say that these divine names constitute the genome of the gods, in the sense that, through an ample combination of elements, one manages to express a variety of divine entities that are at the same time close and distant, related but also differentiated. It is precisely this vast exploration of ancient divine names, and the portraits they provide, that we have wished to share with a wider audience in this volume because even the most specialised scholarship is meant to be shared and debated.

The gallery of portraits of deities that the reader will discover on their journey through this book is as eclectic as the objects that populated Rudolf II's *Wunderkammer* or Arcimboldo's imagination. One searches in vain for a chronological thread or a geographical itinerary. From one shore of the Mediterranean to the other, from Sumer and Babylon to Tyre and Alexandria, passing through Athens, Jerusalem and Palmyra, not to mention even more unexpected stages, this book is an invitation to wander and travel, to discover deities who themselves easily crossed borders, moved in spaces that transcend those of human experience. From the mountains to the ports, from the desert to the moon, from the fields to the swirls of the sea, from rock to rock, or from the sky to the netherworld, the paths taken by the gods are as countless as their names and portraits. When reading, each reader will be able to discover countless faces, decipher assemblages and take side roads. Far from the canonical order of mythology handbooks, which fixes what is fluid, we propose to pay attention to exchanges, permeabilities, sharing and mobilities, as well as to the anchoring in territories – in short, to the complexity of what constitutes the divine in Antiquity.

Let us start with an example. In the heart of the Cyclades, on the island of Delos, which was a hub of international trade in the Hellenistic period, a certain Andromachos, son of Phanomachos, deposited an ex-voto, around 150 BCE with the aim to seal a successful 'transaction' with the gods at the shrine of Sarapis; this was a Graeco-Egyptian god from Alexandria who had already been established there, together with Isis, since the third century BCE. There is good reason to believe that this man had left Syria to settle in Delos, unless he was merely passing through for some professional reason.[9] In the same act, Andromachos expressed his thanks to two groups of divine inter-locutors, one feminine, the other masculine: on the one hand, *Isis who saves Astarte Aphrodite of the good navigation who listen(s)*,[10] and on the other, *Eros*

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[9] Cf. Laurent Bricault, *Les cultes isiaques dans le monde gréco-romain*, Paris, Belles Lettres, 2013, no. 160a, p. 493.

[10] As the end of the line is damaged, it is impossible to know if the last qualification focuses on Aphrodite alone or on the three goddesses.

Harpocrates Apollo. This deliberately multicultural arrangement of deities makes sense in this particular context and for the people involved. It is the result of a construction on the part of the dedicant who named the chosen deities and combined them according to what he knew about them and what he expected from them. There is no dogma and no genuine rule or norm; the onomastic sequence mirrors an empirical and pragmatic approach based on a certain knowledge of the divine world and its workings. In this case, Andromachos thanked the aforementioned deities on behalf of himself, his wife and their children, probably after a successful sea crossing that would have been preceded by a prayer to the same deities in which he committed himself to honour them in case of effective protection: *do ut des*, 'I give so you may give'. When reading the 'list' of the deities recruited, it is striking that they were simply juxtaposed in two gendered and coordinated groups of three entities each, thus leaving it to the ancient reader and the modern interpreter to recognise the possible links between them. We note that Isis and Aphrodite were associated with descriptions of their functions or character, but not Astarte, who was 'sandwiched' between them, nor the three male entities. In any case, the names mentioned evoke various geographic and cultural horizons: Egypt, Syria and Greece, with Apollo providing a reference to his birth place, Delos. Could these names be equivalent to each other as 'translations' or 'transpositions'? Could Isis, Astarte and Aphrodite be one and the same entity, expressed in three different languages – a three-headed goddess? The arrangement becomes even more complex since Harpocrates was the son of Isis while Eros belongs to Aphrodite's environment. When looking beyond this line up of divine names on the stele, a whole web resurfaces, a micro-network that was purposely crafted by Andromachos.

This aggregate of names and entities, images and relations, seems to express a logic comparable to Vertumnus and Arcimboldo: something dizzying and elegant at the same time, pragmatic in its effects and ornamental or rhetorical in its arrangement. In our attempt to understand the portrait of the deities that Andromachos called upon to protect his family, to clarify why he summoned and combined these and not others, and why he named them in this way and not otherwise, making use of the rich repertoire of names, epithets and syntagms – in short, of onomastic elements and attributes – it is precisely each onomastic element that provides precious clues that allow us to decipher the logic of this contextual configuration, specific to a place and a time, to human actors and contingent situations. Through the names, we can get closer to grasping the knowledge that informed the actor's ways of addressing gods and practicing rituals. 'Isis who saves Astarte Aphrodite of the good navigation that listen(s)' and 'Eros Harpocrates

Apollo' are designations that sketch a 'family portrait', but it is up to us to understand the 'family ties' and the distribution of tasks.

What we have just seen at work in the Greek context also exists in the Hebrew Bible, which may seem surprising. Indeed, naming strategies are employed for the one who has become the only god in the course of a long history. For the one god, many names coexist in the Old Testament. He is certainly Yahweh, the *tetragrammaton* YHWH, which is read *Adonay* to respect the prohibition on pronouncing his name; he is also *Elohim*, a surprising plural word that means 'God(s)'.[11] He is also provided with a whole panoply of designations referring, comparable to Greek deities, to his appearance, functions, domains, and so forth. The Psalms are particularly rich in this respect, since these liturgical texts are intended to praise the divine power of Yahweh; for example, at the beginning of Psalm 18, 1–2:[12] 'I love you, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.' The book of Exodus also contains highly interesting passages on the name of Israel's god, when the meeting between Moses and the one whose name he does not yet know is described. Chapter 1 begins with a list of those who entered Egypt with Jacob in the manner reminiscent of a Homeric catalogue: the human actors are thus well identified by name. As early as chapter 3, which describes the scene at the burning bush, the question of the name of Moses' divine interlocutor arises in explicit terms: 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob', Yahweh says by way of introduction. He entrusts Moses with the mission of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, but Moses immediately raises a problem (Ex. 3:13–14):[13]

> Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?' The famous answer is: 'I am who I am', which can also be translated as 'I shall be what I shall be', so that Moses is invited to say, 'I am/shall be' has sent me to you.

In truth, the translation of this passage has caused rivers of ink to flow, and Fabio Porzia will come back to this extraordinary case later.[14] But we

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[11] On this subject, see Ron Naiweld, *Histoire de Yahvé. La fabrique d'un mythe occidental*, Paris, Fayard, 2019.

[12] English translation: *Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011 www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2018&version=NIV (accessed 17/07/2022).

[13] English translation: *Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011. www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+3&version=NIV (accessed 17/07/2021).

[14] Chapter 10, pp. 189–206.

also note a marked difference with what we observed in Delos. Instead of employing the names to explain the nature and specificity of the divine interlocutor, we are dealing here with a case of a hollow portrait: in other words, what is provided is a non-portrait, a non-name, unless we are to perceive the extraordinary superhuman power of the theological statement inherent in the name of Yahweh, 'I am/I shall be', everything else being a superfluous ornament.

From Onomastic Sequences to Portraits

In a recent article devoted to the visual reception of the fifteenth-century chivalric poem 'Orlando Innamorato', Giovanna Rizzarelli reminds us that 'ogni immagine racconta una storia'.[15] Similarly, each divine name, whether short or long, single or composite, tells a story. We suggest calling the combinations of names that serve to designate a deity or a group of deities 'onomastic sequence' or 'onomastic formula' to emphasise the human action that governs their formation in specific contexts. Even if they are composed with 'traditional' elements, customs linked to a particular sanctuary and prescriptions deriving from shared knowledge and know-how, it was the individual agent who made the choices about how to address the god, just as Arcimboldo did when he painted a composite head. When calling upon the deities effectively in the context of a ritual, it is indeed crucial to select the right names, the relevant 'onomastic elements' that are appropriate and that, in the right combination, aim to paint a glowing picture to please the gods. The names that were attributed to the gods are in fact in themselves an offering that serves to create a pleasing – and therefore potentially beneficial – communication under the sign of *charis*, 'grace, pleasure'. Charming, the names must be relevant to the divine skills that one is trying to mobilise, such as those that ensure safe navigation, rescue or listening to the pleas to protect the lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to name but a few mentioned earlier. Each onomastic sequence therefore recounts a story, that of an exchange – more or less fruitful, but always asymmetric – between men and gods, between the mortal and fragile 'dream of a shadow', in the words of Pindar, and the immortal and unshakeable.[16] These are the stories that we will tell in the

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[15] 'Each image tells a story': Giovanna Rizzarelli, '"Ogni imagine racconta una storia": Episodi della ricezione illustrativa dell' l'Inamoramento de Orlando', *Italian Studies* 74/2, 2019, pp. 158–173.

[16] Pindar, *Pythian* 8.95. In *Nemean* 4.1–4, he expresses it even more forcefully: 'There is one race of men, one race of gods; and from a single mother we both draw our breath. But all allotted power divides us: man is nothing, but for the gods the bronze sky endures as a secure home forever'

following chapters, taking the reader on a journey from one edge of the Mediterranean to the other, inviting him or her to explore the concerns and the logic of a communication that is always sensitive and ambiguous.

We are therefore going to discover the deities through their names in an attempt to improve our understanding of the ways in which ancient people represented these complex, powerful, changing, versatile and largely elusive beings. From the Hebrews to the Greeks, from the Mesopotamians to the Phoenicians, from the Egyptians to the Romans, the conviction had taken hold that true knowledge of the gods is beyond the reach of men. Nevertheless, through the various media, such as names, qualifications and titles, sites with which they were associated, physical traits ascribed to them in literature and visual arts, and actions attributed to them, it is possible to get an insight – in an experimental and approximate way – of their paradoxical and superior existence. However, it would be wrong to consider that a deity is nothing but the sum of the onomastic elements attached to him or her as if it were enough to add up and map the labels to provide a complete, reliable and definitive portrait. Nothing could be further from the truth! First of all, some deities, like Zeus, are associated with hundreds of different elements at countless places and over an enormous time span, which makes their sum simply unreadable and unreal. Moreover, we must be attentive to the spatial and temporal scales involved: while some names are widely attested, such as *Olumpios*, 'Olympian', for Zeus – a polysemous term that refers both to Olympus as the seat of the gods and to the city of Olympia as an important cult centre of Zeus – or that of *Adonay*, 'my Lord', applied not only to Yahweh hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible, but also for many Phoenician and Punic Baals, other onomastic elements are limited to specific locations or periods, such as Yahweh 'of Samaria', attested at Kuntillet Ajrud on the Sinai peninsula around 800 BCE, or Zeus *Ondoureus*, attested at Ondoura in Caria in the second century BCE. Onomastic elements therefore enable us to draw up several portraits of deities that vary according to place and time. The existence of multiple focal points is a key element in the complexity of religious systems and the making of gods. The names thus constitute a language with variable geometry.

One last point should be stressed. The vast number of elements that make up the names of the deities in various locations – momentarily or

(translation: Diane Arnson Svarlien, *Odes: Pindar*, 1990, www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0162%3Abook%3DN.%3Apoem%3D6).

permanently, mono- or polysemously, in Greek or Hebrew, on cuneiform tablets or the pylons of Egyptian temples – make sense *in relation to each other*. Even when they are juxtaposed, as in the onomastic sequence 'Zeus Helios Great Sarapis', which Laurent Bricault will examine further,[17] or as in the aforementioned example from Delos, the various elements form a group and correspond to a 'formula' that we need to decode. How can we understand the trinomial 'Isis who saves Astarte Aphrodite from the good navigation who listens(s)'? What ties unite the three entities whose names also seem to echo each other ('who saves' versus 'of good navigation')? Rather than a two-dimensional list, we can imagine a three-dimensional network. These relationships, illustrated by a group of deities combined in one document, can also be catalogued and interpreted on the scale of a sanctuary, a city and its colonies, a kingdom, a province and even an empire. Collecting all the testimonies, as we have undertaken to do in Toulouse, and mapping all the contextual elements will allow us to see, for example, that there are many gods qualified as 'saviours', but not all of them! And that there are different ways of 'saving' when it comes to the gods' actions. There are multiple *karpophoroi*, 'fruit-bearers', but not all! And many 'holy' gods (*qdš*) in the Semitic domain, but not all! Despite the fragmentary and therefore incomplete nature of our sources, we can see how the study of divine names in context unravels affinities, polarities, families and associations – in short, semantic and functional networks that shed light on the way the divine worlds are structured. In other words, polytheism is not only *plural* due to the multiplicity of divine entities and the plurality of names (*eponumiai*), honours (*timai*), competences (*technai*) and forms (*eidea*), using Herodotus' (2.53) taxonomy when referring to Homer's and Hesiod's legacy of divine representations, it is also because of the exponential potential it offers to actors to combine names, images and configurations.

By assembling artichokes, grapes, pears, cherries, cabbages, chillies, ears of wheat and lilies (to name but a few ingredients of his visual recipe) for his portrait of Rudolf II as the god of seasons, symbol of prosperity, harmony and the golden age, using the reference to Vertumnus to emphasise his power of metamorphosis, Arcimboldo ultimately constructed an image that is much more than the sum of its parts. The arrangement of familiar but disparate elements that make sense together produces an impression of strangeness; this unpacking, however, helps to re-semanticise the various elements in the whole. The back and forth between the whole and the

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[17] Chapter 7, pp. 129–155.

detail insinuates the instability of what is offered to the eye, a versatility that can be understood as the privilege of the powerful, whether men or gods, half a century before Hobbes' *Leviathan* (published in 1651). This 'monstrous' Vertumnus is at the same time *schema* ('figure') and *sema* ('sign'), portrait and mask, open and provisional statement in an attempt to express the very high, the unspeakable. Though the onomastic sequences designating the ancient gods do not always show such a degree of imagination, they demonstrate the capacity of human actors to introduce micro-variations and produce a multitude of divine configurations, from the most basic to the most complex, by using various 'rhetorical' means and by deploying a logic that consubstantially weaves and connects unity and plurality.

Armed with these few liminal reflections, the time has come to set out to meet the gods through their onomastic portraits, conceived as ephemeral imprints of the all-human representations of the gods' superior power. From port to port, from sanctuary to sanctuary, and from deity to deity, we will cross landscapes and settings from Tyre to Ibiza and from Babylon to Palmyra; we will observe the gods' savagery and magnanimity, confront Apollo and Dionysus, Zeus and Sarapis, scrutinise the hair of the gods and follow in their footsteps, turn towards the Moon and question the dark side of the Force. From the root to the summit, whether on a journey or for eternity, we shall explore the world of the deities in all its complexity in search of unseen portraits in the mirror of Vertumnus.