

INTRODUCTION

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The majority of the papers contained in this volume were first presented at a conference that was held in August 2008 at the University of Wales, Lampeter. This final collection, however, does not entirely represent the proceedings of that event. While various obligations unfortunately prevented the inclusion of several papers, additional essays were subsequently added, in the effort to fill conspicuous gaps, to round out the volume and to strengthen its overall coherence. The result naturally does not aspire to be comprehensive; given the nature of the topic, such a goal would hardly be realistic. The intention is simply to offer a variety of approaches to, and discussions of, the relationship between the Roman State – along with the cities and communities that came to be incorporated into Rome’s Empire – and the various priests and priesthoods that existed within that Empire. No attempt has been made to ensure a unified approach, or indeed point-of-view; the diversity of both, it is to be hoped, will provide stimulus for further debate.

That very diversity does, however, make the tasks of arranging the papers and writing an introduction to the whole collection somewhat difficult. For obvious reasons, a chronological approach will scarcely work. Nor can the papers easily be grouped by topic or theme, as any one pairing so often comes at the cost of another. The papers have, therefore, essentially been organised into two broad sections, the first of which is primarily concerned with the Roman State and the priests of Rome, and the second with the various provinces of the Empire and the priests who operated within those provinces. Naturally within these two sections coherence and structure have been accorded some attention. As for the introduction, what is offered here is merely an attempt to trace some of the themes that run through the various papers, to show how seemingly different discussions can come together to shed useful light on similar issues, and to show that there is in fact considerable coherence despite the diversity of the papers.

Few papers attempt to engage directly with the nature of the Roman State itself. Some consideration is, however, given to the position of individual communities that came to be incorporated into the Roman Empire. Perhaps most prominently S. Dmitriev’s paper is concerned with the competitive nature of the cities of Asia Minor – something which was not confined to the cities of that region, or to the people who inhabited them, as other papers which deal with the various regional contexts show. R. Haeussler’s paper on Southern Gaul tackles the theoretical issues raised by the relationship between religion and the city itself, and the problematic model of ‘*polis* religion’. Moreover, with the notable exception of C. Kvium’s study on inauguration and foundation, there is little direct engagement in

any paper with the city of Rome. For these reasons, it seems prudent to give some brief consideration to the Roman State itself.

A clarification is perhaps necessary: the very notion of State in the Roman world is not entirely unproblematic.¹ The State that may immediately come to mind is the classic *res publica* that had Rome at its centre, and a set of institutions that included the Senate, the assemblies of the people, the elected magistrates, and of course the numerous priesthoods. Not only is the precise nature of the relationship between these several institutions a matter of considerable debate,² but even the very processes by which this system came into existence are complex and for the most part unclear, on account in particular of the lack of contemporary evidence, and on account also of the Roman tendency to assume that the past was often little different from the present – a phenomenon which equally affects our understanding of archaic Roman religion.³ The value of the literary evidence – which comes from later periods – for our understanding of early Rome is therefore highly uncertain and a subject of much contention. Archaeological evidence has recently altered our understanding of archaic Rome considerably, but archaeological evidence can only answer certain questions.⁴ The general – but not total – absence of discussion in this volume of priests and the archaic State is not therefore a gap or omission. This also explains why most papers deal with later periods, and with periods for which there is contemporary evidence (which is of course not necessarily the same as *reliable* evidence).

The development of the classic *res publica* also coincided with, and was inevitably influenced by, Rome's imperial expansion and the gradual growth of the citizen body. Even at the peak of its maturity, however, the Empire never became monolithic, and certainly did not consist of just the one State: free cities and communities were present across the board. These cities and communities naturally possessed their own institutions and their own religious infrastructures – their own *sacra* – and of course their own traditions, most of which predated the coming of Rome and most of which were influenced in a number of various ways by it.⁵ In every one of these contexts, be it Rome, a province, or a free community

1 The decision to use State with a capital S throughout this volume was made with the aim of singling out the concept more clearly, rather than on account of any adherence to an abstract notion of the State.

2 E.g. Millar 1998, with references to his earlier publications on this topic; North 1990; Hölkeskamp 2000 and 2010, with an excellent bibliography.

3 E.g. Wiseman 1979, 41-53; Oakley 1997, 86-88. Although it is sometimes still supposed that the conservative nature of Roman religion ensured that it was largely immune to change, the supposition is erroneous; see Wiseman 2008, 18-22.

4 See, e.g., the material collected in Ross Holloway 1994; on the limitations of this sort of evidence, see for instance the discussion in Wiseman 2008, 84-139.

5 See in general De Blois-Funke-Hahn 2006; Rüpke 2007. Sanctuaries were an important part of the picture too, not least because they could mobilise impressive reservoirs of energies: a recently published honorific decree from the sanctuary of Apollo at Halaesa in northern Sicily, probably dating to the first century BC, was voted by 825 members of the local *koinon* (Scibona 2009; Manganaro 2009, 21-28; a comprehensive study of this text will be published by J. Prag).

in the Empire, religious activity was an essential component of corporate life; consequently, no public office was merely concerned with the fulfilment of secular duties. The political significance of any office can often only be fully appreciated in light of its religious significance.

Any examination of the relationship between priests and State in the Roman world must also attempt to look at the complexity of the nature and level of power. In some cases it is apparent that priests did not always interact with the State and could at times even be opposed by it (as, for instance, the priests of Bacchus were in 186 BC), and priests were on occasion also confronted with other forms of power. Access to priesthoods, however, nonetheless remained invaluable to the elites, in Rome and across the Empire. In Republican Rome competition came to be regulated by specific pieces of legislation, such as the elusive *lex Domitia* that J. North reconsiders in his contribution. Prosopographic enquiry into the priestly *Fasti*, that is into the names of the men and women who held the various priesthoods, enables J. Rüpke to consider the lines of distribution of priestly power throughout the elite, and the significance of distribution across different colleges for the profile of public religion and its enduring success.

There were moments in Rome's history when the unity and nature of the State were openly questioned, or came under threat. The Civil Wars in the late Republic and a number of succession crises during the Principate offer obvious instances of such times. Moreover, in late antiquity there came the division of the Empire into West and East, a development which was furthermore accompanied by the emergence of a complex relationship between State and Church (or indeed States and Churches).⁶ The demise of the Republic and the establishment of the Principate prompted a significant change in the organisation and distribution of priestly authority and power. The Augustan resettlement was based on the understanding of the importance of religion to the stability of the State and was an attempt to restore the coherence of public religion by putting all the State's religious institutions under the firm control of the *princeps*. Priesthoods were naturally affected too, and D. Wardle reviews the evidence for their reorganisation, with a special emphasis on Suetonius' account of Augustus' activities. The Augustan resettlement inevitably also affected fields of activity that were coterminous with those of the priests, most notably the auspices. The auspices could be a formidable means of political control; under the Republic, the creation and consolidation of augural lore represented an attempt to instil a series of checks and balances into the system. The scrutiny of the evidence carried out by A. Dalla Rosa in his paper shows how crucial monopoly of the auspices was for the agenda of the emperor. Control and even the patronage of the priesthoods remained central concerns to the agenda of the emperors even down to late antiquity. D. Hunt's paper shows how central interaction with Christian bishops was to the agenda of Constantine. The legislation of the same emperor was also concerned with the legal status of Jewish priests and synagogue officials, who were granted sets of privileges that are explored by D. Noy in his contribution.

6 Cf. D. Hunt's choice to write 'church' with a small C in his chapter.

Several studies in this collection are directly concerned with the role of knowledge in the running of public religion and in the contribution that priests made to it. Important lessons can be hidden in matters of detail: F. Glinister revisits an often overlooked passage of Festus and does justice to the otherwise unknown priesthood of the *Saliae*, which has previously been dismissed as lowly and obscure, but which had in fact played a time-honoured, prestigious and highly specialised role in Roman public religion. C. Kvium deals with problems of ritual, and especially with inauguration – a process in which augurs and pontiffs could be involved in different measures, and a process which had deeply political implications, especially because it involved the boundaries of the city. Any body of religious knowledge includes and entails the creation of what could be termed theological concepts, on what constituted a religious offence for instance, or on what the position of the gods towards mankind and Rome was. The papers by J. H. Richardson, who discusses the significance of the ritual entombing of unchaste Vestal Virgins, and F. Santangelo, on the *pax deorum* and the alleged role of the pontiffs in its preservation, deal with issues related to the expiation of religious crimes and with the establishment of a viable relationship between gods and men. These are not just problems of ritual and theological construction, but also of the recording of the interventions of the priests. The nature and scope of priestly records in Rome were intensely debated in the nineteenth century, and this discussion led to the emergence of the scholarly myth of the priestly book, which supposedly contained all sorts of ritual regulations and religious records. This myth has finally been dispelled in recent years; the problem of the pontifical records is, however, still worth considering because of its repercussions on our understanding of the formation of the literary tradition of early Rome and the problem of the *Annales maximi*.⁷

The *Annales maximi* were said to have contained information about events at home and abroad, and that, in a Roman context, naturally suggests that they included details of military activity. Warfare was obviously central to the workings of the Roman State and the handling of it was carefully regulated by religious constraints which required the intervention of priests on a number of occasions, and which are carefully reconsidered by J. Rich. But even beyond the battlefield, priestly expertise was so necessary for the running of the State that it was sometimes sought from outside the city and even outside the citizen body itself. This was the case with the priestesses of Ceres who came from Naples and Velia, and who are studied by E. Isayev and, to a more considerable extent, with the Etruscan *haruspices*, who remained heavily involved in the State even well into the imperial period, as M. Torelli shows in his study on the impressive figure of Tarquinius Priscus.

One of the central working hypotheses of this project is that, in order to understand the relationship between priests and State, the focus of the discussion has to be extended far beyond the boundaries of the city of Rome: hence the series of

7 The bibliography on the *tabula* of the *pontifex maximus* and the *Annales maximi* is immense; a small selection of recent works can be found in the bibliography of Richardson's paper.

regional and provincial surveys – L. Capponi on Egypt, A. Clark on Italy, S. Dmitriev on the province of Asia, V. Gaspar on Africa, B. Goffaux on Spain, R. Haeussler on Gaul, L. Allason-Jones on Britain, S. Aleshire and S. Lambert on Athens, J. Reynolds on Cyrenaica, and B. Rossignol on the Danubian provinces – that constitute the second part of the volume. These surveys do not aspire in any way to be exhaustive; they are intended to provide a series of representative case-studies and to stress the importance of the provincial dimension to our understanding of the relationship between priests and State.⁸ The epigraphic evidence is often crucial to the appreciation of the picture, even when it provides incomplete answers, or elusive ones; at times the analysis of a specific historical phase can provide valuable insights to the understanding of long-term developments (as in Capponi's paper on Augustan Egypt). A. Raggi's analysis of the place of priest-hoods in the municipal laws corroborates the impression that these laws can shed light on the way in which territorial and administrative structures relate to religion, even though it is usually quite difficult to appreciate just what set of duties priests actually carried out in the organisation and performance of rituals.

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The study of Roman priests and priesthoods took a crucial turn in 2005 with the publication of the monumental *Fasti sacerdotum* by J. Rüpke, a work that does not simply provide an exhaustive prosopography of the priests in the city of Rome, but which also rests upon a thorough evaluation of the role and importance of priesthoods in the Roman world.⁹ Rüpke's *Fasti* is not simply the impressive outcome of the lengthy scholarly work of one individual; it is also a sign of a wider revival of scholarly interest in priests that has arisen over the last two decades. The work of J. Scheid, of course, has also played a central role in this process. A great deal of his analysis of the workings of Roman religion has been based on the discussion of how priesthoods worked (most notably in his study of the records of the Arval Brethren), what the duties of priests in the staging of rituals were, and how the duties of the priests interacted with those of the magistrates.¹⁰ Speaking in more general, and surely rather simplistic terms, the last few decades have seen a scholarly trend that takes Roman religion more seriously and does not regard it merely as a tool for political dominance – the model of the *instrumentum regni*, which derives from a tradition that arguably started with Polybius. Issues like ritual have received more attention; the problem of the dialectic between conservatism and change has been studied with great interest; stronger emphasis has

8 Readers who are interested in provincial priesthoods, especially from a prosopographical angle, will also be able to use with great profit the splendid database on the priests of the imperial cult in the province of Asia compiled by G. Frija and based on her PhD dissertation (Paris 2009): <http://www.pretres-civiques.org>.

9 Rüpke 2005; see the English edition, Rüpke 2008.

10 See esp. Scheid 1984 and Scheid 1990; cf. also the general discussion in Scheid 1996.

been put on the diversity and variety of the religious experience in the Roman world.¹¹ Moreover, important attempts have been made to understand Roman religion as a set of practices and behaviours that carried significance and gave stability and identity to communities. Indeed, some of the best recent work in the field has shown the importance of the role that religion played in the construction of a sense of communal belonging and identity, a role that does not contradict a scenario of pluralism and diversity.¹²

Against this background, the study of priests and priesthoods can provide an invaluable vantage point from which to reconsider many aspects of Roman religion, or indeed religious life in the Roman world. The title of an important collection on pagan priests published nearly two decades ago rightly linked the study of priesthoods with the power that they conveyed on those who held them.¹³ Roman priests were not simply ‘givers of sacred’, to use D. Porte’s formula.¹⁴ They were also the bearers of a specialised and formalised knowledge which bestowed an invaluable social function upon them, and a deeply empowering one too. This is fairly unproblematic, of course, even if one does not buy into M. Foucault’s model of the association between knowledge and power.¹⁵ The aim of this book is to explore this association from a specific angle: the relationship that Roman priests and priestesses had with the State, and how their power interacted with that of the State.

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- 11 See e.g. Scheid 2005 and Prescendi 2007 on sacrifice; North 1976 on conservatism and innovation; Ando 2008 on diversity. The choice of the plural in the title of a reference handbook like Beard-North-Price 1998 (‘Religions’, rather than ‘Religion’) carries obvious significance.
- 12 Bendlin 2000; Clark 2007.
- 13 Beard-North 1990.
- 14 Porte 2007.
- 15 See esp. Foucault 1975.

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