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Representation or presence? Picturing the divine in ancient Rome

Jörg Rüpke

0 Introduction

The ancient religions that we try to conceptualize as "traditional religion" or "polis religion", "civic cults" or "polytheism as an open system" in order to avoid the derogatory term of "paganism" had simply be called "idolatry" by centuries of Jewish or Christian not only polemicists but simple observers.[1] In fact, in using statues housed in temples, ancient religions had a powerful instrument to construct – or, from a different perspective, represent – the divine in a differentiated, polytheistic form. It enabled ritual access, stimulated reflexion, inspired imagination in day or night dreams and visions. It even informed critical philosophical thinking. The gods could be met and addressed in their temples, sacrifices enabled via extispicy to put questions and receive immediate answer. The inquiry into the will of the gods in the many forms of divination frequently draws on this system of representation, too.

"Idolatry" seems to be a much less derogatory term today. Or at least, should be. In an age of media innovation, humanities have discovered images as a major object of research. Specialties like art history or iconology have advanced to the centre of research in anthropology as religious studies. Drawing on the concepts and results of such inquiries, I will try to more precisely describe the place of images in Roman religion by asking: Do they and how do they represent the gods?

1 Religion with and without images

In his speech in front of the pontiffs, Cicero (106–43 BC) protests that Clodius had robbed him of his house without a sufficient legal basis for turning it into a sanctuary, that is, to have consecrated his house, to have made a monument in

1 See Schmidt 1987. – For intensive discussions I would like to thank the colleagues within FIGVRA and Nicole Belayche, the coordinator, in particular. The respective grant of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft is gratefully acknowledged.

the place of his house, to have dedicated a statue.[2] Clearly, this is an intensification in religious quality. The steps are not a necessary sequel. According to Roman right of property and usual public procedure, a magistrate could dedicate a piece of land to the gods, thus transferring property from the public realm into the power of a god, rendering it *sacer.*[3] A religious monument, the next step, needs not house a statue, one could think of an open altar, an enclosure, even a roofed structure. Of course, thirdly, a statue would undeniably attest that such a structure has to be considered as the "house", *aedes,* of a god, a dwelling place of a divinity, not a storage room or a meeting hall, a *schola* – buildings that might of course house statues, too. Piety and rituals could exist without images.

And yet, by the time of Cicero, images were important and ubiquitous. In the case of Clodius' dubious temple foundation, it is the use of the statue (of which we will learn further details later in Cicero's speech and this paper) which seals the sacralisation of previously private property, and which, I suppose, created unambiguity. Varro (116–27 BC), Cicero's contemporary, claims this to be an old, but secondary development after one hundred and seventy years of cult without images *(deos sine simulacro coluisse)*,[4] even if temples, Varro speaks more precisely of roofed structures *(testudines),* had already been in use earlier.[5] Probably rightly, Varro is pointing to Greek and Etruscan influence in these matters[6] and to the fact that statuary is intimately related to architectural décor. Not the one or the few images in the temple's interior, but the many images put on the roof would have been the more striking innovation and remained the hallmark of this and later periods' Tuscan temples and its Roman variants.[7]

Now, I am not going to discuss the historical significance of Varro's philosophically motivated statement that postulates (because I do not see how Varro could possibly have clear evidence for the lack of images) the absence of large images in a locality before the start of urban monumentalization. And yet, Varro probably was right. With the exception of Egypt, the rise of anthropomorphic images in the mainland and on the margins of the Near

2 Cic. *dom.* 51: *te meam domum consecrasse, te monumentum fecisse in meis aedibus, te signum dedicasse.*

3 See Rüpke 2006.

4 Varro, Ant. rer. div. fr. 18 Cardauns: *antiquos Romanos plus annos centum et septuaginta deos sine simulacro coluisse. quod si adhuc mansisset, castius dii observarentur.*

5 Serv. Aen. auct. 1,505; Cardauns, comm. ad loc. 1976, 147. Cf. Varro, Ant. rer. div. fr. 70, where *delubrum* is associated with images, not *templum: delubrum esse … aut ubi plura numina sub uno tecto sunt, ut Capitolium, aut ubi praetor aedem area sit adsumpta deum causa, ut in circo Flaminio Iovi Statori, aut in quo loco dei dicatum sit simulacrum … sic in quo deum ponunt, delubrum dicant.*

6 Varro, Ant. rer. div. fr. 38 Cardauns.

7 See Cristofani 1987; Zevi 1987; Izzet 2000.

Eastern and Greek cultures is dateable to the end of the first half of the first millennium BC only according to recent research.[8] As already pointed out, central features of Roman religion could function without reference to images. Divine property in space or in time, that is consecrated land or *feriae*, holidays marked in the calendar by NP and attributed to a single god each[9], might be seen as rather static features. However, even prayers and sacrifices could be performed without direct address to an image. A temporarily raised altar of grass sods and simple earthenware for the vessels would do, as Varro points out in the context of his critique of temple luxury.[10] But this is no adequate description of the late republican and imperial period.

2 Picturing

A Roman of that time did not need to go to a temple in order to need to know about images. For a brief moment I enter or pass some Pompeian houses. In the doorway of the Casa dei Vettii (VI.15.a/b) a visitor encountered an image of Priapus. It is famous for his penis being balanced against a bag of money, but it is representative for Priapus being frequently found at an entrance position, probably indicating sexual punishment for thieves and badly behaving guests rather than sexual lust.[11] The complex position of the doors enabled the gatekeeper to force certain guests into a direct confrontation with Priapus through a smaller entrance or to let them just pass the image through a wider doorway[12] – only to encounter Priapus again in statuary form on a fountain in the peristyle.

In a house at VI.7, famous for the so-called "carpenters' procession" (that showed common people, perhaps the proprietors, to carry an image of Minerva around) the doorway 9 (now faded) greeted a visitor with paintings of Mercury and Fortuna to his left and right. John Clarke's interpretation is confirmed by many instances: "The owner was, as it were, doubling his luck, since Mercury was the god who made tradesmen and shopkeepers prosper. Fortuna brought wealth and prosperity as well." Outside, a painting of Minerva completed the combination of protective deities.[13] A third example can be added. Over the entrance to the Shop of the Procession to Cybele in IX.7.1 was a row of four busts, showing Sol, Jupiter, Mercury, and Luna. Again, I follow Clarke and

8 See Ornan 2005, 171.
9 See Rüpke 1995, 492 f.
10 Varro, Ant. rer. div. fr. 38 Cardauns: *Frugi religio et paupers ritus et nulla Capitolia … sed tempraria de caespite altaria et vasa adhuc Samia …*
11 Thus e. g. Clarke 1998, 174–7; Balch 2008, 118 f.
12 Kastenmeier 2001, 307–11.
13 Clarke 2003, 86.

expand on his interpretation: Sun and Moon set the shop into a cosmic framework, inside of which the bearded Jupiter pointed to the political Roman framework, Mercury to the wealth accorded by trade.[14]

Obviously, such a form of communication between owner and visitor or client presupposed a standardisation of the "medium" and its meaning – to use a first classification.[15] It is a restricted number of items, that is, deities, which are combined. The stabilization of meaning is produced by the iconographic practice.

This mechanism had been seen by Varro. After his systematic accounts and constructions of different groups of highly specialised gods, he added to his pentadic structure of the *Antiquitates rerum divinarum* a sixteenth book "De dis praecipuis atque selectis", "on special and selected gods". In his introduction to the book he defined these as those gods who received temples and who were "distinguished by many signs" (*quibus aedes dedicaverunt eosque pluribus signis ornatos notaverunt,* fr. 228 Cardauns). Linguistically, Varro seems to be contracting the ideas of statues, elsewhere always called *simulacra*, and attributes giving uniqueness to each. A single god could be venerated without image, as is pointed out in fr. 15, but for further differentiation temples and images are necessary. The dedication of a statue by women enables the creation of a Fortuna Muliebris; Fortuna and Felicitas could be differentiated first of all by having different temples.[16] Given this principle, Varro has problems to imagine the dealing with the multitude of gods already introduced by king Numa. Clearly, different rituals *(sacra)* existed, but would these temporary events suffice to permanently differentiate numerous gods, he must have reasoned. Different paraphrases and parallel passages suggest that Varro, even if he claimed that there had been no images and temples yet (fr. 38 Cardauns), assumed that a sort of different small sanctuaries, *delubra*, must have existed.[17]

It should be pointed out that narratives, a possible media alternative, are not referred to in these contexts – huge differences between religious knowledge encoded in texts and knowledge encoded in images are a frequent phenom-

14 Cf. Clarke 2003, 89. Cf. Cic. ND 1.83: *Isto enim modo dicere licebit Iovem semper barbatum, Apollinem semper inberbem.*

15 The concept of religious communication is elaborated in Malik, Rüpke, Wobbe 2007, 35–43 und 73–88.

16 Varro, Ant. rer. div. fr. 192 (from Aug. civ. 4,19): … *quam Fortunam vocant, ut simulacrum eius, quod a matronis dedicatum est et appellate est Fortuma muliebris, etiam locutum esse* … Cf. fr. 191: *Fortuna de … colitur … aliud est Felicitas, aliud Fortuna … diversae aedes, diversae arae, diversa sacra.*

17 See Varro, De vita populi Romani 1, fr. 15 Riposati; Tert. idol. 3,1: *Idolum aliquamdiu retro non erat. priusquam huius monstri artifices ebullissent, sola templa et uacuae aedes erant.*

enon.[18] An important confirmation for this interpretation of the Varronian fragments is given by the pontiff Cotta's account in Cicero's treatise "On the nature of the gods": "From childhood onwards we know Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Neptune, Vulcanus, Apollo, and the other gods in that appearance, that was intended by painters and sculpturers, not only in facial appearance, but also in paraphernalia *(ornatu),* age, and clothing."[19] Of course, this fact is a problem, as the philosophical debate points out, this is arbitrary and contingent, it is not a notion on which one could build a concept of anthropomorphic gods as the Epicureans do.[20] But the occasional critique of intellectuals – naturally shared by Varro[21] – did not endanger the actual working of the semantic system, and intellectuals knew to account for this practical usage, too. After all, Varro passes over his earlier criticism, the statues and their paraphernalia *(simulacra deorum et insignia ornatusque),* he said elsewhere, were intended to help the initiated to see the real significance of the gods, the soul *(anima)* pervading the world.[22]

In historical perspective, other advantages were more important. The dominance of the iconographic system enabled the easy generation of new gods, Fortuna Muliebris has already been mentioned. The cult of divine qualities or personifications, that seems so awkward to modern accounts of ancient religion, looses all exceptionality if approached from the visual angle. Temples and statues made them an integral part of the system.[23] Judged by the number of prodigies reported for these temples, Salus, Fortuna, or Concordia were not different from Juno or Mars; about one third of the prodigies reported for temples relate to such deities.[24] It is from the temple of such a goddess, Fortuna huiusce diei, of which we have fragments of one of the largest statues. Her statue of probably more than eight metres stood on a basis of more than two metres height and

18 Stolz 2004, 14, referring to action as the third form of encoding of the "religious message"; Uehlinger 2006, 178.

19 Cic. ND 1.81: *a paruis enim Iouem Iunonem Mineruam Neptunum Vulcanum Apollinem reliquos deos ae facie nouimus qua pictores fictoresque uoluerunt, neque solum facie sed etiam ornatu aetate uestuti.*

20 Cic. ND 1.76–84. Cf. Wifstrand Schiebe 2003 on the ontological status of these gods.

21 See the harsh critique Varro, Ant. rer. div. fr. 18 Cardauns (cit. in n. 4).

22 Ibid., fr. 225 Cardauns: *Antiquos simulacra deorum et insignia ornatusque finxisse, quae cum oculis animadvertissent hi, qui adissent doctrinae mysteria, possent animam mundi ac partes eius, id est deos verso, animo videre; quorum qui simulacra specie hominis fecerunt, hoc videri secutos, quod mortalium animus, qui est in corpore humano, simillimus est inmortalis animi; tamquam si vasa ponerentur causa notandorum deorum et in Liberi aede oenophorum sisteretur, quod significaret vinum, per id quod continent id quod continetur; ita per simulacrum, quod formam haberet humanam, significari animam rationalem, quod eo velut vase natura ista soleat contineri, cuius naturae deum volunt esse vel deos.*

23 Clark's notion of "resources" (she adds e.g. festivals) stress the creative process, less the individual appraisal.

24 Clark 2007, 184.

must have filled the small space of the circular temple B in the Largo Argentina.[25] The recently popularized concept of "picturing", of transforming a world by making pictures of it, seems to catch this process neatly.[26]

The previous remarks seem to imply an unlimited proliferation of new gods and statues. The opposite is true. The same Ciceronian Cotta already noticed that the number of names of gods in the Roman pontifical rituals and texts is rather limited.[27] Inflation of signs would have endangered the working of the semantic system as described before. New cults were subjected to a complex senatorial procedure, and a second potential source of inflation was curbed, too. As Peter Steward in his book on "Statues in Roman Society" observed, "strong socio-political pressures [existed] that ensure the differentiation of divine and human images in Rome."[28] The conceptual differentiation was reflected in the terminology. "*Simulacrum* with its divine associations is specifically *not* applied to honorific and public commemorative statues of human beings."[29]

3 Using images

It is a truism of the iconic turn[30] that images are created by seeing, that by being seen they are perceived as looking at the observer, thus focusing the analysis on the interaction of object and observer rather than on inherent qualities of the object and a semiotic approach only.[31] The gaze of the temple visitor changes the image, creates a new, if you like, social fact. Varro is right in stating that images made of bronze, earthenware, plaster, or marble[32] do not feel and do not demand anything, thus neither producing guilt nor gratitude.[33] And yet the praying visitor makes the god hear, even if the deity refuses to grant the wish.

25 See ibid., 128–31. The average height of a honourific statue including basis was about 3 metres (Fejfer 2008, 18).

26 See e. g. for geography: Mike Crang, "Picturing practices: research through the tourist gaze", *Progress in Human Geography 21* (1997), 359–73.

27 Cic. ND 1.84: *deinde nominum non magnus numerus, ne* in pontificiis quidem nostris.

28 Stewart 2003, 31. See also Fejfer 2008, 20–25 for the archaeological evidence of the 1st cent. BC.

29 Stewart 2003, 33. As Sylvia Estienne demonstrated in a paper presented at the Max-Weber-Kolleg Erfurt, in inscriptions *signum* is synonymous with simulacrum in this respect. However, exceptionally in Africa *statua* usually refers to divine statues (2010).

30 Maar 2004.

31 Briefly Bräunlein 2009, 774–7; Bauer 2007, 105.

32 Cf. Sen. *superst.* fr. 31 = Aug. civ. 6.10 on the contrast between the inviolability of the gods and the unworthiness of the matter.

33 Varro, Ant. rer. div. fr. 22 Cardauns: *Dii veri neque desiderant ea (sc. sacra) neque deposcunt, ex aere autem facti, testa, gypso vel marmore multo minus haec curant; carent enim sensu; neque ulla contrahitur, se ea non feceris, culpa, neque ulla, si feceris, gratia.*

With regard to the practices of votives, Propertius' poem on Vertumnus in the Vicus Tuscus is very much an analysis of this constructive process.[34] There is negative evidence, too. In reflecting on the limits of appropriate religion, practices related to statues are within the focus of the critique of *superstitio.* One of the few fragments known from Seneca's treatise "De superstitione" deals with such practices, people who from a distance wash or comb a statue for instance.

> *In Capitolium perueni, pudebit publicatae dementiae, quod sibi uanus furor adtribuit officii. Alius nomina deo subicit, alius horas Ioui nuntiat: alius lutor est, alius unctor, qui uano motu bracchiorum imitatur unguentem. Sunt quae Iunoni ac Mineruae capillos disponant (longe a templo, non tantum a simulacro stantes digitos mouent ornantium modo), sunt quae speculum teneant; sunt qui ad uadimonia sua deos aduocent, sunt qui libellos offerant et illos causam suam doceant. Doctus archimimus, senex iam decrepitus, cotidie in Capitolio mimum agebat, quasi dii libenter spectarent, quem illi homines desierant. Omne illic artificum genus operatum diis inmortalibus desidet.*
>
> But if ever you go up on the Capitol, it will make you feel ashamed just to see the crazy performances put on for the public's benefit, all represented as duties by light-hearted lunacy. So Jupiter has a special attendant to announce callers and another one to tell him the time; one to wash him and another to oil him, who in fact only mimes the movements with his hands. Juno and Minerva have special women hairdressers, who operate some distance away, not just from the statue, but from the temple; they move their fingers in the style of hair dressers; others hold up mirrors. You find some people who are praying to the gods to put up bail for them, and others again who are handing over their writs and expounding the lawsuits they are involved in. There used to be an old, decrepit but very experienced pantomime artist who put on his act every day on the Capitol as if the gods were enjoying the show of a man, who those human spectators have deserted. Every type of artisanship has settled down there working for the immortal gods.[35]

These are acid remarks, addressed at traditional cult as well as individual radicalisation. At the same time it is precious evidence for the embodiment of ancient religion, hard to swallow for sublime philosophical concepts of the divine. Plutarchos, thus, concentrates his criticism of *deisidaimonia* on behaviour in temples, too. Plutarch's text is prominent for his contrasting of *deisidaimonia* on the one hand and atheism on the other as the two main forms of a wrong position against the gods (ch. 1, 164E). This antithesis structures the whole text, leading to a comparison that – surprisingly – prefers atheism, never leading to superstition, to superstition, frequently resulting in atheism (ch. 10a–12; 169E–171B). This had even led to the hypothesis, that Plutarch did employ a third-century BCE diatribe of the atheist cynic Bion of Borysthenes.[36]

34 Prop. 4.2; see Rüpke 2009, more generally 2009a.

35 Sen. superst. fr. 36 Haase = fr. 69 Vottero (Aug. civ. 6.10), trsl. following Beard, North, Price, *Religions of Rome*, Cambridge 1998, 2, 234 (ending different).

36 Erbse 1952, 299, following Abernetty.

Dominant characteristic is the fear of the gods, clearly displaying a wrong concept of the gods, a mistaken theology.[37] This does without differentiation include the daimons. In his attempt to trace the concept of superstition mainly in Greek texts, Dale B. Martin has rightly pointed out that the concept of *daimones,* which might have negative attitudes towards men, is introduced by Plutarch only in later texts – and becomes quite consequential, as it undermines a general line of philosophical argumentation.[38]

In his early text, Plutarch concentrates on the resultant ambiguity of piety, if tainted by unwarranted fear. It is his choice of examples, his observations that give an insight into pragmatic concerns with regard to contemporary religion. His analysis starts in the private realm, in sleep or at home (3c–d, 165E–166 A), but quickly arrives at temples. Instead of places of salvation in crisis, sanctuaries become places of punishment (4a, 166F). This logic of hate and fear and seeking the vicinity of the gods (11) permeates the whole treatise. Proskynesis in front of images instead of a realistic conception of transcendent deities, combining criticism and refuge (6b) is characteristic. To stay at home is a rather mild form of *deisidaimonia* (7d), the most severe form is realized in the temples of the gods (9b). It is the image of the Carthaginians sacrifices of their own children that forms the final climax (13) of the concluding analysis of *deisidaimonia* as emotional disorder (14), leading to atheism rather than – the final word – *eusebeia* (14).

Even if certain reactions to images and anthropomorphic images, to images of humans, in particular, have an anthropological fundament,[39] such reactions and even the mere glance are culturally informed and potentially a matter of conflict.

Obviously, many Roman users interpreted the confrontation with the statue as a personal encounter. I should like to come back to Cicero's speech in front of the pontiffs. For about five paragraphs Cicero deals with the deity, to whom his house had been dedicated. The evidence is telling:

> *Ista tua pulchra Libertas deos penatis et familiaris meos lares expulit, ut se ipsa tamquam in captivis sedibus conlocaret? …* (110) *At quae dea est? Bonam esse oportet, quoniam quidem est abs te dedicata. 'Libertas,' inquit, 'est.' Tu igitur domi meae conlocasti, quam ex urbe tota sustulisti? Tu … Libertatis simulacrum in ea domo conlocabas, quae domus erat ipsa indicium crudelissimi tui dominatus et miserrimae populi Romani servitutis? Eumne potissimum Libertas domo sua debuit pellere, qui nisi fuisset in servorum potestatem civitas tota venisset?* (111) *At unde est ista inventa Libertas? quaesivi enim diligenter. Tanagraea quaedam meretrix fuisse dicitur. Eius non longe a Tanagra simulacrum e marmore in sepulcro positum fuit. Hoc quidam homo nobilis, non alienus ab hoc religioso Libertatis sacerdote, ad ornatum aedilitatis suae deportavit …* (112) …

37 Erbse 1952, 304–313; Martin 2004, 96.
38 Martin 2004, 98–108.
39 Mitchell 2008.

signum de busto meretricis ablatum isti dedit, quod esset signum magis istorum quam publicae libertatis. Hanc deam quisquam violare audeat, imaginem meretricis, ornamentum sepulcri, a fure sublatam, a sacrilego conlocatam? haec me domo mea pellet? haec victrix adflictae civitatis rei publicae spoliis ornabitur? haec erit in eo monumento quod positum est ut esset indicium oppressi senatus ad memoriam sempiternae turpitudinis?[40]

Did that beautiful Liberty of yours turn out my Penates and the Lares of my family, in order to be established there herself by you, as if in a conquered country? … (110) And what goddess is she whom you have established there? She ought indeed to be the good goddess; since she has been consecrated by you. "She is Liberty," says he. Have you then established her in my house whom you have driven out of the whole city? Did you … then place the image of Liberty in that house, which was of itself a proof of your most cruel tyranny and of the miserable slavery of the Roman people? Ought Liberty drive him, of all men in the world, from his house, whose existence was the only thing that prevented the whole city from coming under the power of slaves? (111) But from whence was that Liberty brought? For I sought for her diligently. She is said to have been a prostitute at Tanagra. At no great distance from Tanagra a marble image of her was placed on her tomb. A certain man of noble birth, not altogether unconnected with this holy priest of Liberty, carried off this statue to decorate his aedileship … (112) … He gave the statue which he had taken from the prostitute's tomb to that fellow, because it was much more suited to such people as he is than to Public Liberty. Can any one dare to profane this goddess, the statue of a prostitute, the ornament of a tomb, carried off by a thief; and consecrated by a sacrilegious infidel? Is it she who is to drive me from my house? Is she the avenger of this afflicted city? Is she to be adorned with the spoils of the republic? Is she to be a part of that monument which has been erected so as to be a token of the oppression of the senate, and to keep alive for ever the recollection of this man's infamy?[41]

The passage starts and end with personifications. Libertas is acting, is expelling Cicero from his house. In between the history of the actual statue is told, a funeral statue of a prostitute, object of a sequence of illegitimate translocations. However, Cicero does not discriminate between goddess and material form. *Ista tua Libertas,* your special type of Liberty, is not a benevolent address of a deity, and it is perverse that the arch-enemy of civil liberty entertains such a goddess. But it is a deity. Semantically and syntactically, the conceptual and the material form of the deity are treated strictly parallel, stressing identity: *at quae dea est* (110) parallels *at unde est* (111). The goddess is present in her simulacrum, she is acting as simulacrum. *Libertatis simulacrum in ea domo …* (110) parallels *Libertas domo sua …* (111). The deity is as negative as her statue and *vice versa.*

This sense of presence is converging with archaeological findings by Henner von Hesberg and Dirk Steuernagel. Paralleling a development that is visible in

40 Cic. *domo* 108–112.

41 Trsl. on the basis of: M. Tullius Cicero. *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero,* literally translated by C. D. Yonge, B. A. London. George Bell & Sons, York Street, Covent Garden, 1891.

restauration of some Greek temples in Hellenistic and imperial times,[42] but prevalent in Sicily and South Italy, Roman temples seem to have staged this sense of presence in order to enable corresponding experiences. Indicators are the lavish interior of temples,[43] complex architectonical regulations of access and a very careful presentation of the cult statue. Doors and doorway gained in importance, floor mosaics or curtains could articulate the structure of the temple interior and the temporal dimension of the process of access to the statue.[44] Positioning the statue directly onto a mosaic floor could stress its mobility.[45] The combination of different materials could heighten the impression of vividness.[46] This is not always well combining with the Greek tradition of an awe-inspiring aesthetics produced by a beautiful and large image at the back wall of the innermost chamber.[47]

The anecdotic evidence, already referred to earlier, also converges. P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus spent every night before major decisions, frequently lonely sitting in the *cella* of Jupiter in the Capitoline temple, as if in dialogue with the god.[48]

Yet, experience of the god need not be restricted to individual visitors. Temples might be robbed or destroyed, and that is called sacrilege. However, occasionally temples and statues were attacked by the gods themselves, one of the forms of *prodigium.*[49] What was happening here? In mythological narrative, in his poem on his own consulate Cicero imagines Jupiter throwing lightning from high on his own temple, clearly separating god and object owned.[50] For the Epicurean Lucretius the same phenomenon served as an argument against the

42 Steuernagel 2009, 124–6.
43 Ibid.
44 Hesberg 2007. According to Pliny (*NH* 36.185) mosaics were installed in the Capitoline temple of Jupiter in 149 BC.
45 Hesberg 2007, 458 f.
46 Ibid., 456.
47 See Bäbler, Nesselrath 2007, 141. For the aesthetics of colossal images at Rome see Cancik 2003, 224–48.
48 Gell. 6.1.6: *Id etiam dicere haut piget, quod idem illi, quos supra nominavi, litteris mandaverint Scipionem hunc Africanum solitavisse noctis extremo, priusquam dilucularet, in Capitolium ventitare ac iubere aperiri cellam Iovis atque ibi solum diu demorari quasi consultantem de republica cum Iove, aeditumosque eius templi saepe esse demiratos, quod solum id temporis in Capitolium ingredientem canes semper in alios saevientes neque latrarent eum neque incurrerent.* Livy 26.19.5: *Ad hoc iam inde ab initio praeparans animos, ex quo togam virilem sumpsit nullo die prius ullam publicam privatamque rem egit quam in Capitolium iret ingressusque aedem consideret et plerumque solus in secreto ibi tempus tereret.* See Rüpke 2007, 20.
49 In general Rosenberger 1998; see also his critique of MacBain in Rosenberger 2005 (not taken up by Engel 2008, 753–4). No advance in Rasmussen 2003.
50 Cic. fr. 10. 36 ff. Courtney = Cic. div. 1.19; criticised in 2.45–47.

divine origin of lightning.[51] Both concentrate on Jupiter. This is against standard practice. Regularly the specialists called in for the interpretation of prodigies declared and it was taken for granted that it was the god of the respective temple or statue, who had to be attended to after such a sign, the advance of a wolf, the destructive power of a storm, or lightning.[52] This interpretation had practical consequences when in 208 BC the pontiffs opposed the dedication of a common temple *cella* to two gods, Honos et Virtus, as they would not be able to sufficiently clearly identify the addressee of the ritual attending to a prodigy.[53] There is no theorizing in those passages narrating about the prodigy as about the ensuing rituals, nothing like Plutarch's admission that a god could signify something through natural processes as involved in supposedly weeping statues.[54] Whatever the origins and the situation leading to a temple foundation and the dedication of a statue may have been, old figures with many a story to be told or newly divinised qualities,[55] prodigies kept the god involved in Roman affairs, not from somewhere else, but at and in the very spot and form religious picturing had given to him or her.

4 Presence and representation

How can we conceptualize the findings? In my title I suggest the concept of representation as a starting point. If we give priority to the notion of metaphysical existence of the gods, this concept is useful. The statue is a sign or symbol for something else, is "showing the invisible".[56] Such an interpretation is communicable with ancient philosophical and theological thinking. One could discuss the suitability and adequacy of the semiotic material, in the sense of

51 Lucr. 6.417–9.

52 Rosenberger 1998, 64.

53 Livy 27.25.7–9: *Marcellum aliae atque aliae obiectae animo religiones tenebant, in quibus quod cum bello Gallico ad Clastidium aedem Honori et Virtuti uouisset dedicatio eius a pontificibus impediebatur, (8) quod negabant unam cellam amplius quam uni deo recte dedicari, quia si de caelo tacta aut prodigii aliquid in ea factum esset difficilis procuratio foret, quod utri deo res diuina fieret sciri non posset; (9) neque enim duobus nisi certis deis rite una hostia fieri. ita addita Virtutis aedes adproperato opere; neque tamen ab ipso aedes eae dedicatae sunt.* Cf. Rüpke 1995, 492 f. for my avoidance of the translation "expiation".

54 Plut. Coriol. 38, quoted by Rosenberger 1998, 26–27.

55 See Clark 2007, 190–1.

56 Thus the title of the introduction to the acts of a colloquium "Image et religion" (Lubtchansky, Pouzadoux 2008). Cf. Bonnet, Huet 2008, 201, opting for a more open approach.

metaphors[57] as of actual matter used. For statues of emperors, beginning with Caesar, this was a veritable political discourse.[58]

The usual indexicality of signs implied an advantage already pointed out by Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose position can be summarized like this: "A representation enhances the ontological reality of what is represented."[59] Or more concrete, if images refer to gods, gods must exist. Discussions about the iconicity, the likeness, of the sign might ensue, as we have seen in the controversy between the Epicurean Velleius and the sceptic Cotta as imagined by Cicero in his dialogue "De natura deorum".

For the Roman habit we have briefly gazed at in form of widespread practices, "representation" does not work. Neither does casual presence. The possibility to admit or negate the presence of the god when confronting his or her image, so clearly shown for Greek religion by Richard Gordon,[60] does not work along the lines of inhabitating, finding a temporary place or the like,[61] concepts, that all suppose the metaphysical distinction between god and image. But simply opting for presence would be too easy, either,[62] even if we restrict ourselves to a sort of mainstream observer. Roman gods are not just present in their images.

When regarding non-statuary Roman images of gods, they are frequently not veristic, do not intend to catch the deity in all its vividness. Instead, these images refer to statues, they are representation of statues and iconographically marked as such.

This holds true for different genres, as Peter Stewart did show. Roman coins frequently enabled an (unrealistic) gaze into a temple's interior onto a statuesque or living god.[63] Lamps presented gods (as humans) in a statuesque frontality.[64] Idyllic landscapes in wall painting presented statues of gods that made the depicted observers inside of the painting aware of the presence of those gods.[65] The presence of the gods is not arbitrary, but it is statuesque. This presence draws its plausibility not from a specific form or material, but from an emotional experience, produced by the specific context of temples, perhaps

57 See Ando 2001 for Augustine's thinking and struggling with older tradition and Wallraff 2003.

58 See e. g. Cassius Dio 43.45 on statues of Caesar and Plin. paneg. 52,3 (Plin. NH 34,15 f. attests the oldest statue made of gold for the republic).

59 Ouwerkerk 1987, 161. This is a stronger notion than Clifford Geertz's "aura of facticity" (Geertz 1966, 1) provided by specifically religious ritual.

60 Gordon 1979; Graf 2001. See also Gladigow 2005, 62–84.

61 Cf. Steiner 2001, 79: container, vessel, residence.

62 Cf. Hubbeling 1986.

63 Stewart 2003, 208–14.

64 Ibid., 207.

65 Hesberg 2004, 214–5; cf. Stewart 2003, 215–221.

heightened by rituals.[66] The many gods of Roman polytheism came into existence by picturing them and by experiencing these statues. Prodigies formed a necessary element of the appraisal of these statues. They demonstrated the uncontrollable aspect of gods who were – with a few exceptions of images fallen down from heaven[67] – artefacts and were known and represented to be artefacts thus giving legitimacy to them.

The lesson thus learnt is important for the reading of cultic scenes with which I started. The wall-painting of the procession to Cybele on the outside of the shop of the same name (IX.7.1) does not only (probably) depict the shopkeeper and his wife (together with other colleagues) with some ritual paraphernalia. Cybele, clearly demarcated as being a sitting statue, placed on a litter, but of double life size, *is* in the image, she is really encountering all the people gazing at her. We will not be able to repeat the experience of the original observers, being not part of their religious individuations. But we can try to imagine their previous experiences and their habits, their inner imagination and cultural stabilisation,[68] thus seeing a reference to a presence that is not anthropologically inherent in the image, but due to historical circumstances[69] that I tried to reconstruct.

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66 Cf. for this factor, that has not been analysed here, Versnel 1987.

67 See Donohue 1988; Scheer 2000.

68 Kramer 2001.

69 For the post-ancient history of statues in Europe see e.g. Beutler 1982; von Stuckrad 2006.

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