

# Objects of Worship

The Place of Idols in Mediaeval Troy  
Narratives

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Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Roman de Troie* 3123–34  
(transl. Burgess & Kelly 2017)

*L'image al deu qu'il plus creeient,  
Ou il greignor fiance aveient, –  
C'ert Jupiter li deus poissanz, –  
Cel fist faire li reis Prianz  
Del meillor or qu'il onques ot  
Ne que il onques trover pot.  
Grant seürté e grant fiance  
I avaient e atendance,  
Que par ço fussent defendu,  
Ne ja ne fussent mais vencu,  
Ne mais destruite lor contree:  
Mais n'ert pas tel la destinee.*

The statue was of the mighty god Jupiter, in whom their faith was strongest and in whom they had the greatest trust; Priam had had it made using the finest gold he ever possessed or could ever find. They had great trust and faith in it, and they expected that through it they would be protected and never again be vanquished or have their country destroyed. But that was not their destiny.





*Roman de Thèbes; Benoît de Sainte-Maure, Roman de Troie; Roman d'Eneas (1326-1350)*

Bibliothèque nationale de France.  
Département des Manuscrits.  
Français 60. (ark:/12148/  
btv1b10023009b)

<http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc508519>

Illuminations: Richard de Montbaston, Geoffroi de Saint-Léger, maître du roman de Fauvel.

Details. f. 59r (top left),  
f. 63r (bottom right)



A sen muer este verain B ion garnier de d'elme

## Dictys, *Ephemeris Belli Troiani* 2.28

*Per idem tempus Chryses ... fretus  
religione tanti numinis ad naves  
venit, praeferens dei vultus ac  
quaedam ornamentorum templi eius,  
quo facilius recordatione praesentis  
numinis veneratio sui regibus  
incuteretur.*

At the same time, Chryses ... trusting in the *religio* of such a great divine power went to the ships, carrying before him an image of the god and some of the decorations of his temple, in order to instil more easily in the kings reverence toward him (Apollo) through the manifestation of his divine presence.



## Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Roman de Troie* 14737-43 & 14806-15

Que n'i face le jor joër,  
E lot natures demonstrer:  
Conoistre fait tot en apert  
De quei chascune joë e sert.  
Merveille semble a esgarder,  
Quar om ne savreit porpenser  
Que devienent après les gieus.

Li dameiseaus, qui tant est genz,  
Après le son des estrumenz,  
Prent flors de mout divers semblanz,  
Beles e fresches, bien olanz;  
Adonc les giete a let plenté  
Desus le pavement listé  
Que toz en est en fin coverz:  
C'est en estez e en iverz.  
Ço fait l'image assez sovent,  
Si ne set rien com faitement  
Ne tant en a ne tant en prent.

... all these she made appear every day to reveal their natural properties. She showed clearly how each of them functioned and what its use was. When one witnessed all these things, they seemed to be marvels. No one could figure out what became of them after their performance.

After playing his instruments, the young man, who was so refined, took up flowers of many kinds that were beautiful and fresh and gave off pleasing scents. He then tossed them in such profusion on to the paving-stones surrounded by a mosaic border that they ended up being covered with them; this happened in both summer and winter. The statue did this quite often and no one knew how it possessed or obtained so many flowers.

# Guido de Columnis, *Historia Destructionis Troiae* X (transl. Meek 1974)

*Hunc gentiles Appollinem deum esse dixerunt. (...) In hoc igitur templo erat maxima ymago tota ex auro composita in honore predicti dei Appollonis. Que licet fuisset ex auro composita et in ueritate fuisset surda et muta, tamen secundum gentilium errores colencium ydolatriam ... adheserunt diis surdis et mutis, qui pro certo homines mortales fuerunt, credentes et putantes eos esse deos, quorum potencia nulla erat. Sed responsa que dabantur ab eis non ipsi sed qui ingrediebantur in eorum ymagines dabant, qui spiritus immundi pro certo erant, ut per eorum responsa homines in perpetuis errorum cecitatibus conseruarent. (...) Per demonum igitur ingressum in ydola surda et muta eliciebantur ab eis petita responsa que tunc gentilitas excolebat. ... Et per hanc dyabolica decepcionis astuciam deus Appollo responsa sua in dicta insula Delos petentibus exhibebat.*

The pagans said that this Apollo was a god. (...) In this temple there was a very great image all made of gold in honor of this god Apollo. Although it was made of gold, and in truth was deaf and dumb, still the pagans, according to their error, embracing idolatry ... clung to the worship of deaf and dumb gods, who assuredly had been mortal men, believing and considering that those who had no power were gods. But the answers which were given by them were given not by them but by those who walked about in their images, who were surely unclean spirits, so that through their answers men were kept in the perpetual blindness of error. (...) Demons, therefore, entered into deaf and dumb idols which the pagans then worshipped, and it was they who produced the answers being sought for ... Through the wiles of this demonic deception the god Apollo revealed his answers to the petitioners on the island of Delos.





## The temple of Apollo at Delphi / on Delos.

Details of miniatures  
f. 29 v (top left), f. 31 r (bottom right).

Cologne, Fondation Martin Bodmer,  
Cod. Bodmer 78

Guido de Columnis, *Historia  
destructionis Troiae*

[https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/  
list/one/fmb/cb-0078](https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/fmb/cb-0078).







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Troiae*

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The temple of Venus at Cytharea. Details of miniatures. Clockwise: f. 20v, f. 21v, f. 22v, f. 22 r.



John Lydgate, *Troy Book* 2.5470–7 (transl. Smith 2018).

*Per was a statue al of purid golde,  
Ful gret and hize, & of huge weizte,  
And þer-in was, þoru3 þe deuels sleizte,  
A spirit vnclene, be false illusioun,  
Þat 3af answer to euery question—  
Nat þe ydole, dovmbe as stok or stoon.  
And þus þe peple, deceyued euerychon,  
Were by þe fend brouzt in gret errour.*

There was a statue all of purest gold,  
Full great and high, and of huge weight,  
And therein was, through the Devil's sleight,  
A spirit unclean, by false illusion,  
That gave answer to every question —  
Not the idol, dumb as stock or stone.  
And thus the people, deceived every one,  
Were by the fiend brought in great error.