

process of a “media revolution” that brought Christianity to what it became at the end of the fourth century (and continued to evolve in later centuries). This media revolution, altogether ignored by the author, contained many elements that brought Christianity into public awareness in the first centuries of the common era, such as public performances by leading Christians, martyrdom as a media asset in the public sphere, the vociferous competition of orthodoxy with its heresies (which became an important asset in publicizing the new religion), and the creation of a significant network of the church and mission as a marketing strategy (an element lacking in the Judaism of the period). Rhetoric was only part of this communication process, and M. lingers solely on this aspect (which became a very important medium for the diffusion of ideas within the public sphere). One would have expected her to show some knowledge of the comprehensive picture, namely the continuity between the fourth century media revolution and earlier centuries, when Antioch played a significant role at the start of the process. M. does not even mention Chrysostom’s famous predecessor Paul of Samosata, who introduced this kind of media in a visible manner.² The beginnings of a process and its outcome are important to such discussions. This book is rather like a study that describes the French Revolution without mentioning the Enlightenment that preceded it.

It has become impossible to write any book which tackles communication and media in the early centuries without a good understanding of communication studies. True, at one point M. refers to the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, but his theory of ‘habitus’ is adduced merely to pay tribute to the social sciences without showing a real understanding of it. Thus the connection to her theme is not meaningful. M.’s study could have profited significantly had it drawn on the vast scholarly studies on communication and media published since Harold Innis wrote his (more than half a century ago) and had attempted to combine these two fields of knowledge with the classics. Among the hundreds of bibliographical items, I would start with Denis McQuail’s introductory work, *Mass Communication Theory* (Third edition, London-New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997), and then would consult Ch.H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), and of course J.D. Peters, *Speaking into the Air. A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999). Be that as it may, the contempt which many classical philologists still show for the social sciences should come to an end.

In sum, the book is attractively written, gives some useful general information (also to the non-specialist reader, an important undertaking), and refers to the relevant bibliography in ancient history. But since it lacks an original methodological perspective, there is not much in it that is significantly new.

Doron Mendels

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Zsuzsanna Várhelyi, *The Religion of Senators in the Roman Empire. Power and the Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xii + 267 pp. ISBN: 978-0-521-89724-2.

The interplay of power and religion has been an intriguing aspect of the study of the history of the Roman Empire. Research has primarily focused on the imperial cult as a paradigm of the interaction of religion and politics as well as on the negotiation of political power by pagans, Jews and Christians in late antiquity. It is surprising that the role of religion has not yet been

1993, vol. II, p. 174.

² See Eusebius, *EH*, 7.29.1-30.19, and F.Millar, ‘Paul of Samosata, Zenobia and Aurelian: The Church, Local Culture and Political Allegiance in Third-Century Syria’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 61(1971), pp. 1-17.

systematically analysed for one of the most significant participants in the empire-wide discourse of power: the senatorial order. Zsuzsanna Varhélyi's (V.) comprehensive study aims to fill this gap by scrutinizing how 'senators ... came to negotiate their own power, as well as that of the emperor, at least in part in religious terms' (p. i). According to V., the new association of power and religion, as it had emerged since Augustus, 'significantly shaped how senators sought and found their paths among the religious options available in the empire' (p. 3).

While the main object of V.'s investigation, then, is appropriately stated, the reader may be surprised by the title of the book. It suggests the existence of a 'religion of senators' as a particular form and manifestation of Roman religion. But what the term 'senatorial religion' basically implies, and how it can be distinguished from 'imperial religion' or 'elite religion', is not explicitly elaborated in the highly theoretical introduction. In the course of the monograph, however, it becomes obvious that V. employs a broad, panoramic definition of what she subsumes under the expression 'religion of senators': her concept embraces the religious authority of the senate and of individual senators, religious roles like the tenure of priesthoods, (provincial) administration and legislation on religious matters, individual and shared religious notions and affiliations, religious contexts like funerary commemoration, participation in religious ceremonies, involvement in local cults, and discourses on and knowledge of religion and mythology. It is thus a monograph on religion *and* senators rather than the religion *of* senators.

The book opens with an introduction (pp. 1-19) that presents the conceptual framework and especially the 'dynamic' approach of the analysis, placing emphasis on the pivotal role of religion for the construction of power in the Roman Empire. In Chapter 1 ('The New Senate of the Empire and Religion', pp. 23-55), V. investigates the significance of the religious element for shaping a strong senatorial identity, introducing a sociological model based on the concept of cultural identity and social networking. V. rightly identifies the collective religious authority of the senate as central to the formation of a sense of community in the senatorial order. In order to corroborate her thesis of a strong *ordo* identity, she further demonstrates that the influx of new senators from the provinces did not have a profound impact on Roman culture and religion insofar as they did not introduce and promote cults and religious practices from their hometowns. Instead, provincial senators adhered to the traditional forms of Graeco-Roman religion by their commitment to local cults, and rather showed an eagerness to use local religious contexts for senatorial self-display.

The religious identity of subgroups of the senate is discussed in more detail in the second chapter ('Religious Groups Among Senators', pp. 56-90) with a focus on the communal aspect of senatorial priesthoods. Despite their comparatively secular nature, the tenure of priestly offices maintained a distinctive role for senators as regards the prestige-generating dignity attached to it. V. argues that due to the communal character of senatorial priesthoods, senatorial rank became closely associated with religion: the regular gatherings of the priestly groups offered a forum for senators to become conscious of their social status and to experience a certain degree of power in their capacity as priests (and thus in a religious role). Less convincing, though thought-provoking is the reference to informal religious group formation among senators through illness; the rather scattered and very specific evidence (bed-side visits, healing experiences at Pergamum, prayers for health) does not allow for any meaningful conclusions about a 'senatorial religion' or identity.

Chapter 3 ('The Dynamics of Senatorial Religion in Rome and Italy', pp. 93-121) and Chapter 4 ('Representing Imperial Religion: the Provinces', pp. 122-50) shift the focus from general considerations of the role of religion in constructing power in the senatorial order to a region-based analysis of this interrelationship at Rome, Italy and the provinces. V. tries to show that in contrast to the priestly colleges, several magistracies (particularly the consulship and praetorship) provided senators with significant opportunities for individual religious authority at Rome, be it on the occasion of civic and religious ceremonies or through building activities. This religious power could be wielded to an even greater extent outside Rome, in Italy, especially in the form of euergetism that was motivated by piety. A similar situation can be found in the provinces, where

senators were involved in a variety of religious activities, ranging from commitment to local cults, attendance at festivals and the provincial imperial cult, to arbitration in religious conflicts. It is regrettable that two very important phenomena are merely touched upon in this context: the absence of provincial high priests of senatorial status, and the bestowal of titular honours on senatorial office holders in the Greek East, i.e. honorific titles with religious connotations such as *sōtēr*, *hērōs* and *ktistēs*. A more in-depth discussion of these peculiarities would certainly have enriched the socio-religious spectrum of V.'s otherwise interesting analysis.

In Chapter 5 ('Towards a "Theology" of Roman Religion', pp. 153-85), V. tackles the sensitive issue of a "theological" background of 'senatorial religion' in the sense of common notions of religion among senators, which she attempts to identify by examining various forms of religious discourse, e.g. the use of mythological language or legislation on religious matters, and the question of basic religious convictions as regards moral-philosophical ideas of divine benevolence and virtue. The latter is singled out by V. as essentially formative in the conceptualization of the divine among senators. It comes to the fore in the iconography and epigraphy of senatorial funerary commemoration, which places emphasis on virtue ethics, thus suggesting a philosophically-inspired transcendental element. Chapter 6 ('Innovations and Aspirations', pp. 186-208) finally turns to what the author calls 'less mainstream religious interests' (p. 186) of senators and discusses new religious ideas and developments among the elite and their relation to the imperial cult. This is illustrated by the examples of the worship of the genius of the senatorial Volusii, which may have been influential in the development of the worship of the emperor's genius, furthermore by the modeling of posthumous honours for senators on the traditions and practices of the imperial cult and the inclusion of senators in *pro salute* prayers for the emperor.

All in all, V. has covered a wide range of aspects of 'senatorial religion', providing several stimulating observations for the ongoing debate over the issue. Throughout her analysis the nexus between power and religion is expounded in subtle and complex argumentation and on a level of reflection that at times runs the risk of obscuring clarity. Her methodological approach is centered on a micro-historical concept with special attention to the 'exceptional typical' (p. 9). As a consequence, instead of grounding her analysis on ample evidence from the sources, V. is inclined to draw general conclusions from the examination of several isolated instances. Although this undoubtedly generates new insights, the tension between the general and the particular and the overemphasis on individual phenomena occasionally weaken the strength of her deductive reasoning.

The significance of the religious factor for senatorial status and power in the Roman Empire is well argued by the author. In her attempt to work out a comprehensive profile of the 'religion of senators', it would, of course, have been expedient and instructive to touch upon the role of religion in the second Roman order, the equestrians, in order to pinpoint further distinguishing features of 'senatorial religion'. These remarks do not impair the fact that the book constitutes a welcome contribution to the study of Roman elites and the intricate question of the interplay of religion and power. There is no doubt that it provides important incentives and impulses for future investigations into the socio-religious idiosyncrasies and facets of the *amplissimus ordo*.

Annika Kuhn

University of Oxford

Michael Alexander Speidel, *Heer und Herrschaft im römischen Reich der hohen Kaiserzeit*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2009. 706 pp. ISBN: 978-3-515-09364-4.

In this book, the sixteenth in the *Mavors* series that specializes in the publication of collections on