Gli studiosi devono essere a lui grati, perché possono avvalersi con grande profitto di una nuova, integrale ed eccellente edizione di testi, per ricerche riguardanti la storia, la società e la produzione epigrafica della capitale della Hispania Citerior, e più in generale del suo conventus, in età romana.

Gian Luca Gregori


In this book, Fritz Graf (G.) engages with two main issues: the spread of festivals of Roman origin into the Greek-speaking provinces of the Empire during the first three centuries after the beginning of the Principate and the Christian response to these festivals during the subsequent centuries, after Constantine converted to the new religion. In this respect, the title of the book might to some extent be misleading. The book does not deal with the impact on the Greek world of the games which, being usually associated with religious celebrations, were regarded as typically Roman – such as the gladiatorial shows and the chariot races – nor does it discuss the influence in the East of festivals dedicated to Roman deities on the whole. The book concentrates on a much more precise, and overlooked, aspect: the transfer from Rome to the Eastern provinces of festivals which were specific to the ‘Urbs’. This issue gains major relevance if we consider the implications of the foundation of a New Rome in Constantinople in 324 and of the survival of originally pagan festivals in the Christianized Empire from the fourth to the sixth century. The inquiry focuses on how Christian religious practice and theological discourse coped with the continuance of heathen festivals and celebrations in Late Antiquity, sometimes with the recognition and support of imperial power.

Chapter 1 (9–60) is not directly related to the topic addressed in the rest of the book and provides an overview of the significance of festivals – in general and not necessarily Roman – for Greek cities during the Imperial period. This chapter does not intend to serve as a comprehensive discussion of Greek festivals during the Early Empire, a huge task which still remains to be done despite the announcement of a monograph on this issue by Louis Robert in the early 1980’s and the dramatic increase of epigraphic evidence which has occurred in the meantime.¹ Starting from several famous case studies, G. shows the vitality of local/regional festivals in the Greek cities under Roman rule. He interestingly emphasizes that the invocation of tradition and the pattern of re-founding ancient cults were often used as a justification for introducing new festivals. Far from being nostalgic or antiquarian activities, festivals in the Roman Imperial period were embedded in the actual concerns of the Greek cities. Festivals were a multi-

layered phenomenon allowing local communities to celebrate the various levels of relationships, internal and external, they were participating in: the benefactors and the elite vs. the people, the city as a whole vs. other cities, the city vs. Roman power. In this respect, Greek local festivals also fitted the imperial agenda: many Greek athletic festivals were officially acknowledged by Roman emperors and were supplemented with celebrations of the imperial cult. In this way, Greek festivals were integrated into the political and cultural system implied by Roman rule.\textsuperscript{1} In some cases, a direct Roman influence was clearly visible, as in the procession launched by C. Vibius Salutaris in Ephesos which looked like a triumphal procession with the display of allegories of the Roman Senate and other Roman institutions.\textsuperscript{2} The final section of this preliminary chapter discusses the moral condemnation of festivals by Greek thinkers of the time, especially Dio Chrysostom and Plutarch, who blamed their contemporaries for spending excessive amounts of money, a behavior they considered obscene. Surprisingly enough, G. does not address in this context the issue of the Christian reluctance for festivals, although the question of the reception of pagan festivals by Christian ideology is central in the rest of the book, nor does he engage with scholars like P. Veyne and S. Remijsen who argue that Christian ethics was only responsible to a minor extent for the end of festivals (particularly athletics and gladiatorial shows).\textsuperscript{3}

With Chapter 2 (61–101), G. presents the central issue of his book, the introduction into the Empire’s Eastern provinces – before the foundation of Constantinople – of festivals which were originally celebrated in the city of Rome, like the Kalendae Ianuariae, the festival marking the beginning of the civil year, and the Saturnalia. G. analyzes an overlooked source, a Talmudic treatise entitled ‘On Alien Worship,’ whose purpose was to establish which gentile festivals – as popular as they might have been – should be avoided by pious Jews. Among these festivals were the Kalendae, the Saturnalia and various festivals celebrating the birthday and the accession day of the ruling emperor, as well as the anniversaries of the birth and of the death of members of the imperial house. It appears that the Kalendae, as the festivals commemorating the emperors and, from the reign of Hadrian onwards, the anniversary of the foundation of Rome, were celebrated all over the Empire. During the Kalendae, sacrifices were performed and vows (vota) expressed for the salvation of the emperor. This festival was the occasion for popular enjoyment, races, games and banquets. Each year this was a crucial moment for Roman power since provincials were requested by Roman governors to reenact on this occasion their oath of allegiance to the emperor.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1} See also, in this context, the local athletic festivals which became labelled as Capitolia on the model of the festival founded in the city of Rome by Domitian in AD 86, mentioned by G. in Chapter 2, on pp. 95–98.


The *Saturnalia*, on the contrary, are not otherwise attested in the provinces. G. wonders if the references to the *Saturnalia* included in Talmudic sources should not be attributed to the fact that this festival could have spread into the province of Syria Palæstina from the nearby military camps. This is all the more convincing since the *Saturnalia* are also known in other Roman garrisons throughout the Empire, such as in Dura-Europos and in Vindolanda.¹ This might also be due to the influence of the Roman colonies which were established in the Near East, especially the many ‘honorary’ colonies which were founded in the Severan period and whose existence is incidentally mentioned by G., for instance on pp. 75 and 78.² As part of the Roman state, these cities which were promoted to colonial rank were eager to adopt the symbols of Romanness, which most probably included festivals such as the *Saturnalia*. The fact that the impact of imperial rule seems to have been noticeably stronger in the Near Eastern provinces than – let’s say – in Asia Minor might also have played a role in this process.³ In any case, since the evidence for *Saturnalia* outside Rome is very scanty, it seems excessive to argue, as G. does, that, like the *Kalendae* or the anniversary of Rome, the «Saturnalia were [...] part of an empire-wide system of originally urban festivals of Rome that helped to construct the unity of the empire» (§6).

The majority of the following chapters deals with the survival of Roman festivals in the Christian Empire and with their comments by imperial legislation and by Christian theologians. Chapter 3 (105–127) comments on the decision by Theodosius I in 380 (*CTh* 2.18.19) to include, alongside Christian holidays like Easter and Sundays, the *Kalendae*, the birthdays of Rome and Constantinople, his own birthday and his accession day among the days during which law courts would remain closed. This empire-wide decision, determining which should be the *imperiales feriae* (*CJ* 3.12.3), confirms the traditional and largely non-religious dimension of the *Kalendae*. Since imperial legislation prohibited the other ‘regular superstitious days of the pagans’ to be counted as holidays (*CTh* 2.8.22), the *Kalendae* should in theory have been regarded from that time on as a purely formal celebration of imperial rule, disconnected from its pagan roots. Chapter 4 (128–162) looks at how *Kalendae* were perceived by Christian theologians and by Christian law. In a very persuasive way, G. proposes to relate to the decision of Theodosius a sermon of John Chrysostom and a speech of Libanius, both of them written about the same time in the late 380’s or early 390’s. These two intellectuals, both active in Antioch, were litigating about the meaning to be given to the *Kalendae*. Whereas Libanius underscored the universality of this festival, which was celebrated «wherever the Roman Empire rule[d]», John Chrysostom, as a priest, condemned what he regarded as the licentious behavior of the people attending meals and masquerades during the *Kalendae*, urging Christians not to take part in them. Such a radical position against the *Kalendae* as a social happening, already expressed by Tertullian, was repeated by Augustine in a particular sermon whose manuscript has recently been rediscovered. G. rightly emphasizes in this respect the discrepancy between the attitude of bishops, who blamed Christians for taking part in the enjoyment of the *Kalendae*, and imperial legislation which recognized the social dimension of public festivities and banquets and, in the name of the ‘ancient custom’ (*CTh* 16.10.17), tolerated such performances as long as they did not include blood sacrifices. *Kalendae* as a popular festival apparently continued to be celebrated long after the fourth century, since councils,

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from the sixth to the eighth century, still found it necessary to condemn the festival as an
*observatio paganissima*. G. has even been able to find references to the *Kalendae* in
twelfth-century Constantinople where the festival seems to have been still performed as
one of the major holidays, including common dining and giving of gifts. Curiously
enough, this short comment on the survival of the *Kalendae* in Byzantium was put into an
independent Chapter 8 (219–225), rather than at the end of Chapter 4.

Two more chapters discuss the afterlife of Roman ‘urban’ festivals in Constan-
tinople until the Middle Byzantine era. Chapter 5 (163–183) examines the surviv-
al of the *Lupercalia*. This initiatory rite, originally consisting in a race run by
young men wearing only a kind of Bermuda-shorts and beating passing women
with a whip, was performed from Augustus’ reform by young members of the
equestrian order. Despite its explicit rejection by pope Gelasius (492–496 CE),
the festival was still celebrated, or better was probably reenacted with the partic-
ipation of actors rather than young aristocrats, in fifth-century Rome. Christian
aristocrats were among its defenders, who regarded it as an appropriate way of
attracting divine protection against diseases, drawing upon the original meaning
of the festival as a purification ritual. G. argues that the *Lupercalia* was trans-
ferred from the Urbs to New Rome shortly after the foundation of Constantino-
ple as part of the Archaizing rites related to fertility – patterned after Romulus’
deeds when he created the City – which were accomplished on this occasion.
This was probably also the case with the *Brumalia*, discussed in Chapter 7 (201–
218), a ritual related to the beginning of the winter season. Its presence in Car-
thage, attested by Tertullian, was certainly due to the fact that the city possessed
the rank of a Roman colony. In Constantinople, the *Brumalia* was assimilated
with the *Saturnalia* and experienced innovations with the introduction of the prac-
tice of greeting friends and exchanging gifts. Both festivals are mentioned in
the tenth-century ‘Book of Ceremonies’, compiled by the emperor Constantine
VII Porphyrogennetos, describing the protocol at the Byzantine court. The *Lu-
percalia* still included at that time a foot-race, but it was now performed by the
charioteers at the hippodrome, which G. sees as an inversion of the usual order
according to a scheme which is not uncommon in rituals celebrating season
changes. The festival was now understood as a spring ritual seeking prosperity
under the protection of God and was largely Christianized. Chapter 6 (184–200),
which precedes the chapter on the *Brumalia*, nevertheless provides further in-
sights about this festival and analyzes the etiological explanations given by John
Malalas in his *Chronicle* of several old Roman festivals. G. shows that Malalas’
interest was driven by the significance the festivals of ancient Rome had for
sixth-century Constantinople. For instance, Malalas assigns to Romulus not only
the creation of the *Brumalia*, but also the most recent developments of the festi-
val which were introduced only in Constantinople such as the greeting of friends
and the reception of dignitaries at the imperial court on this occasion. For that
reason, Malalas gives the weird etymology of the festival’s name as coming from
the words *broma* in Greek and *alius* in Latin, that is, ‘to be fed by others’ in his
interpretation.

Chapters 9 to 11 are rather peripheral with respect to the main topic of the book and
mainly regard the Christianization of religious practice in general. Chapter 9 (226–238),
relying on the narrative of the stay in Jerusalem of the pilgrim Egeria between 381 and 384,
is an attempt at reconstructing the sacred topography of the various annual Christian
festivals which were celebrated in the Holy City during the fourth century.1 G. reflects on the possibility that some elements of these festivals could have replaced older pagan, or Jewish, counterparts, in particular as relates to the use of public space during processions. A map of Late Antique Jerusalem would have been useful to support the demonstration. One should also emphasize the fact that Jerusalem had been turned not only into a «minor garrison city» by Hadrian (232), but into a Roman colony. The rank of a Roman colony had deep implications as far as festivals were concerned. In particular, the fact that colonies belonged to the Roman state implied the introduction of several distinctive cults which were typical for Rome.2 Despite very scarce archaeological and epigraphic evidence, this must have also been the case in Jerusalem/Aelia Capitolina and had an impact on the pagan religious topography of the city.

Chapter 10 (241–267) reassesses the question of the assumed continuity of dream incubation in healing rituals from pagan practices to Christian worship in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Despite the theological condemnation and imperial prohibition of divination during the fourth century, cults of healing saints involving dreaming appeared in Christian contexts in the fifth century. G. dismisses the archaeological evidence which is usually adduced to prove the continuation of incubation practice in pagan sanctuaries which were turned into Christian churches and, opposing hagiographical narratives assuming that Christian incubation replaced pagan healing cults in some places, concludes that the healing cults related to the worship of saints in connection with dreams emerged only later, «after the period [he is] interested in» (267). This assessment would probably need the support of further enquiry, in particular a more thorough examination of the transformation and of the reuse of pagan healing sanctuaries in Christian times,3 as well as a more systematic discussion of the development of martyrial cults.4 To cite one single example here, one could mention the cult of St. Philip at Phrygian Hierapolis where a church was built during the fifth century in connection with a spa complex and dormitories for the pilgrims and where healing rituals using water touched by the relics of the saint were performed.5 In his discussion of how dreams were interpreted by Christian theology, G. alludes to pagan night rituals and more broadly to the perception of the night by pagan minds (252, see also on pp. 238, 286). This aspect has recently been investigated by A. Chaniotis who is currently fostering studies leading towards a cultural history of the night in Greek and Roman Antiquity.6

In his last chapter, Chapter 11 (268–304), G. turns back to one of the topics on which he has already extensively written in previous works, magic, focusing this time on how Christian discourse coped with the survival of magical practices. G. notes that there was a general condemnation of magic among Christian thinkers. Even if Augustine was ready to show some respect towards Neoplatonic philosophy, he characterized its use of theurgy as being false rites. G. thoroughly discusses imperial legislation against magic and astrology and emphasizes that, unlike his successors, Constantine had not prohibited magic as a whole, but only hidden divination practices which were performed in private and harmful magic. This means that ‘positive’ magic rituals, for instance rituals seeking the healing of ill persons or the protection of the harvest, were still allowed. As a matter of fact, there is ample evidence that, even after all kind of magic practices were prohibited by imperial

6 The 2017 ‘Entretiens’ of the Hardt Fondation have been devoted to this topic.

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legislation, Christ together with the angels was invoked in combination with pagan and Jewish elements and formulas in magic spells. In the same way, binding spells were abundantly used by Christians in the fourth and fifth century, in particular in the contexts of chariot-races and political rivalries.

In his Epilogue (305–322), G. summarizes the main views supported in his book. First, he notes the remarkable permanence of festivals of pagan origin in the Christian Empire from the fourth to the sixth century. Although he deliberately rejects any anthropological approach, G. admits that festivals had a structuring function for the community. Thus, festivals were maintained and were still celebrated mainly for political and social reasons. We have to keep in mind, however, that G. in his book does not discuss all festivals, but only the Roman festivals of urban origin which had a stronger political meaning. Yet, festivals were the occasion for common enjoyment, dining celebrations, and traditional gatherings and many Christians, despite the moral condemnation of theologians, did take part in them as a social habit. Second, G. shows the gap between, on one hand, the realistic approach of imperial legislation, especially by Constantine, which, if only to keep social order, recognized the importance for the people of traditional festivals and celebrations (CTh 16.10.3: priscarum sollemnitatis voluptatum) and for that reason did not systematically prohibited all pre-Christian practices, and, on the other hand, the radical rejection of social behaviors of pagan origin by bishops and theologians, who were disconnected from what most Christians were experiencing in their daily lives. Third, G. strongly and convincingly refutes the simplistic explanation that most Christian festivals replaced older pagan ones. G. shows that the evolution was more complex and, as in the case of the Lupercalia and of dream incubation practices, that many pagan rituals had already experienced deep changes in Late Antiquity, regardless of any Christian influence.

On the whole, this very learned book, using many sources which are usually overlooked (a comprehensive index of passages cited would have been useful in this regard), will be a crucial landmark in the scholarship on Late Antique religious practices, both pagan and Christian, and on the tension between imperial legislation and Christian theology about the survival of pagan rituals. The book will also be an important contribution to the discussion as to what extent Eastern provinces were ‘Romanized’ during the first three centuries after Augustus. It appears that, apart from the festivals which had an immediate political meaning for the perpetuation of Roman rule and which were for that reason imposed by central power upon local communities (the Kalendae, the birthday of Rome, celebrations of the birthday and the accession day of the ruling emperor, etc.), Roman festivals did not, in general, spread into the provinces. ‘Urban’ festivals were found in Constantinople because the city was founded as the New Rome and in Carthage, according to Tertullian’s testimony, because it was a Roman colony and thus was expected to adopt the rituals performed in the capital and mother-city. With the exception of the Saturnalia in Syria Palæstina, which most probably spread from the neighboring Roman colonies which were settled there, Greek or Hellenized cities in the Eastern provinces were not expected to introduce Roman festivals in their own local festive calendars and the influence of Roman colonies on provincial communities remained very limited in this field, as
in others. In order to assess more precisely the impact of Roman festivals and of the Greek cities, one will need further studies on the diffusion of cults of Roman/Italian/Western origin in the Eastern provinces, on the celebration of Roman military victories in local communities, on the use of Roman consular dates in Greek official documents and on the spread of the Roman calendar in the East.

Fribourg

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