

GREEK DEITIES AS SINGLE OR PLURAL FIGURES? SOME CASE STUDIES*

By Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge

Summary: Greek deities are a valuable touchstone for assessing the opposite or complementary notions of ‘unity and diversity’, and the same issue could have been raised from the perspective of sacrificial ritual. In the context of ancient Greek religion, but also of Greek culture as a whole, no generalizing statement can be made without testing it against the fragmented evidence from several hundred cities. Some scholars have therefore come to consider that we should speak of ‘Greek religions’ in the plural in order to reflect the fragmentation, considering both the representation of the gods and the rituals performed in their honour. Focusing on the divine world, this paper asks the question: which dimension prevails in the (ancient as well as modern) way of dealing with a Greek deity, the apparent unity given by its theonym or the diversity of its cult-places, images, cult-titles, etc.? The argument here is for addressing together unity and diversity, singleness and plurality when studying Greek gods.

At Plataea in 479 BCE various battles took place, including one between the Spartans and the Persians near a sanctuary of Demeter. The Persians were routed and fled in disorder to their own camp. Herodotus, who is referring to the episode, considered as a marvel that no Persian entered the sacred grove of the goddess and died, while the bodies were piling up outside. Then he went on to say: “I think – if it is necessary to judge the ways of the gods – that the goddess herself denied them entry, since they had burnt her temple, the shrine at Eleusis.”¹ Referring later to the naval

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battle at Mycale in Ionia, Herodotus pointed out that the simultaneous occurrence of the two events on the same day was accompanied by another coincidence: “Moreover, there was the additional coincidence, that there were precincts of Eleusinian Demeter on both battlefields; for at Plataea the fight was near the temple of Demeter, as I have already said, and so it was to be at Mycale also.”² Already in Book 8, the omens in favour of the Greeks were linked to the Demeter of Eleusis, since the sound of the procession of the mysteries was heard in Attica during the war, even though Athens was empty of its inhabitants. This mysterious sound arose just before the battle of Salamis and manifested a clear indication of divine support for the Greeks, with an emphasis on Athenian commitment against the Persians.³

Aside from the fact that it allows me to evoke the battle of Plataea, inscribed in the title of the present volume, the episode told by Herodotus raises the question of the local *versus* regional *versus* Panhellenic character of the Greek gods. Such a topic is well adapted to a collective reflection about ‘unity’ and ‘diversity’ in ancient Greece and emphasises the religious dimension of this issue. In the historian’s words, the goddess Demeter is at the same time Demeter *tout court* supporting the Greeks against the Barbarians, Demeter whose sanctuary in Eleusis was burnt by the same Barbarians, and Demeter worshipped at Plataea and Mycale under the cult-title Eleusinia. In Herodotus’ times, the Panhellenic openness of the Eleusinian mysteries closely associates the generic Demeter supporting the Greeks with her local location in Attica. Moreover, it partly explains why the historian exceptionally addresses the concrete agency of a specific deity in the context of war, even if this choice contradicts the critical stance on “divine matters” exposed in Book 2. At

- 1 Hdt. 9.65: δοκέω δέ, εἴ τι περὶ τῶν θείων πρηγμάτων δοκέειν δεῖ, ἡ θεὸς αὐτῆ σφραγὸς οὐκ ἔδέκετο ἐμπρήσαντας {τὸ ἱρὸν} τὸ ἐν Ἐλευσίνοι ἀνάκτορον (trans. A.D. Godley, Loeb, 1920, slightly modified).
- 2 Hdt. 9.101 (cf. 97): καὶ τότε ἕτερον συνέπεσε γενόμενον, Δήμητρος τεμμένα Ἐλευσινίης παρὰ ἀμφοτέρας τὰς συμβολὰς εἶναι· καὶ γὰρ δὴ ἐν τῇ Πλαταιίδι παρ’ αὐτὸ τὸ Δημήτριον ἐγίνετο, ὡς καὶ πρότερόν μοι εἴρηται, ἡ μάχη. καὶ ἐν Μυκάλλῃ ἔμελλε ὡσαύτως ἔσσεσθαι (trans. idem).
- 3 Hdt. 8.65. On Demeter as an ‘identity factor’ in Herodotus, see Boedeker 2007 and Rodrigues 2020. For assessing Herodotus’s perspective on these episodes, see Harrison 2000: 65–67.

this stage, he had stipulated that he would confine his investigation to human affairs (*ta anthropeia pregmata*) without addressing divine ones (*ta theia* or *ta theia pregmata*), except when forced to do so by the necessities of his *logos*.⁴ In explaining the ‘miracle’ of Plataea by Demeter’s intervention, Herodotus seems to be in breach of his preliminary commitment and activate “the necessities of his *logos*”.⁵ Referring once again to Demeter’s support for the Greeks seems to have been important enough to justify this deviation from the investigator’s programme, recalled by the incidental clause: “if it is necessary to judge the ways of the gods.”

Gods and goddesses are a valuable touchstone for assessing the opposite or complementary notions of ‘unity and diversity’, and the same issue could have been raised from the perspective of sacrificial ritual.⁶ In the context of ancient Greek religion, but also Greek culture as a whole, no generalizing statement can be made without testing it against the scattered evidence from several hundred cities.⁷ Some scholars have therefore come to consider that we should speak of ‘Greek religions’ in the plural in order to reflect this diversity, considering both the representation of the gods and the rituals performed in their honour. For instance, the late Simon Price entitled his book on Greek religion, published in 1999, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks*. In the preface, he justified the plural form of the word religion in the title of his book: “I have examined the interplay between local and Panhellenic practices and ideas: the plural ‘religions’ of my title is designed to suggest the resulting variety, in both space and time” (p. ix). The same choice was made for the title of the book he had published with Mary Beard and John North one year earlier, the textbook on Roman religion entitled *Religions of Rome*.⁸ In French-speaking scholarship, Edmond Levy published, in 2000 and in French, a paper entitled “Can we speak of *one* Greek religion?” He gave a qualified answer to this question: “Is Greek religion one or many? It is

4 Hdt. 2.3 and 2.65.

5 Darbo-Peschanski 1987: 33; Scullion 2002: 197-98; Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 70-74.

6 See Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 139-59 (chp. 5: “Sacrifier aux dieux”).

7 Kindt 2023 addresses this point, mainly in a historiographical perspective, in a collection of papers devoted to *The Local Horizon of Ancient Greek Religion*.

8 John Scheid made the same choice in the title of his last book: *Les Romains et leurs religions. La piété au quotidien*. Paris, 2023.

both.” There is a deep ‘tension’ between general and particular, between global and local, between unity and diversity within the framework of Greek religion, especially regarding the figure of its multiple deities.⁹

Should we choose the plural to talk about Greek religion to emphasise its diversity? In comparison, when the topic of the ‘Greek city’ is addressed, one hardly finds the question of whether we should refer to Greek cities in the plural. Despite the political fragmentation of Classical Greece, the singular is widely used in publications on this subject. In Numa Fustel de Coulanges’ *La Cité antique* (1864), Gustave Glotz’s *La Cité grecque* (1928), and François de Polignac’s thesis, published in 1984 under the title *La Naissance de la cité grecque*, we find city in the singular. Other examples can be found in different languages.¹⁰ Simon Price himself, who put the religion of the ancient Greeks in the plural, edited in Oxford, in 1990, with Oswyn Murray, a collective work entitled *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander*. It is as if the concept of ‘city’, the Greek *polis*, was more amenable to a collective singularity than religion; it is as if, behind the multiplicity of particular city-states, it was easy to imagine an idea of the city shared by the Greeks—and hence by modern scholars—beyond its specific variations.

Of course, contrary to the famous Greek word *polis* encapsulating what we call ‘city’ (despite all the problems of translation), the term ‘religion’ has no strict equivalent in the ancient Greek language. However, the tension between the singular and the plural applies to the city itself as well as to one of its major components, which is the relationship of the Greeks with their gods. Keeping ‘Greek religion’ in the singular is the best option because the singular is able to accommodate plurality, while the reverse is not that easy to implement. *Religion* in the singular retains the tension to which I referred previously. On the contrary, *religions* in the plural only implies plurality.¹¹

9 Parts of the present paper are the English version of insights presented in the fourth chapter of Pirenne-Delforge 2020, a book entirely built on this tension.

10 See very recently Beck 2020, whose work is an emphasis on ‘localism’, under the title *Localism and the Ancient Greek City-State*, with ‘city-state’ in the singular.

11 Cf. Osborne 2015: 11: “The term ‘religion’ cannot be translated into Greek. The Greeks knew that different people worshipped different gods and did so in different ways. They also knew that worship of different gods or use of different names for the gods tended to correlate with different cult organization and practice. But no Greek

Let us add some more general words about the topic of diversity and plurality. In the context of any polytheism, the multiplicity of divine agents is the most obvious and direct manifestation of this issue. In Greece, the plurality of polytheism extends even wider. The category of heroes is one of these expansions, which, at the level of local communities, considerably increases the number of supra-human interlocutors.¹² A second element is the fact that some divine names are plural forms: Muses, Charites, Horai, Moirai.¹³ The tension between unity and plurality is particularly noticeable in the case of the Charites in Olympia. According to Pindar, Heracles had founded, in the sanctuary of Zeus, six altars for the Twelve gods, honoured two by two.¹⁴ The poet does not identify the pairs associated with each altar, but a scholiast gives the list.¹⁵ One of the altars was devoted to Dionysos and the Charites. This group of goddesses was considered as *one* divine power, despite its collective name. Moreover, the presence in the list of the river Alpheios flowing by the sanctuary of Zeus Olympios attests to the local interpretation of the group of the Twelve. Accordingly, the divine ensemble can remain perfectly generic or it can be deployed in twelve names varying from place to place. In the first case, the Twelve gods are conceived as a unity. In the second case, diversity prevails.¹⁶ A third process of expansion in the divine world is the attribution of cult-titles to deities worshipped in the myriads of sanctuaries in the Greek world. The result is what Robert Parker called “the cultic double name”.¹⁷ Beyond the fact that the Greeks

writer known to us classifies either the gods or the cult practices into separate ‘religions’.”

12 By contrast, Herodotus 2.50 pointed out that the Egyptians did not honour heroes.

13 Hes. *Theog.* 901-911, 915-917. Cf. Paus. 3.18.6; 9.35.1-3.

14 Pind. *Ol.* 5.5-6; 10.24-25. Cf. Paus. 5.14.6, 14.8, 14.10; 5.24.1.

15 Schol. Pind. *Ol.* 5.10a Drachmann: Zeus Olympios and Poseidon; Hera and Athena; Hermes and Apollo; Charites and Dionysos; Artemis and Alpheios; Kronos and Rhea.

16 See Pironti 2017: 98-99, with previous bibliography.

17 Parker 2003. The number of works on this topic has gradually increased in two decades now: e.g. Belayche *et al.* 2005; Versnel 2011: 60-84, 517-25; Lebreton & Bonnet 2019.

honoured a plurality of gods, this naming process attests to the fact that each god was potentially conceivable in the plural.¹⁸

Three case studies support the statement that, regarding their gods, the Greeks managed to conceptualize unity and diversity *together*. They form the core of the present paper. In conclusion, Demeter briefly comes back.

The first passage I want to discuss is from Herodotus, to which I return, the second is from Xenophon. Both authors are intellectuals, but their respective ways of addressing the issue of gods and cult-titles, directly or incidentally, tell a lot about the vision of the gods by their fellow-citizens. Despite the different levels of understanding of religious traditions in any culture, the following texts are produced by members of an educated elite, but they do not construct ‘worlds apart’.¹⁹ Even if, in this respect, we can never reach the level of information obtained by a field anthropologist interacting with those she or he observes, this literary evidence testifies to a cultural competence held, to varying degrees, by many Greeks. Archaic epic underlies this shared cultural knowledge, particularly the works attributed to Homer and Hesiod, whose role in the representation of the Greek gods was duly emphasised by Herodotus.²⁰ The passages analysed below provide a glimpse of the Greek ways of conceiving the gods between unity and diversity, between the general and the local. They should allow us to move beyond questioning the inconsistencies of Greek polytheism mainly based on our own difficulties in grasping a complex and fluid conception of the divine world.

Let us start with Herodotus. In Book 1, Croesus, the king of Lydia, has just lost his son, Atys, who was accidentally killed by the guest he had taken in. Distraught with pain, the king turns to Zeus:²¹

18 Detienne 1997: 72. Cf. Scully 1998: 163: “... in short, each individual god embodies a kind of polytheism”, and earlier: Gernet 1970: 222-30, Rudhardt 1992: 97, and Vernant 1974.

19 I resolutely distance myself from the vision of a ‘popular’ way of considering the gods that would be deeply distinct from the vision that intellectuals would have of them. See Stowers 2011 and Pirenne-Delforge (forthcoming a).

20 Hdt. 2.53. This passage is a recurring reference in the collective book directed by Gagné & Herrero de Jáuregui 2019.

21 Hdt. 1.44. On the onomastic attributes in this passage, see Gagné 2021: 50.

ἐκάλεε μὲν Δία καθάρσιον, μαρτυρόμενος τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ ξείνου πεπονθῶς εἶη, ἐκάλεε δὲ ἐπίστιόν τε καὶ ἑταιρήιον, τὸν αὐτὸν τοῦτον ὀνομάζων θεόν, τὸν μὲν ἐπίστιον καλέων, διότι δὴ οἰκίοισι ὑποδεξάμενος τὸν ξεῖνον φονέα τοῦ παιδὸς ἐλάνθανε βόσκων, τὸν δὲ ἑταιρήιον, ὡς φύλακον συμπέμψας αὐτὸν εὐρήκοι πολεμιώτατον.

... he invoked Zeus as the patron of purifications, taking him as a witness to the evil which the stranger had done to him; he invoked him as the protector of home and friendship – it was the same god whom he so called; as the protector of the home, because after having received the guest into his house he had unknowingly fed the murderer of his son; as the protector of friendship, because after having sent him as guardian, he had found in him his worst enemy.

The context is that of an invocation (the verb is *kalein*) in which three different cult-titles qualify the name of Zeus: *katharsios*, ‘purifier’, *epistios* (an Ionian form of *ephestios*), ‘home protector’, and *hetaireios*, ‘protector of fellowship’. Each designation is given an explanation that helps to circumscribe the circumstances of Atys’ murder. The first title introduced by μὲν refers to the defilement with which a death always affects a household, and even more in case of murder. Introduced by the expected δέ, the second and third epithets are closely linked to each other by the formula τε καί that emphasizes their semantic proximity. Protecting the home and the bonds of friendship belongs to the same register, since the hospitality discussed in the episode activates both aspects; a guest has been introduced into the king’s circle of sociability, which partially overlaps with the family context via the son, and the guest has been received into the household. The cult-titles *ephestios* and *hetaireios* invoke the protection of Zeus on these two aspects of hospitality.

Then comes the incidental clause specifying that it is ‘the same god whom he so names’ (the verb is then *onomazein*). At first glance, one could consider that the combination of unity and plurality of the god, which is my reading grid, was not self-evident, since Herodotus felt the necessity to stress that it was the same god and not three different gods.²² But the

22 So Versnel 2011: 73–74 with note 185.

balancing of Herodotus' statement that we have just reconstructed requires a different understanding of the sentence. If the author feels the need to insert the remark about "the same god" after the enumeration of the three cult-titles, this does not imply that his reader can think that he is dealing with a different Zeus each time. In fact, it is the theonym of the god called *ephestios* and *hetaireios* that could lead to confusion since Zeus' name is not repeated. The purpose of the investigator is to deliver a formal clarification about the identity of the god addressed by Croesus and not some theological statement that would contradict the common sense of his reader and justify the precision. Consequently, this passage cannot support the idea that a Greek conceived in the first instance that there were as many Zeuses as there were cult-titles associated with his name. It is even the opposite view that it supports. Indeed, in this passage, where three cult-titles appear that refer to two spheres of Zeus' competence, Herodotus does assert that only one god is at stake—the expression τὸν αὐτὸν τοῦτον [...] θεόν raises no doubt in this regard. The ancient reader of Herodotus was probably not surprised by it.

Xenophon can also be called upon to address this issue, in a speech he attributes to Socrates speaking about the god Eros in the *Banquet*.²³ The philosopher opposes two Aphrodites for the purposes of his philosophical demonstration. In the *Banquet* of Plato, the same discourse is made by a certain Pausanias.²⁴ On both sides, two kinds of love (*eros*) are described, one that addresses the soul and the other the body. Since Eros is indissolubly linked to Aphrodite, there are two Aphrodites behind these two types of love, according to two cult-titles of the goddess well attested in Athens. As Ourania ('the Celestial One'), Aphrodite would be the goddess of pure love, while the Pandemos ('She of all the people') would protect love based on sexuality. It has long been shown that such an opposition was an *ad hoc* invention adapting aspects of the cult to the needs of a philosophical demonstration. Nevertheless, the exercise of multiplying the goddess herself—and Eros with her—is rooted in the fact that in a polytheistic context, a god can be considered as plural. However, there

23 Xen. *Symp.* 8.9.

24 Pl. *Symp.* 180e-181a, 181e.

is more in this text. The remark attributed to Socrates by Xenophon serves to deepen and refine this observation (8.9):

εἰ μὲν οὖν μία ἐστὶν Ἀφροδίτη ἢ διτταί, Οὐρανία τε καὶ Πάνδημος, οὐκ οἶδα—καὶ γὰρ Ζεὺς ὁ αὐτὸς δοκῶν εἶναι πολλὰς ἐπωνυμίας ἔχει—ὅτι γε μέντοι χωρὶς ἑκατέρᾳ βωμοί τε καὶ τε ναοί εἰσι καὶ θυσίαι τῇ μὲν Πανδήμῳ ῥαδιουργότεραι, τῇ δὲ Οὐρανίᾳ ἀγνότεραι, οἶδα.

Whether there is only one Aphrodite or two, Ourania and Pandemos, I do not know, for Zeus, who always seems the same, has many surnames. What I do know, however, is that for each of the two separately there are altars and temples, and also sacrifices which, for the Pandemos, are full of impudence, while they are purer for the Ourania.

The process of argumentation must be closely followed to understand the passage. Socrates first raises the question of Aphrodite's duality (μία ἐστὶν Ἀφροδίτη ἢ διτταί) by linking it to the existence of her two cult-titles, Ourania and Pandemos. He suspends his judgment on the goddess to take a point of comparison in Zeus, the god arguably best provided with cult-titles in the entire Greek world. Yet, despite this 'eponymous' abundance (πολλὰς ἐπωνυμίας ἔχει), Zeus seems to remain the same (Ζεὺς ὁ αὐτὸς δοκῶν εἶναι [...]). Socrates therefore returns to Aphrodite without needing to answer the original question since the case of Zeus has provided for it. The underlying hypothesis is the unity of the divine figure. Where does the plurality of the divinity 'which appears the same' come from? It is rooted in the multiplication of its sanctuaries and cults under various titles.

The moralising reference to distinct rituals related to each surname of Aphrodite does not withstand scrutiny of the data on the Athenian cults of the goddess, but this aspect of the argument is incidental to the present point.²⁵ The more important element in this passage, which takes the form of an internal interpretation of Greek culture, is the careful approach of "the cultic double name". Socrates makes a first observa-

25 See e.g. Pirenne-Delforge 1988.

tion: no certainty is reachable as far as gods are concerned. A second observation follows: despite these uncertainties, something stable seems to exceed and surpass the polyonymy of each divine figure. Then comes the third and last observation: the local anchorage of sanctuaries and rituals is a determining factor in understanding Greek gods, in parallel with something stable, which is the theonym when it is shared by the Greeks at a supra-local level. As a result, in a local cult, the god's name with a cult epithet is one aspect of the deity seen in close-up, not the expression of a completely different deity. A Greek god is a power at work in the world, distributed locally in the many places where it is likely to be honoured.²⁶ In this respect, myths and rituals are not unrelated bodies of evidence, but specific languages, which resonate inside the mental frame of poets who narrated tales, of painters who decorated Attic vases and of worshippers who performed rituals.²⁷

At a local level, other types of evidence are available. Sales of priesthoods shed a particular light on local cults, and one of these contracts forms my last case study before coming back to Demeter. In the second half of the second century BCE, the city of Cos sold at least twice the priesthood of Heracles Kallinikos. The contracts of these transactions have been preserved by chance, but only one is readable enough for study.²⁸ According to the wording of the text, the sale concerns the priesthood of Heracles Kallinikos at the agora and at the harbour. The contract further stipulates that at the time of the sale, the magistrates in charge of the process shall “sacrifice to each of the two gods a sacrificial animal of 100 drachmas for the health of the male and female citizens, and of those who live in the city”.²⁹ Similarly, when reference is made to the management of offerings performed by other magistrates, “sacrifices for these gods” are mentioned.³⁰

26 The *locus classicus* about Greek gods as ‘powers’ is Vernant 1974. On the notion of ‘distribution’ of a god’s power, see Bettini 2015: chps. 2 and 7.

27 On this way of studying the Greek gods, see the methodological reflections in the introduction to Pirenne-Delforge & Pironti 2022.

28 IG XII.4 320 = CGRN 221. On the various aspects of this cult, see Paul 2013: 99-117.

29 Lines 10-12: θυσάντω ἐκατέρω τῶν θεῶν ἱερεῖον ἀπὸ δραχμῶν ἑκατὸν ὑπὲρ ὑγείας τε πολ[ιτᾶ]ν καὶ πο[λ]ιτιδῶν καὶ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐν ταῖ πόλει.

30 Line 24: αἱ θυσίαι τοῖς θεοῖς τούτοις.

That this Heracles is one and the same god is all the more evident from the fact that he bears the same cult-title in both his sanctuaries. The title of the single priesthood supports this: the buyer of the office will serve Heracles Kallinikos τοῦ ἐπὶ ἀγορᾷ καὶ ἐπὶ λιμένι, “the one at the agora and at the harbor” and not “the one of the agora and the one of the harbour”.³¹ However, the reference to sacrifices administered by magistrates complicates the picture. Rather than stipulating that an animal of 100 drachmas will be sacrificed in each of the sanctuaries, the contract states that the offering will be made “to each of the two gods”, which is confirmed a few lines later in a slightly different form. The Heracles of the two sanctuaries thus becomes “the two gods” honoured by one sacrifice each. The double location of the cult has dualized the *theos*. Does this mean that Heracles Kallinikos is “two gods”?

The question thus formulated is absurd and invites us to return to Wilamowitz’s considerations about the predicative value of the term *theos*. The attribution of the predicate confers a particular quality to a subject, but says nothing about the ontology of the subject so qualified.³² Following this intuition, let us say that Heracles Kallinikos is *theos* both in the agora and in the harbour. Clearly, the manifestation of his divine power is expected on both sides. The inscription could be considered as an epigraphic actualisation of the reflections of Socrates on the duality of Aphrodite mentioned above. Let us paraphrase it *à la manière de Socrate*: “Whether Heracles is one or two, I do not know. But what I do know is that he was honoured at Cos in two different sanctuaries where he is called Kallinikos.”

The philosopher takes the trouble to ask the question of divine ontology, even if it means suspending the answer in favour of local cultic considerations. In contrast, the epigraphic contract has no use for philosophy and ontology, and is fully embedded in the local cultic situation. Where the modern interpreter identifies a contradiction (Heracles Kallinikos seems to be ‘two gods’), the regulation remains impervious to the principles of formal logic. In a way that is all the more enlightening for being incidental and involuntary, the contract from the island of Cos

31 Lines 8-9: περὶ τᾶς ἱερωσύνας τοῦ Ἡρακλεῦς τοῦ Καλλινίκου τοῦ ἐπὶ ἀγορᾷ καὶ ἐπὶ λιμένι. A point well made by Versnel 2011: 76.

32 von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff 1931: 363.

confirms that the Greeks conceived each god as a divine power that was ‘distributed’, notably according to the places where they paid him homage. Unity and plurality of the gods are smoothly juxtaposed in this modest administrative document, and both are to be addressed *together* when studying ancient Greek religion, in the singular.³³

To conclude, let us return for a moment to Plataea in 479, where we find Demeter preventing the Persians from dying or taking refuge in her sanctuary. In this passage from the *Histories*, Herodotus refers, in his authorial voice, to the agency of a specific deity on the battlefield – or rather around it. Exceptionally, he adopts an overhanging point of view in the manner of Homer describing the Olympian gods engaged in battle at Troy. As we saw earlier, Herodotus highlights the presence of sanctuaries of the goddess at key moments in the Greeks’ engagement with the Persians. The goddess herself is supposed to be on the Greek side against the Barbarians, contrary to the Homeric perspective, where she is never involved in the war.³⁴

The Eleusinian framework, related to a strong Athenian perspective, is predominant when Herodotus makes Demeter an ‘identity factor’. The explanation for the recurring presence of the goddess alongside the Greeks could end there. However, if we consider that, in Attica, the Eleusinian divine mother and daughter are also called *Thesmophoroi*,³⁵ another element is echoing the present argument about unity and diversity: the importance of the *Thesmophoria* festival for the two deities throughout the Greek world, from the archaic to the Roman period.³⁶ De-

33 Cf. also Kindt 2023: 19, in relation to Beck 2020.

34 In neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey* is Demeter a protagonist of the plot. In the *Iliad*, she appears in verses where reference is made to her cereal-growing skills: e.g. Hom. *Il.* 5.500, 13.322, 21.76. In the *Odyssey*, Calypso recalls her union with the mortal Iasion (5.125).

35 CGRN 94 (Eleusis, ca. 330-270 BCE).

36 “By far the most widespread of all Greek festivals”: Nilsson 1906: 313. Cf. Parker 2005: 270-83, and McLardy 2023 with a good emphasis on the local variations of the festival, between Athens and Sicily. On this topic, I gave a series of lectures in 2023 at the Collège de France, which are available on the internet: <https://www.college-de-france.fr/fr/agenda/cours/demeter-thesmophoros>.

spite the local variations that can be glimpsed in the evidence, the framework of the festival appear to be recurrent: everywhere, it seems to concern the fertility of the fields and the fecundity of married women who are key players in the birth and nurturing of future generations. In other words, these divine competences involve a fundamental dimension of community survival. Behind the Eleusinian motif of Herodotus' narratives lies perhaps also this Thesmophoric divine profile, amply attested in the Greek world.³⁷

To model these final considerations on the questioning of Socrates by Xenophon, I could conclude as follows: "Whether Demeter is one or many, I do not know, but what I do know is that she is honoured almost everywhere in the Greek world under the title *Thesmophoros*." When it comes to studying the Greek gods, unity and diversity need to be considered together.

ABBREVIATION

CGRN: J.-M. Carbon, S. Peels-Matthey & V. Pirenne-Delforge, *Collection of Greek Ritual Norms (CGRN)*, 2017-, consulted in 2023. URL: <http://cgrn.ulg.ac.be>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54510/CGRN0>.

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37 On the history of the epiclesis' meaning, see Pirenne-Delforge (forthcoming b).

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