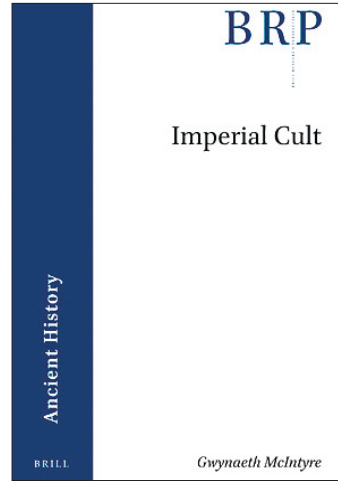
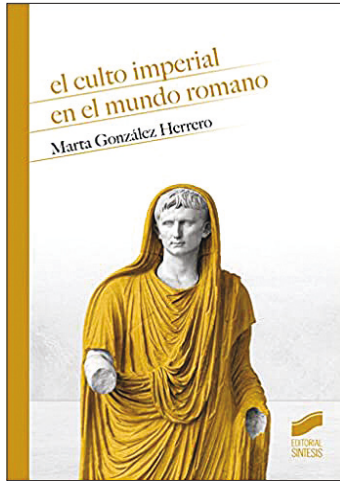


## EL CULTO IMPERIAL EN EL MUNDO ROMANO



GONZÁLEZ HERRERO, MARTA (2020). *El culto imperial en el mundo romano*. Temas de Historia Antigua. Madrid: Síntesis. 247 pp., 22,00 € [ISBN: 978-8-4917-1458-3].

MCINTYRE, GWYNAETH (2019). *Imperial Cult*. Brill Research Perspectives. Leiden & Boston: Brill. 88 pp., 70,00 € [ISBN: 978-9-0043-9836-8].

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THESE ARE TWO WELCOME TREATMENTS OF THE (SO-CALLED) imperial cult in ancient Rome. The cult was a highly differentiated phenomenon and scholars have long recognized that the same matrix does not fit all its manifestations. McIntyre, therefore, appropriately starts with the astute and succinct formulation by Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price that “there is no such thing as *the* imperial cult”<sup>1</sup> and Marta

1. Beard *et al.*, 1998, p. 348.

González Herrero stresses and demonstrates its diversity throughout. For scholarship the result has been that there are many valuable studies on the cult's individual actualizations. Overarching studies, in contrast, are a challenge and all the more so for concise treatments – shorter books, especially on a multi-faceted subject, are always harder to write than longer ones.

Both these scholars, however, admirably succeed in this task. Moreover, their books complement each other well because of their different emphases. González Herrero's is more nuts and bolts oriented and, in less than 250 pages, offers an enviable amount of information, which is clearly structured, about details of the cult especially in terms of organization, functionaries, and locales. McIntyre's monograph – she keeps calling it an "article" (it also appeared simultaneously as issue 21. [2019] of the journal *Ancient History*) – runs to barely 90 pages and she focuses more on conceptual and methodological aspects while presenting select and well-chosen case studies for specific illustrations of larger issues. Both scholars are well acquainted with the relevant scholarship that is as sprawling as was the cult itself and their overviews will be useful especially as a competent introduction to the subject.

As noted, González Herrero's book is organized in a way that makes it user friendly. There are ten chapters with major subheadings many of which have further subheadings. The listing of these in the table of contents (titled "Índice") affords the reader an immediate view of the subjects and items under discussion; on the other hand, there is no actual index whatever. Further, the book aims at readers who are not already familiar with major developments of Hellenistic and Roman history. Hence, especially in the early chapters, background is provided succinctly on, for instance, Alexander's successors and the social conflicts in 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE Rome; not all of this information is strictly necessary to explain the origin and later developments of the imperial cult. The author's stated aim is to provide context and it is a matter, as always, of choosing its boundaries nor is the effort distracting. Chapter 1, on "Política y religión en la Roma antigua", presents succinct information on our sources of knowledge, such as inscriptions, calendars and the *Acta* of the Arval Brothers, and the brief discussion of all these prepares the reader for their use in the following chapters. The second part of the chapter lays out "Formas de veneración del emperador y su familia", informatively summarizing rites and sacrifices, *supplicationes*, celebrations listed in the calendars, dedications, offerings, and oaths. This again prepares the reader well for the characteristic variety, just in terms of everyday and practical details, of the phenomenon and its illustration in her ensuing discussion. The cult, both private and public, was near ubiquitous and touched many aspects of the lives of the imperial population on more than just special occasions.

Chapter 2 takes *la disgregación* of Alexander's empire as its starting point and blends a historical outline, which ends with Cleopatra, with information on the divine honors for Alexander and the diadochi and the latter's assumption of divine status, which includes the category of *isotheoi*. This leads up to the central question whether the Roman imperial cult had its roots in Greece. González Herrero answers that question very much in the affirmative but also follows *communis opinio* that the cult incorporated Roman precedents. She cites Plautus' *Iuppiter terrestris* as a main witness following a suggestion made by I. Gradel (*Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 44-49), but Gradel also discusses the problematics with it. There certainly are more obvious exemplars, beginning with Romulus, that had a much higher profile. Judging from the title of Chapter 3 ("Personalidades honradas como si fueran dioses en la Roma republicana") one would expect a fuller discussion there, but the chapter again is more of a historical survey while Scipio's divine aura is rightly emphasized as a paradigm. The chapter fittingly concludes with the divinization of Julius Caesar. The author makes good use of Koortbojian's major recent contribution to the subject while the role of the excessive honors bestowed by the senate has been further illuminated by Penelope Davies, whose book probably came too late to be considered, and who memorably concludes that the senate made Caesar "assassinatable".<sup>2</sup> As for the divinization, as Nandini Pandey has recently shown, the initiative and agency of the plebs were crucial and Octavian followed that lead.<sup>3</sup>

A discussion of the establishment of the imperial cult under Augustus takes up Chapter 4. It follows traditional lines, including Augustus' construction of an "ideology"; at the same time, astute attention is given to the range of Augustus' sacralization and the religious nuances of his name. Similarly well chosen is the emphasis on what the author calls Augustus' "theology" of Victory, an important aspect that is often underplayed though Hölscher's groundbreaking monograph is not cited.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, it is at least arguable whether the cult of the *Lares Compitales* is part of the imperial cult unless that term loses definition nor are the Lares simply *Lares Augusti*. Corollary issues are the worship of Augustus' *genius* and *numen*; on all these matters it would have been helpful to consult the recent, and authoritative, study by Harriet Flower that has revised much of the conventional picture.<sup>5</sup> As so often, however, González Herrero's forte is the concise definition of the overall phenomenon

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2. Davies, 2017, pp. 272-274.

3. Pandey, 2013, pp. 405-449.

4. Hölscher, 1967.

5. Flower, 2017; Lott, 2004 is cited on p. 81, but not in the bibliography.

and her ability to direct the reader to the forest rather than the trees, to wit: “Augusto construye una dimensión divina de su persona... por vías diferentes en la religiosidad popular” (p. 78). The statement is apt even if its referentiality needs updating.

Chapter 5, halfway through the book, provides a useful informational basis for the following chapters about the actual practice of the cult and its functionaries; the priesthoods included women, a fact that may also be relevant to discussions of the role of women in the compital cult.<sup>6</sup> Concise as usual, the author’s discussion comprises a short survey of the divinization of emperors and empresses in the first two centuries CE with a useful list that extends into the next two centuries down to Romulus Augustulus. Similarly, there is a catalogue raisonné of the relevant temples and shrines in the city of Rome and their archaeology so far as it is available. The author well notes un lógica sólida for the localización, i.e. the distribution over Forum Romanum, Palatine, and Campus Martius. As for *consecrationes*, she points out that they went on till the fourth century and, further, the little-known fact that Theodosius’ father was honored by the senate in this way in 384.

The next two chapters track the development of the cult after Augustus with emphasis on the role of individual emperors, running the gamut from Tiberius’ reluctance to the antics of Caligula, Nero, and Commodus. There are excellent comments on the Antonines and their collocation of the cult within the framework of traditional Roman virtues projecting their qualities and achievements. Similarly, the author highlights their efforts to link the imperial cult with traditional and existing state cults; the links are more than contextual. Overall Chapter 6 is also a successful demonstration of the cult’s embeddedness in a rich historical and religious context. It is an essential perspective and González Herrero outlines it well. Her informed discussion of the Hadrian’s Olympeion at the end of the chapter provides an exclamation point. The same perspective continues in Chapter 7 on the third and fourth centuries that she rightfully views as characterized by syncretism and tolerance. The cult underwent modifications such as fewer public sacrifices; a valuable parallel she cites is the corresponding numbers from the *Acta fratrum arvalium*, and they were finally forbidden by Theodosius in 389. Given the predominant scholarly focus on the public realm González Herrero commendably calls attention to the continued vitality of the cult in the private sphere by way, for instance, of banquets and libations.

In the discussion of the cult’s role in the persecution of the Christians there is, surprisingly, no mention of Trajan’s rescript to Pliny, probably because that would belong in the time frame of the previous chapter. If so, chronological organization

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6. Most recently on that subject: Flower and Diluzio, 2019, pp. 213-236.

should not have been an obstacle to tracing unfolding developments; in fact, at the end of this chapter she refers back to the critiques of paganism by authors such as Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian from the second century. But she well points out, with reference to the important article by Fergus Millar (misspelled as “Miller”), that such imperial edicts and rescripts focused not on the imperial cult *per se* but on sacrifices to the pagan gods in general.<sup>7</sup>

The next two chapters are organized geographically and give concise details about the cult in the west and east. Chapter 8 in particular is a mini-version of Fishwick’s more compendious undertaking and extremely useful for that alone. Just about all the relevant sites from North Africa to the Danube receive a thumbnail sketch; minor sites are mentioned, too, such as the Flavian altar in the *agri decumates* that is far less known than the altar of the Ubii at Cologne. The chapter concludes with a more extensive discussion of the cult’s functionaries, both *flamines* and *flaminicae*: the modes and duration of their appointment, their honors and duties, their social profile, and their attire. Here the author draws on a rich repertory of specific sources and resources, including the *lex de flamonio* of Narbo, epigraphy, statuary, and texts, and her succinct command of specifics shines. Chapter 9 is the corresponding survey for the Roman east, beginning with a historical summary of actions taken especially by the Julio Claudians, such as the various reorganizations of Asia Minor in particular. It leads up to the role of the provincial assemblies in establishing imperial cults and includes the cities with a neokorate. The focus then shifts to the Greek mainland and sponsorship by the Leagues, including the panhellenic version. This is again done very competently and informatively, with a useful concluding account of sacerdotal organization both in the province of Asia and in Greece and brief comments on the social standing of the *archiereus*.

That aspect is developed more fully in the final chapter (*El culto imperial en el ámbito cívico*) that brings together several strands of the preceding chapters for a final and successful review. It includes the *titulatura* of the priests and priestesses with their corresponding duties; useful lists are provided and help illustrate the great range of differentiation. There is a plethora of concise observations and information along the way: we do not always know why a city chose to link itself with a specific member of the imperial family; the ratio of priests to priestesses in the west was something like 1:4-5; and the gender of the member of the imperial family did not determine the gender of the cult officials, who could also be involved in other cults in their cities. Nor was their role, especially in the east, limited to cultic functions *per se*, but, draw-

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7. Millar, 1973, pp. 143-66.

ing on the work of Price, the author gives some brief examples of civic festivals and the like. They were civic patrons with the appropriate resources.

A fairly representative cross section of eight selected texts, followed by a timetable, rounds out this volume. They include the religious calendar of Urso, chapter 21 from Augustus' *Res Gestae*, the inscription from the statue of a *flamen* in Baetica, the fragment of the Gytheum decree, and text passages from Plautus, Herodian and Philostratus, all with an informative commentary. They are a useful enhancement of a useful survey and introduction to the imperial cult and especially its realities on the ground.

As I noted at the beginning of this review, McIntyre's treatment is shorter and differently oriented but no less valuable. Also, in addition to important earlier studies such as Hänlein-Schäfer's *Veneratio Augusti* she cites recent relevant publications like those of Noreña, Brodd and Reed, and Flower. The focus is primarily on literary sources, central definitions, and important scholarly debates. I could not summarize her aim better than she does in her final paragraph (p. 76):

“The goal of this article was to outline the major themes, issues, and discussions surrounding the imperial cult and its various manifestations. The worship of the emperor and his family members, both living and dead, played an important role in the social, political, economic, and religious landscape of the Roman Empire. Although multifaceted and complex, the study of the imperial cult and its role within Roman society provides valuable insight into constructions of power, relationships between people and communities, and how the Romans constructed and defined what they hoped was their secure, stable, and eternal Empire”.

The result is superb for its conciseness, insightful emphasis on central issues, and up-to-date and intelligent perspectives. The “article” is helpfully organized around five major themes; herewith a few brief comments on each.

1) *Talking about Gods: Terminology Associated with the Imperial Cult*. The new status of the imperial gods posed terminological – and, I would add, iconographic<sup>8</sup> – challenges. McIntyre well discusses them for both Latin and Greek; the permeable boundary between *divus* and *deus* perhaps could have been stressed. Similarly, for *numen* Gradel's comments on the “obstructive vagueness” of the concept and Rüpke's on its “precise imprecision” would have been helpful additional guideposts.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Well discussed by Koortbojian, 2013 (the book is cited in both González Herrero's and McIntyre's bibliographies).

9. Gradel, 2002, p. 235 (the book is cited in both González Herrero's and McIntyre's bibliographies); Rüpke, 2018, p. 280.

And, as I have noted above, including the *Lares Compitales* in a discussion of the imperial cult casts the net rather wide, especially as Harriet Flower, as McIntyre duly notes, has revised our understanding of the *Lares* cult whose object and practices in many ways are not comparable to those of the cult of the deified emperor. The valuable concrete case study for this chapter is the deification of Julius Caesar with an emphasis on the terminology used by our sources and the honors he was accorded. As noted above, the recent studies by N. Pandey and P. Davies round out the picture in some important details.

2) *Gods at Rome: Divine Funerals and Physical Monuments*. This again is an excellent short survey and it is not lacking in concrete examples; especially the second part on “Temples of the Gods” can be read usefully in conjunction with González Herrero’s discussion of the same topic. The first part is on the instrumentation of the funerals and McIntyre does well to highlight the connection of Augustus’ funeral with Republican precedents, providing another example of continuity that contradicts the facile binary of Republic and Empire. At the same time, there is the monumentalization of the *ustrinum* and, of course, the tomb as a Mausoleum. The only suggestion I would have for this section is to add Javier Arce’s standard work on the subject (a later article by him is cited).<sup>10</sup>

3) *Negotiating with the Divine: Three Case Studies*. They are well chosen, discussing the chief source, respectively, for the establishment of the cult of Augustus and Roma in Asia Minor (Dio, LI 20, 6-8), the request of Hispania Ulterior to establish a temple and cult for Tiberius and Livia (Tac., *Annales* IV 37), and the rescript of Constantine to the request of the *civitas* of Hispellum to build a temple to the *gens Flavia* (ILS 705). Viewing these three foundational documents together provides an extremely valuable perspective all by itself counteracting, as it does, all too frequent compartmentalization. More: McIntyre offers an excellent commentary on each case, differentiating and contextualizing expertly in light of up-to-date knowledge. She highlights factors such as inter-city competition; the process of negotiation with the emperor or senate and its literary construction, which may not always correspond to actual practice, by the two writers; the importance of precedent and, simultaneously, the ability of both parties to innovate and adapt.

4) *Worshipping the Gods: Priesthoods, Sacrifices, and Festivals*. The survey and discussion here are very straightforward. They are similar to González Herrero’s Chapter 8 (see above) and richly informative without being quite as detailed. McIntyre, too, highlights the *Lex de Flamonio Provinciae Narbonensis*, the role of *fla-*

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10. Arce, 1988.

*minicae*, and the municipal euergetism incumbent on priests and priestesses. Particularly valuable is her discussion of the distinction between sacrifices *in honor of* and *to* the emperors and the current state of the question. As so often, and that is another merit of her short monograph, she points to future work that is waiting to be done. In this case, it is a needed antidote to prosopographical approaches to the existing evidence that do not lead beyond it.

5) *Christianity and the Imperial Cult*. This is another masterful update, in just four pages, of a subject that often has been framed by the sole issue of Christian persecutions. The scope of interaction, however, was much richer and McIntyre commendably focuses on recent work on the presence and adaptations of “imperial” terminology in the New Testament. Scholarly perspectives have ranged from casting the Jesus movement almost entirely as a reaction to empire, with the imperial cult as a significant aspect, to studies that carefully analyze commonalities of language and concepts, such as *divi filius*. There was nothing monolithic about the imperial cult and the interactions and affinities between the early Christian communities and the cult’s manifestations and practices were similarly complex. Negotiation was ongoing and includes the effort by New Testament authors and others to recast and adapt the relevant terminology for their new purposes. Again, as McIntyre comments, there is the need for further work.

A Conclusion summarizes the discussion in the preceding chapters. There is an extensive 12-page bibliography but, unfortunately, no index nor *index locorum*. Still, as can be seen, I heartily recommend these two publications. They will be useful both to those who seek an introduction and orientation on this major component of imperial culture, politics, and religion, and to experts who want to revisit the forest for the trees.

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