von der Osten, Goldhill), in quanto essi fanno anche riflettere sul ruolo e valore di autori quali Luciano, Pausania e Plutarco come fonti per la comprensione della religione del tempo. Illuminanti anche i contributi di Auffarth e Henderson, nei quali si sottolineano i collegamenti, rispettivamente, tra alcune frasi espresse da Paolo e i rituali dei primi cristiani, con le tradizioni greco-romane.

Insomma, preziosa lettura per chiunque si occupi della vita religiosa romana dell'età imperiale. Il libro, nitidamente stampato, conclude con un Stellenregister. Ancor più utile lo avrebbe reso un index rerum.

Mika Kajava

One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire. Edited by Stephen Mitchell – Peter Van Nuffelen. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2010. ISBN 978-0-521-19416-7. IX, 239 pp. GBP 55, USD 95.

One God. Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire introduces eight papers presented at the conference of the same name at the University of Exeter in 2006. Other papers from the same conference have been published in *Monotheism between Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity*, also edited by Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen (Peeters 2010).

Both volumes continue the vigorous discussion instigated by the articles in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (eds. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, Oxford University Press 1999). The 1999 volume introduced the term "pagan monotheism", and one of the questions the writers of *One God* discuss is the usefulness of this term as a heuristic tool in analysing religious phenomena in Graeco-Roman paganism. By pagan monotheism the writers refer to monotheistic ideas that by the mid- and later third century CE had emerged as part of the pagan religious life of the Empire. Nonetheless, ideas of a single divine power had been a part of Greek philosophical speculations from the sixth century BCE onwards.

In the research of monotheistic tendencies, there has been a gap between scholarly approaches that have concentrated on ritual and those that have taken philosophical conceptions as their starting point. The gap is understandable: most of the evidence for monotheistic tendencies is derived from literary and philosophical sources whereas it is difficult to find unambiguous documentary evidence of pagan monotheistic cults. In their introduction to *One God*, editors Mitchell and Van Nuffelen insist that it is necessary to define monotheism not only as an intellectual construct of ancient philosophers, but also as a religious phenomenon arising from the religious experience of "normal" people. Therefore, the main emphasis of the volume is on monotheism as a religious phenomenon in its social context.

Van Nuffelen sets the agenda in discussing pagan monotheism as a religious phenomenon. He aims at deconstructing the distinction between belief and ritual traditionally drawn in the research of Greek and Roman religion. As Van Nuffelen points out – following John Scheid's *Quand croire c'est faire* (2005) – questions of belief and theology had their important part in Greek and Roman religion. In ritual there is presupposed theology involved since it is impossible to have a ritual without the cognitive element. During the Roman Empire, monotheistic ideas in paganism became a religious phenomenon in the sense that they were not restricted to the literary and philosophical elite. Van Nuffelen distinguishes three factors for this

change: the close interaction between philosophy and religion, the expansion of new religions and the increased relations between Judaism, Christianity and paganism.

John North asks whether pagan monotheism is a concept that would have been comprehensible to ancient Greeks and Romans and that they could have used to express their religious beliefs. As North points out, for pagan writers there was no opposition between the propositions about one or many gods (as there is for modern observers). North connects the development of monotheism in Late Antiquity with the competition between various religious groups in the Roman Empire and the consequent change in religious identity that was based on membership of a specific religious group. North outlines the religious transformation as driven by an increased level of religious commitment which for its part stirred the need for clear criteria of membership and even clarified verbal formulations of the beliefs of a group. This led to requirements to overlook all divinities other than those allowed by the group. Thus, North convincingly interprets the spread of monotheistic tendencies as an outcome of the overall religious situation of the Roman Empire. Neither more nor less, for it would be misleading to imagine that the rise of monotheism was the most significant element in the religious transformation in the late Roman Empire.

Michael Frede outlines tendencies towards monotheism in Greek philosophy, introducing a number of ancient thinkers – Antisthenes, Chrysippus and Galen – who developed a conception of a single transcendent deity. Frede maintains that, for instance, Stoics should be regarded as monotheists since they believed in a single deity. Stoic philosophers called some other beings "gods", too, but these were called "gods" in a sense which was not incompatible with Stoic monotheism. Frede appositely shakes up the prejudices of modern researchers who do not regard Greek philosophical monotheism as presupposing "just not the right kind of god to qualify them as monotheists", which is usually taken to be the kind of deity that modern Christianity accepts.

Alfons Fürst moves the discussion on monotheism onto the level of politics and authority, analysing the two ancient debates between pagan and Christian thinkers, the one between Origen and Celsus and the other between Augustine and Platonists. Both debates show a consensus on the supreme deity between the disputants. Augustine, for instance, worried not about the terms used for describing the divine or the number of deities, but about the worship of the deity. Thus Augustine drew the difference between himself and Platonists in regard to religious practice. According to Fürst, these debates were not confrontations of polytheism and monotheism but battles of religious authority. Thus the dispute between Celsus and Origen circled around ideas of social and political order.

In modern discussions, monotheism has often also represented religious fundamentalism and bigotry. Christoph Markschies takes part in the recent debate in Germany on the intolerance of monotheism, referring to the so-called Mosaic distinction outlined by Jan Assmann in his *Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus* (2003). Markschies questions Assmann's structural division between primary and secondary forms of religion that is roughly the same as that between polytheism and monotheism. Secondary forms of religion distinguish between true and false gods as well as true and false doctrines. Consequently they are exclusive, intolerant and repressive of religious deviation. In his criticism of Assmann, Markschies makes an appropriate move, in shifting the discussion from the level of abstractions onto the level of people and religion as practised in concrete historical and social contexts. It is the detection of ancient people practising their religions that really matters.

Markschies asks who the monotheists were and goes on analysing the "one god" (*heis theos*) acclamations in inscriptions in the Late Antique Near East.

Angelos Chaniotis maintains that the concept of worshipping only one god is unhelpful for comprehending Graeco-Roman paganism. Instead, he proposes a new term "megatheism", that he defines as "a designation of an expression of god, represented one particular god as somehow superior to others, and was expressed through oral performances (praise, acclamations, hymns) accompanying, but not replacing, ritual actions" (p. 113). Chaniotis connects the increased inclination of worshippers to depict their deity as the "greatest" with the competition between cities and communities. He reminds us that the field of religion in the Roman Empire was competitive and by no means peaceful. Chaniotis points out that the shared vocabulary in regard to the divine ought not to be taken self-evidently as confirmation for either homogeneous concepts or syncretism. On the contrary, homogeneous language may have emerged from competition and emulation.

Nicole Belayche analyses various ritual expressions and epithets acclaiming the superiority of a deity (the *heis theos* acclamations among them). She reads these acclamations and epithets (such as *heis* and *megas*) not as monotheistic but as conveying the worshippers' enthusiasm for the superior powers of their favourite deity. Both Belayche and Chaniotis maintain that most of the documentary material evidence for pagan cult ought to be interpreted from a polytheistic perspective: monotheistic interpretations would be anachronistic. As Belayche states, these attestations are "evidence for a different sort of religious communication and a new way of articulating the presence of divine beings in the world" (p. 146), here clearly challenging the position of Stephen Mitchell who regards a group of these acclamations as relating to the cult of Theos Hypsistos with monotheistic features.

In his article, Mitchell defends his hypothesis on the worship of Theos Hypsistos (already presented in *Pagan Monotheism,* 1999) and introduces further epigraphic documentation to enhance his views. He proposes that the term *Hypsistos* in inscriptions is a term with a firm theological connotation. In addition to the epigraphic evidence, Mitchell's hypothesis of the cult is based on the four Greek fourth- and fifth-century Christian writers who mention the worshippers of Theos Hypsistos. In Mitchell's opinion, the cult as a "soft monotheism" provides a remarkable parallel to contemporary Christianity.

One God consists of intriguing, well structured and masterfully argued articles. These bring forth the religious life of the Roman Empire in its striking diversity of which the ideas of superior and minor gods were just one part. The phenomenon of pronouncements about a single deity existing alongside the evidence of religious devotion to many gods which appears as a paradox to modern observers is precisely what makes Graeco-Roman Antiquity so fascinating. While *Pagan Monotheism* in 1999 opened the topic for discussion, *One God* deepens and widens the perspective, stimulating scholars to further investigation. A similarly nuanced analysis of Christian polytheism would be most welcome.

Maijastina Kahlos

Zsuzsanna Várhelyi: *The Religion of Senators in the Roman Empire. Power and the Beyond*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2010. ISBN 978-0-521-89724-2. XII, 267 pp. GBP 55, USD 95.