

Johannes Hahn (Hrsg.): Spätantiker Staat und religiöser Konflikt. Imperiale und lokale Verwaltung und die Gewalt gegen Heiligtümer. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter 2011. 227 S. EUR 79.95. ISBN 978-3-11-024087-0.

This volume is comprised of a short introduction plus eight individual papers (six in German, two in English) presented at a conference held at Münster in 2005. Given this delay, it does not come as a surprise that the editor Johannes Hahn apologizes to both readers and authors for the late publication of the book. Otherwise, his six pages of “preliminary remarks” provide a useful introduction to the volume, clearly stating (p. 2) the general subject of the book: the abuse and violation of places of worship, seen from the point of view of the authorities.¹

However, the expression “Lobbyarbeit der katholischen Kirche” (p. 4) may appear somewhat questionable. As Hahn himself acknowledges, this “Lobbyarbeit” was often directed against personal enemies within the Church, by individuals; in which case, it makes no sense to speak of an action by the Church as a body. But the same applies to petitions directed against pagans etc., since our records describe the actions of individuals only. Whoever would construe an anti-pagan “Lobbyarbeit” as representing the will of the entire Church therefore bears burden of proof. Moreover, the modern term “Lobbyarbeit” implies a lot more than the petitioning customary in Antiquity; but one may allow for a certain shift of meaning when modern terminology is reused to describe the past.

Martin Wallraff’s contribution is entitled “Die antipaganen Maßnahmen Konstantins in der Darstellung des Euseb von Kaisareia”. Wallraff points to the discrepancies between the anti-pagan measures ascribed by Eusebius to Constantine, and the picture drawn by other sources; he is especially successful in isolating a few cases in which the diverging interests of Constantine, as the author of a given measure, and Eusebius, as its biased interpreter, can be clearly discerned. According to Wallraff, Constantine condemned certain cult practices such as bloody sacrifices, temple prostitution et al. not from a Christian point of view, but rather because he found them intrinsically abominable. Wallraff also argues convincingly that it would be rash to dismiss some of Eusebius’ bolder claims out of hand. In several instances, he shows how Eusebius exaggerated certain measures (or reinterpreted them in a biased way), without inventing them entirely. Wallraff’s methodological approach, his clear argument and sound judgment make his views convincing. His contribution is also a good read, and it is a pity indeed that, not counting the bibliography, it is a mere ten pages. Moreover, it can be observed that the piece was handed in quickly

1 The author of this review wishes to record his warm gratitude to Anthony Ossa-Richardson for kindly correcting his English manuscript.

after the original convention and not updated: Note 9 (p. 10–11) announces the edition of Iulius Africanus' *Chronographia*, edited under Wallraff's supervision, and since printed in 2007.

Much longer is Frank R. Trombley's "The Imperial Cult in Late Roman Religion (ca. A.D. 244–395): Observations on the Epigraphy", a 36 p. article. Trombley offers an intriguing collection of sources on the Imperial cult under the Later Roman Empire, not limiting himself to epigraphy. This comprehensive review of the evidence is indeed most interesting.

However, readers would profit still further if those sources were quoted in the original Latin and Greek and not just in English translations, with only the occasional word or phrase given in the original. Loose translations are perfectly acceptable as long as the original texts are easily accessible. But since many of those texts are rather obscure (and missing in the online databases), it would have been a boon to readers to have them included in the article.

Here and there, methods and conclusions fail to convince. A few instances: The *contagiosus* of the famous Hispellum inscription CIL XI 5265 = ILS 705 (*ne aedis nostro nomini dedicata cuiusquam contagiose superstitionis fraudibus polluatur*) is explained exclusively by checking the (very scanty) evidence for *contagiosus*, which lets Trombley conclude (p. 30): "The Hispellum inscription clearly uses the term in the sense of spiritual disease, with possible physical repercussions, as expressed for example in Book 2 of Porphyrius of Tyre's work on abstinence from animal meat, where sacrifice is denounced because, in Pythagorean theology, it was thought to attract the daemons of disease."

Drawing on the Greek-writing philosopher Porphyry seems far-fetched. A much more straightforward approach would be to examine not only the rare *contagiosus*, but also the much more common *contagium*, from which it is derived, and to which it refers. There are many instances of *contagium* employed in a figurative way (ThLL IV 627, 53 – 628, 17), and there is hence no need to believe that *contagiosus* must imply some reference to a medical condition.

In reference to Eusebius, Trombley writes (p. 26): "Constantius is elsewhere described as being 'on friendly terms with the God over all' and 'attached to what pleases God': it is also said that he recognised 'only the God over all' and condemned 'the polytheism of the godless'. All this was fairly easy to come by, and could have meant practically anything in the monotheistic jargon of the late Tetrarchic period, assuming that Eusebius is expressing the actual terminology that Constantine the Great reported to him about his father's belief – something that may be open to question." In fact, one might doubt not merely the faithfulness of Constantine's report, but rather its very existence; this passage is especially striking after reading Wallraff's article on how to make use of Eusebius in a methodologically sound way.

There is a non sequitur on p. 28: "He [Constantine] is saluted in an inscription at Vicetia in 328 [CIL V 8011 = ILS 697] as 'best of princes in human affairs, son of the

deified Constantius, born for the good of the Republic' (*humanarum rerum optimus princeps, divi Constanti filius, bono reipublicae natus*), a clear intensification of the familial rhetoric that qualifies the obscure origin of Constantine's mother Helena in a positive way." It is difficult to discern how *bono reipublicae natus* might be connected to Helena. And again, it is useful to have the original Latin at hand; *res humanae* being the opposite of *res divinae*, the idea is that Constantine is the best ruler of the human world. This is not conveyed adequately by "best of princes in human affairs".

Yet despite these and similar issues, Trombley's collection provides a valuable and exceptionally helpful review of the sources available. Diverging interpretations do not detract from its intrinsic usefulness.

Giorgio Bonamente's contribution, "Einziehung und Nutzung von Tempelgut durch Staat und Stadt in der Spätantike", amply treats the confiscation of temple properties in Late Antiquity. The author deserves praise for the breadth of primary sources and scholarly literature harnessed for his article. This is truly a comprehensive work, presenting one well-defined problem in an authoritative fashion.

However, it would have read more fluently in Italian. Though Bonamente's German is grammatically flawless, it closely keeps to the focus structure of Italian, thwarting German end focus expectations. In places, it is taxing to read. A case in point (p. 60): "Die konkreten Auskünfte, die uns Eusebios mit seiner Rede liefert, von denen anzunehmen ist, dass sie einen wahrheitsgetreuen Spiegel der Politik Konstantins darstellen, entkräften jeden antiken und neuzeitlichen Verdacht über die Unsicherheit oder sogar Doppeldeutigkeit seiner Religionspolitik, der sich auf die Überzeugung gründet, dass das Fehlen einer Anordnung der generellen Schließung der heidnischen Tempel als ein Zeichen von Eklektizismus und Kompromissbereitschaft zu deuten sei."

"*Mala desidia iudicum?* Zur Rolle der Provinzstatthalter bei der Unterdrückung paganer Kulte (von Constantin bis Theodosius II.)" by Eckhard Meyer-Zwiffelhofer is a vividly written and powerfully argued piece of scholarship. Meyer-Zwiffelhofer examines the role of governors in the application of the Imperial anti-pagan legislation. He does so most impressively, using every scrap of evidence available to build up a conclusive picture of what governors actually did, and of what they could do within the framework of Imperial administration and the social relationships surrounding them. Meyer-Zwiffelhofer's conclusion is that Roman Emperors were indeed justified in deploring the inaction of their representatives in the provinces, for, according to him, governors were reluctant to face the opposition of influential local figures. Besides, holding their post for only a few years, they did not feel powerful enough to be confrontational in such matters. Governors were, according to Meyer-Zwiffelhofer, keen on obtaining excellent references, a goal that might easily be thwarted if they dared to intervene too much in local affairs.

Despite Meyer-Zwiffelhofer's impressive scholarship, his final conclusion does not seem airtight. Would an Emperor promote someone who faithfully carried out his orders, or rather someone who could boast letters of recommendation obtained for ignoring or even violating his orders? If governors did not execute anti-pagan legislation because they felt overawed by local big-shots, there is no need to examine the problem of those measures specifically, for a n y k i n d of unpopular measure would be at risk, which in turn would mean that Imperial legislation as a whole was futile.

Another approach to this question (i.e., when governors carried out measures, and when they did not) might be to study the religious convictions of individual governors, as far as possible. It may be expected that many did not carry out anti-pagan laws not because they could not, or did not dare, but simply because they did not want to do so and, at the same time, felt safe to follow their own interests at a huge distance from the Imperial court, especially when the local ruling elite shared their views.

In "Zwischen Christentum und Staatsraison. Römischer Imperium und religiöse Gewalt", Ulrich Gotter explores the repercussions of expanding Christianity in terms of the proneness to violence. His straightforward thesis might be summarized as follows: The general framework of the Empire, guaranteeing the absence of haphazard riot violence through the supervision of the Roman authorities, collapsed with the advent of Christianity; now, violence could be justified for the sake of higher goals and was hence carried out with impunity.

The point is argued well, and the sources presented bear out Gotter's thesis. There is just one passage with which one might disagree (p. 145): "Aus einer solchen, transzendent armierten Freund-Feind-Perspektive ist die Rechtsfrage irrelevant und die Ordnung des Reiches zweitrangig. Daß sich Ambrosius damit gegen die traditionellen imperialen Prinzipien wendet, ist ihm völlig bewußt, ja er formuliert das Problem ebenso offen wie brutal: ‚Aber vielleicht ist es die Ordnung (*disciplina*), um die es dir zu tun ist, Kaiser. Doch was ist wichtiger? Die Durchsetzung der Ordnung oder die Sache der Religion? Es ist da allemal notwendig, dem Glauben nachzugeben.‘"

This is the original version (Ambr. epist. 74, 11): *Sed disciplinae te ratio, imperator, movet. quid igitur est amplius, disciplinae species an causa religionis? cedit oportet censura devotioni.* The following English translation may be suggested: "But it is a concern for strictness that moves you, my Emperor. What, then, is more? The appearance of strictness, or rather an opportunity for piety? By necessity, strictness should yield to piety!"

This is not just the same thing in different words. Pace Gotter, Ambrose is not making a general statement to the effect that religion is more important than public order, but rather advising the Emperor that it is better to carry out acts of piety than to appear severe at all costs. Ambrose's allegedly sweeping statement then becomes no more than an appeal to the Emperor's personal piety. For *censura*, left untranslated by Gotter, must mean "strictness, severity". It is clear that *censura* takes up *disci-*

plina. Hence, *disciplina* will also mean “strictness”, not “public order”, which is in any case the natural way to understand *disciplina*. Besides, *species* (also not rendered by Gotter) means “external appearance”, hence *species disciplinae* is “appearance of severity”, “showing oneself as severe”. If we understood *disciplina* as “public order”, *species disciplinae* would translate as “charade of public order” which is impossible in the context. *causa* might be either “cause” as in “the cause of religion” (ThlL III 688, 21–689, 11) or, less pompously, “opportunity” (ThlL III 680, 3–680, 15, cf. also ThlL III 678, 76–379, 66). Since *species disciplinae* appeals to the Emperor’s inner self, *causa religionis* may be supposed to do the same (“opportunity for piety”). However, even if Ambrose’s intended meaning of it is “the cause of religion”, he would still merely be claiming that “the cause of religion” takes precedence over the Emperor’s desire to appear harsh – not over the public order.

The title of Hans-Ulrich Wiemer’s “Für die Tempel? Die Gewalt gegen heidnische Heiligtümer aus der Sicht städtischer Eliten des spätrömischen Ostens” is slightly misleading, as Wiemer’s contribution focuses almost entirely on Libanius and, strictly speaking and unsurprisingly, on his *Pro templis*. Notwithstanding the scope of the contribution, it is an outstanding piece of work, drawing on a breathtaking knowledge of Libanius’ and his contemporaries’ writings, and a solid grasp of modern scholarship. Wiemer deserves particular praise for his methodological approach, tirelessly asking in which context and to which end authors wrote what they wrote. The result is a conclusive picture of the situation Libanius was witnessing and the views he held on it. Commendably, Wiemer tells his readers in the notes quite clearly what he thinks about others’ published work instead of merely citing them without taking up a stance, as too many others do.

Bryan Ward-Perkins’s “The End of the Temples: An Archaeological Problem” investigates (p. 187) “Why does archaeological evidence not play a more central role in the increasingly sophisticated and nuanced literature on the end of Roman paganism?” Ward-Perkins’s answer, presented (excluding bibliography and illustrations) in ten pages, is a combination of practical issues and methodological challenges. With good reason, he stresses that temples, given their prominence, were usually excavated during the infancy of the discipline of archaeology, using unsophisticated procedures. Moreover, archaeologists then (and perhaps even today) had interests other than the period of abandonment of a sanctuary.

The methodological challenges Ward-Perkins mentions include chronological limitations (the difference of a few decades in the 4th c. AD means a lot to historians), the difficulty of proving destruction if a temple was completely demolished, the impossibility of tracing the reassignment of a materially unchanged temple to a different use, et al.

Other common-sense observations may be added to the many caveats put forward by Ward-Perkins. For example, in the case of a Gallo-Roman sanctuary (Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer) and a statue found in a well, Ward-Perkins (p. 195) mentions Christian fanaticism or a “process of ‘tidying up’ by local inhabitants” as possible causes. Wanton destruction due to rampaging barbarians is another straightforward possibility. And when Ward-Perkins discusses the defacement of Egyptian temples (p. 191), he does not mention the greater chronological issues: Were these acts carried out by early Christians, or rather by medieval Muslims? (Needless to say, this depends on the question of the exact point of time at which a particular place ceased to be accessible.)

Ward-Perkins (p. 190) also asks for “the reasons behind the preservation within the cities of Late Antiquity of some undamaged pagan imagery”. He declares Lepelley’s comparison of the preservation of pagan statues to Alexandre Lenoir’s rescue activity during the French Revolution “perhaps a little over-romantic” (p. 190 n. 13). But in fact Imperial legislation shows the influence of a concept akin to what is now called “Cultural Heritage Management”, calling for the preservation of temples as buildings of artistic merit, and a similar line of argument is employed by Libanius when he argues for the rescue of the temples from destruction. Hence, an ancient precursor of Lenoir, i. e., a person of Late Antiquity interested (quite independently from their personal religious convictions) in saving pagan statuary or buildings as objects of art, is no far-fetched idea. This constitutes another challenge for archaeology, for a depot of pagan statues might be interpreted as a cache of objects saved for their artistic (or perhaps monetary) value, not only as a place where pagan believers hid their sculpture from persecutors.

Those excavators who are prone to invent fanciful stories for their findings should carefully study Ward-Perkins’s insightful and prudent remarks before they venture on unsafe ground and propose theories which prove difficult to weed out later. More often than not, these theories percolate from one article to the next, and later scholars (especially non-archaeologists) are often reluctant to disagree with the original excavator, who after all must have known best. Another conclusion to be drawn from Ward-Perkins’s article (though not spelled out by him) is that there is no portmanteau methodology which can be carried out step-by-step with any set of findings; as his examples show, there are many different situations available (and even more imaginable), and each demands specific consideration by anyone working on it.

Johannes Hahn, the editor of the volume, is also the author of the last contribution “Gesetze als Waffe? Die kaiserliche Religionspolitik und die Zerstörung der Tempel”, investigating the relationship between legislation and temple destructions. In this discussion, a grander question looms large: How effectively were the laws enunciated by Emperors put into action? Hahn draws a solid picture, based on recent research, on how this legislation came to pass and what

scope it had. This is a very useful article, offering an accessible introduction to the issues at stake.

Unfortunately, one cannot but notice that too few working hours of “studentische Hilfskräfte” were applied to the volume. On p. 213, a Greek phrase (in fact, the one on which “Gesetze as Waffe” is based) comes out garbled, with most vowels containing diacritics replaced by ‘missing character’ boxes. This glitch is to be found in the main text, not in the footnotes. Any proof-reader, even an undergraduate with little or no knowledge of Ancient Greek, would have spotted this.

This apparent lack of proof-reading is evident throughout the volume. As Raphael Brendel has pointed out in his own review², there is a surprisingly high number of mistakes in the footnotes. One need not worry too much about the occasional typo, but tracking down works cited in the author-date style (e. g., “Dally 2003”) and missing from the bibliography can be tiresome. Brendel’s review includes a commendable list of those missing references; this is a job a paid undergraduate student should have carried out, not a reviewer.

The indices present another problem. Apart from the social aspect of having a conference paper in the corresponding volume as a personal souvenir of the get-together (an argument rather weak “sub specie aeternitatis”), there are mostly drawbacks associated with conference volumes (as opposed to publication of the individual papers in peer-reviewed journals): Late publication, limited availability in smaller libraries, lacking peer review process. However, there is one aspect that could redress all these disadvantages: full indices. A conference volume is likely to be devoted to one limited, well-defined subject, and anyone working on this subject will greatly appreciate clear indices to names, subjects, and primary sources.

Although “Spätantiker Staat und religiöser Konflikt” does include indices both of subjects and of sources, they are sadly rather incomplete. To put it bluntly, an unreliable index is worse than no index at all, if it leads the reader to believe that the book contains nothing on a subject when in fact it does, or that all passages of interest have been checked, when they have not.

For example, the entry “HisPELLUM” cites 29–30, 37, 60; one might add 15 and 101 n. 39. There is a main entry “Tempel” with subentries “Bewahrung”, “Plündung”, “Schließung” etc. Yet for some reason, there is a main entry “Schutz von Tempeln” which should rather have been another subentry there. The source index leaves out many citations (e. g. Conc. Carth. 13 Iun. 407 on p. 4 n. 5 or Cod. Theod. 9, 16, 2 and 9, 16, 9 in p. 44 n. 137; many more can easily be found, it is tiresome and superfluous to list them here). Much less of an issue, but still undesirable are the inconsistencies in the index: Book numbers are usually cited with Arabic numerals, though there are a few exceptions such as “Aug. civ. XVIII 54” in the index. There is usually no comma between author name and work, such as in “Hieron. comm. in Ier.”, but this policy is not followed with “Hieron., exeg. in Dan.”. Conferences are expensive in terms of

² [H-Soz-u-Kult, 26.09.2011](#)

money, and the volume under review, at EUR 79.95 for 227 pages, is not exactly a bargain. Editors should allocate a low three figure Euro sum for diligent “Hilfskräfte” who might guarantee complete bibliographies, spot the odd typo (or missing font character) and take care of an easy to use and, first and foremost, complete index.

These quibbles aside, “Spätantiker Staat und religiöser Konflikt” gathers uniformly excellent articles written by some of the foremost researchers of the field. Taken together, they provide a painless short-cut to today’s scholarship on late antique temple destruction and the Roman authorities’ stance. The shortcomings of the publication can easily be overcome: Brendel’s list of expanded bibliographical indications helps with entries missing in the bibliographies, and Google Books allows for searching the volume’s full text³, compensating for the unreliable indices.

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³ <http://books.google.de/books?id=APk2bzUfhrkC>