

ACTA CLASSICA UNIV. SCIENT. DEBRECEN.	LIII.	2017.	pp. 79–82.
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THE ARMAAC PROJECT

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The research project ARMAAC (“Aculturación religiosa en el Mundo Antiguo y en la América Colonial”), funded by the Spanish Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad (ref. HAR 2014-57067-P), is an interdisciplinary study which brings together Ancient and Modern historians, anthropologists and archaeologists, specialists in iconography and in the analysis of cultural contact. The team is integrated by some twenty researchers working in diverse academic and research centers in Spain (Universities of Zaragoza, País Vasco and Carlos III in Madrid), Italy (La Sapienza in Rome, Padova y L’Aquila, besides the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma), United Kingdom (Institute of Classical Studies, London), Germany (University of Erfurt), Hungary (University ELTE of Budapest) and Finland (University of Helsinki), as well as the Mexican universities Autónoma del Estado de Morelos (Cuernavaca), Veracruz, Guanajuato, Michoacana (San Nicolás de Hidalgo) and Autónoma de México (UNAM).

America resulted as never before in the knowledge of the total otherness in European consciousness. And yet, the American reality has not traditionally received enough attention in conceptual models and narrative strategies (compared to Africa or Southeast Asia, for example). On the other hand, within the field of Sciences of Antiquity has not been addressed (with very few exceptions) a comparison between the processes of religious contacts in the ancient Mediterranean (especially in its central-western part) and in colonial Mesoamerica.

Our methodological key to the study is the consideration of comparison as a starting point (Scheid – Svenbro 2004) and never as a point of arrival, since the goal of all historical comparison should be a better understanding of cultural diversity; a globalizing and differentiating comparison at the same time. The project proposes to analyze:

1) The invention of the ancient barbarian and the invention of Mesoamerican Indian, using the Classical world and the “rhetoric of otherness” as models to conceptualize the colonized people in both historical moments according to

well established categories and stereotypes (barbarism and idolatry, sorcery and magic) to justify domination.

2) The diverse strategies of conquest and assimilation in the ancient Mediterranean and in as well as in Colonial Mesoamerica through a comparative methodology, privileging the analysis of the different responses of the colonized, from conflict and resistance, violence and rejection, to selective appropriation and assimilation – “interpretatio” of indigenous religious systems and the role of Christian rhetoric or syncretism / “bricolage” as possible final variant in the process.

Having in mind the selective appropriation by the natives of some elements of the colonizers’ culture, a comparison between the diverse strategies to conceptualize alterity in terms of barbarism and idolatry, magic and witchcraft is posed, as well as the importance of the Roman (imperialistic) model by the European colonizers and its use in the intellectual debate. As Lupher (2006) has proposed, the exploration, conquest and colonization of the New World by the Spaniards led to re-evaluate the model of ancient Rome and reflection on their own identity.

The ARMAAC project was presented in the XXI World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, held in the University of Erfurt (23th-29th August 2015). Within a panel on “Interreligious Contact in the Roman World and in Colonial Mesoamerica: A Comparative Analysis”, F. Marco Simón intervened with a paper on “New victims for old gods: Human sacrifice of the conquerors in colonial contexts”. Celia Fontana Calvo and Gonzalo Fontana Elboj spoke on “The Book of Revelation, a text for the defeated of both hemispheres”, and David Charles Wright-Carr focused on “Persistence of native military iconography among the Otomi in New Spain”, while Silvia Alfayé Villa dealt with “Hybrid images: ritual and visual dynamics in Celtiberia under Roman colonization”. All these interventions in the Erfurt conference have been published in *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* (volume 2016-2).

Within the framework of the project, Fernando López Meraz defended with the best qualification his PhD dissertation on the theme “*Entre el bien y el mal: Representaciones franciscanas sobre el natural mesoamericano en dos crónicas franciscanas del siglo XVI*”, and two more PhD researches are being carried out by members of the team: Liviu Popescu (Universidad Autónoma de México, supervised by G. Olivier) on “*Conquistadores y frailes frente al sacrificio idólatrico en la Nueva España. El primer contacto*”, and Lorenzo Pérez Yarza (Universidad de Zaragoza) on “*El culto a Sol en la antigua Roma*”.

Finally, four integrants of the Mexican part of the team (María Lourdes de Ita Rubio, María Estefanía Agraz Rubi, Jesús Nieto Sotelo and María Celia

Fontana Calvo), participated in the XXXVIII *Convegno Internazionale di Americanistica*, organized by the Centro di Studi Americanistici, Circolo Amerindiano “Onlus”, held in Puebla (México) between 7th and 11th November. These papers were included in a panel coordinated by Celia Fontana and Jesús Nieto on “América vista y construida por los extranjeros”, with some contributions dealing with the language and culture previous to the Spanish conquest and others centered on the colonial period.

The papers included in this volume were presented in the *Giornata Internazionale di Studio* that took place on 8th September 2016 in the Escuela Española de Historia y Arqueología de Roma (EEHAR - CSIC). The chosen topic for reflection was “*The cult of the others. Interreligious contacts in the Roman Empire and Colonial America*”. F. Marco Simón aims to compare the diverse strategies used to conceptualize the deities of the other peoples in Ancient as well as in Mesoamerican worlds, from the absence of gods (“atheism”) to idolatry, to the attempt of assimilating them to the own categories through the processes of *interpretatio*. Antón Alvar Nuño analyses Pedro Mártir de Anglería, the first chronicler who interpreted the New World as the empirical proof of the revival of the Classical World, and specially his frequent comparisons with Roman religion in his description of the indigenous (*taíno*) religion. Celia Fontana analyses the eucharistic portals of some Augustinian churches in New Spain (such as Yuriria), and the theological and intellectual bases that gave rise to them, stressing the importance of Eucharist as an important strategic agent in evangelization.

Paolo Taviani deals in his contribution with the representation of the other as a warrior: In the *Imperium Christianum* from the IVth century onwards, the classical opposition between *disciplina* and *ferocia* is replaced by a more radical opposition between *miles Christi* and *miles diaboli*, which reappears later in the context of the European colonizers in Mesoamerica.

David Charles Wright-Carr studies the Nahuatl and Otomi words within the semantic fields related to the Christian concept of the soul, finding many calques revealing that these two languages shared beliefs in three animic essences that could survive the death of the body. There is evidence from colonial period documental sources showing how the beliefs of the Otomi were affected by the teaching of Christian priests, and also of native resistance to the efforts of the missionaries to impose the Catholic doctrine.

There are two more contributions in this volume not presented in the above mentioned Rome conference. Fernando López Meraz focuses on some essential actions or mechanisms used by the Sixteenth-century Franciscan friars in their description of Mesoamerican natives, particularly *interpretatio*, evemerism and *inquisitio*, following the path established by St. Augustine regarding Varro.

And Anti Lampinen deals with the literary representations of subaltern or lower-class religiosities in the context of Late Roman and Early Merovingian ecclesiastical writing in Gaul, and their relationship with Late antique ideas about the characteristics of rural societies, a strategy of the episcopal hierarchy to legitimacy for their privileges.

doi 10.22315/ACD/2017/6

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(ISSN 0418 – 453X)