

## BOOK REVIEW

*Divine Honors for Mortal Men in Greek Cities: The Early Cases.* By CHRISTIAN HABICHT. J.N. DILLON, trans. Ann Arbor: Michigan Classical Press, 2017. Pp. xvi + 238. Hardcover \$67.50. ISBN 978-097-99713-96.

Habicht maintains that cult for living persons is not fundamentally different from hero-cult (149; n. 227 admittedly remains inadequate). Powerful individuals had encroached on the functions and honors of the gods (170). Leaving aside Homeric precedents such as Achilles (e.g. Il. 9. 155 and similar formulae), the historical Hellenic practice of honoring mortal men as gods while alive began with Spartan Lysander, as Douris states (Plut. Lys. 18 = *FGrHist* 76 F71), and with Syracusan Dion, the father and savior god (#4, quoting Plut. Dion 46.1). Macedonian foundations start already with Philip and Alexander, but living Hellenistic rulers, chiefly Antigonids, Seleucids, and Ptolemies (e.g. #43), dominate the 54 civic case studies, here terminating in 240 BCE. Habicht gathers the far-flung inscriptional evidence and literary sources to discuss this peculiar polis institution meanwhile dating problematic events and inscriptions.

This learned *Gottmenschentum* volume collects (part one) evidence for individual (or paired) godlike honors (no Greek word for “cult,” 154), before analyzing (part two) the nature of this peculiarly spontaneous, civic cultivation of contemporary potentates—not artificially constructed dynastic or posthumous “cults.” Habicht considers towns’ motives for the establishment of and the forms that these highest of all “profane” honors took (153).<sup>1</sup> How do these only formally religious characteristics play out as Hellenic historical phenomena? Habicht concentrates on the persons and communities establishing so-called cults, rather than on the honorands, and then living—not those already dead, such as the elder Miltiades in the Chersonese (Hdt. 6.38) and Brasidas at Amphipolis (Thuc. 5.11; cf. 4.121.1, and p.145). At least fifty of the latter foundations existed before Alexander.

Habicht investigates who established civic cults and what their motives were. Leading causes were explicit gratitude for specific soteric benefits (117), such as liberation, and implicit anticipation of future benefits. He observes how (little)

<sup>1</sup> Sanctuaries, cult statues (103, *agalmata*—not honorary *eikones*), tombs, priests and altars, sacrifices and temples, festivals, calendrical renaming, eponymic tribal (*phyle*) institutions, and honorary *epikleses*, e.g. *theos* Demetrius in Athens, #20.

they evolved, how long the worship endured—when known, and which pre-existing ritual forms were adopted. He mentions the occasional abolition of such cults, when political advantage encouraged a city to do so, or when a cult had been established only under duress (137).

Habicht denies vigorously that the practices were religious and posits that belief in recipients' divinity was non-existent. He studies instead the secular politics of one theological eccentricity, in a period when confidence in the gods' power and interest waned (Douris, *FGrHist* 76 F13). The Alexander sources never mention these local civic cults. He leaves later examples to others (xv). Eurydice (Philip's granddaughter and the first living princess so honored) is exalted, counter-intuitively and contrary to many interpretations, precisely for *not* exercising political power (191). This example disproves modern interpretations of divine honors as having been devised for constitutional consequences. The shattered late-classical sources do not seem to regard these intensely local foundations as extraordinary or religious in themselves. The circumstances that brought them into being (96), usually a foreigner interceding for the city in a crisis and protecting it (121), explain the political origin of such cults. The inscriptions declare their donors' perceived terrestrial salvation, they do not essay to make new gods (123), at least until Augustus' Mytilenean apotheosis (132). No Greek refused the honor or thought himself a god when so honored (132). The formally religious, Hellenic act was in fact an elaborate civic "thank you," something like a modern symbolic "key to the city."

Part 2 begins with the sources: few of those honor-attestations known from inscriptions appear in ancient authors. Most of the events lurk in the fragments of epichoric historiography (93–5). Habicht asserts that the institution of such cults themselves were not as noteworthy to contemporary writers, as the Alexander-historians demonstrate, or to the honorands, so much as important to the cities instigating the rites (sacrifices, *agones* athletic and musical), structures and graven images (e.g., Sicyon's *Arateion*), and inscriptions. Favor produces gratitude produces favors. The institution remained much the "same everywhere for a very long time" (203). Modern monotheism impedes scholarly understanding of the more capacious sensibilities that impelled the ancient Hellenes (207) to these practices, although we certainly can perceive contemporary cults of personality and powerful persons.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Roman consecration of mortals in cults of the caesars differs fundamentally (154 n.242).

Supplements to part one of Habicht's original Hamburg dissertation of 1951 and the second edition of 1970 consider additional evidence unearthed in the past half-century. The author in his supplement to part two responds to his critics, revises certain opinions (e.g. 186), and provides some further bibliography published since the second German edition of 1970. Probably no one else could have composed this beautifully organized, methodical if somewhat cumbersome presentation. It is a pleasure to have it in Dillon's fluent and somewhat updated<sup>3</sup> English translation. The print is small and the right margins are not justified, but the quires are sewn. Three indexes facilitate consultation for specific ancient individuals, Greek vocabulary, and literary and epigraphical sources.

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<sup>3</sup> Habicht, surprisingly for an epigrapher publishing in 2017, cites Tod's *Greek Historical Inscriptions* (1946/8), not Meiggs and Lewis (1969) and Rhodes and Osborne's (2007) thoroughly revised editions. Other items described as "recent" are now half a century old. Footnotes (not endnotes, thankfully) cite much of the inscriptional Greek.