Gallic images of Hercules
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Moitrieux aims to analyse the origins and development of the cult of Hercules in Gaul. Gaul is taken in a wide sense, comprising the area from the Pyrenees to the Rhine, and from the North Sea to the Mediterranean:

Plutôt que de retenir une donnée strictement administrative limitée aux Trois Gaules, nous avons retenu ce que les Anciens appelaient Gaule dans son sens général ... (4).

This view is familiar in much recent literature on Roman Gaul.1 Nor is a study of Hercules in the West a novelty. A host of general contributions exists,2 as do articles on Hercules in, e.g., Spain and N Africa.3 The rôle of Hercules in the various localities in greater Gaul has equally received attention. Indeed, Moitrieux himself has been instrumental in providing much information on the matter. The present volume attempts to draw together all the disparate evidence for Hercules in Gaul and to use it as basis for a further synthesis. Moitrieux divides the book into three parts. The first, “Les données quantitatives” (9-85), constructs a substantial corpus, while the second, “Études spatiales” (87-165), analyses the distribution patterns of the different types of material. The final section, “Le dieu et le culte” (167-265), tries to distil answers as to nature, function and individuality of the cult of Hercules in Gaul from the data in the first two parts. A short conclusion (269-71) is followed by a proliferation of bibliographies, indices, tables, maps and illustrations (275-508). Use of the illustrations is somewhat hampered by the poor quality of the reproductions. For example, it is often difficult to distinguish between some of the colours of maps 7-13. The writing style is not always easy to read.

Evidence and methods: the corpus

Moitrieux puts his material first, carefully compiling an extensive corpus of 971 items offering evidence for Hercules in Gaul, usefully separated into different types of materials: stone objects (11-29), non-stone statues and statuettes (i.e., precious metals, bronzes, non-metal statuettes, and funerary objects) (30-37), and a miscellaneous group, consisting of utensils, ceramics, coins, mosaics and paintings (28-47). These items are catalogued, following different organisational principles, in Tables at the end. Attention is given to problematic objects where identification, provenance, or date is unclear or doubtful. The corpus also includes literary evidence from Greek and Roman authors (69-73), and 141 inscriptions (73-84, with Tables III-IV on 349-55). The work in accumulating such quantities of evidence could easily be praised as


Herculean, but it is not unproblematic. In his introduction, Moitrieux says that to compile the evidence he used a dual strategy. First, he sent questionnaires “à la totalité des musées recensés pour leurs collections archéologiques sur le territoire retenu …” (4). This brings two obvious problems with it. The response of the different museums was uneven, some giving detailed responses, whilst others, “et parfois parmi les plus importants” (5), were more haphazard in their reactions. In part this problem could be solved by personal visits. More problematic is the exclusion of museums outside the area of research. Any evidence of Hercules which is, for whatever reason, no longer in greater Gaul is excluded. The second part of Moitrieux’s method of compilation was a comparison of “la liste ainsi obtenue” with and checking it against modern scholarship. Modern catalogues (especially for inscriptions) were also consulted. In brief, the assembled evidence may well form a representative sample of Hercules’ presence in Roman Gaul, but his corpus of 971 items is unlikely to constitute a complete list.

Moitrieux then separates the material into a multitude of groups and tries to find local variations in the evidence. Images are split between those depicting the Labours (192 items) and those showing Hercules alone (526). A further 86 items could not be interpreted (109-11 Tables 15-16, 432-48 Tables XVIII-XIX). The various Labours are differentiated. The information does not always lead to definitive interpretation. It may well be true that “les épisodes propres à la Gaule … sont totalement ignorés des artistes gaulois” (98), but this may simply result from an absence of a recognised iconography of specifically Gallic deeds: it does not necessarily imply a lack of local expression.

There are other problems too. For much of the evidence the archaeological context is no longer traceable. Although it is likely that evidence in a particular museum originates from nearby, this is far from certain. That makes the Tables of evidence by town (120-39) somewhat problematic. Accidents of survival may also influence the evidence. Post-Roman history comes into play too, since late-antique town walls tended to incorporate many inscriptions. Towns with such walls supply more evidence than others, and a few such sites could distort the picture substantially.4 Moitrieux recognises some of this when he excludes the major site of Hercules Salutaris at Deneuvre (discussed at 239-42) from his distribution pattern (132 fig. 4; 136 fig. 5; 478 map 4; 482 map 8).5

Moitrieux’s Tables yield some interesting results. Clearly, the majority of the evidence stems from the northeast of his territory, as may be illustrated by a Table of the evidence in stone in Gaul’s different administrative units (118, Table 21):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Monuments</th>
<th>Inscriptions</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Overlap</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narbonensis</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquitania</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgica</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lugdunensis</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germania Inferior</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germania Superior</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conclusion that there is more attributable worship of Hercules in the northeast seems sound. But the relative density of monuments and inscriptions in the different provinces ought to be taken into account before concluding where more actual worship will have taken place. Thus, the high number of Hercules inscriptions from Narbonensis coheres with the generally high density (6.1 inscriptions per 100 km²), whereas the low numbers of Hercules inscriptions in Aquitania and Lugdunensis are unsurprising considering the low density there (1.1 inscriptions per 100 km²). Noticeable is the relatively high number of Hercules inscriptions in Lower Germany, especially in light of a low general density (1.9 inscriptions per 100 km²).6

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4 Woolf (supra n.1) 83, also mentioning the “activities of local érudits who, since the seventeenth century, in some towns systematically collected or recorded many inscribed stones”.
6 W. V. Harris, Ancient literacy (Cambridge, MA 1989) 266-68; Woolf (supra n.1) 83-87, with figs. 4.2-5.
tions among the Ubii are crucial here, supplying 20 of the 29 recorded inscriptions (Table III on 349-52, nos. 4-12, 42-45, 96-98, 100, 107, 121). This, in combination with the rather high number (33) of inscriptions stemming from the nearby military territory around the Rhine (Table III, nos. 13-39, 46, 80, 82-84) offers strong support for Moitrieux’s main assumption, that the army brought Hercules with it to Gaul, rather than Hercules being an indigenous Gallic deity. This is refined by Moitrieux’s argument that Hercules entered Gaul via the Danube area rather than the Rhône valley. An interesting sequence is set out on 147, where the movement of various legions from the Danube to the Rhineland is considered to define a “communauté culturelle”. Most movement, however, was in the opposite direction, questioning Moitrieux’s assumption.

The notion of a Danubian ‘origin’ for the diffusion of Hercules in Gaul is supported by an intricate description of possible systems of diffusion, based mainly on stylistic and chronological analysis (148-65). The approach is somewhat hampered by the poor maps (esp. 141 fig. 7, 148 fig. 8). The general picture may also be somewhat distorted by problems of dating and locating original findspots. In general, however, the distribution pattern as shown in a summarising map (165 fig. 22) seems rightly to suggest a principal centre of dissemination in the northeast.

This centre, and the area it seems to ‘supply’ with the Hercules theme, overlaps to a large extent with the distribution pattern of terra sigillata that was produced in E Gaul. However, Moitrieux does not consider the socio-economic context. This is unfortunate, since economic, cultural and even ecological backgrounds form crucial contexts for religious practices. This has been amply demonstrated by T. Derks’ book on religion and ritual practice in Roman Gaul (supra n.1), which Moitrieux has not integrated into his text nor cited in his footnotes (though it is listed in his bibliography). This oversight is all the more regrettable, since Derks supplies an alternate reason for the relative paucity of references to Hercules in the south of Gaul. According to him, cultural-economic factors defined the distribution of cults of Hercules and Mars within Gallic lands. Derks sees the ‘cattle breeding’ economic background in the north as a natural one to embrace the ‘herding’ god Hercules, whereas “villa landscapes oriented on arable farming and viniculture” worshipped especially Mars. One may or may not agree with this economic reading of the way in which two different military gods were integrated into Gallic culture, but the problem should have been addressed in some way.

A Roman god and indigenous cults

Notwithstanding the above difficulties, Moitrieux supplies a wealth of evidence with which to approach the development of the worship of Hercules in Gaul. He tries hard to avoid the pitfall of many similar studies, of reading too much into “l’analyse d’un document particulier ou de quelques-uns présentés comme significatifs ou même révélateurs d’une pensée cachée” (171). It is hardly surprising, then, that he places little credence in Lucian’s peculiar and oft-discussed Hercules Ogmios:

The Celts call Heracles Ogmios in their native tongue, and they portray the god in a very peculiar way. To their notion, he is extremely old, bald-headed, except for a few lingering hairs which are quite grey. His skin is wrinkled and he is burned as black as can be, like an old sea-dog (Herak. 1).

Lucian’s Hercules Ogmios has only very limited (and later) iconographical resonance, and Moitrieux is probably right to see this apparent interpretatio graeca as not being instrumental in

7 Woolf ibid. 199, fig. 7.6.
promulgating worship of Hercules: "la seule certitude est l'existence d'un dieu celtique appelé Ogmios" (181).10

But what of the other famous epithets with which the Gallic Hercules is linked? As so often in this book, Moitrieux emphasises the limits of the evidence, recognising only 5 epithets as properly attested: Andossus, Ilunnus, Deusonienis, Magusanus, and Saxanus (181-89). Most emphasis goes to Magusanus and Saxanus. Moitrieux rightly questions the hypothesis that Magusanus must be the 'national' god of the Batavians, showing that this notion does not cohere with the actual finds spots of much of the evidence for the deity. There is also a dedication to Hercules Magusanus (RIB 2140) by a horseman from the ala Tungrorum at Mum rills on the Antonine Wall, and in general the modes of naming gods in NE Gaul are rather similar to those prevailing near Hadrian's Wall, but Moitrieux does not mention the theory that the military presence may well be more important than 'indigenous cosmologies'.11 Following a detailed analyses of the date and location of the various inscriptions with the epithet 'Saxanus', he concludes that this semble bien un toponyme propre à la Germanie, utilisé par les militaires d'abord dans la carrière de Brohl, avant qu’il ne se diffuse vers l'intérieur de la Gaule et vers l'Italie (189).12

Again, then, Hercules in Gaul appears as a Roman 'export model', not a Gallic-Roman 'cooperation'. Epigraphic evidence might confirm this — with the military and local élites of the more remote parts of Gaul dominant in inscriptions by dedicators. Still, the epigraphic habit may (again) distort the picture, both through the different relative density of inscriptions in different areas, and through the dominance of the military and élites on inscriptions in general. The emphasis on evidence for Hercules in the peripheries of Gaul, however, supports Moitrieux's general thesis. Moitrieux's Hercules, in this respect, forms a useful counterbalance to notions of a 'German' or 'French' Hercules, influenced not only by 19th-c. nationalism but by early modern kings such as Francis I and Henry IV of France, or the Polish king Augustus the Strong, who became Elector of Saxony and portrayed himself as Hercules Saxonicus.13

Worshipping Hercules in Gaul

If Hercules was an extraneous deity, did the functions he fulfilled in Gaul correspond with his functions at Rome? In general it seems they did. Hercules was a martial god to most of the military, and a protector of merchants and travellers. Somewhat more peculiar is Hercules as a 'career-promoting' god, in which rôle he seems to have been worshipped at Brohl, Norroy-les-Pont-à-Mousson, and Hermes (215); still, this may fit Hercules' more general rôle as a bringer of Fortune. Moitrieux also emphasises Hercules' rôle in agriculture, especially transhumance, which is of course relevant to Derks' thesis on the possible socio-economic geographical divide between worship of Mars and Hercules. In Gaul, Hercules was linked to sacred springs — as he was in much of the empire (e.g., Britain, the Peloponnese, and Numidia, where the Aquae

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Herculis were named after him14). This aspect somewhat dominates the Gallic evidence, and is expertly set out by Moitrieux, who had already written extensively on the subject.15 On all these points, then, Gallic worship of Hercules was perfectly in keeping with Roman tradition. Similarly, a considerable amount of evidence links Hercules to the funerary world. This is straightforward and much in keeping for one who tamed Cerberus and brought Alcestis back from the dead, only to become immortal after his death. It is nonetheless striking how much of Moitrieux’s reconstruction of the Roman worship of Hercules seems to be based on J. Bayet’s paper on “Hercule funéraire”, now over 80 years old, without incorporating much of the recent (and not-so-recent) literature on death, burial and religion, or indeed on Hercules.16 In this case, the problem is less serious than it could have been, since Moitrieux seems to wish merely to point out the Gallic archaeological evidence for Hercules in funerary contexts, without much direct comparison with the rest of the empire. Nor is the incompleteness of the modern bibliography a problem when Moitrieux, summarily but knowledgeably, sets out the evidence for the different Hercules sanctuaries in Gaul (236-57).

Connections and comparisons with Hercules in Rome

When, however, Moitrieux tries to establish links between the development of Hercules in Gaul and the political context in Rome (256-65), the Roman development is sketched out in very rough and often misleading terms. The place of Hercules under Augustus is described either as consciously diminished or an attempt to ‘repossess’ an ‘Antonian’ Hercules.17 In fact, neither premise seems accurate. The links between Hercules and Mark Antony are not nearly as strong as is often suggested.18 Nor are depictions of Hercules during the Augustan reign always to be interpreted as straightforward political choices.19 Moreover, the question “laquelle de ces deux thèses reflète la place d’Hercule en Gaule” (257) implies a direct correlation between representational choices and religious reception, which is very doubtful even for Rome, let alone in a recently pacified province. Further, to claim that “Néron s’est parfois proclamé descendant d’Hercule” (258) is simply wrong. Moitrieux refers to a footnote in Le Glay’s “Héraclès-Hercule en Afrique du Nord”, where attention is merely drawn to the fact that Mark Antony, who claimed descent from Hercules, was one of Nero’s ancestors. That is something quite different from proclaiming descent. The problems continue. The increase of central ideological use of Hercules under Trajan does not necessarily lead to a change of “la diffusion du culte d’Hercule dans l’Empire” (259). Before one can ascribe (religious) reception to political changes, one needs

to find specific changes at local level, for example in iconography or coin legends, coinciding with similar changes at the central level. Under Trajan such clear changes do not seem to take place anywhere in the empire. As far as the 2nd c. A.D. is concerned, it is not surprising that the evidence from Gaul does not reflect a philosophical preference for Hercules under Marcus Aurelius, or a discrediting of the cult following Commodus’ aspirations to be seen as the Hercules Romanus (259). In fact, Marcus made very few references to Hercules — the deity was actually absent from coinage minted for Marcus, though he figures on some coins featuring Lucius Verus — whilst no discrediting of Hercules took place following Commodus’ reign. Even if one would want to try to equate political events and diffusion of cult to the extent that Moitrieux seems to do, these are not the right test cases to choose.

Much more useful is Moitrieux’s short discussion of Postumus’ coinage (261-62), rightly describing the use of Hercules on the Gallic emperor’s coins as a mainly Roman, rather than a Gallic, ploy. Indeed, it might have been interesting to note that Gallienus depicted himself with the attributes of Hercules on his coins and medallions in 261 and 265. The latter year also saw a campaign against Postumus’s ‘Gallic Empire’. Were these perhaps attempts to show which ruler had the support of Hercules?

When discussing evidence from the 3rd c., Moitrieux again tries to find “un lien fort entre le culte d’Hercule en Gaule et le contexte politique et militaire” (264). But the evidence does not allow this. The general decline of the epigraphic habit from the second half of the 3rd c. onwards makes a decrease in evidence for Hercules’ worship in Gaul almost inevitable. Interestingly, though, Moitrieux points out (262) that, notwithstanding the general reduction in evidence for worship, part of the Deneuvre sanctuary revived under the reign of Constantine and survived up to the reign of Gratian. Such a local departure from the general trend is striking, and shows quite how difficult it is to describe religious developments in a wider geographical context. The problems with the more generalising sections of Moitrieux’s book unintentionally illustrate the problems in drawing together local analyses. Perhaps a more focused (and slimmer) version of the book would have strengthened the main arguments. But Moitrieux should be lauded for organizing local evidence for the origins and diffusion of the cult of Hercules in Gaul: scholarship can benefit from such a regional approach to a general question.

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