

RITUALS AND POWER

The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor

S. R. F. PRICE

Fellow and Tutor of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford



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MAPS

A Classical Map of Asia Minor by W. M. Calder and G. E. Bean (1958) has been used as a base, though I have made corrections on the location of sites wherever possible.

- I *Asia Minor*. I show provinces (in larger type) and provincial boundaries as they existed in the early second century A.D. I also show the regions to which I refer in the text.
- II *Imperial altars*. I include all certainly or probably imperial altars, though the choice is often difficult as older publications do not always describe the actual stone on which the text is inscribed. For much of the evidence see ch. 5 n. 74. I exclude monumental altars which formed part of a temple complex, on which see ch. 6 n. 4. I also exclude altars to the gods on behalf of the emperor and those dedicated to gods and emperor where the addition of the emperor is simply honorific. On this problem see Veyne (1962) 75–81, esp. 83 n. 3, and Drew-Bear (1978) 12, no. 6.
- III *Imperial temples*. I include both temples and shrines which are dedicated to the emperor or are very closely associated with him and also other sanctuaries where there was a significant imperial presence. For evidence see ch. 6 and Catalogue from which I exclude doubtful cases.
- IV *Imperial priests*. I exclude provincial priests but include civic priests of individual emperors or of the Sebastoi. For much of the evidence see ch. 4 n. 5. The high priests whose cult is not specified present an intractable problem. Some assume that all were imperial priests (Robert, *L'Antiquité classique* (1966) 414–15 n. 3; *BE* (1977) 459). But in fact there are cases where they demonstrably served other specific cults (*IGR* III 299, Dionysus, Antioch; Robert, *Noms indigènes* 436ff. n. 7, Ma, Cappadocia; Lane, *CMRDM* I, nos. 168–74; more examples in *RE* I (1894) 481) or even had some general control of all the cults of the city (*IGR* IV 708, Synnada; *Syll.*³ 807, Magnesia on Maeander, including the imperial cult). The point is of some importance as an extra twenty cities would be added to the map if all high priests were included. I include only those high priests who fairly clearly served the emperor.

Maps

- v *Imperial cult.* This map is a composite version of Maps II–IV with some rivers and the high ground over 1,500 m marked.
- VI *Non-imperial temples and theatres.* I include new or rebuilt temples of the imperial period dedicated to gods other than the emperor. For most of the evidence see Akurgal (1978) and Anabolu (1970). I also give new or rebuilt theatres. See especially Akurgal (1978), Bean (1978) and de Bernardi Ferrero.

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9	Eresus	42	Philadelphia
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11	Elaea	44	Tire
12	Myrina	45	Ephesus
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16	Erythrae	49	Aphrodisias
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18	Smyrna	51	Heraclea ad Latmum
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24	Didyma	57	Stratonicea, Caria
25	Calymnus	58	Panamara
26	Cos	59	Bargylia
27	Nisyros	60	Hydisos
28	Parium	61	Halicarnassus
29	Cyzicus	62	Ceramus
30	Apollonia, Mysia	63	Caunus
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74	Prusa	120	Aperlae
75	Dorylaeum	121	Idebessus
76	Ancyra, Phrygia	122	Acalissus
77	Aezani	123	Cormus
78	Temenothyrae	124	Phaselis
79	Traianopolis	125	Rhodiapolis
80	Acmonia	126	Corydalla
81	Acroenus	127	Heraclea Pontica
82	Blaundus	128	Prusias ad Hypium
83	Sebaste	129	Bithynium
84	Synnada	130	Choria Considiana
85	Eumeneia	131	Germa
86	Stectorium	132	Pessinus
87	Apamea Celaenae	133	Philomelium
88	Apollonia, Pisidia	134	Antioch, Pisidia
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92	Laodicea, Phrygia	138	Selge
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167	Caesarea, Cappadocia	187	(Avasun)
168	Faustinopolis	188	(Seleuceia, Pamphylia)
169	Tarsus	189	(Tyana)
170	Amasia	190	(Soli-Pompeiopolis)
171	Neocaesarea, Paphlagonia	191	(Olba)
172	Sebastopolis	192	(Elaeussa-Sebaste)
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1

INTRODUCTION

Because mankind address him thus [as Sebastos] in accordance with their estimation of his honour, they revere him with temples and sacrifices over islands and continents, organized in cities and provinces, matching the greatness of his virtue and repaying his benefactions towards them.

The cults of the Roman emperor performed by the Greek cities of Asia Minor during the first three centuries A.D., which form the subject of this book, confound our expectations about the relationship between religion, politics and power. The civilized, complex cities, with their ideals of autonomy and freedom, had to accept subjection to an authority which, while not so alien as to make adjustment impossible, was external to the traditional structures of the city. The answer to the problem lay in finding a place for the ruler within the framework of traditional cults of the gods.

These imperial cults have a particular importance for those interested in the formation of large-scale societies. Much royal ritual – coronations, court ceremonial and funerals – is located in and created by the centre. In many kingdoms there is little representation of the monarch outside the centre, except in royal progresses, which are occasional and transient. In Asia Minor there were ceremonies to greet emperors who visited provincial cities, but they were rarely called for; no emperor visited the area in the whole of the first century A.D. The rituals with which we are concerned are not irregular and passing events, but cults performed for the emperor in his absence and institutionalized on a regular basis. The Roman empire thus offers an excellent opportunity to explore a ruler cult which was a permanent institution, created and organized by the subjects of a great empire in order to represent to themselves the ruling power.

Because of the size of the Roman empire, which stretched from Spain to Syria and from Britain to North Africa, I propose to focus on one area, namely Asia Minor, which is roughly equivalent to modern Turkey. Here the basic unit of political organization was the

Introduction

city, and the dominant language Greek, but the cities were always at the mercy of external power. Both Persia and Athens had exercised sway over them, and from the time of Alexander the Great (336–323 B.C.) onwards the cities had gradually lost their independence, first to Greek kings and then to Rome. The reign of the first emperor Augustus (31 B.C.–A.D. 14) marked a turning point in the consolidation of Roman power. Asia Minor consisted of several provinces, each administered by a governor who came out from Rome (see map 1). With only a small staff, the governor himself could do little more than handle important legal cases and maintain order. The cities continued to organize themselves and they, rather than Rome, were the primary centres of attachment for their inhabitants.

In this introductory chapter I shall discuss a range of problems which arise in dealing with the imperial cult. Some of these problems concern the quality and limitations of the source material we have available (i); others are problems of method in the interpretation of ritual and especially imperial ritual (ii). We must also analyse and avoid the difficulties which derive from our own cultural background; Christianizing assumptions and categories have proved a major stumbling block in interpretations of the imperial cult (iii) and of these the most pervasive is our assumption that politics and religion are separate areas (iv); we need also to reject an ethnocentric prejudice for the Romans against the Greeks (v). Finally, as a guide to the subsequent chapters, I want to explain how the book is conceived as a study of the re-creation of a meaningful world by the subjects of a large empire (vi).

I SOURCES

The passage at the beginning of the chapter, taken from a contemporary Greek biography of the emperor Augustus, gives an overall view of the imperial cult.¹ The author, with his eyes no doubt on the eastern part of the Roman empire, sketches out the rituals performed by the subjects of the empire in honour of their ruler. The prevalence and the organization of the cult are made strikingly clear. Travellers in the empire would not have been surprised to meet the cult wherever they went: they would have found the cult located both in local communities and in the associations formed of these communi-

¹ Nicolaus of Damascus, *FGH* 90 F 125. The Latin 'Augustus' was a title, implying divine favour, given to the first emperor, whom we call Augustus, and employed by his successors. 'Sebastos' is the Greek equivalent, but has a stronger association with the display of religious reverence (*eusebeia*) to the emperor. For other literary references to the cult see Philo, *Legatio* 149–51, and Lucian, *Apologia* 13.

Sources

ties in particular Roman provinces. The actual forms which the cult took varied from place to place; fortunately there are sources which provide a picture of the details of the cults in their local contexts. For example, the city of Eresus on the island of Lesbos recorded on an inscription the munificence of a local citizen towards the imperial family in the later years of Augustus' reign and the early years of his successor, Tiberius (Catalogue no. 5).

In the magistracy of Gaius Caesar, son of Augustus, leader of the youth, he sacrificed again at [the festivals of] the Nedameia and Sebasta and offered sweet-meats to the citizens and Romans and foreigners. In the magistracy of Apollonodotus, when news came of the safety and victory of Augustus he sacrificed at the good news to all the gods and goddesses and feasted at the sacrifice the citizens, the Romans and the foreigners and gave to those mentioned a bottle of wine and three pounds of bread. He also dedicated to the sons of Augustus a sanctuary and temple from his own money in the most prominent part of the square, on which his name was also inscribed, wanting to show his gratitude and piety to the whole [imperial] house... He also founded at the harbour of the market a temple to Augustus god Caesar, so that no notable place should lack his goodwill and piety to the god [*sc.* Augustus].

This text vividly evokes the range of imperial rituals celebrated in the cities of the empire. The rule of Rome was represented in marble. But the widespread imperial temples and imperial statues did not form the cold grandeur of an alien authority. The visual expression of the emperor was incorporated into the regular life of the communities through public celebrations. Long established festivals, such as the Nedameia, had an imperial element added to them; they were now also called Sebasta. Separate imperial festivals were also founded, where sacrifices were offered and the whole community was involved either in processions or as the recipients of donations from members of the élite, often acting as imperial priests. The honours, temples, priests, festivals and sacrifices, were curiously close to the honours given to the traditional gods. Indeed these honours were designed to display quite explicitly 'goodwill and piety to the god'.

The sources available for the study of the imperial cult in Asia Minor are rich, though there is no extended contemporary discussion of imperial ritual in the provinces. The Greeks themselves felt no need to describe or explain the imperial cult in the Greek world; the quotation with which this book opened is one of the few general descriptions of the cult. The silence is not in itself surprising. It is typically outsiders who are provoked to record the basic institutions of a society, as the Greeks themselves did for certain aspects of Rome.

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For example, Dionysius of Halicarnassus elucidated Roman sacrifices by comparison with Greek ones (ch. 8 n. 3) and Herodian (iv 2) described the ceremony of imperial apotheosis in Rome for a Greek audience. But the Romans were not motivated to study the social institutions of their subjects and produced no comparable works. With the exception of important evidence on the early Christians and the imperial cult, the main evidence for the local cults of the emperor is thus non-literary.

The non-literary material is abundant. There is firstly the evidence of archaeology and numismatics. Many imperial temples are known. One is indeed still standing in the centre of Ankara (ancient Ancyra), others have been excavated and more are represented on local city coins. Numerous statues of the emperor survive, some actually discovered in temples, while others are again shown on coins. All these mute remains can be made to speak of the position of the emperor in the city. But their value is limited in comparison with the evidence surviving in thousands of texts inscribed on stone. The imperial period was a time when an enormous variety of texts was recorded in this manner and it is these inscriptions which make the present study possible. Two types of text are crucial for our purposes: firstly, the inscriptions put up to commemorate the offices and activities of local notables, such as the citizen of Eresus; secondly, official regulations, both Greek and Roman, for the cults giving details of how the cults were established and prescribing the order of the ceremonies.

These texts make it possible to reconstruct what was supposed to happen at particular imperial festivals. They also provide explicit and unforced uses of the conceptual framework of the cults. For example, the various formulae used to describe imperial sacrifices allow us to create a picture of the relationship between the emperor and the gods; the terms in which activities of the local notables are described and praised are important evidence for the overall purpose of the cults; quite explicit reasons are also provided in some documents concerning the establishment of the cults, since, happily for us, the standard form of Greek decree runs, 'Since it is the case that..., therefore the city has decided...'

The evidence, though plentiful, is very scattered in both time and place. In time it covers the three hundred years of the imperial period, though with a concentration of documents prescribing the ceremonies in the early years of the empire. In place the evidence comes from about 180 communities throughout Asia Minor (see map v); these communities range from small villages up to cities, with a concentra-

Sources

tion in a few places (Aphrodisias, Ephesus, Mytilene, Pergamum and Stratonicea), partly because of their size and in part because of the accidents of survival and discovery. In order to handle this dual diversity of place and time the book generally offers a synchronic analysis which assumes that the archetypal Greek city, whose institutions were relatively uniform, provides an adequate framework in which to slot evidence from different places. It does, however, also analyse historical developments, the range of the imperial cult in towns large and small, and the diversity of cultures in the area.

These sources are public and formal, and therefore some historians feel that we lack access to the crucial source of information about personal attitudes to the cult; a questionnaire given to the Greek in the street would surely make everything clear. They imagine the Greeks as having clear and determinate responses to make to our time-travelling researcher about their attitudes to the imperial cult or their views on the divinity of the emperor. Questionnaires may be useful in ascertaining the simple facts of what television programmes were watched the previous evening, but direct questions are of little value when the topic is more delicate and complex.² There is no point in asking bluntly what someone believes about the after-life, or about the imperial cult. The respondent would probably have no definite, articulate response to make. There is in fact no reason to think that the public and formal documents are necessarily misleading. There might be private exegetical response to these official conceptions, but one should not privilege such private responses. Nor should their absence lead us to believe that the cult has no meaning for individuals. As an anthropologist has argued, 'A complex symbolic system can work very well without being accompanied by any exegetical commentary.'³

Much would no doubt be gained from more subtle questioning of the Greeks. On a matter where questionnaires would have revealed nothing, oblique and in-depth interviews have, for example, shown that a much higher proportion of English students than would otherwise have been expected claim some sort of religious experience.⁴ It would be interesting to be able to ask a Greek to list a number of gods. Would the emperor be included in any such list? And better still, we might wish that we could have obtained the status of participant observer in a Greek city, like a modern anthropologist.

² R. Towler, *Homo Religiosus* (1974) ch. 8.

³ Sperber (1975) 18.

⁴ D. Hay, 'Religious experience amongst a group of post-graduate students. A qualitative study', *J. Scientific Study of Religion* 18 (1979) 164-82.

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But in some ways we are actually better placed to understand the Greeks than to understand a tribe studied by an earlier anthropologist. Many such tribes are known about only through a single source composed by an outsider. For example, anthropologists for fifty years and more have puzzled over the statement by the Bororo of Brazil that they are parakeets.⁵ But the elaborate theories founded on this statement have been totally dependent, often unwittingly, on a single source, an explorer's report which was first published at the end of the nineteenth century. The difficulty of using a single source is not just the narrow empirical base but also the fact that the societies studied are typically themselves non-literate and the source is actually composed by an outsider in his own conceptual framework. In dealing with the literate society of Greece we have available to us documents covering a considerable span of time and created by the society for its own purposes. Admittedly these documents emanate from the élite and do not permit us to investigate the tension between ideology and practice, but we can eavesdrop on the Greeks' debates without encountering the dangers that arise from the promptings and interventions of an outsider.

Books and articles on the imperial cult are numerous,⁶ but pride of place has traditionally been given to the analysis of the attitudes of members of the Roman élite through the study of literary texts. Little attention has been directed to imperial ritual, particularly outside Rome itself.⁷ However, out of the antiquarian tradition long occupied with the evidence from the Greek world, there did emerge at an early date a strand of scholarship that was concerned with the provincial cults of the emperor. So, Spanheim's great work on ancient coins, first published in 1664, included sections on the divine titles of ancient kings and on the nomenclature of the priests of the province of Asia.⁸ Similarly the volumes of the French Academy of

⁵ J. Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory* (1978) 265–88. J. C. Crocker, 'My brother the parrot', in *The Social Use of Metaphor* (ed. J. D. Sapir, J. C. Crocker, 1977) 164–92, does, as it happens, largely confirm the explorer's main facts on the basis of his own field work, but he shows that the ethnographic context is much more complex than had been realized previously and suggests a new interpretation.

⁶ Taylor (1931) remains the best introduction. For fairly complete, classified bibliographies see Cerfaux, Tondriau (1957) 10–73 and P. Herz, *ANRW* II 16.2 (1978) 833–910, with some additions in my bibliography.

⁷ The interesting collection of papers, den Boer (1973), largely excludes ritual, and thus produces negative findings about the imperial cult.

⁸ E. Spanheim, *Dissertatio de praestantia et usu numismatum antiquorum* (1664) 105–27, 240–7. A. van Dale, *Dissertationes IX antiquitatibus, quin et marmoribus, cum romanis, tum potissimum graecis, illustrandis inservientes* (1702) chs. 3–4, discusses similar topics. See A. D. Momigliano, 'Ancient history and the antiquarian', *JWI* 13 (1950) 285 = *Primo contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (1955) 67 for the distinction between antiquarians and historians.

Interpretation of ritual

Inscriptions, whose publication began in 1717, contain numerous studies of points of detail. An article on ancient statues included a section on the cult of imperial statues⁹ and other articles catalogued information on the imperial priests, games and titulature of individual cities.¹⁰ Detailed study has continued this century¹¹ and reaches its finest flowering in the work of the French epigraphist Louis Robert; his writings, devoted to the collection and analysis of detailed information about Greek cities in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, include sympathetic studies of the imperial cult.¹² But, valuable as the antiquarian tradition may be in the collecting of facts, it tends to address itself to endless discussions of problems of purely technical importance and to neglect major questions of interpretation.

II INTERPRETATION OF RITUAL

Having outlined the strengths and weaknesses of the sources and the importance of the antiquarian tradition devoted to their compilation, I want now to turn firstly to the problem of how to interpret the rituals of the imperial cult and then to an examination of the evaluative categories which scholars have traditionally imposed on the cult.

Royal rituals have long held the attention of historians of other societies, who have written, for example, on the royal touch or on mediaeval European royal insignia.¹³ The reason for these studies is that royal rituals and insignia are seen to define the nature of the king and hence of the state itself. I wish to develop the idea that imperial rituals too were a way of conceptualizing the world.¹⁴ I do not see rituals merely as a series of 'honours' addressed to the

⁹ Blanchard, 'Observations générales sur les statues des anciens, particulièrement des Grecs et des Romains', *Histoire de l'Académie royale des inscriptions* 14 (1743) 21-37.

¹⁰ M. Vaillant, 'Du titre de Néocore dans les médailles grecques frappées sous les empereurs romains', *Histoire de l'Académie* 2 (1717) 545-61; Abbé Belley, *Histoire de l'Académie* 18 (1753) Mém. 115-58 (Sardis), *ibid.* 37 (1774) Mém. 391-418 (Ancyra), and *ibid.* 38 (1777) 147-70 (Pergamum). Note also the studies of apotheosis collected in J. A. Fabricius, *Bibliographia antiquaria*³ (1760) 366-8, with frontispiece.

¹¹ Geiger (1913) and Riewald (1912).

¹² I signal the following from his voluminous output: 'Le culte de Caligula à Milet et la province d'Asie', *Hell.* vii (1949) 206; Robert (1960), (1966), (1967) 44-64 on neocorates, (1969); *BE* (1969) 496.

¹³ See Bloch (1924) on the royal touch, and on insignia, the useful introductory pieces by P. E. Schramm, *Kaiser, Könige und Päpste* 1 (1968) 30-58 and iv 2 (1971) 682-701, the latter piece reprinted from *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik* iii (1956) 1064-83.

¹⁴ Note the suggestion by E. Will, *Rev. phil.* (1960) 76-85, that royal rituals incorporate 'une pensée informulée'.

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emperor but as a system whose structure defines the position of the emperor. This approach has been discussed in detail by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who argues ((1966) 10) that complexes of symbols, embedded in ritual and lying outside the individual in 'the intersubjective world of common understandings', shape the world by inducing in the individual a certain distinctive set of dispositions which result in actions. 'The merit of this sort of view of what are usually called "mental traits" or, if the Cartesianism is unavowed, "psychological forces"... is that it gets them out of any dim and inaccessible realm of private sensation into that same well-lit world of observables' where investigation is possible. The interpretation of ritual as a cognitive system, which has proved fruitful for anthropologists, will, I hope, help to shed new light on the imperial cult.

If ritual is to be seen as an embodiment of thinking, the question arises as to the sort of knowledge which is contained in ritual. Perhaps the most helpful way of looking at ritual or religious knowledge, one part of the more general area of symbolic knowledge, is given by Sperber (1975).¹⁵ He accepts a version of the traditional philosophical distinction between analytic and synthetic knowledge, which he terms semantic and encyclopaedic knowledge. Semantic knowledge is knowledge of categories ('All sons are male'), while encyclopaedic knowledge is knowledge of facts about the world ('John is the son of James'). Sperber then argues that symbolic knowledge is distinguished from both. It may take a similar form to encyclopaedic knowledge ('Jesus was the son of God'), but the structure of the knowledge is entirely different. While encyclopaedic knowledge is closely organized to avoid incoherence and contradictions as far as possible, symbolic statements are not so related and can exist along with encyclopaedic statements that contradict them. For example, 'Jesus was the son of God' is a classic symbolic statement which is not falsifiable by encyclopaedic knowledge. Empirical doubts about the existence of God and the physiological facts of paternity are not deemed to be relevant. The crucial point about religious symbolism, whether it is put in a verbal or a non-verbal form, seems to be the way in which it is underexpressed. The suggestiveness of symbols, which Sperber terms their power of evocation, offers a crucial way

¹⁵ Cf. also D. Sperber, 'La pensée symbolique est-elle pré-rationnelle?', in *La fonction symbolique* (ed. M. Izard, P. Smith, 1979) 17-42. Tim Moore, *Evocation* (1978), is a helpful introduction. V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (1967) chs. 1-2, 6, laid the groundwork.

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for people to handle types of knowledge which do not fit into either the semantic or the encyclopaedic categories.¹⁶

The merit of emphasizing the evocative power of ritual and symbolism is that it avoids many of the old problems. A traditional difficulty is the dichotomy posed between literal and reinterpreted approaches to ritual.¹⁷ People might erect a statue of *theos Sebastos* ('god Augustus'). Do they mean that the emperor is literally a *theos*, or is the phrase to be reinterpreted in some manner? The literalist interpreter holds that there is no difficulty about establishing what beliefs a society holds (given a good knowledge of its language) and that if we find a particular belief bizarre, then so much the worse for us. People just do hold unaccountable views and so, in our case, the emperor really was believed to be a god. The literalist approach has seemed very unsatisfactory to many scholars, because it does not enable us to see the point of holding the belief in question. In response, the second approach attempts a different strategy of reinterpreting the ritual so that it does not in fact mean what the observer might normally take it to mean. One version of this approach would see peculiar beliefs as metaphorical rather than literal, and so would suppose that the Greeks perhaps only meant that the emperor was *like* a god. The theory of symbolic evocation, on the other hand, avoids the difficulties inherent in both these approaches. It does permit us to accept that people mean what they say but it does not entail the crude 'literalist' consequences. People can mean what they say without their statements being fully determinate.

To treat ritual as a public cognitive system is to shift the perspective of enquiry away from that traditionally adopted. The conventional approach in ancient history attempts to locate meaning at the level of individuals and their mental states. Thus scholars have often searched the imperial cult for evidence of real feelings or emotions towards the emperor; Nock, for example, grudgingly conceded that 'there were no doubt moments of intense emotion'.¹⁸ In a seemingly different approach Veyne has argued that it is inadequate just to point out and recreate the 'confused sentiment'

¹⁶ For a development of Sperber's ideas see R. L. Gordon, 'Reality, evocation and boundary in the Mysteries of Mithras', *J. Mithraic Studies* 3 (1980) 19.

¹⁷ For philosophical elucidations of the different approaches see J. Skorupski, *Symbol and Theory* (1976), and, more briefly, 'The meaning of another culture's beliefs', in *Action and Interpretation* (ed. C. Hookway, P. Pettit, 1978) 83.

¹⁸ Nock (1957) 121 = (1972) 843. Cf. *Conversion* (1933) 229, by the mid first century the cult was an 'outward sign of loyalty which involved little sentiment'.

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which generated the cult and that it is necessary to explain the apparently religious phenomenon not religiously but in terms of the political structures that created it.¹⁹ But Veyne unfortunately does not question the idea that the sentiment of the participants should be seen as the crucial factor in any study of the imperial cult. Indeed he is so influenced by this assumption that he even compares the relationship between cult and sentiment to that between a marriage service and the statement 'je vous aimerai toujours'.

The problem with emotion as the criterion of the significance of rituals is not just that in practice we do not have the relevant evidence but that it is covertly Christianizing. The criterion of feelings and emotions as the test of authenticity in ritual and religion is in fact an appeal to the Christian virtue of *religio animi*, religion of the soul, that is, the interiorized beliefs and feelings of individuals.²⁰ It would be bad enough naively to adopt a participant category of Christianity as a criterion when analysing Christianity itself. It is far worse to deploy this category in the analysis of the imperial cult. That is to apply the standards of one religion to the ritual of another society without consideration of their relevance to indigenous standards.

The appeal to emotion as a criterion is closely related to another common approach to ritual. One might imagine that although analysis of symbolic knowledge was interesting so far as it went, the important question remained: what did the Greeks really believe about the relationship between the emperor and the gods? That is, the beliefs of individual Greeks are appealed to as a more solid or 'real' level than that of symbolism. I would like to suggest that such an appeal is deeply misguided for two related reasons. Firstly, the status of these 'real beliefs' can only be private and mental, but fundamental objections have been made to the theory of belief as a private and mental action, from various directions. Some philosophers have argued persuasively for a dispositional theory of belief; 'believing that x' is more like being interested in cricket than feeling a twinge in one's big toe.²¹ But such philosophical objections to the traditional theory of belief are perhaps still rather culture-bound and do not question the validity of analysing other cultures in terms of 'belief'. Indeed the centrality of 'religious belief' in our culture has sometimes led to the feeling that belief is a distinct and natural capacity which is shared by all human beings. This, of course, is

¹⁹ Veyne (1976) 560–89; cf. p. 566 'L'institutionnalisation ou l'imitation à froid d'une attitude d'exaltation dévote'.

²⁰ Criticized by Bickerman (1973) 11–12.

²¹ See H. H. Price, *Belief* (1969), on the philosophical tradition.