

REVIEW–DISCUSSION

AN ARISTOCRATIC DILEMMA: DO IT RIGHT, OR DO IT BETTER?

Craige B. Champion, *The Peace of the Gods: Elite Religious Practices in the Middle Roman Republic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. Pp. 304. Hardback, \$39.95/£30.00. ISBN 978-06-91-117485-3.

The author (hereafter C.) has dedicated this immensely learned and formidably wide-ranging investigation of Roman republican religion to the late J. A. Hanson, director of graduate studies at the time of C.’s matriculation into Princeton’s Ph.D. programme and a beacon of encouragement and support before his untimely passing. Perhaps best known nowadays for his Loeb edition of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, Hanson launched his career with two publications that exploited archaeological and literary testimonies to advance the study of mid-republican Rome: a dissertation on Roman theatre-temples and a lengthy *TAPA* article on religion in Plautus, both of which saw the light of day in 1959.¹ In his eagerness to embrace both material culture and the Plautine *palliata* as sources for the history of Roman religion, Hanson was well ahead of his time: the interarticulation of theatre and temple in mid-republican Rome would have to wait until 1998 for Sander Goldberg’s definitive exposition, while Plautus’ relevance to the religious history of the imperial Republic is only now beginning to be fully appreciated.²

For C., however, all roads ultimately lead back to the enigmatic Polybius. Beginning with his 2003 reader on Roman imperialism and his 2004 monograph *Cultural Politics in Polybius’s Histories*—not to mention numerous articles, including a gem on ‘the politics of cultural indeterminacy’ for *Classical Philology*—C. has worked hard to keep the pride of Megalopolis on the radar of students of the middle Republic. It will therefore come as no surprise to anyone familiar with C.’s work that his latest book takes a much-fussed moment in Polybius as its starting-point: the digression on Roman religious devotion at 6.56. Because the passage itself as well as C.’s (memory of his) undergraduate encounter with it are credited in the opening sentences as spurs to the book’s writing, I will briefly yield the floor to Polybius:

¹ Biography and publications: Galinsky in Briggs (1994) 256–7.

² Goldberg (1998) for performances in front of the Temple of Magna Mater (and (2018) for performances in the Forum Romanum); Dunsch (2009) and (2014) and Rey (2015) on religion in Plautus.

But, it seems to me, the state of the Romans distinguishes itself best of all in observance towards the gods. It also seems to me that the thing that among others is a topic of reproach—I am talking about **excessive religious scrupulousness** (*deisidaimonia*)—is the thing that holds the state of the Romans together. To such a degree has it been **‘theatricalised’** (*ektetragoidetai*) and introduced among them in both their private lives and in the city’s public proceedings that there is nothing else that exceeds it in importance ... Among the Greeks, apart from anything else, men who hold public office cannot be trusted with the safe-keeping of so much as a single talent, even if they have ten accountants and as many seals and twice as many witnesses, whereas among the Romans their magistrates handle large sums of money and scrupulously perform their duty because they have given their word on oath (*Hist.* 6.56.8–9, 13–14; tr. Scott-Kilvert with modifications).

C. paraphrases this passage as ‘Roman elites used religious ceremony and ritual to awe and cow the gullible, common people’ in order to introduce ‘elite-instrumentalism’, the proposition that Rome’s aristocrats wielded religion strictly as a tool for moving around non-elite pawns (ix). Neither the claim nor the debate surrounding it is new. Already in 1967, John North had economically outlined the stakes, in the introduction to a dissertation that heralded his ascent into the front ranks of Anglophone scholarship on Roman religion: ‘Some attempts at a choice must be made between different pictures of Roman religion in politics; was it no more than a political convenience? Or was it a conspiracy to deceive and cozen the plebs? Or was it in any sense a system with its own values and its own dignity?’³ In the decades since, scholarship on Roman religion has more or less consigned a straightforwardly uncritical instrumentalism to the dustbin of historiography, and C. has no interest either in reprising the usual critiques or in defending elite-instrumentalism against its detractors. His book has bigger game in mind. Leading with the question, ‘how can one hope to recapture subjective, interior, psychological states of historical agents?’ (ix), C. calls on elite-instrumentalism as a counterfactual strategy for recovering and mapping the various gradients of Roman aristocratic religious practice and experience. In other words, the book will be structured around a sustained thought-experiment in what Roman elite religion would have looked like *if* elite-instrumentalism had underpinned its institutional and experiential manifestations.

Although lacquered with the polish of this counterfactual, *The Peace of the Gods* is mostly concerned with building up a positivist account of aristocratic religious observance. Summoned whenever a straw man is in need of some

³ North (1967) 5.

good whacking, the counterfactual is mostly a minimal addition to a monograph that does one thing extremely well: round up and synthesise literary evidence in order to bring the religion of Roman elites back to life for the twenty-first-century reader. In what follows I will work through and against C.'s book to shine a light on some of the more intractable problems bedeviling scholars of Roman republican religion, in the hope of identifying areas where one might improve on C.'s valiant effort to extract the essential components.

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At the opening of his fourteen-page introduction ('Studying elite religion in the middle Roman Republic'), C. spells out the exclusive protagonists of his study: 'This book is about the elites, the magistrates and public priests, who shouldered the burden of maintaining the *pax deorum*, and what their religious behavior may have meant to them' (xi). But, C. contends, in order best to gauge the depth of this elite's religious feeling, we will need to set aside the 'jaded, cynical view of any official, public expression of religiosity and piety' that is likely to kick in for those twenty-first-century products of the 'separation of church and state' who are inclined to assume 'that there is almost always some hidden agenda and self-interested motivation lying just below the surface' (xiii). By interpellating his readership,⁴ C. loses an opportunity to address prospective audiences for whom the second-guessing of public religious expression is not a conditioned reflex; nothing of this sort should be taken for granted after the events of November 2016 in the United States. Perhaps more to the point, C.'s confinement of his book's analysis to those 'who shouldered the burden of maintaining the *pax deorum*' is not without complications of its own. Leaving aside the frustrating elusiveness of devising a vocabulary for defining Rome's aristocracy that does not capitulate to that elite's own self-definition, I want to underline one drawback to centring the book around the 'total interpenetration of religious and political authority' as embodied in the persons of male religious actors (xvi): the resultant inability to accord appropriate coverage to the responsibility of priestesses for securing the *pax deorum*. The Vestals are not utter aliens to C. (7–8, 38–9, 43–4); but if Meghan DiLuzio⁵ is correct in positing a symbiosis of male and female priestly activity as fundamental to the management of divine affairs at Rome, the meshwork of elite status, gender identity, and religious performance needs to

⁴ C. is familiar with Althusserian interpellation, which receives some airtime in the final chapter; but his claim that the concept 'expunges the individual' (215) downplays the theory's usefulness for clarifying how individual selfhood takes shape around the recognition scenes that are engineered by an ideological apparatus.

⁵ Di Luzio (2016).

be theorised afresh, and C.'s designation of those primarily responsible for 'shoulder[ing] the burden' of the *pax deorum* along with it. Even granting that DiLuzio's book was published too late for C. to take into consideration, the tendency in Roman religious studies to privilege male-only priesthoods has been in the midst of a significant and overdue course correction for some time now.⁶ *The Peace of the Gods* would have been a different but in my view better book if it had not been so invested from the very beginning in the idea that responsibility for the *pax deorum* was men's work.

Other portions of the introduction veer into protest-too-much territory, notably the choice line that the study of Roman elites is 'in need of no further defense and justification' because 'Senators and generals were in a profound sense catalysts for the development of Roman imperialism, and on the long view they shaped not only the history of Europe, but that of the world' (xxi): C. is perhaps a little overeager to brandish his membership card in the club of Great Men historiography. Apart from trivialising the mark left by non-senatorial elites in the packaging of religion and empire—on conspicuous view at sites such as late Hellenistic Delos⁷—C.'s framing removes from further consideration some discursive features of middle republican religion that could have been muscled into his project with minimal strain. There is, for starters, the question of how the Roman community identified and rectified moments of crisis in which the religious disposition of non-elite agents was a prominent factor. A famous incident of uncertain date that is rather flatly rendered by C. later in the book brings out the stakes of this problem quite nicely.

At one iteration of the *Ludi Maximi*, an otherwise unknown Autronius Maximus had his slave beaten and marched around the Circus with his neck hooked to a forked stick. The spectacle so infuriated Jupiter that he appeared to a certain Annius in a dream, ordering him to report to the Senate that the cruelty had displeased him; Annius tarried, not approaching the Senate to communicate Jupiter's displeasure until his son had died and he himself had been struck with a serious illness; then and only then did he report to the Senate, at which point the *patres* recommended and a law subsequently ratified the addition of an extra day to the Games to appease Jupiter's wrath.⁸ Our

⁶ J. Scheid's insistence on the 'sacrificial incapacity' of women at Rome has not stood up well in the face of stress-testing: see the critiques of Schultz (2006) and Flemming (2007). On the ritual responsibilities of women in the performance of those *sacra* that were conducted *Graeco ritu* see Šterbenc-Erker (2013). Glinister (2011) and Pavón Torrejón (2016) on the *virgines Salviae* complements DiLuzio well. For intra-peninsular points of comparison see Krauskopf (2012) on women's involvement in priestly activity in Etruria.

⁷ See e.g. Hasenohr (2003) and (2007).

⁸ Macr. *Sat.* 1.11.3–5. Other versions of the story: Coelius Antipater, *FRHist* 15 F 48 (= Cic. *Div.* 1.55); Liv. 2.36.1–8; D. Hal. *A. R.* 7.68–9; Val. Max. 1.7.4; Lact. *Inst.* 2.7.20–1; Aug. *C.D.* 4.26. The sources vary in the dating of the episode (Macrobius: 280; other sources:

most complete notice for this incident comes from Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, where it is cited in the course of Vettius Agorius Praetextatus' pointed riposte to a dinner companion's mockery of the idea that slaves were of interest to the gods. As tends to be the case with such reports, the notice is more remarkable for what it veils than for what it discloses. One can only wonder whether the slave himself was ever aware of Jupiter's fury at his master, and (moving beyond the incident itself) whether and to what extent a species of slave religiosity was constituted and enacted in the teeth of slaver brutality, especially in ritual-cultic settings.⁹ More pertinent to the design and justification of C.'s venture into the religious thought-worlds of the Republican elite is that the slave-owner appears to have dodged any direct responsibility for his behaviour at the Great Games, the weight of divine chastisement falling instead on the shoulders of the *homo de plebe* Annius for not speeding to the Senate with the news of his dream. Such an elision may say something about how elite religious power mystified itself through the characterisation of non-elites as *not* acting hastily to recognise and communicate the will of the gods, with the force of that characterisation proving capable even of indemnifying the (presumably elite) Autronius Maximus whose public mistreatment of a slave irritated the Best and Greatest of the Gods.

That the episode varies and inverts the story of another Roman of humble station who did attempt to notify his social betters only to be ignored—the M. Caedicius who a century earlier had heard a nocturnal voice alerting to the imminent Gallic sack—might incline the sceptical historian to treat it as merely another sign of Roman historiography's fondness for doublets. But the two incidents are better taken as mirror images of the republican aristocracy's religious self-conceptualisation: at one time we didn't listen to our social underlings with their ominous reports of divine wrath; but we listen and act now, provided they get us the information we need in a timely fashion. In other words, elite religious practice as a posture of social mastery is entwined both with the figuration of the non-elite as the eyes and ears for the divine's irruptions into sight- and soundscapes, and with the stipulation of a code of conduct for the elite itself: do not slight or demean the gravity of major religious festivals by abusing slaves in public.¹⁰ Moreover, for elite self-confidence in the justice of their claim to preeminence in the control of public *sacra* to retain its authoritative hold despite moments of transgression by individual members, there had to be a discursively transmissible means through which exemplary representatives of the non-elite could be seen to

490s) and in the naming of the man whom Jupiter visits in a dream: see *FRHist's* commentary on Coelius F 48.

⁹ I have taken a very preliminary stab at this question: Padilla Peralta (2017).

¹⁰ There were other occasions for the ritual humiliation of slaves: see e.g. Plut. *QR* 16 with Scheid (2012) *ad loc.*

discharge their responsibility as aides and ministers to the elite—as prosthetics.¹¹ Enter exemplary story-telling, which was more than up to the task: it cradled and nurtured the habits of mind through which praxis continuously interacted with self-policing and self-fashioning to turn internalised convictions into externalised realities, in a manner not at all dissimilar to the prayer discipline of those American evangelicals at the heart of T. Luhrmann's ethnography *When God Talks Back*.¹²

I offer this reading of a semi-legendary episode at the *Ludi Maximi* to draw attention to the ideological work that went into the transformation of Rome's senatorial aristocracy into religious masters, as they grew increasingly preoccupied with affirming their own significant otherness vis-à-vis the Roman population at large. But far from being of a piece with those 'one-way communicative actions from elites to non-elites' whose continuing prominence in contemporary scholarship is not always to C.'s liking (20), this story and others of its kind can be pried open to yield a richer panorama of the mutually interactive processes—effective story-telling being one of them—by which the 'elite' acquired and donned the mantle of religious authority across the generations. To follow C. in extracting from this incident the simple lesson that the 'authorities duly complied'¹³ when informed of a breach of ritual decorum is to deprive oneself of the opportunity to swim in these deeper waters.

To its credit, C.'s opening chapter ('Elite-instrumentalism: persistence and paradox') grapples with some of the processual dynamics involved in the moulding of a religious elite, by laying down some definitions of who counted as 'elite' and some temporal parameters for the monograph's undertaking. C.'s professed desire to 'resist the impulse to press my focus into a tight chronological box' is one of the least felicitous sentences to be printed in an Anglophone classics publication of modern vintage, but the thrust is clear: abiding by '[H.] Flower's precepts' for periodisation, C. outlines a time map that ranges from the second quarter of the third century to the decade after the Gracchi, culminating with the 'last attested instance of public human sacrifice' at Rome in 114/13 (1–2). Next, the recourse to elite-instrumentalism as counterfactual test is firmed up through a survey of trends in Greco-Roman religious studies, from the *savoir-faire* of Linder and Scheid to the lived ancient religion of Rüpke's Erfurt school. For all of their many virtues, the paths scouted by these scholars supply little insight into the psychological dynamics that most intrigue C., who would want us to contemplate the 'psychological state of the father whose priestess-daughter was about to be offered up as a

¹¹ 'Prostheticisation' and elite self-formation: Reay (2005) on Cato the Elder.

¹² Luhrmann (2012).

¹³ At 144, with no mention of the beating of the slave or Annius' initial recalcitrance.

human sacrifice'. To grasp the magnitude of 'the nearly unbearable grief and suffering' that the father of a Vestal condemned to be buried alive for being unchaste had to repress, one has only to appeal 'to the parental instinct, so primal not only among human beings, but so many species in the animal kingdom' (7, 8).

The call to scrutinise the mental states of Roman religious practitioners has been sounded before, in cognitively orientated approaches to the Roman prodigy system.¹⁴ As much as I'm inclined to agree with C. that zeroing in on mental states is justified, it is not obvious to me why focalising the wrenching drama of the episode through the Vestal's father (and not the Vestal herself?) yields the most rewarding payoff.¹⁵ Attention to the performative particulars of Vestal burial would not have been out of line here: to take only one example, were the 'secret prayers' uttered by the pontiff who oversaw the rite a means of recognising and encoding grief through ritual action?¹⁶ C. is on surer footing when plotting the genealogy of elite-instrumentalism in ancient sources and when documenting how even modern scholarship of an avowedly non-instrumentalist stripe lapses into the old sins from time to time. The effort to differentiate his undertaking from previous scholarship does occasionally result in procrustean distortion: thus, for instance, Z. Várhelyi's monograph on the religious world of Roman senators under the Empire is dismissed with the remark that 'her work still falls under the elite-instrumentalist scholarly umbrella' because it uses 'the lens of a (somewhat modified) Foucauldian notion of power' (15 n. 40), but with no recognition either of Várhelyi's refinement of Foucault¹⁷ or of the adaptability of Foucauldian power as a heuristic scaffold. The remainder of the chapter offers a critical overview of the basic aspects of Roman elite religion, as prolegomenon for a demonstration of how elites were 'not immune from the psychological pressures of trying to maintain the gods' good-will and the dread of failing to do so'; the key for C. will be to pursue the

¹⁴ See e.g. Lisdorf (2004).

¹⁵ For an attractive entry-point into the psychological anguish of women within this religious system, and the plotting of this suffering along the axis of exemplary self-vindication, one has to look no further than the Second Punic War saga of Claudia Quinta—taken up by C. on pp. 153–4 but with no comment on the interiority of the legend's protagonist. Burns (2017) offers an alternative reading more attuned to the episode's encapsulation of the 'female force of agency and connection' that was active in the ordering of Rome's body politic.

¹⁶ Plut. *Num.* 10 on these *εὐχάς τινας ἀπορρήτους*; cf. Plutarch's comment on the *ἀπορρήτους καὶ ἀθεάτους ἱερουργίας* of the live burials of Greeks and Gauls (*Marc.* 3.7). On 'silent prayer' in public religious rituals see Corre (2017).

¹⁷ Her preference for Foucault over 'classical conceptions of ideology in society' is hedged as follows: '... on my reading, culture is understood not simply as a discursive regime, as F. would have it, but as practices that put that language to work in order to reference and interpret the world' (Várhelyi (2010) 12).

evidence for the ‘irrational, creative, and aleatory dynamism [that] lay at the base of elites’ understanding of and approach to religious institutions and practices’ (21).

The chase really gets going in chapter 2 (*Domus*: priesthoods, politics, and the people), a fifty-three-page essay that is partitioned into four units. The opening pages delimit the quantitative scope of religious ritual, digesting the work of Millar, Gabba, Nicolet, Mouritsen, Bispham, and Hölkeskamp in order to propose an equivalence between the relatively small percentage of the civic body likely to have been in attendance at any given legislative or electoral assembly (not at all different ‘from what we have come to expect from electorates in modern democratic states’ (27)) and the number of Romans capable of participating in public religious rituals and festivals. From there the discussion shifts to elite domination of and control through state religion, with two questions anchoring and structuring C.’s analysis: ‘To what extent did the People *perform* the state religion?’ and ‘To what extent might meaningful non-elite religious practices have been relatively independent of the state religion?’ (28, 29). A nod to Millar’s vision of the political agency of the *populus Romanus* is swiftly followed by a rendezvous with Mouritsen and Morstein-Marx, who ease the way for C.’s account of the *pars pro toto* logic behind the orchestration (one might, with Polybius, even speak of theatricalisation) of religious ritual at Rome.

Somewhat paradoxical on a first read is C.’s attempt simultaneously to marginalise non-elite forms of religious practice and to argue that aristocratic penetration into the religious lives of non-elites only went so far. ‘To whatever degree public enactments of the state religion may have functioned as a means for ensuring elites’ political and social control’, C. writes, ‘their reach did not extend beyond those who attended them in the city of Rome itself’ (32). Although curiously dismissive of the Roman state’s endeavours to project interest in and authority over the religious domains of its allies through the prodigy expiation system (which is acknowledged only briefly on p. 41), C.’s statement has a plausible enough ring to it: other indices for the limits on centralised power at this period in the imperial Republic’s state-formation arc seem to square up well with this claim.¹⁸ However, if non-elites, especially those residing outside of Rome, really did enjoy religious autonomy, historians of Roman religion would perhaps be better served by turning to the archaeological evidence for the ebbs and flows of rural cult (as synthesised in e.g. Stek (2009)), if only as a kind of *chiaroscuro* for what goes on in the big city. Unfortunately, archaeological evidence receives only intermittent coverage in C.’s study, and extra-urban material culture practically none at all. I will return to this issue below.

¹⁸ Cf. the imperial Republic’s rudimentary fiscal and taxation system: Tan (2017).

C.'s command of and dexterity with the literary source material are sometimes obscured by a penchant for flattening out the evolving and emergent properties of mid-republican religion. When sizing up the assorted religious responsibilities of the major Roman priesthoods and of the Senate, which provided 'whatever unity the religious system did have', C. pivots from commenting on the absence of a 'real locus of centralized religious power' at Rome to the proposition that there was 'little possibility for religious authority to challenge seriously the political primacy of the Senate' (34). As this situation was not so much a static state of affairs as a dynamic equilibrium undergoing constant fine-tuning, presenting it as a *fait accompli* rather oversimplifies matters. In the decades before C.'s chosen period, the equilibrium shifted as a result of the steady erosion of patrician prerogatives, capped by the *lex Ogulnia* of 300; the subsequent rise of a patrician-plebeian religious elite then gave rise to new tensions in need of finessing and resolution. Throughout C.'s period, the improvisational and essentially ad hoc stratagems that were devised to contend with crises in the allocation and apportioning of sacralised power—ones that directly involved challenges to senatorial power—increasingly stand out, perhaps nowhere more emphatically than in the conceptual and ritual dilemmas unleashed by the creation of *provinciae* in the aftermath of the First Punic War.¹⁹ Even when a granular view into the procedures whereby the Senate and/or the *populus* tightened the screws on elite priestly action is denied to us, the second-century uptick in legislation that was specifically geared to address the augural interface of politics and religion—notably the shadowy but undeniably important *lex Aelia et Fufia*—should be taken as a sign of how creaky if not downright shambolic the entire operation was. None of this is unknown to C., but I would have wished for a diachronically sharper account that took 'the fragmentation of religious competencies' not as self-evident given but as an iterative and highly contingent process. C. might well object that such a quibble has little bearing on the main objective of this section, which is to underline how the various aspects of mid-republican elite religious observance fail to align with 'a religious system whose primary purpose was to uphold the political and socioeconomic status quo' (45). Except that, of course, the *pax deorum* itself has been understood by some scholars as designating an abstracted version of the status quo: the concept's epistemic and affective salience at times of crisis may reflect how unsettling it was for the status quo of 'normal'

¹⁹ Arnhold and Rüpke (2017) 415–16: smoothing out the tensions provoked by the collision of the longstanding problem of patrician vs plebeian religious prerogatives with the demands of holding office outside of the city 'took about half a century, two generations, and included manifold shifts, a sequence of *flamines* losing their priesthoods on account of minimal ritual mistakes, the office of *rex sacrorum* being opened to plebeians and closed again, the *flamen Dialis* being denied of provincial offices and gaining a seat in the senate, a *pontifex maximus* voluntarily opting for an Italic region as a consular area of office ...'

relations—not only human–divine but human–human and human–animal—to be upended. Even if the historical diffusion of sacred responsibility across the elite renders impractical any effort to identify a unified and coherent agenda of social control, making a clean cut between the quest to maintain the ‘peace of the gods’ and the drive to maintain a social order that conferred benefits on elites is not the way out of the impasse. I found myself wishing that C. had allowed himself to linger longer on theories of heterarchy, which hold more promise for his project than the brevity of his exposition would suggest.

Along similar lines, C.’s unwillingness to take up directly the question of when and how ‘religious’ office-holding came to be formalised as distinct from ‘political’ capacity left me scratching my head, since even a tentative answer would have enriched some of the arguments put forward in the chapter. That authority over the *sacra* could in certain instances prevail over the prerogatives of magistrates is apparent from a notice in the Livian *periochae* that in the 160s a praetor was fined after a fractious dispute with the *pontifex maximus* M. Aemilius Lepidus,²⁰ a dispute revealing less for its final outcome than for its lodging in the annalistic records—as precedent for and/or as signal of the accelerating process by which elite religion began to butt heads with what those of us still captive to Foucault might term ‘governmentality’. The historical moment when priestly status failed to function effectively as a buffer against criminal prosecution also earned a place in the historical tradition: after decades of abortive attempts to prosecute religious officials under the civil or criminal law, C. Sulpicius Galba became the first priest to be condemned under a *quaestio* in 109.²¹ Again, this change over time can be hard to detect in C.’s snapshot of a more or less fully formed system.

But what really stuck in this reader’s throat was Chapter 2’s final section on non-elite religious engagement. Returning to a topic first broached in the chapter’s opening, C. reminds us that we lack sources for a Geertzian thick description of the ‘qualitative role’ played by the *populus Romanus* ‘in actual enactments of public festivals’; as for the quantitative dimension, C. continues, the sources do not afford ‘specific answers’: even if we had a more textured sense of scale, it can be difficult (that overworked adjective) to determine the meaning of the experience for individual participants (66–8). C. is too tentative here: for ideas as to how to model the spectrum of epiphanic, phenomenological, and intersubjective possibilities for festival culture in mid-republican Rome, one has only to turn to the slew of recent publications that have done so much to revivify the study of festival and pilgrimage experience in the Greek

²⁰ Liv. *Per.* 47 (to be read with Bleicken (1957)): *Cn. Tremellio pr. multa dicta est, quod cum M. Aemilio Lepido pontifice maximo iniuriose contenderat; sacrorumque quam magistratum ius potentius fuit.*

²¹ Cic. *Brut.* 128 with Farney (1997).

Mediterranean.²² In terms of the interaction of the quantitative and the qualitative, a chasm-defying leap of faith is hardly required to bridge from S. Goldberg's reconstruction of the scale of the *ludi scaenici* to some (necessarily speculative) inferences about orders of magnitude and modes of experience in non-theatrical religious contexts. That theatrical and non-theatrical spectacles could not only promote greater prosociality by generating intense emotional arousal but habituate non-elites to the most intricate details of elite religious performance (*pace* C.'s remarks on p. 61) is best attested by Plautine comedy's extensive riffing on religious ritual, the details of which were first compiled by J. A. Hanson;²³ C. will himself concede two chapters later that Plautus' plays 'suggest a populace that was far from naïve, but rather attuned to contemporaneous politico-cultural debates and political-religious dimensions of civic ritual and ceremonial' (138–9). If Amy Richlin's reading of the *palliata* has historical purchase, the plays were an electrifyingly potent communicative device for slaves processing the shock of subjugation. In ritual scenarios, some of this shock will have been precipitated by the experience of being denied the role and responsibility of the 'masterly' religious officiant.²⁴ Even if one were inclined to wave off Plautus as simply an artifice of elites for other elites, it would still be fruitful to consider mass enslavement as one of the mechanisms by which several generations of forced migrants to Rome were socialised into knowledge of Roman cult in their owners' homes and at those festivals that roped together the domestic and the public, such as the Compitalia.²⁵ One direct consequence of C.'s inability to see slaves or enslavement as significant for his story will be his insistence in chapter 5 that 'Romans as a totality, elites and non-elites alike, were held together only sporadically and tenuously as far as religious culture went' (182): this stance is oblivious not only to the sheer number of festivals on the Roman calendar by the early second century but to the exceptional cultural visibility of those festivals that functioned to acculturate Rome's slaves and freedmen.²⁶ If, as Martin Jehne has proposed,

²² To cite only two recent edited volumes: Elsner and Rutherford (2005); Brandt and Iddeng (2012).

²³ Prosociality and the neurobiology of theatre spectatorship: Dunbar et al. (2016).

²⁴ Richlin (2014) and (2017) on the *palliata*; Padilla Peralta (2017) 322–36 for restrictions on slaves' ritual and sacrificial capacities.

²⁵ Cato's technical wrangling over what might invalidate his domestic auspication—with the farting of his slaves mentioned as a candidate for *vitium* only to be dismissed—is a truly remarkable instance of attempted ritual precision in response to a form of non-elite disruption: Cato *apud* Festus 268 L., s.v. *prohibere*, with Padilla Peralta (2017) 355 n. 173 on the possibility that his slaves were deliberately subverting Cato's attempted auspice-taking. Slaves and freedmen at the Compitalia: Flower (2017) 162–91.

²⁶ The latter may be indirectly attested in the correspondence of one of Rome's Hellenistic adversaries, Philip V of Macedon: *Syll.*³ 543 with Lott (2004) 42–3, who speculates that Philip may be referring to freedman magistrates at the Compitalia.

political gatherings were capable of generating potent and durable *Konsensfktionen*, it would not be unreasonable to ascribe a similar function to festivals—communal rituals that were tailor-made for manifestations of Durkheimian effervescence.²⁷ And we have ample evidence for cultural exchange between freedmen and elites from the late Republic onward, in all sorts of settings;²⁸ why preclude or write off the possibility of these interactions in the preceding two centuries, when slaves started pouring into Rome in large numbers?

Much more successful is chapter 3 (*Militiae*: commanders, elite religion, and fear of military disaster'), which in forty-four pages evokes both the terrors faced by Roman elites on their campaigns abroad and their reliance on religious practice and belief as coping devices. With Pindar fr. 110 as its cue, the chapter develops the claim that 'a psychological state of intense fear, uncertainty, and anxiety is likely to have underlain many an elite's religious behaviors in the military realm' (76). Borrowing liberally from neo-Realist and face-of-battle approaches, C. is largely successful in identifying and characterising the pressures that weighed down members of the Roman aristocracy on campaign, especially in the wake of military calamity. Yet I missed any reference to J. H. Clark's *Triumph in Defeat: Military Loss and the Roman Republic*,²⁹ and sometimes C. overplays his hand. For example, to drive home the meaningfulness of ritual orthopraxy as a means of boosting confidence and 'mitigat[ing] the terror and uncertainty of battlefield encounters', C. observes that 'high command personnel were relative amateurs' (81); however, seeing as young male elites had to serve a minimum of ten years before beginning their journey on the *cursus*, C.'s appeal to their amateurishness (relative to whom?) will not do. Several pages later, C. comments on the limited reconnaissance available to the average Roman commander (94–5): the point is well taken, but one should not gloss over the information-gathering potential of those Italian *negotiatores* who rode the coattails of Roman conquest, or the geographical and topographical data-harvesting that was required for the equipment and replenishment of Roman armies in the field. And while C. is certainly right to call out Roman historians for failing to reckon adequately with the 'tremendous psychological burden' that commanders tasked with independent initiative regularly faced (99), more testimonies of battlefield anxiety beyond those infamous reports of mishandled or ominous auspice-taking could have been cited and analysed: in one of his speeches Cato the Elder may have admitted to nerves while on campaign (*Or. Fr. 33 Cugusi–Sblendorio Cugusi: me sollicitum atque ex<er>citum habitum esse atque porro fore*) and

²⁷ Jehne (2013). Effervescence theory and modern religious festivals: Leal (2016). 'Mass communication' at the *ludi*: Rüpke (2018) 136–41.

²⁸ See MacLean (2018) for a sharp-eyed intervention.

²⁹ Clark (2014).

later in that same speech reminisced about what it felt like to behold the rush of enemy combatants (fr. 34: *id ego primo minus animadverti; veniunt iterum atque tumultuosius*). For the most part, though, this chapter makes a compelling case for understanding the religious meticulousness of Roman commanders as a means of allaying the fear and trembling of combat.

The domestic and external faces of aristocratic religiosity meet in Chapter 4 (*Domi et militiae*: elite religion at Rome in response to external triumphs and crisis). The major intervention here comes in the form of an extensive analysis of ‘accumulative civic polytheism’: ‘... the unceasing addition of prophylactic gods to the pantheon provided insurance for the city’s protection and well-being’ (127). Plautus finally makes an appearance, in an opening section whose procession from the staging of spectacles of all kinds to the ‘sensory overload’ of the triumph stops at the *Amphitruo* along the way. Taking to heart Polybius’ interest in the theatricality of Roman culture, C. adeptly conjures up for the reader the triumph’s welter of sights and sounds, and the turbulent journey of the man at the centre of it all. By comparison, the treatment of *evocatio* as performance is rather compressed, though this deficit is partially offset by the next section’s concentration on the adoption and regulation of non-Roman cults. C. did not have to work hard to persuade me that Magna Mater’s importation was due not so much to the imperatives of international diplomacy as to ‘religious fear [which acted] as an inducement on the part of the elite at Rome’ (147). Nor is it all that controversial of C. to hold that, in the years of the Bacchanalian conspiracy and its suppression, the aims of ‘policing Rome to demonstrate the Senate’s authority’ and ‘monopolizing legitimate means for intercessionary relations between humans and the divine’ were ‘not mutually exclusive’ (163)—although here I wondered if elite-instrumentalism was being admitted through the back door. Where C. does push into relatively underexplored territory is in the chapter’s third section, which locks onto the history of human sacrifice at Rome to bring out more clearly how Roman elites ‘shared a genuine, collective conviction that Roman success, and the city’s existence, depended on preserving the “peace of the gods” through orthopraxy’ (174). Here the live burials of Greeks and Gauls are held up as perhaps the most drastic example of how far the Roman elite class was willing to go to mitigate psychological crisis through ritual action, confirming Polybius’ observation that at moments of upheaval Romans went all in on propitiation, with no rituals deemed too out-of-bounds or ignoble (3.112.9).³⁰ C. is good at scene-setting, introducing the three main instances of human sacrifice (in 228, 216, and 114/13) with due consideration of the political and military circumstances specific to each. Not content with recreating the

³⁰ Polybius speaks of propitiating both gods and men (*καὶ θεοὺς ἐξιλάσασθαι καὶ ἀνθρώπους*); C. cites this passage together with Walbank’s commentary but does not follow up on the latter’s intriguing gloss.

atmosphere of generalised anxiety shrouding each of these inflection-points in Roman history, C. bores into the intra-elite dynamics of apprehension and desperation that incentivised the turn to live burial. This shift in focus pays off, if not nearly as handsomely as should have been the case: hewing closely to A. M. Eckstein's indexing of human sacrifice to fear, C. does not give nearly as much thought to the signifying properties of live burial itself, or to where the practice for entombing Greeks and Gauls in the Forum Boarium may have been derived from.³¹ Likewise awaiting its moment in the limelight of analysis is another dismal feature of the ritual: elites may have overseen the burials but were almost certainly not physically shutting up Greeks and Gauls themselves. How, if at all, did delegation of this miserable form of grunt-work act to insulate or buffer elite officiants from the trauma of direct physical confrontation? In other contexts, elite practitioners grew accustomed to keeping their hands clean, as the reliance on slave and freedmen *victimarii* and *popae* in sacrificial settings reveals.³²

In any event, individual and collective psychology does take centre stage in Chapter 5 ('Understanding elites' religious behaviors in the middle Roman Republic'), where C.'s interdisciplinary nimbleness is on display. On the assumption that Romans were 'hard-wired in much the same way as present-day people' (178), C. digs into research in psychology and related fields to explain how members of the Roman elite juggled the 'normative enjoinders' that modulated and guided orthopraxy in times of crisis and (potential) cognitive dissonance. Resorting occasionally to special pleading in order to dispose of those texts whose voicing of elite religious skepticism has elicited strong scholarly interest in recent years,³³ the chapter's first section offers a generally robust and rigorously researched account of the phenomenon of 'brain-balkanisation' that P. Veyne and D. Feeney first sketched two decades ago. Carneades' lectures at Rome are placed under the microscope here: C. argues that their charismatic appeal for members of Rome's elite 'was sequestered from their affective attachments to and conditioning of orthopraxic prescriptions in the field of religion' (190). This reconstruction could have been tested by squaring up Polybius 6.56's praise of the religiously backed integrity of Roman magistrates against the high-profile prosecutions for corruption that convulsed Rome after Carneades's visit, and that prompted at least one satirical commentator to wonder aloud if such perjurers believed

³¹ Frascetti (1981) on the first issue, Várhelyi (2007) on the second.

³² *Victimarii*: Lennon (2015).

³³ Cato's put-down of *haruspices* is taken to refer to private and not public ones; Lucilius's edgy characterisation of the statue worshipper is taken to exemplify satirical sauciness; theological commentary in Ennius's plays is interpreted as heeding the dictates of the genre and not as representative of the author's own views. But cf. Rüpke (2012) 51–61 on second-century drama's 'incipient systematization of religion'.

in the gods.³⁴ I was not entirely sure what to make of C.'s recapitulation of one strand of the psychological research: 'powerful individuals, such as Roman senators, are the most likely to root cognitive processes, attitudes, and behaviors in specific, highly situational, environmental cases' (192); does this mean that elites were more likely to ditch long-term proactive calculations in favour of reactive short-term religious remedies?

Be that as it may, C. leaves attitudinal ambivalence behind to focus in the next section on cognitive dissonance, taking as his signature example the behaviour of Scipio Africanus as Salian priest in the fall of 190. Scipio's decision to prioritise his ritual obligations and to remain in the same place for thirty days instead of prosecuting the Antiochene War is, on C.'s reading, *not* a case of cognitive dissonance. Normally one to press his military luck and advantage, Scipio opted to stay put and sacrifice to Mars and Quirinus 'because there was no cognitive dissonance with which he had to grapple': the absence of efforts to ignore the ritual requirement or to devise some workaround are for C. unimpeachable evidence of how matter-of-factly Scipio accepted and embraced his priestly charge. Despite its heavy reliance on what is for all intents and purposes an argument from silence, I found C.'s reading of this episode to be ingenious, and this section as a whole one of the highlights of the volume. Also infused with findings from the psychological literature but otherwise more conventional in content and analysis is the next section on Scipio Aemilianus' 'supposed *evocatio*', where C. establishes the historicity of the episode in part by demonstrating how the siege of Carthage during the Third Punic War created the perfect conditions for a 'heightened religiosity' that latched on to the ritual as one of various means for securing 'psychological security and mitigation of anxiety' (213). The closing section rifles through a stack of theories and models before alighting on a mix of Bourdieu, Giddens, and Skinner as the ammunition for what will be the chapter's parting salvo: '... in large part elites' religious practices—and here I am especially thinking about those practices in their rigid formalism and painstaking exactitude—were produced for and consumed by elites' (218), with non-elites doomed to incomprehension of this essentially self-contained world of speech and action. The reason for relegating this unit to the book's final pages was not apparent to me.

* * *

Having anatomised the individual chapters, I'll now step back for a moment to regard the whole. Outfitted with an extensive bibliography and written with great erudition, C.'s study is the product of many years of mature reflection on

³⁴ See Lucil. 1312–13 Marx (*apud* Cic. *N.D.* 1.63) with Goh (2018) 7–10.

the peculiarities of mid-republican religion. Concerned as it is with testing ‘elite instrumentalism’ in order to locate and delineate the more richly textured interiorities of Roman aristocratic religion, C.’s study does not pretend to be comprehensive. That said, there are some deficits in scope and in argument that blunt C.’s readings. The emphasis on vindicating Roman elites as religious actors who were not obsessed with manipulating non-elites occludes the degree to which elites weaponised religion to manipulate and define each other. And save for his exploration of attitudinal ambivalence, C. seems uneasy with the possibility that an assortment of religious driving forces, some geared towards internal coping and others towards externalised exploitation and control, could harmoniously co-exist in the minds and hearts of members of the elite; and yet, as a juicy fragment from Sextus Turpilius’ *Hetaera* may indicate, Romans were quite at home with imagining how veneration of the gods might mingle with the lust for exploitation.³⁵ If Roman drama furnished elite and non-elite members of the *res publica* with conceptual tools for making sense of their place in the world, it is curious to find among Plautus’s many quirky creations a pious pimp ‘whose religiosity mitigates his criminal behavior and even makes him a somewhat more sympathetic character ...’ There’s something refreshing about a vision of Roman male elites as religiously devout pimps.³⁶

My more substantive reservations about *The Peace of the Gods* ultimately come down to three issues. In terms of the book’s positioning in the broader scholarly landscape, I found it hard to make sense of C.’s decision not to confront or intervene directly into ongoing debates about the definition of religion. How best to parse terms such as Latin *religio* and Greek *deisidaimonia* has become a bone of contention in recent scholarship, with B. Nongbri’s *Before Religion* and T. Barton and D. Boyarin’s *Imagine No Religion* leading the charge.³⁷ Although C.’s monograph is well attuned to the longstanding controversy regarding criteria for ‘belief’, it has far less to say about the heuristic utility of religion itself as a unit of analysis.³⁸ If C. finds the back-and-forth over this issue tedious or prone to diminishing marginal returns, other and potentially more powerful conceptual tools are out there for wielding: presenting ‘religion’

³⁵ *Hetaera* 72–4 Ribbeck² (the protagonist speaking): *ducit me secum: postquam ad aedem venimus / veneratur deos, interea aspexit virginem ...*

³⁶ The quotation is from Gellar-Goad (2016) 232 on *Curculio*’s Cappadox. For K. Williams’ virtuoso stand-up routine on pimping and governance (‘All of the government is pimps’) see *Pimp Chronicles Pt. 1*, <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/asjxr3/stand-up-government-pimps> (Last accessed 3 July 2018).

³⁷ Nongbri (2013); Barton and Boyarin (2016).

³⁸ Compare C.’s reticence on this front to Z. Várhelyi’s brisk elucidation of a tripartite definition of religion that builds on the works of Bruce Lincoln and Willi Braun: Várhelyi (2010) 6.

as a species of ‘world-building’, in the form first propounded by P. Berger and now stretched across a global-historical canvas by J. Laine (*Meta-Religion*),³⁹ would have added a nice touch to those moments in *The Peace of the Gods* in which we are treated to the sight of elites engaged precisely in that—cosmopoiesis as a means of bracing oneself and one’s peers to contend with extraordinary adversity.

Another of the book’s limitations has to do with what I will term (for lack of a more evocative characterisation, and with no presumption as to C.’s own confessional allegiances) its Protestant sobriety. Perhaps because of a professional lifetime spent in dialogue with an ancient historian who was not endowed with the gift of humour, C.’s authorial sensibilities make little allowance for the lighter emotions of Roman religion: playfulness, joy, euphoria. Yet a template for framing and articulating these emotions was packaged into Roman comedy, which brims with characters exuberantly thanking the gods for their good fortune.⁴⁰ Opportunities for elites to have rambunctious fun in religious contexts abounded: if not at the *ludi* themselves, then at those dinners whose centrality to a social economy of aristocratic *Banket-* and *Eßkultur* stimulated the passage of mostly ineffectual sumptuary legislation.⁴¹ And feelings verging on joy may even have crept in even at the most serious of ritual moments, and in the most earnest of religious pronouncements. Setting to the side Cato’s puzzling preoccupation with his farting slaves,⁴² I have in mind another text that could be doing double work as dead-serious pontification and smirking self-congratulation. C. dutifully comments on one of the more eyebrow-raising attestations of Roman confidence in their own religious practices: M. Valerius Messala’s letter to the Teians in 191, with its bombastic declaration that the efficacy of Roman cult can be ascertained ‘especially from the favor accompanying us on account of these things from the divine ... the special honor we give to the divine is completely clear to everyone from many other things as well’.⁴³ C. cites this communication as illustrative of the Roman conviction that ‘correct observance of religious imperatives could result in tangible rewards in this world’ (18). Countering previous readings that have made much of the letter’s preening self-confidence, L. Driediger-Murphy has now demonstrated that neither the sentiment nor the language in which it is couched is atypical of

³⁹ Laine (2014).

⁴⁰ Joy in Plautus and Terence: Caston (2016).

⁴¹ Banqueting: Rüpke (1998); Veyne (2000); Vössing (2012); Rüpke (2018) 130–3. Tilg (2007) offers a literary case study. The archaeology of Roman religious feasting: Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2000) 272–329. Hercules and triumphal feasting: Marzano (2009).

⁴² See n. 25 above.

⁴³ *Syll.*³ 601; I have abridged C.’s translation of lines 11–17.

Hellenistic Greek theology;⁴⁴ so much, then, for the idea that Messala's boast parlays a *distinctively* Roman take on the relationship between ritual orthopraxy and sun-kissed outcomes into geopolitical swagger. But consider for a moment how a Roman office-holding class that came of age in the Second Punic War and its immediate aftermath might have felt about the turn from the dire straits of the Hannibalic years to (virtually) unprecedented wealth and (seemingly) irresistible imperial prospects. Buying fully into the proposition that the gods had backed and would continue to back one's society and its managerial elite would not translate simply into phlegmatic forbearance or steely equanimity. Yes, sneering self-regard was one possibility. But what about incandescent rapture, something akin to that night-time rush of emotion that later gripped Sulla in the aftermath of his greatest achievement?⁴⁵ C.'s monograph, tilting as it does in the direction of white-knuckled urgency and anxiety, locates only in the context of the triumph the unbridled exhilaration that must have rippled through those Roman male elites whose wildest dreams of domination and exploitation came true thanks to the gods; but surely the thrill of seeing the prosperity gospel of *do ut des* pay off received expression in other venues, international as well as domestic.

All of these warts are minor when set against the book's most problematic shortcoming. C. shows scant interest in what is arguably the single most consequential transformation in the study of mid-republican religion in the past few decades, one that was responsible for nudging a scholar who had written in 1967 that 'archaeological evidence can offer little help' into appreciating some two decades later the 'disturbing implications ... [of] a type of religiosity which the accepted model of Roman religion seems to exclude':⁴⁶ I am talking about the anatomical terracottas that have been unearthed in prolific quantities in Rome and throughout central Italy. Well before J. North advertised the game-changing potential of votives, no less an eminence than Wissowa himself had discerned their potential significance.⁴⁷ It is only in the past several decades that this material archive has been mined extensively for insights into the religious practices and dispositions of elite and non-elite Romans and central Italians throughout the period of interest to C., as he is aware (202–3). Regrettably, his book, unwavering in its literary focus, eschews a direct engagement with the scholarship on these votives. For all its citational generosity, which I have tried to emulate in this review, *The Peace of the Gods* makes very little effort to capture even in its footnotes the progress that has been made on the material-culture front, or to wrestle with some of the

⁴⁴ Driediger-Murphy (2014).

⁴⁵ Sulla *FRHist* 22 F 26 with Flower (2015).

⁴⁶ North (1967) 8; id. (1989) 580.

⁴⁷ Wissowa (1912) 248 on the votives at the sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis.

implications. The implicit assumption guiding this oversight may be that, insofar as elite religious culture was predominantly a matter of (male) speech- and ritual acts that were inscrutable to non-elites, it was not likely to have taken the same material forms as non-elite religious practice; but interrogations of the archaeological record have called this premise into question. Celia Schultz's *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic* is missing from C.'s bibliography,⁴⁸ one casualty of his book's reluctance both to acknowledge women as full-fledged religious agents and to leverage the votive record in order to recover and reanimate their agency.⁴⁹ With Schultz and others having paved the way, the real excitement in the study of mid-republican religion now lies in interpretations of the votive corpus that apply concepts derived from gender and disability studies.⁵⁰ Since some of these publications were probably not available to C. during the years that he worked on his manuscript, it would be ungenerous to take him to task for failing to acknowledge them. What is fair to state is that the new wave of research, with its archaeological dexterity and intersectional sophistication, makes the androcentric and principally literary focus of *The Peace of the Gods* seem dated at times.

These complaints notwithstanding, I want to conclude by stressing that C. has written a remarkable book that will embolden future scholars to make fuller use of scientific literature. Rarely does one see publications from the *Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics* tapped as *aides-à-penser* for the history of Roman religion. Even though I was at times exasperated by C.'s refusal to untether himself from historiographical texts, his book's capacity to spark disagreement is ocular proof of its overall success, and there is no doubt in my mind that *The Peace of the Gods* deserves to occupy a position of prominence in Roman religious studies for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, we remain in need of research that more adventurously roams across the multiple registers of domination and subjection through which religious experience in mid-republican Rome came to be distributed along the axes of status, gender, (dis)ability, and affect.

Princeton University

DAN-EL PADILLA PERALTA
dpadilla@princeton.edu

⁴⁸ Schultz (2006).

⁴⁹ Cf. the treatment of votives in Rüpke (2018) 83–92.

⁵⁰ Purely e.g.: Griffith (2015); Flemming (2016a) and (2016b); Graham (2016a) and (2016b); Hughes (2017) 63–105.

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