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978-0-521-19416-7 - One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire

Edited by Stephen Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelen

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ONE GOD

Graeco-Roman religion in its classic form was polytheistic; on the other hand, monotheistic ideas enjoyed wide currency in ancient philosophy. This contradiction provides a challenge for our understanding of ancient pagan religion. Certain forms of cult activity, including acclamations of 'one god' and the worship of Theos Hypsistos, the highest god, have sometimes been interpreted as evidence for pagan monotheism. This book discusses pagan monotheism in its philosophical and intellectual context, traces the evolution of new religious ideas in the time of the Roman Empire, and evaluates the usefulness of the term 'monotheism' as a way of understanding these developments in later antiquity outside the context of Judaism and Christianity. In doing so, it establishes a new framework for understanding the relationship between polytheistic and monotheistic religious cultures between the first and fourth centuries AD.

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Preface and acknowledgements

This volume has its origins in a research project on the intellectual background to pagan monotheism, financed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and directed at the University of Exeter by Stephen Mitchell from 2004 to 2007. The funding provided for a post-doctoral research fellowship, taken by Dr Peter Van Nuffelen, and a PhD studentship, awarded to Anna Collar. Within the framework of the project they have respectively completed a monograph on philosophy and religion in the Roman Empire, from the first century BC to the second century AD, provisionally entitled 'Philosophical readings of religion in the post-Hellenistic period', which has focused on the evidence of major writers from Varro to Numenius, and a thesis on networks and the diffusion of religious innovation in the Roman Empire, based on a theorised approach to the documentary evidence for three forms of worship, the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus, Diaspora Judaism, and the cult of Theos Hypsistos. As a focal point, we organised an international conference on pagan monotheism in the Roman world, held at Exeter in July 2006, which included more than thirty papers. These have formed the basis for two publications, a collection of essays entitled *Monotheism between Christians and Pagans in Late Antiquity*, edited by Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen and published by Peeters, Leuven (2009), and the present volume.

This addresses two related issues that were at the heart of our research. First, what was pagan monotheism? How should the term be defined, and how useful is it as a concept for understanding religious developments in the first four centuries AD? Second, is it possible to classify significant aspects of pagan cultic activity during this period as monotheistic? The introduction that follows presents the Exeter monotheism project in the context of other recent work on monotheism in antiquity, and indicates the different approaches to these questions by the contributors.

The British Academy supplemented AHRC financing with a conference grant. Kerensa Pearson, of the Exeter Classics Department, expedited

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many of the practical arrangements, as she has done on many similar occasions. Anna Collar designed the web-site: www.huss.ex.ac.uk/classics/conferences/pagan_monotheism/home.html, which remains accessible as a record of the proceedings. The papers by Fürst and Belayche in this volume have been translated from their original German and French versions by Stephen Mitchell. We are especially indebted to Professor Hasan Malay of Izmir who provided the photograph of the much discussed inscription for a priest of the 'one and only god' which is reproduced on the book's dust-jacket and on p. 154 below. Peter Van Nuffelen not only organised the conference, but also, critically, set out its intellectual agenda with a version of the paper that is published in this volume. All the participants, not only those who offered papers, contributed enormously to lively discussions, which have left a perceptible mark in the subsequent publications. It is necessary to single out Michael Frede among these. He himself, by his role as contributor and co-editor with Polymnia Athanassiadi of the 1999 volume *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, can reasonably claim to be the modern father of this subject. His own interventions at the Exeter meeting gave a decisive steer to many sessions. The developed version of his own lecture, which was sent to us in July 2007, was perhaps the last major piece of scholarly work that he completed before his untimely death. We would like to dedicate this volume, in sadness and gratitude, to his memory.

Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen

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Periodical titles are abbreviated according to the conventions of *L'Année Philologique*, and short titles of other collections and ancient works follow the practice of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Note in addition that inscriptions from particular sites are often cited in the form *I.* + ancient city name. Many are published in the series *Inscripfen Griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien*.

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année Epigraphique</i>
<i>Bull. ép.</i>	<i>Bulletin épigraphique</i> , published in <i>Revue des études grecques</i>
<i>CIG</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
<i>CIRB</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum regni Bosporani</i>
<i>CMRDM</i>	E. N. Lane, <i>Corpus monumentorum religionis dei Menis</i> , 4 vols., Leiden, 1971–8
<i>CIMRM</i>	M. J. Vermaseren, <i>Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis mithriacae</i> , 2 vols., The Hague, 1956, 1960
<i>IGLS</i>	<i>Inscriptions grecques et latines de Syrie</i>
<i>IGUR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae urbis Romae</i>
<i>IJO</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis</i>
<i>IOSPE</i>	<i>Inscriptiones orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini</i>
<i>JJWE</i>	<i>Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe</i>
<i>PTS</i>	<i>Patristische Texte und Studien</i>
<i>RECAM</i>	<i>Regional Epigraphic Catalogues of Asia Minor</i>
<i>RICIS</i>	L. Bricault, <i>Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques</i> , 3 vols., Paris, 2005
<i>SBAU</i>	<i>Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten</i>
<i>SGO</i>	<i>Steinepigramme aus dem Griechischen Osten</i>