Servire due padroni

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For readers who know previous works of the author, they will expect neither an
easily digestable nor a boring book. And they will not be disappointed. The present
volume is a breathtaking tours de force through three centuries of socio-political
squaring of "Christians" and the political system of the Roman Empire, focussing
on people who were members of the somehow elusive category of the "leading core
class of the provinces of the Roman Empire in the years 50 to 313 CE") (p. 329). Indi-
viduals or groups, senators, decurions, members of city councils, *egregii clarissimi* or
simply *clarissimi* and often unspecified people from the capital or the provinces. In-
terestingly, as the table in the appendix shows (pp. 329-336), none is listed for the first
century and with the exception of the Pliny-Trajan source, all information belongs
to the late second to the early fourth centuries. Only canonical sources, not listed in
the appendix, allow the author to include the first century (for example, pp. 44-45,

Rev., *Mk.*). Based on Bourdieu's understanding of genealogy, the book plays with the theme of the lookalike (p. 11), not taken as a figure of a novel, but as an anti-fictional label to deal with the double nature of people who from different perspectives can be seen as belonging to the upcoming movement of Christ followers and on the other as adherents to an existing socio-political frame. Perhaps, this notion of a genealogical development is one of the stumbling blocks for the reviewer, as it is based on the traditional picture of a binary divide between identities, here "Christ followers", and there "Romans" – of course, something the author does not intend at all, but rather wants to deconstruct while, at the same time, continues to use as a hermeneutical basis, expressed in the title of the monograph ("due padroni"). This, unfortunately, clouds the sky which does hardly allow – at least for the first 200 years of the Roman Empire – to make out clear forms of "Christian" identities.

The book has the following structure:

A short, but important introduction (pp. 9-28) points to the non-binary nature of what the author is going to undertake ("le false opposizioni"), hence working against the chosen title of the book and pointing out that it can only be understood as a retrospective classification rather than the result of a teleological development.

The monograph than unfolds in four, almost equally long chapters 1) "Life and destination of being non-political in the public" ("Vita e destino dell'essere pubblicamente impolitico", pp. 29-96) showing the double nature of "Christians" who are political, yet, as in-group actors under an imagined theocracy or messianism, oriented towards a numinous transcendence, while rejecting and abstaining from the public sphere (see, for example, the sub-chapter on "Theocracy and the non-political", pp. 37-57); yet, one may ask to what extent this picture – as some of the sources used show, particularly those dealing with persecutions – is more that of "Christian" as well as "anti-Christian" apologetics from which also derives the notion of two different identities, that of Christians and that of non-Christians or Romans.

2) "Between Imperium and Theocracy: The Rule of Strata in Light of a Political Economy of Religion" ("Tra imperium e teocrazia: La legge dei campi alla luce di un'economia politica della religione", pp. 97-168); making use of Bourdieu's notion of social stratum or region, the sphere of political influence and power regime, the author describes the Imperial power and how it develops or mutates politically and economically through the crisis of the third century, pointing particularly to the diminished influence of aristocrats at a time when "Christians" are found more and more amongst these. Different from the Imperial camp, the religious camp of the Christians is being described (pp. 131-165) with a particular emphasis on the second century (Ignatius, Irenaeus) and underlining the difference between the secular and

the religious camps. Again, the reviewer sees the tendency of playing on a duality that the author creates, yet also denies. So, why create it at all?

3) "'I want the State to be ...': Six Ways of Christian Political Subjectivity" ("Ho interesse a che lo Stato...": Sei forme della soggettivazione politica cristiana, pp. 169-234); in this chapter the author starts with a disillusion of Christian ambitions and shows the hard-wiring of the Roman Imperial traditions that resists, for example, Christian "vocation" or the figure of martyrs who are not able to become "men of the world".

4) "'I Served the Roman Emperor': Trajectories of Christian Public-Political Engagement" ("'Ho servito l'imperatore di Roma": Traiettorie dell' impegno pubblico-politico cristiano', pp. 235-328). With reference to Bourdieu and Certeau, the author reflects about the notions of strategy and engagement and how Christians try to marry the two camps, outlined in the previous chapter. A particular interest seems to be the economic realm in which Christians succeed in positioning themselves and making their fortunes. This, however, is not only a phenomenon of the third and fourth century, but one could also point to economically successful figures in the second century.

As can be seen from the few outlines here, this monograph is rich in methodological reflections, develops its stimulating and critical readings of sources and develops a complex, if not consciously ambiguous picture of the double-edged political history of Christians in the Roman Empire.