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Julietta Steinhauer, Religious Associations in the Post-Classical Polis, Potsdamer Altertumwissenschaftliche Beiträge 50, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2014, 189 pages, ISBN 978-3-515-10646-7

Julietta Steinhauer's first monograph is the result of her Ph.D. studies carried on in the University of Saint Andrews, Scotland and the Max Weber Kolleg in Erfurt, supervised by Greg Woolf and Jörg Rüpke. Although a highly debated topic, the problematic of the religious associations in the Late Hellenistic and Roman period still have new perspectives.

Steinhauer's main aim – as she claim in the introduction – is to establish a new methodological approach, different that the traditional legislative view, focusing more on a more complex interaction of the associations within a smaller and larger social and religious context of the polis and Roman cities. Following the German school of *Religionswissenschaft*, she is also very rigorous on terminology and definition: abandoning the traditional "*Religioeser Verein*" or "*communauté religieuse*" terms, she convincingly argued why is more accurate to use the "religious associations" than other modern terms. The ancient terminology however, is too varied and confusing (more than fifty terms), which made her modern notion also, anachronistic. Being a conventional choose of course, it is a good starting point for further studies. Presenting shortly the history of the research, she focus on the material, the geographic area (Greece and the islands and the west coast of Asia Minor) and the structure of her book. As a new and leading idea of her book, Steinhauer claims, that although the religious associations are focused mainly on the same divinities in various cities of the Greco-Roman world, their very own nature is different. This conception means, that her focus will emphasize more the local

specificities and a contrastualist – comparative study. She identifies three aspects that makes her methodology “new”: the diversity of the apparently the same religious associations in different cities, the local assimilation of “new” divinities and the calm nature of attracting new members. This last point stands in a slight opposition of the new concept of “religious market” and competitive waves, present in numerous recent publications. However, if something is not aggressive, doesn’t mean that can’t create competitive situations.

The second chapter present the case of Athens and Piraeus in the late Classical, Hellenistic and Roman times, focusing mainly on the dynamics of the associations in a historical and social frame. She presents the 4th century B.C. *orgeones* associations and the *asklepiastai* based mostly on the epigraphic evidence and the dynamics of the members, neglecting or presenting shortly some important aspects, such as performance, religious rituals, materiality and an “outsider” view on these associations. This could be explained – as she claims in the conclusions – with the poor evidence of archaeological material from Athens and Piraeus, especially for the Late Classical period. However, she mentions that “*few buildings can be ascribed to religious associations [in Athens and Piraeus]*”, which means that the analysis of the materiality and experience within these buildings could be possible.

A more detailed analysis we found in the third chapter, which presents the case of Delos, where seven possible religious associations were identified. Unfortunately all of them are presented very shortly, the only exception is the sanctuaries of the so called Oriental deities and the Kyntheion. Important to highlight her detailed analysis also on the synagogue and the religious associations related to this.

The next chapter focusing on “the people: personnel and participants”, but in the first chapter she deals with the case

of the Egyptian associations from various settlements, mostly on the case study of the *serapiastai*. Steinhauer here points out, that in some cases, the Egyptian associations and sanctuaries seems not only to imitate the Egyptian religion, but in some cases, such as in the Serapeion of Thessalonica and Delos, it was even founded by Egyptians.

An important contribution is the subchapter focusing on the architecture and archaeology of these associations. Similarly to the book of Inge Nielsen appeared in the same year⁴, it presents various architectural forms and not only places, but also, spaces – opening a new chapter in the interpretation of movements and religious experience within buildings and it's environment. She deals also with the funerary sites of the *isiastai*, Jewish or Bacchic communities. She use a similar structure on the typology as Nielsen, identifying dining halls attached to temples, free standing assembly rooms and public spaces, as places for rituals.

In the last chapter, Steinhauer presents the relationship between religious associations and civic institutions. Identified till now as the copies of the polis structure, these associations however seems to change more often than the official and administrative language of the cities. This could be argued by the presence and importance of immigrants in these communities, as a social factor already in the 4/3rd centuries B.C. increasing also the attractiveness of the associations for citizens and non – citizens too.

As conclusion, the author cites Arnaoutoglou's words: "*associations were multi-functional units of people in which each of the above mentioned features played a role which rendered possible the slow, but smooth, integration into a new cultural context*" (164 p.). Arguing further, Steinhauer presents her book in

⁴ Gasparini 2015. Online access: <http://bmc.brynmawr.edu/2015/2015-03-40.html>. Last accessed on 23 April 2015. She cites two of Nielsen's articles but doesn't mention her new book or her name in the acknowledgements.

a historiographic perspective, redefining this, ten years old concept, affirming, that commensality played a more important role in the life of these associations, which became some “*mediating institutions between the polis and the individual*” (165 p.).

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