

Religion In, For, and Against the Roman Empire

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The Roman Empire was built on alliances, military occupation and indirect rule via local elites. The power of the emperor rested on his armies and economic resources, not on ritual or divine status. Certain religious practices and beliefs were even seen as dangerous and threatening to the imperial community, human sacrifice for instance, but also atheism and occasionally being a *Christianus*. This view of the administration (usually also functioning as judges) proved time and again correct, as manifold forms of resistance and rebellion demonstrated, including alternative calendars (the Gallic calendar of Coligny), hateful oracles (“Potter’s Oracle”, “Sibylline oracles”) and performances of “martyrs”. At the same time many people used religious practices and ideas to represent the empire at the centre as well as in many local contexts. Living and dead emperors were addressed as gods, usually on individual, peripheral initiative, thus producing central assent as much as attempts at control. The paper tries to briefly review these diverse developments from the perspectives of the agents (“lived ancient religion approach”) as well as to consider functions as systemic effects. It is claiming that many people appropriated the *Imperium Romanum* by religious practices, but that the same empire also shaped what we call now “religion” and furthered the very development of “religions”.