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**Bassir Amiri (ed.), *Religion sous contrôle: pratiques et expériences religieuses de la marge? Institut des Sciences et Techniques de l'Antiquité*. Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2016. Pp. 200. ISBN 9782848675619. €22.00 (pb).**

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### Contents

This compact volume publishes the proceedings of a 2015 colloquium organized by Bassir Amiri at the Université de Franche-Comté, the primary focus of which was “la pratique et les expériences religieuses de ceux qui, en raison de leur statut et de leurs choix, sont exposés à des phénomènes d’exclusion” (11). While the essays vary considerably in quality, the collection as a whole is a welcome departure from the usual obsession with elites and will prove a handy resource for anyone interested in the interplay of religious practice and social marginalization in antiquity.

Although the cultural and geographic sweep of the volume is not immediately apparent from the title, the attractively reproduced image of a Pompeian *lararium* on the cover as well as the opening sentences of Bassir Amiri’s introductory essay dispel any uncertainties: these contributions are concerned primarily with Roman religion. As Amiri’s references to the works of Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Jean-Pierre Vernant, and François de Polignac make clear, scholarship on Greek religion was an inspiration to the colloquium and to the essays that grew out of it, but the collection has both feet firmly planted in the world of Roman religious marginality, understood to encompass the cultic and devotional practices of women, slaves, freedpersons, and adherents to “foreign” cults in the Republic and Empire. Unifying the volume’s study of these different (if sometimes intersecting and overlapping) groups is a theory of the marginal as that which stands at a remove from a “center” or “norm” of status and/or power. Other avenues of inquiry originally teased in the colloquium’s *problématique*—such as the experiences of pilgrims—did not make their way into the volume but are mentioned as possibilities for future investigation (15).

The contributions themselves are organized under three headings. In “Pratiques religieuses et marginalité,” four essays take up the interest of Romans in non-traditional cult, with the first two training their sights on Varro. Yves Lehmann asserts on the basis of Varro’s interest in Egyptian cosmogenic theologies that the most erudite of the Romans may have been intimate with the mysteries of Isis and Serapis; while I was not won over by the claim that “l’âme contemplative, fortement idéaliste de Varron a recueilli avec ferveur” (22) the teaching of Egyptian priests, Lehmann is surely right to see Varro as far more than a stolid custodian of the old Roman religion. Alessandra Rolle’s essay works through a close reading of five fragments of Varro’s Menippean satire *Eumenides* to build a case for interpreting the satire as an ironizing - if not outright sarcastic - depiction of Serapis cult at Rome, detecting in it the faint echoes of a strong Varronian response to the Egyptianizing proclivities of late-republican figures such as Q. Caecilius Metellus Pius. While some Serapis worshippers may have steered clear of onions and watercress (fr. 138 Bücheler = 147 Cèbe), other Romans of the late Republic and early Empire became aficionados of vegetarianism, the Pythagorean flavor of which is the theme of Gérard Freyburger’s essay. Harping on the “hostilité constante de la population [romaine] à l’encontre du pythagorisme” and concluding with the speculation that Ovid’s famously enigmatic Pythagorean interlude in *Met.* XV not only discloses the poet’s personal views but factored in his exile, Freyburger’s sketch should be read alongside Katharina Volk’s recent essay on the Roman Pythagoras.<sup>2</sup> Rounding out this section of the volume and bridging to the next section’s concern with slaves and freedpersons is Françoise Van Haepere’s clear and focused summary of her research in progress on civic priesthoods during the Empire. Exploiting the epigraphic evidence, Van Haepere documents the underrepresentation of freedmen and freedwomen in these priesthoods, with the significant and revealing exception of the cult of Magna Mater (and possibly the cult of Isis).

Part II of the volume takes up “La religion au prisme du statut juridique des dévots,” beginning with Bassir Amiri’s evocative reconstruction of the religious life of the Roman slave, “situé à l’interface” of visibility and invisibility. In its investigation of the double dialectic of prominence and subordination at work in the cultic routines of slave *victimarii*, Amiri’s sophisticated essay drives home its arguments by adducing the visual evidence of sacrificial scenes on Roman reliefs. Yet save for a remark about “l’attention scrupuleuse portée à la réalisation des gestes qui permettra de faire place à la satisfaction du devoir bien accompli” (68), Amiri mostly punts on the question of the emotional affect engendered within *victimarii* by the paradox of being at once ritually necessary and socially marginal. Next in line is Andrea Binsfeld, whose contribution steps outside of Roman Italy to summarize research on slave and freedperson inscriptions from the *civitas Treverorum*: four inscriptions from Trier are discussed with the aim of showing how dedications of slaves and *liberti* “s’inscrivent d’une part dans le cadre du culte municipal de Lenus Mars et d’autre part dans celui du culte impérial” (83); also examined are dedications addressed to Mercury and Rosmerta in the

territory of the *civitas* and inscriptions from the military outpost at Mainz. For all that the epigraphic material does to showcase the religious activities of slaves and *liberti* in this neck of the provincial woods, Binsfeld is quick to remind us that those capable of erecting these inscriptions formed part of a “groupe très élevé ... la plupart des esclaves et affranchis restent muets” (89).

Darja Šterbenc Erker’s chapter travels back to Rome to investigate the role and place of *matronae* in the Secular Games of Augustus and of Septimius Severus. After a brief overview of the debate over the “sacrificial incapacity” of Roman women, the chapter proceeds to a lucid analysis of the different roles accorded to *matronae* in the two *ludi*, as gleaned from the epigraphic *commentarii* that survive for each. At both the Augustan and Severan games, male officiants (Agrippa and Septimius Severus respectively) dictated to the supplicating matrons the prayer they were to use; however, whereas the Augustan *commentarii* present these matrons as an undifferentiated group, the Severan record names them (110). Likewise attentive to the cultic roles of women but ranging well beyond Rome is this section’s final chapter, in which Ludvine Beaurin assesses whether the cult of Isis in the Roman West was truly “un culte de femmes.” Mining the epigraphic evidence gathered and sifted in a 2013 doctoral *thèse*, Beaurin is able to debunk the stereotypical representation of Isis-cult in the literary sources by demonstrating that it was neither a specifically female cult nor a cult primarily of interest to foreigners and social outsiders; what it did offer women perusing the wares available to them in the empire-wide religious marketplace were “des alternatives individuelles leur permettant d’enrichir non seulement leur vie religieuse mais aussi leur existence sociale” (137).

With Part III (“Chrétiens et païens dans le devenir religieux de Rome”), the focus tilts to Christianity. Of all the contributions, Christian Stein’s essay is the only one to open with a definition of *marginalité*—after which he proceeds to an exposition of a simple yet powerful model for explaining early Christianity’s durability on the social margins. The model lays down three determinative factors: first, the extent of an individual or group’s religious integration (here Stein devotes some words to the religious “gradient” typical of cities throughout the Roman Empire, sweeping downward from elites at the center of public religious ritual to non-elite citizens, and from there to residents, migrants, women, slaves, etc.); second, social integration, best gauged by considering whose prospective or actual conversion to Christianity was likeliest to give rise to public scandal; and third, legal constraint, in particular the (un)willingness of governors to prosecute Christians during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries. Baudouin Decharneux’s chapter on the marginalization of Christians in Lucian’s *Peregrinus* shares some interpretive affinities with Stein and is enlivened with delectable moments, among them the *amuse-bouche* comparison of Lucian’s Greek to “l’anglais que les petits-bourgeois des lointaines régions du Commonwealth affectent lorsqu’ils font leurs études à Oxford ou Cambridge” (163). However, the claim that Lucian had no patience with marginalized Christians in part because he had been born a marginal and came to feel the need to distinguish his cultural trajectory

from that of a Peregrinus could have benefited from a sharper polish; and readers jaded by sunny- side-up panegyrics to empire will find Decharneux's rose-tinted representation of the world of the Antonines as a social system that "savait comment s'adjoindre les plus brillants de ses marginaux en les fascinant et subjuguant par et grâce à sa richesse culturelle" (164) hard to take on board. The final chapter of this section and of the volume as a whole returns the reader to Trier, in the form of Marcello Ghetta's re-evaluation of the Late Antique evidence for the wax and wane of ritual activity in and around the sanctuaries of Gaul and Germania. Ghetta shows that the material evidence for a pagan "decline" is far from straightforward, and cites the inscriptions that survive to attest the continuing presence of pagan cults: "... la religion païenne n'était pas devenue une religion à la marge durant l'Antiquité tardive" (182).

The volume ends with a wrap-up by Bruno Poulle that commences with the *recusatio* "Il n'est pas toujours facile de faire la synthèse [...]." Much the same feeling weighed on this reviewer when evaluating these contributions. Despite their differing emphases, the volume's essays coalesce around several methodological commitments, some more apparent on an initial read than others. Channeling John Scheid (and William Van Andringa), multiple contributions take as axiomatic the notion that blood sacrifice was at the center of Roman religion, and that those not competent to officiate over blood sacrifice were *ipso facto* religiously subordinated to those who could. To cite only one instance of this line of argument, L. Beaurin contends that the roles of women in the public rituals of Isis cult were "mixtes mais subordonnées puisqu'elles ne semblent pas avoir un rôle actif dans le sacrifice sanglant, cœur de la pratique religieuse romaine qui reste entre les mains des hommes" (126). However, it bears noting that real pressure has been applied to Scheid's position in recent years: efforts to dethrone blood sacrifice from its Burkertian preeminence are now picking up steam,<sup>3</sup> and Celia Schultz has contended that not all—in fact not even *most*—sacrifice was blood sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

By and large, the contributors' engagement with English-language scholarship is light, with Binsfeld's reliance on Orlando Patterson and Sandra Joshel and Stein's interest in Rodney Stark standing out as prominent exceptions. Not that this is a bad thing: some readers might find it curious that a collection of essays on marginal groups in Roman religion makes only passing references to Beard/North/Price, but others might see this non-engagement as a tactful redress of one of BNP's shortcomings. And certainly the essays will bring good cheer to anyone fearful of the tyranny of the Anglophone over classics, or of the prospect of scholarship practiced "allein mit Englisch und im Horizont allein amerikanischer Diskussionen" that so distressed E.A. Schmidt back in 2001.<sup>5</sup> It is French scholarship that receives pride of place in this volume, and the imprint of Scheid is everywhere to be found: seven of the eleven contributions cite him, with Amiri—half of whose bibliography consists of Scheid publications—leading the charge.

This embrace of Scheid does result in some conceptual shortcomings, especially when it comes to the topic of women's "sacrificial incapacity." Moving against Scheid, Meghan DiLuzio has recently marshaled a significant amount of evidence in support of the claim that "official religious service was the one area of public life in which Roman women assumed roles of equal legitimacy and comparable status to those of men."<sup>6</sup> A concerted effort to venture beyond the Scheidian horizon on these matters might have emboldened some of the volume's contributors to power up their conclusions. Turning back to slaves for a moment, I was disappointed not to see more attention devoted to what Jacques Annequin in a review of E. Herrmann-Otto's new guide to ancient slavery termed the production of a self "socialment divisé"<sup>7</sup>: what are the experiential and psychological aspects of roaming Roman society's margins as a *religiously* divided self? Yet the questions that multiplied like mushrooms as I put down *Religion sous contrôle* are in the end a testament to the volume's overall success.

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#### Notes:

1. [The program](#) .

2. It is hard to square "constant hostility" with the apparently favorable reception accorded to Pythagoras in mid-republican Rome, the installation of a statue of the philosopher on the corner of the Comitium (Pliny *NH* 34.26) being the most startling example. On these and other Pythagorean matters see, in addition to K. Volk's recently published "Roman Pythagoras" (in G.D. Williams and K. Volk, eds., *Roman reflections: studies in Latin philosophy* [Oxford, 2015], 33-49), M. Humm's *Appius Claudius Caecus. La République Accomplie* (Rome, 2005), 483-638.

3. See C. Ando's final salvo in C. Faraone and F.S. Naiden, eds., *Greek and Roman animal sacrifice: ancient victims, modern observers* (Cambridge, 2012).

4. "Roman sacrifice, inside and out" (*JRS* 106 [2016]: 58-76).

5. *Entretiens Hardt* 2001, p. 264.

6. M. DiLuzio, *A place at the altar: priestesses in Republican Rome* (Princeton, 2016), 241.

7. *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 36.2 (2010), p. 158.

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