

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.

Zsuzsanna Várhelyi's book on the religion of senators from Augustus to Severus Alexander contributes to the scholarly discussion on the religious transformations during the early Roman Empire. The author partly continues, partly challenges and modifies the insight of religious variety and individual creativity of the imperial period modelled by Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price (in *Religions of Rome*, 1998). According to their view, in the religious crisis in the late Republic, the civic embeddedness of religion could no longer control over an ever-growing religious diversity and this led to a marketplace of less socially embedded religious choices in the imperial era.

Várhelyi's major claim is that, whereas the new rule of Augustus made ample use of religion to legitimize his supremacy, senators in turn aimed at negotiating their own power in religious terms. Therefore, religion had a new and prominent role in the processes of settling power relations between the emperor and the senate in the early Empire. Várhelyi argues that senators had an active part in participating in imperial rule in which the emperor and senators both cooperated and competed in claiming power. Várhelyi explicates as her goal to identify "normative trends *and* variations within them": for the senatorial religion "participates in promoting normative social order but can also change and challenge it" (p. 15).

Várhelyi innovatively combines the methods of prosopography and the observations of microhistory. As she remarks, the large-scale generalizations of historical research often tend to misrepresent the intricacies of human life. Instead of the macrostructures, microhistorians concentrate in the sphere of the individual.

Várhelyi introduces detailed analysis on the different aspects of senatorial religion in Chapters 1–6. The chapters are divided into three parts that discuss the senators as a group (part I), the interaction between religious and political powers (part II) and the conceptual aspects (such as religious knowledge) of senatorial religion (part III).

In Chapter 1, Várhelyi proposes that the senate maintained a strong *ordo* identity (*contra* earlier research that emphasized the limited capacity of senators to form a group with power in the imperial period). She stresses the collective religious identity of senators that was based on established senatorial expertise and authority in religious matters. Moreover, while new senators have often been considered potential candidates in importing elements that challenged traditional religiosity, Várhelyi argues that new senators were not religious innovators; rather as *homines novi* they not only accepted the traditional ideals and attitudes of the old aristocracy, but were even keen promoters of these ideals. There is no evidence to suggest that new senators undertook any strange rituals to honour non-Romanized or non-Hellenized deities; instead senators' religious engagements seem to have followed Graeco-Roman terms. Várhelyi also argues for the senate as a body with religious authority. Even though the religious activities of the senate (such as decrees on sacrifices and temple buildings) might have been only formalities, they continued throughout, from Augustus to the fourth century.

Chapter 2 surveys senatorial priesthoods that have usually been considered almost secular magistracies. Acknowledging the increasing professionalization of senatorial priesthoods, Várhelyi draws the attention to the social experience of being a senatorial priest. She points out that membership in a priestly college provided a senator with additional resources in preserving power across generations. Várhelyi also discusses less formal social events such as the ad hoc gatherings of friends around the sickbed of fellow senators, arguing that shared health concerns in religious terms indicate the importance and self-understanding of the peer group of senators.

Chapters 3 and 4, discussing the intersections of religion and power in Rome, Italy and the provinces respectively, show that non-priestly magistrates (most notably consuls and praetors) during the Empire were invested with religious authority, clearly following the example of the new power of the emperors. Magistrates in Rome, Italy and the provinces held highly ritualized roles with strong religious associations. One example is the close connection between the cult of Hercules and urban praetors. Outside Rome, in Italy and in the provinces, a senatorial officeholder took the role as the prime sacrificer and benefactor, and this position of a magistrate invested a senator with religious authority in a manner similar to the emperor's position. In the provinces, senatorial magistrates engaged with local religious life, such as imperial celebrations including sacrifices and dinners and arbitration in religious matters. Senatorial officeholders had a significant role in the public cults of provinces which is attested in copious dedications to the emperors and their families as well as building projects under their patronage. Senatorial officeholders in fact stood in for the emperors in the local religious life in the provinces.

Chapter 5 aims at elucidating the conceptual background to senatorial religion. Várhelyi draws attention to the increasing role of philosophical discourses in promulgating a "theology" that partly substituted earlier religious narratives with the discourse of virtues, especially that of imperial Stoicism. Várhelyi uses "theology" in inverted commas because, as in the Republic, there were no foundational or central theological doctrines involved in Roman religion during the Empire. Nonetheless, from the late Republic onwards, there was an increasing engagement with religious questions among the upper classes. Várhelyi maintains that senators played a significant role in shaping the religious life of their time, challenging a number of earlier top-down accounts in which senators are seen as trying to keep up values separate from the emperor.

In Chapter 6, Várhelyi demonstrates the senatorial impact on a number of aspects of imperial religion. Senators were less interested, for instance, in challenging the divinity of the deceased emperor than in picking up similar forms of imperial religion and contributing to them. Furthermore, senators not only copied forms of imperial religion, but also contributed to them, by applying forms of their own cult practices to the cult of the imperial family. One example of these applications that Várhelyi analyses is the worship of the *genius* of a senatorial family. Private *genius* worship of the *paterfamilias* had existed for centuries before the rule of emperors. The acceptance of *genius* worship in the imperial religion was thus based on the more general cult of the *genius* of the *paterfamilias*. The cult of the living emperor's *genius* was accepted after the title *pater patriae* was bestowed on Claudius in 42 CE. Várhelyi also discusses the inscriptions of senators with the formula *pro salute* which she takes as supporting the complex connections between senatorial and imperial religion. The earliest *pro salute* inscriptions of senators appeared in the late 60s CE, coinciding with the development of the concept of *salus Augusti*, the personal health of the emperor that was connected with public welfare.

*The Religion of Senators in the Roman Empire* is a well structured and harmonious work. Várhelyi uses a vast wealth of Roman inscriptions, combining it capably with literary evidence. Her social historical analysis is solid and concise and her emphasis on "imperial" and "senatorial" powers not as opposites but rather as existing in a dynamic connection is compelling.

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