

The Reborn Identity: Religion and Politics in Ancient Greece and Rome

The idea that religion was embedded in the politics of the ancient Greek and Roman societies is well-established among modern scholars (for ancient Greece, see Bremmer 1994; Evans 2010; Kindt 2012; for ancient Rome, see Scheid 2003; Rüpke 2016). The dichotomy between religion and politics is a modern one that the ancients would not have recognized. Instead, the two categories were intertwined and mutually reinforcing. How, then, should the modern researcher approach the relationship of these two fundamental aspects to ancient life? This panel seeks to demonstrate that, across geography and time (from the archaic Greek period through the late Roman Republic into Rome's empire), religion was fundamental to personal and political identities. Whether in the interstate sphere (the first paper), the domestic political sphere (the second paper), or the personal sphere (the third paper), religion was constantly encountering political institutions. Through a closer look at these examples of this particular type of engagement, we can gain a better understanding of the complex identities of these ancient peoples.

Our first paper, "The Panionion: Where Religion and Politics Intersected in the Early Ionian League," aims to address specifically how religion and politics operated together in the creation of a common identity among the members of the early Ionian League. Whereas previous scholarship has focused on the early political institutions of the League, the importance of religious activities has only recently seen much attention. This paper seeks to combine the two approaches by highlighting the role of the Panionion, the sanctuary of Poseidon Helikonios at Mycale, and by drawing on ancient literary and modern archaeological evidence, it proposes that the sanctuary, the location for ritual ceremonies as well as political discussions, provided the

environment within which the early League members created and cultivated an exclusive Ionian identity.

Our second paper, “Immortal Efforts: Divine Audiences in Cicero’s *Post Reditum* Speeches,” focuses on two speeches Cicero delivered in 57 BCE to celebrate his return to Rome. After a politically charged exile, Cicero delivered one speech in the Senate and another to the people. These speeches served similar functions: to thank those responsible for Cicero’s recall from exile. By comparing the speeches, the appeals to religion reveal a rhetorical tactic that is acutely tuned to Cicero’s Roman audiences. Cicero appeals to individual senators with divine adjectives, while attributing godlike powers to his popular audience for their efforts in securing his return. Likewise, Cicero’s absence leaves Rome vulnerable — broken consular rods and burned temples a common image in both speeches. With the temples in danger, the Roman Senate and people oversaw Cicero’s return and ultimately restored Rome’s safety. For that, Cicero thanks them like the gods whose temples they had saved.

Our final paper, “*Caelestes Honores*: Emperor Worship among Corinth’s Earliest Christians,” examines how early Christians navigated Roman religion. Emperor worship, though new and not an official state cult, nevertheless, proliferated from the early days of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Scholars have recently demonstrated emperor worship to be much more than mere *Graecae adulatio*, an older view predicated on a false and anachronistic dichotomy between religion and politics. Rather, the emperors received divine honors relative to their position in the cosmic hierarchy. In this framework, Paul attempted to communicate the divine status of Jesus. The earliest evidence of his struggles comes from his own letters. First Corinthians reveals confusion surrounding Paul’s gospel. Paul’s attempt to stifle offerings made to imperial *genii* (δαίμόνιοι, 1 Cor 10:20) evinces not only his recalcitrance toward imperial

authority but also how *some* Corinthians received Paul's gospel as a call to worship a peculiar Jewish *divine man* on par—or on spectrum—with the Roman emperor.

As our papers show, the embeddedness of religion in politics is more than a hackneyed observation. The various interactions of religious belief and rituals with the political lives of Greeks and Romans shed light on the construction and representation of identity. The papers on this panel show how this could be addressed in different, sometimes reactionary, ways. The first two papers demonstrate how religion influenced political identities, while the third paper shows the reverse. But in each case, there is the common theme that the interaction of religion and politics worked towards the construction of personal and political identities. This panel's emphasis on their mutual interaction gives further proof that both religion and politics should be considered together.

Bibliography

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