# Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion

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# Polis-Religion and its alternatives in the Roman Provinces

by

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## 1 Introduction

One of the most striking features of the religious life of the Roman provinces is its sheer complexity: so many gods, so many images, such complex rituals. The search for a rationale that might order that complexity engaged the attention of ancient scholars of religion such as Varro in his *Antiquities*, Plutarch in his monograph *On Isis and Osiris* and (polemically) by Augustine in the *City of God*. Modern scholars too are preoccupied by an attempt to find an order in religious practice and belief.

Modern accounts are less ideologically charged than those of ancient writers who were concerned to define collective identities, to impose discipline within citizen bodies and confessional groups, and to reconcile traditional practices and beliefs with other intellectual systems, in particular philosophy.[2] Much ancient writing on religion was prompted by a sense of complexity resulting from contact between very different cultural traditions: Xenophanes and Herodotos, Varro and Cicero, Caesar and Tacitus are cases in point. The use of scholarship as a device for negotiating these cultural transformations, was itself a Greek practice, adopted in turn by Romans and others, and used alongside other cultural strategies designed to similar ends, syncretisms of various kinds, the appropriation of new cults and the persecution of groups whose religious practice was regarded as deviant. Ideological concerns are equally evident in the attempts by writers such as Paul, Philo, Plutarch and Clement to respond to the cognitive challenges posed by philosophical arguments.

The accounts of ancient religion produced since Fustel de Coulanges,[3] have a different cultural origin but are equally characterised by attempts to seek order and coherence in the diversity of ancient religion. Naturally, without

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[1] This paper represents a revision of that written for the Bad Homburg colloquium and also draws on papers given at the universities of Heidelberg and Göttingen. I am grateful to JÖRG RÜPKE for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

[2] For an example of the latter see BEARD 1996.

[3] FUSTEL DE COULANGES 1873.

some attempt at ordering it is impossible to do more than describe and cata-
logue ancient cults. Yet ordering is never an innocent procedure. Even assig-
ning ancient cults to a series of religions – Athenian religion, Roman religion,
Mithraism, Christianity – involves a certain collusion with the disciplinary
aims of ancient writers. The best we can hope for is to be aware of the
ideological context of the various ordering principles we disengage from our
study of ancient cults, to be conscious, in other words, of the interests that
were served by various ancient orderings of religion.

## 2 Polis religion

It is with these considerations in mind that this paper attempts to examine one
ordering principle that has recently become especially prominent in the study
of the cults of the Roman provinces, a principle that for convenience I shall
refer to as the ›*polis*-religion model‹. That approach is a powerful one and I
should begin by stating clearly that I shall accept that the order it uncovers is
not a modern fiction but rather corresponds closely to some ways in which
certain ancients understood their religions, even if their understanding was not
formulated in quite the same terms and was perhaps manifested more in per-
formance and practice, that is to say in the rituals and routines of cult and in
its management, than in explicit statements. But that model of ancient religion
itself has an ideological component. The aim of this paper is to consider what
difference it makes to our understanding of the cults of the Roman provinces if
the *polis*-religion model is regarded not as the key to understanding their
organisation, but simply as one among several ordering principles, and an
interested one at that.

Let me begin by outlining the main features of the *polis*-religion model.
Those who make use of it begin from seeing ancient religion as essentially
homologous with the social and political structures of ancient societies. The
accounts of Greek religion presented by Bruit and Schmitt-Pantel and by
Sourvinou-Inwood (from whom I gratefully borrow the term ›*polis*-religion‹)
provide excellent examples of how this is envisaged in practice.[4] The public
cults of the city, shared in some sense by all who are citizens of it, occupied a
central place in ancient religion. Those cults were controlled and presided over
by priests drawn from the civic elite, which collectively also had authority
over the entirety of religious action within the *polis* and by its citizens. In this
respect (as for Fustel) Greek *poleis* and the Roman Republic are alike. So
Beard and Crawford begin their brief survey of Roman Republican religion by
stating ›we firmly believe (although we cannot finally prove) that this »offi-

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[4] BRUIT ZAIDMAN, SCHMITT PANTEL 1992, SOURVINOU-INWOOD 1990; cf. also (more
cautiously) PARKER 1996.

cial« Roman state cult was the crucial defining element of the religious system as a whole. Here was to be found the »Romaness« of Roman religion; here was the centre around which other elements took a secondary place.‹[5]

The *polis*-religion model brings with it a history of ancient religion. The homology of the sacred and the social/political is seen as exemplified in its most perfect form in the archaic and classical *polis* (Rome again included). Its origins have been most fully examined in the case of the Greek *polis*, with de Polignac's argument that as the *polis* emerged in the archaic period so collective *polis* sanctuaries were developed, while others were subordinated to them, linked to them by processions or allocated roles as collective sanctuaries of the constituent entities of the *polis*; demes, tribes, *pagi, vici, komai, compitalia* and the like. Border sanctuaries, federal and international sanctuaries likewise reflected and reinforced the emergent political geography of classical Greece.[6]

The spread of the city state in Greece, through the Mediterranean basin and in Hellenistic and Roman empires, led to the extension of *polis*-religion.[7] Yet as the autonomy and integrity of *poleis* were weakened by those same imperialisms there was a marked growth in alternative forms of religion – Bacchic cult, Judaism, Mithraism, Christianity among others – which paid less respect to *polis* boundaries and the social order. While some see these developments as preserving the homology of the sacred and the social, as an adaptation, in other words, to new patterns of social and political organisation in which the role of the *polis* was diminished,[8] for North ›the basic story ... is one of development from religion as embedded in the city-state to religion as choice of differentiated groups offering different qualities of religious doctrine, different experiences, insights, or just different myths and stories to make sense of the absurdity of human experience‹.[9] Generally, however, the history of ancient religion is inserted into the narrative of the rise and fall of the classical city state.

That brief summary does not do justice to the nuanced and sophisticated arguments of the scholars whose work I have been discussing. All accept the complexity of religion and the extent to which any ordering is incomplete, and to some extent the following discussion develops caveats and qualifications in their accounts. *Polis*-religion, then, in its modern formulation is a heuristic construct. Its strengths may be illustrated from significant advances it has secured in our understanding of several key aspects of ancient religion. Notably it has enabled more convincing accounts to be produced of the interaction of politics and religion in ancient society. The new cults created for the

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[5] BEARD, CRAWFORD 1985, 25 f.
[6] DE POLIGNAC 1984, 1994.
[7] GORDON 1990.
[8] Cf. RIVES 1995, 173–249 for a nuanced version of this argument.
[9] NORTH 1992, 178. GORDON 1990 also accords religious change a degree of autonomy from social and political developments.

new Cleisthenic tribes and the cult paid to the Roman emperors in the pro-
vinces are two cases in point,[10] where previous accounts of insincere ›mani-
pulation‹ of religion for political ends have been superseded by descriptions of
how a religion conceived of as homologous with the political and social might
help mediate political and social change. The study of religious innovation
more generally, and the roles played in it by civic authorities, has been trans-
formed so that we no longer write of the decline, obsolescence and decay of
traditional orders, and rather of religion as a creative and fluid force.[11] The
establishment of public cults in the western provinces has been illuminated by
a close attention to Roman conceptions of the relationship between the civic
and the divine order.[12]

The explanatory power of these accounts derives from the identification of
homology as a central structuring or ordering principle of ancient religions,
and as one important way in which those religions differed from the religious
systems we are familiar with from our own experience. Homology does not, of
course, mean identity. Greeks and Romans were perfectly able to conceptua-
lise religion as a discrete cognitive domain. All religions are primarily means
of making sense of the world, of mankind and of each individual worshipper's
place in it, devices that offer a consistent account of the origins and workings
of the cosmos and some explanations of and remedies for common mis-
fortunes. What is distinctive is the place that *polis*-religion allocated to society
and politics within the cosmos, and the institutionalisation of that relationship
in the structures of the classical city state.

It is important to ask not only how ancient religion was ordered but also:
Whose order was it? Putting the public cults of the *polis* at the centre of
accounts of ancient religion allows us to read some ancient accounts of reli-
gion more sympathetically but runs the risk of collusion with just one view of
ancient religion, that of those who controlled the *polis*. Gordon's brief account
of the religions of the early empire has done most to expose this difficulty.[13]

Gordon's formulation for what I have called *polis*-religion is ›the civic
compromise‹ which he glosses as a ›close nexus between sacrifice, benefac-
tion and domination by the elite‹.[14] That model of priesthood and cult he
regards as a dominant one, deliberately opposed by Rome to alternative reli-
gious systems in Italy and in the provinces alike. It bolstered the power of the
elite of the city of Rome over other citizens, and of Romanizing elites against
their social subordinates and against traditional priesthoods such as the Druids

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[10] KEARNS 1985, PRICE 1984 respectively.

[11] E. g. NORTH 1976.

[12] SCHEID 1991 followed by VAN ANDRINGA 1994 and RIVES 1995.

[13] GORDON 1990. For a fuller view on similiar lines cf. BEARD, NORTH AND PRICE (forth-
coming) volume I, chapter 9. I am grateful to the authors for allowing me to see this work
prior to its publication.

[14] GORDON 1990, 235.

or the Egyptian priesthood. Practices deemed deviant were marginalised as *superstitio* and magic, and from time to time their practitioners were persecuted as well as ridiculed and despised by the powerful and the educated. Naturally the boundary between *religio* and *superstitio* needed constant policing, and practices like astrology appealed to some of the most prominent members of those very elites that legitimated their dominance partly through their public support of ›the right rites‹. But in general Gordon sees the proponents of the civic compromise as successful in maintaining their dominance of ancient society and ancient religion. If a few religions, notably Mithraism and Christianity, rejected outright some key features of ancient religion, for the most part the resistance offered by ›oriental cults‹ and magic came to trace the contours of the hegemonic power of *polis*-religion, strengthening the public cults of the city by tacitly consenting to its cosmology.

Gordon's account has the merit of situating ancient cult in the context of struggles for power within ancient societies. The central tenets of *polis*-religion tell us not how ancient religion was organised but how some groups tried to organise it. That shift in perspective reminds us to read Cicero's religious writings as prescriptive and disciplinary, rather than as disinterested systematisations of norms. The very existence of such works reminds us that at least some of the powerful did not regard the dominance of *polis*-religion as wholly secure. Accepting the interested nature of the religious action need not entail a return to the view of ancient elites as closet rationalists, keeping up the mumbo jumbo for the sake of the gullible and superstitious masses. Rather we should imagine that a good many of them conceptualised their views in purely religious terms, without being ignorant of their interest in the status quo. The religious sensibilities of those northern European princes who sponsored the Reformation provide a distant parallel, and it is well known that the proponents of any dominant ideology are often those most convinced of its truth.

But if Gordon's view offer' a critical approach to *polis*-religion it is inevitable that public cults of the city remain's central to his account. In fact all accounts of ancient cult that begin from the public cults have these characteristics; that other cults are relegated to the category of private (defined negatively as cults which were not organised by public authorities); that new cults are seen, as it were, from the perspective of the Capitol, remarkable for their difference from public cults, and most visible at the moment of acceptance (and adaptation) or rejection (and persecution); and that syncretisms and *interpretationes* in the naming and representation of deities tend to be viewed from a political (i. e.: *polis*-centred) perspective, as if Romanization and Resistance were the only issue at stake when provincials turned to the heavens.

This emphasis is one that the religious and political authorities of ancient cities would have approved of, even if they may have dissented from the critical stance adopted by Gordon's account. It is not simply a product of the evidence, since traces of ›private‹ cults abound: votive objects and inscriptions

are extremely common finds, traces of ritual acts on low status sites are not
rare, curse tablets and magical papyri are attested archaeologically and ancient
*testimonia* tells us a good deal about how they were used. The emphasis on
public cults is a product of the way one ordering principle has been privileged
in both ancient and modern studies of ancient religion.


# 3  Shortcomings

Some of the strengths of *polis*-religion as a heuristic model have been outli-
ned. It is appropriate now to identify a few areas where it has been less
successful.

First, *polis*-religion offers little explanation of the complexity of ancient
religion: put bluntly, the profusion of gods, cults and priesthoods seems re-
dundant if the needs of the city are seen as paramount. Even if this complexity
is viewed, as it often is, as the result of an accumulation of successive layers
of religions (e.g. Indo-European cults on top of mother goddesses, or bronze
age rituals overlying Neolithic survivals and both subordinated to the new
religion of the city-state) it is difficult to see why redundant cults were pre-
served and supernumerary deities not simply syncretised into some sort of
order by those who ran *polis*-religion.

Second, the emphasis on public rituals leaves little room for some aspects
of religion that seem to have been very important to some ancients, myth for
example, or even some prominent deities, for example Silvanus or the *Matres,*
who never received public cult.[15]

Third, *polis* religion may be good at showing how civic authorities mana-
ged change and coped with religious innovation, but not very good at showing
why change took place at all. A few cults – the rituals performed by the fetials
are usually cited – might seem to have become impractical in changed cir-
cumstances, but many public ›innovations‹ seem in fact to be responses to
changes in what might be termed the religious *koine* of the Mediterranean
world. If the origins of religious innovation most often came from the world of
›private religion‹, any perspective that marginalises non-public cult is bound
to be handicapped in accounting for change.

Fourth, treating private cult as secondary makes it difficult to account for
the continued popularity of paganism in a period when public cults withered
away and were abolished. Continuities in ritual from paganism to Christianity
– hymns, ritual feasting at graves, votives – are also difficult to examine if
such practices are as marginalised by scholars as they were by civic priests
and Christian bishops.

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[15] DORCEY 1992.

This list of ›blind-spots‹ is not intended to be comprehensive, yet neither does it provide grounds for rejecting the *polis*-religion model and all its strengths. The point of raising them here is to illustrate some of the drawbacks in regarding ancient paganism as structured only or even primarily around the public cults of the *polis*. A more realistic (if less neat) account might aim to uncover a variety of interlinked and intersecting ordering principles, some more influential in private cult than in public, some common to both.

## 4 Alternatives

A glimpse of the range of possibilities is offered by Glen Bowersock's recent study of late paganism in the east. The post-Constantinian era, when public cults and the religious authority of public bodies steadily diminished, offer a view of what paganism might look like without the *polis*. What emerges is not a formless sea of local superstitions, private cults bereft of the centres around which they had formed, but rather a complex yet structured system of beliefs and practices. Bowersock argues that what linked the pagan cults of Greece, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt was Hellenism, conceived of as ›language, thought, mythology, and images that constituted an extraordinarily flexible medium of both cultural and religious expression‹.[16]

*Polis* religion had a role to play, of course. To begin with a number of world-famous temples – the Alexandrian Serapeum, the grove of Apollo at Daphne outside Antioch, Syrian Hierapolis, the Temple of Asclepius at Pergamon among others – continued to provide *foci* for pagan cult, as the determination of Christian authorities to destroy and/or appropriate them indicates. These temples had been, at least since the Roman conquest, subordinated to civic authorities and euergetistic priesthoods. But it is equally clear that paganism survived the destruction of its temples, and that even before their destruction those temples drew worshippers from well outside the *poleis* by which they were notionally controlled.

In fact the *polis*-religion model provides only a partial account of the religious life of the Greek east under Roman rule even during the early imperial period. Sacred texts, personal revelation and initiations seem to have gained in prominence since the classical period, as well as the new forms of religious organisation mentioned in the quotation from North cited above. Several alternative's ordering principles may be discerned, mostly visible through literary texts which reflect and in some senses reproduced a distinct religious sensibility.

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[16] BOWERSOCK 1990, 7.

Perhaps the most obvious is myth. No canonical account of Greek myths
existed, although the Homeric epics provided something similar for writers
such as Strabo who were concerned to document the cultic geography and
history of places as well as their political traditions. The importance of Homer
and of myth is a reminder that Greek religion pre-dated the *polis*-religion
created in the archaic and classical periods. *Polis*-cults had drawn on myth and
continued to do so in the Roman period, celebrating them in civic festivals like
those at Ephesos connected with the cult of Artemis whose birthplace the city
was said to be; on local coinages for which local heroes and deities provided a
major source of images; and on the iconography of temples. Hierogamies and
syncretisms offered various ways of representing civic identities and relation-
ships like *syngeneia* and *homonoia* between cities. Myth was only able to
perform this function of expressing the place of a city in a wider world and a
longer tradition because it was already shared by all Greeks. Discrepant tra-
ditions did not seem to erode the utility of myth, since no supra-civic religious
authorities existed that could rule definitively on these matters.

Closely connected with the use of myth was the ordering of religion by
place. If certain gods might be worshipped anywhere, nevertheless some pla-
ces were more intimately connected with their myths than others, and onto this
landscape of myth was grafted a landscape of cult.[17] Places were famous not
only for their ›real‹ history, which might also be celebrated with cult as at
Plataea or Actian Nicopolis, but also for the divine deeds that had been per-
formed there. The fact that *poleis* competed to control some sanctuaries, as
happened in the case of the long rivalry between Sparta and Messene for the
border sanctuary of Artemis Limnatis,[18] demonstrates the religious status some
sanctuaries enjoyed independently of their function in *polis*-religion. Other
cities owed their own status to the sanctuaries in their territory: Claros and
Apollo's oracle, for instance, or Abonoteichos and that of Ion for which the
city was renamed Ionopolis.

Oracles provide a good example of a form of cult that co-existed with
*polis*-religion but was never wholly subordinated to it. Their popularity during
the Roman period is well documented.[19] Other cults too were firmly rooted in
one particular place, for example the healing sanctuaries of Asclepius at Epi-
dauros and Pergamon, or the Mysteries at Eleusis. It is notable that in both
cases we are dealing primarily with cult paid by individuals. One consequence
of this rooting of certain cults in the particular places was the growth of
pilgrimage, a device that allowed worshippers to use travel as a way of mak-
ing contact with the divine. Nor was it confined to the very rich. Inscribed
footsteps in temples throughout the Roman world attested the fulfilment of

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[17] ALCOCK 1993, 172–214 for an innovative study case in these terms.
[18] Tac. *ann.* 4.43.
[19] LANE-FOX 1986, 168–259 for an evocative account.

pilgrimages. Literary accounts naturally offer a fuller insight into some of the ways religion and place were connected up. Pausanias account of his journey through Greece is suffused with a religious sensibility,[20] perhaps felt even more acutely by a Greek who was not born in old Greek lands.

Pilgrimage was made much easier by the Roman peace. Its growing popularity provides one example of a general phenomenon, the extent to which Roman rule had begun to undermine the autonomy of the *polis* (and so *polis*-religion). The loosening of the bonds of the classical city is a familiar feature of the Roman period in the Greek East. A general increase in geographical mobility resulted in the growth of immigrant communities in most major coastal cities. Some of these newcomers were doubtless small traders, yet the period also sees the emergence of provincial elites who held land in several *poleis*, while the wealth of some *incolae* and *metoikoi* was significant enough for *polis* authorities to attempt to tap it. The economic growth enabled by better communications, greater security, more unified systems of law, currency and language, resulted in the growth of large cities at the expense of small ones, and these large cities with significant immigrant minorities were culturally and so religiously cosmopolitan. When many of a city's citizens lived abroad and many of those resident in the city were not citizens then *polis*-religion was less and less viable as a form of social integration.

Roman rule was not the only threat to the dominance of *polis*-religion. North notes the growth within the Hellenistic and Roman periods of religions whose organisation was not homologous with that of society. Certainly, the larger post-classical *poleis* offered environments well suited to these new cults and freer movement facilitated the travels of Diaspora Jews, Christian and Manichee missionaries, and travelling priests of Cybele of the kind satirised by Apuleius. But it is implausible to account for these cults simply in terms of their capacity to offer a cure for urban anomie. The success of these religions also owed something to their capacity to integrate lower status worshippers into a community more closely than did *polis*-religion, and to the various kinds of salvation and revelation they offered. Although it is now customary to emphasise that so called ›Oriental Cults‹ like those of Isis, Serapis, Mithras and Christ were largely remodelled and sometimes created in a Mediterranean environment, their alien origin is not irrelevant. Classical Isis did preserve attributes and myths of Egyptian origin, Cybele, even when Romanized as Mater Magna, preserved a ›foreign‹ character as representations of her priests make clear. If *polis*-religion tried hard to exclude alien cults or else to admit them strictly on its own terms, private worship was clearly much more open to novelty.

One of the main reasons such changes were possible was that, for pragmatic reasons, a huge gap existed between the cults *polis*-religion prescribed and

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[20] ELSNER 1992; cf. AUFFARTH in this volume.

those it proscribed, a space within which citizens were notionally free to worship as they wished in ›private cult‹. Those limits were policed and frequently renegotiated by *polis* authorities and religious writers alike, but the gap was never completely closed because *polis* authorities were even less capable than Christian bishops would be to create a totalitarian religious system. It was through this gap that cultural exchanges brought new religious beliefs and rites that would disturb *polis*-religion, especially since some of these new religions rejected the subordination of private cult to public.

It remains to be asked how the *polis*-religion of the Greek East fared in these changed conditions. There, where *polis*-religion owed little to Roman imperialism, it seems likely that the cumulative effect of Roman rule was to loosen the control exercised by the *polis* over cults. New cults and new religious organisations attracted adherents from the citizen body. Although from the perspective of the civic authorities these developments might have been regarded as simply a re-organisation of private cult, in fact the public cults of the *polis* came to be less and less central in the religious lives of the citizens and non-citizen inhabitants, if only because not all those adhering to new religions accepted the official line that these ›private‹ cults were essentially secondary, and because those adherents included some drawn from the *polis* elites.

This is one context, I suggest, in which we might set the massively increased expenditure by euergetistic elites on public festivals in the second century A.D.[21] The great festivals were not, in other words, an expression of the continued importance of *polis*-religion but rather an attempt to bolster it against rival attractions. That attempt did not succeed in restoring to *polis*-religion the dominant position it had enjoyed in the archaic and classical periods. Yet *polis*-religion remained powerful and through festivals continued to involve many more than just the elite of the city. Civic identity still remained important, after all, not just among those elite members who paid for festivals and public buildings and took on expensive priesthoods, but also among the populations of cities that occasionally rioted against neighbouring cities or against religious minorities within their own. Christian apologists certainly saw *polis*-religion as powerful enough to require a refutation of the charge that Christians were necessarily bad citizens.

One possible response to the argument so far would be to accept that *polis* religion was under pressure in the east but to account for this in terms of a supposed greater degree of resistance to Roman influence on the part of the Greeks.[22] Yet if we turn to the west – and I shall consider the Gallic provinces in particular – some similar patterns can be made out, albeit less distinctly in

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[21] SPAWFORTH 1988, MITCHELL 1993, 217–26 for recent introductory accounts.

[22] Although the notion that the Greek did mount a greater resistance to Romanization might be challenged, cf. WOOLF 1994.

the absence of many of the categories of evidence available for the Greek world. If the Gauls ordered their religious world with myth it is lost to us now and was perhaps already forgotten in the Roman period. Local coinages did not survive the first half of the first century A.D., and neither pre- nor early Roman art in Gaul has any clear narrative element.

Yet pre-Roman religion was not completely obliterated. Syncretism of Roman and local gods – rare in the Greek world – may have served similar ends, and took many forms. Gods might be given double names (Mars Lenus); sometimes Deus or Dea preceded an indigenous name or epithet; hierogamy linked some Roman male deities with some indigenous local ones (Mercury and Rosmerta); gods with Roman names might be represented with local attributes, Sucellu's *sagum* for Silvanus in southern Gaul, or with particular animals (Epona and her horse, Nehalennia and her dog); and occasionally statuary might combine a series of classical and indigenous deities as happened on the pillar of the nautae at Paris. It is easy to suspect mythic episodes lie behind some common local iconographic motifs, such as Jupiter fighting serpent-footed giants on many of the Jupiter-columns of the north east, or Esus cutting down a tree on the pillar of the nautae. But attempts to interpret these deities and images in terms of a mythology or a pantheon are fraught with difficulty.

But the existence of a landscape of the sacred is much clearer. Deities often had toponymic epithets, like Mercurius Dumias worshipped on the Puy de Dôme in the Auvergne or Dea Bibracte worshipped at Autun. It was not only mountain peaks that attracted cult. Early imperial offerings at the source of the Seine and the spring of Chamalières show river-deities too received cult. Earlier cultic geographies contributed to the Gallo-Roman landscape of the sacred. *Fana,* small shrines of hybrid design, are frequent on the sites of abandoned *oppida* and/or overlie iron age sanctuaries as at Gournay-sur-Aronde in Picardy. It has been suggested that pilgrimage was a feature of the pre-conquest period.[23] Whether or not that is the case, pilgrimage certainly developed in the Roman period, for example to the huge oracular shrine at Grand near Toul, some of whom were interested in astrological as well as Apolline predictions.[24] It is irrelevant for present purposes to try to determine which of these cults were new and which old. The point is that Gallo-Roman cult was not ordered solely in terms of *polis*-religion or the civic compromise.

Naturally the Gallo-Roman city did play an important role. The creation of Roman *coloniae* and *municipia* entailed the establishment of a Roman version of *polis*-religion, complete with euergetistic priesthoods, control of cults by the magistrates and decurions, and public festivals at central sanctuaries.[25] But

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[23] GOUDINEAU 1991.

[24] ABRY *et al.* 1993.

[25] BRUNAUX 1991 suggests that something akin to polis-religion may be discerned in the

it is difficult to determine how big a part was played by *polis*-religion in the cults of the Gallo-Romans. It certainly mobilised the funds of many of the Gallo-Roman elite in the formative period of Gallo-Roman culture, but whether the absence of great festivals like those of the Greek East in the second and third centuries shows the strength of *polis*-religion or its weakness is difficult to say. Public building of all kinds was rare after 200 A. D. and in the north after 150 A. D., whereas evidence for private cult increases in quantity in the second and third centuries as *fana* and Jupiter columns were constructed by wealthy landowners on their estates, and as votive practices were adopted from the military in the north east.[26]

Whether or not the decline of *polis* religion in the west followed the same pattern as in the east, it is clear that the creation of Gallo-Roman religion opened up a similar gap between public cults and the proscribed religions (such as Druidism and human sacrifice), and within this space, conceptualised by Romanised city authorities as ›private religion‹, a wide range of cultic activity is visible. At the Altbachtal sanctuary in Trier it included cult to syncretised deities, to thoroughly Roman gods and to indigenous ones.[27] Cultic practices attested elsewhere in Gaul included animal sacrifice along traditional lines in which whole or mutilated corpses were buried in deep pits surrounded with other objects, including coins, ceramics and metal ornaments, yet also curse tablets in Latin and in Celtic; votive objects and (adopted from the military in the north west) the dedication of votive altars.[28] Naturally Isis, Mithras, Christ and Mater Magna had their adherents.[29] In short, the cults of the Gallo-Romans seem as complex and diverse as those of the Romano-Greeks, and those who controlled *polis*-religion succeeded in organising only a part of them.

# 5 Conclusion

The importance of the *polis*-religion model of Roman provincial religion is not undermined by the preceding observations. Indeed the repeated efforts made by the ruling elites of ancient city-states to define proper cult and distinguish it from superstition; to subordinate religious practice to their vision of

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late iron age when large sanctuaries appeared in some parts of Gaul, but the evidence for social and political change in that period is too slight and its interpretation too controversial to permit certainty.

[26] DERKS 1991 on votives; BAUCHHENSS, NOELKE 1981 on Jupiter columns; GOUDINEAU, FAUDET AND COULON 1994 on *fana*.

[27] SCHEID 1995.

[28] BRUNAUX 1995 on ritual continuities, DERKS 1995 on vows, LEJEUNE, MARICHAL 1976/8, LEJEUNE 1985 for curses.

[29] TURCAN 1986 for an introduction.

civil society; and to retain religious sanction for their social and political pre-eminence appear all the more significant when set against the background of the more complex religious lives of their subjects. Yet an appreciation of that religious ferment that the term ›private religion‹ inadequately describes and deliberately marginalises is equally important, most of all for understanding the origins of change, both in public cults and in religious practice as a whole. Myth, landscape and ritual traditions (in which representational traditions should be included) were only some of the ways in which that wider religious world might be ordered and conceived, but give some sense of how others outside the *polis* elites might have experienced ancient religion, and of what went on in that crucial gap between the prescribed and the proscribed cults of the ancient city.

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