

# ERC Advanced Grant AGRELITA

**The Reception of Ancient Greece in pre-modern French Literature and Illustrations of Manuscripts and Printed Books (1320-1550) : How invented memories shaped the identity of European communities**

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<https://agrelita.hypotheses.org/>

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**Workshop coorganized with the École française d'Athènes**



ÉCOLE FRANÇAISE D'ATHÈNES  
ΓΑΛΛΙΚΗ ΣΧΟΛΗ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ

**The new lives of Greek divinities in Europe:  
Textual and visual figurations from the 14th to the 20th century**

Friday, November 15th, 2024 | École française d'Athènes

In his famous work, *La survivance des dieux antiques*, published in 1939, Jean Seznec demonstrated that knowledge of the Greek gods did not disappear during the Middle Ages, and thus challenged the opposition often drawn between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in Western Europe : "Pagan antiquity, far from being 'reborn' in 15th-century Italy, survived in medieval culture and art; the gods themselves were not resurrected, for they had never disappeared from the memory and imagination

of men<sup>1</sup>.” He studied how, in the Middle Ages, the Greek gods, who then often bore their Latin names, survived thanks to the ideas they embodied and thanks to three main lines of interpretation, largely inherited from Antiquity - the evemeristic explanation, the physical and astrological explanation, and the allegorical, moral and religious explanation. He also analysed how, at the same time, their forms were transformed, with surprising metamorphoses, before returning to antiquity during the Renaissance. In Latin literature, new mythographic works were written from the 5th to the 13th century, starting with the ones by Fulgentius and the three Vatican mythographers, and from the beginning of the 14th century, evocations of pagan divinities were multiplying, as much in Latin works - such as Petrarch’s *Africa*, Boccaccio’s *Genealogie deorum gentilium* or Pierre Bersuire’s *De formis figurisque deorum* - as in works written in Romance languages. The pagan Greek or Greco-Latin divinities were then used in a variety of textual universes: numerous Universal Histories and Chronicles, translations, historico-fictional works, novels, didactic works about a wide range of topics, poetic works, epics, new translations of ancient texts, books of emblems, mythographic treatises specifically dedicated to the ancient gods... These pagan divinities also appear in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine works.

The many texts in which these divinities appear, in the illustrations of manuscripts and printed books, give them a new life rather than survival, or to say it more accurately: new lives. They are represented in many different forms of writing and in many different environments, some of them are far removed from the ancient world. The transformations of their forms in relation to ancient traditions, which are very varied but not always present, accompany their integration into these diverse contexts.

Simultaneously, the renewed fascination with ancient remains and artefacts since the 14th century, the documentation and curation of collections, and subsequent excavations of ancient sites and findings have resulted in novel methods of depicting and comprehending Greek deities.

The workshop will be devoted to analyses of the multiplicity of representations, interpretations, and uses of these ancient divinities over the centuries under consideration, by combining permanence and renewal, repetition and variation, continuity and innovation. They will provide the opportunity to extend research works on the ways and reasons for this multiplied presence of ancient divinities: why did these authors inspire new stories into the memory of ancient gods, why and how is it possible to give them back such a presence, why did they bring them back to life?

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Seznec, *La survivance des dieux antiques. Essai sur le rôle de la tradition mythologique dans l’humanisme et dans l’art de la Renaissance*, Paris, Flammarion, 1993, foreword to the second edition, p. 11.

The submitted papers may deal with the following themes, which do not exhaust the range of possibilities:

- Textual representations of Greek divinities, and how forms of writing are used - description, narrative, commentary
- From translation and compilation to adaptation and invention: dissemination of knowledge, reconfigurations of knowledge
- The rediscovery of ancient representations (statuary and other visual arts): new ways of looking at and understanding Greek divinities.
- The literary contexts in which authors and artists develop these textual and visual images
- The cultural and political contexts and debates in which they take on these divinities
- The interpretations of these divinities and the various purposes for which they are evoked - political, ethical, religious, scientific, poetic ones.
- The visual representations of these divinities in manuscripts and then printed books : how they are depicted and it does mean, how these representations are linked with other forms of artistic representation devoted to them
- The links between texts and images in manuscripts and printed matter
- The actualizing/anachronistic appropriation or, on the contrary, the view of Antiquity and its otherness reflected in the textual and visual images of these divinities
- The circulation, reception, and transformation of these representations from the 12th to the 16th century: the transmission and renewal of the memory of these divinities
- How these divinities are transposed into new worlds

The papers will be published by Brepols publishers, in the "[Research on Antiquity Receptions](#)" series.

Please submit a short abstract (200-300 words and a title) **before May 15th, 2024** to Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas at the following addresses:

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An agreement in principle before the deadline would help us to organize these workshops.