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Julietta Steinhauer: Voluntary Associations in the Post-Classical Polis

This book, which originates as a doctoral dissertation, investigates the private religious associations of mainland Greece, the Aegean islands and some cities of western Asia Minor from c. 300 BC to AD 200. Steinhauer seeks in particular to offer a new perspective based on the material remains connected to associations; to focus on the emergence and the nature of the communities of worshippers which shaped the phenomenon; and to give a synchronic comparative perspective of a group of cults (3). These aims are pursued in five chapters, preceded by an Introduction and followed by a Conclusion, Bibliography, General Index (but not an Index locorum) and three appendices, the most important of which reproduces the plan drawings of the main architectural structures discussed. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to Athens and Delos, which are selected as case-studies on account of their rich evidence for associations. Other places, e.g. Rhodes, receive only brief treatment because of 'insufficient archaeological remains' there (23). After offering a summary of the contents of the six chapters, I will return to an evaluation of Steinhauer's volume.

Starting with the groups of *orgeones* and *thiasotai*, chapter 2 traces the development of the Attic associations. During the fourth century, Steinhauer argues, new associations worshipping foreign deities and created by foreigners supplemented traditional groups of citizens, primarily *orgeones* formed around Attic hero-cults; while they adopted and transformed older institutional forms, these new associations of metics were later on joined by Athenian citizens (49). Moreover, the focus of religious associations is considered to have changed over time from ritual to sociability: whereas the annual meeting of the *orgeones* of Amarynion, Dexion and Asklepios was focused on their feast, the monthly meetings of the second-century AD Iobacchoi were not focused on a specific cultic feast (49, 161). By contrast, on Delos, Steinhauer argues in chapter 3, religious associations emerged only in the late third century BC and were mostly concerned with the worship of Egyptian (Serapis, Isis, Anubis), Syrian (Atargatis, Hadad) and other oriental deities. Originally composed of immigrants, these associations were compelled (or chose) to build their sanctuaries from local materials and in local styles (69). Over time, Steinhauer points out, their members became more ethnically diverse, while after Delos' return to Athenian hands in 166 BC, their cults and sanctuaries came under strict control. But Delos, Steinhauer notes (70), may be exceptional in providing both a rich archaeological record of sites linked to associations and inscriptions directly connected with these sites. The corresponding archaeological evidence from Athens and Piraeus, in contrast, is described as modest (49). In chapter 4, Steinhauer concentrates on the members of religious associations. The structure of membership is discussed here by dividing associations into (i) Serapiastai and other Egyptian gods, (ii) worshippers of other 'new' gods (e.g. Sabazios), including Jewish and Samaritan groups, and (iii) worshippers of 'Greek' deities. A general characteristic of our documentation, Steinhauer holds, is the paucity of information it provides on fundamental aspects of membership. It is not possible to determine whether slaves and women were permitted to join an association; a similar dearth of evidence is believed to prevent us from determining the status of members. From the second century BC, however, the epigraphic record documents an almost entirely Greek membership with citizens as the dominant segment (107). According to Steinhauer, it was the new and different rituals that attracted individuals to join the groups worshipping 'new' deities, Egyptian or other. Characteristically, though, our epigraphic record sheds little light on the ritual aspects and almost exclusively provides information about associations of the second and third generation, when citizens and wealthy metics had become members (108).

The preserved architectural structures that can be linked to associations form the topic of chapter 5. Besides burial grounds, the focus here is on the spatial organization and functions of the best known buildings in Athens (*Iobaccheion* ; the so-called *Amyneion* is mentioned in chapter 2) and Delos (Serapeia, the sanctuary of the Syrian gods, the sanctuary of the gods of Ascalon and the controversial 'synagogue') with inclusion also of the *Podiensaal* in Pergamon and the Hall of Mystai on Melos. Some associations met in civic sanctuaries. Most, however, had their own sanctuaries and / or dining- / assembly-halls, since privacy was a fundamental selling-point to attract members (138). Most of these buildings, designed on local (i.e. Greek) traditions, generally differed from one another. The only discernible pattern, Steinhauer holds, is that, whereas the structures of 'new' deities were situated in the newer part of a city (e.g. the *orgeones* of the Mother of the Gods placed their *Metroon* in Piraeus), those of non-religious associations were situated in the centre of the city (e.g. the house of the *Poseidonastai* on Delos, 139 and 161). In the final chapter, Steinhauer examines the relation of religious associations to pre-existing *polis* institutions. Whereas previous studies tend to emphasize the formal aspects (legal, economic, social) documented by our inscriptions, Steinhauer wishes to go behind this formal mask of inscriptions and retrieve 'the ritualistic and innovative side of religious associations', which is considered to have constituted their essence (141). Comparison between Athens, Delos and Rhodes is here intended to reveal the different trajectories followed. Of these three places, only Athens exhibits a direct connection between religious associations (the *orgeones*) and long-standing civic institutions ('pre-existing constitutional structures', in Steinhauer's terms, 158), though there, too, that connection became looser in the second century BC. In contrast, no connection to 'pre-existing' institutions is detectable on Delos and Rhodes. Religious associations on Delos, Steinhauer states, appeared only in the end of the third century BC and were 'established in the first instance according to each deity's origin' (such as the *dekatistai* and *enatistai* , 158, with 151). As for Rhodes, religious associations are said to have been established simultaneously with their professional and military counterparts and lacked specifically Rhodian characteristics (158). Yet besides these differences there were also some common features: a similar language for the administrative and cultic staff; the religiously motivated establishment of associations - i.e. the religious aspect existing independently of social or economic concerns; and a body of epigraphic evidence which, while portraying the religious associations as superficially similar, in fact shows that they were different from each other. I now turn to an evaluation. How successful is Steinhauer's monograph, which is the first one on the topic since Paul Foucart's *Des associations religieuses chez les grecs. Thiasés, éranes, orgéones* , of 1873 (not in the bibliography)? The study most usefully assembles and discusses some of the main archaeological evidence from Athens and Delos, with occasional glances at other places. Steinhauer wisely chooses to include only structures which are certainly or probably linked to associations through inscriptions. The emphasis on buildings, however, results in only a cursory treatment of other types of material, such as that discovered within necropoleis. This might potentially shed light on ritual practices, a principal concern of this book, said to be scantily documented by inscriptions. Steinhauer's study seeks, *i.a.* , to substantiate two cardinal theses (25-6). First, in facilitating the assimilation of 'new' deities into their new environments, religious associations adapted superficially to local architectural and epigraphic habits, but remained different with regard to their rituals and to the hierarchy among officials and ordinary members. Second, associations worshipping 'new' deities became popular without any 'aggressiveness and exoticism', but quietly (i.e. without advertising or showing off in public), using local honorific practices and legal elements only in order to attract wealthy members who would ensure their survival; their inscriptions, as a result, though similar to other documents, conceal to all but the perceptive scholar the novelties of these associations: freedom of religious choice and the attraction of 'new' deities. Their non-aggressive, quiet posture might explain our difficulties in finding material remains from e.g. Jewish and early Christian groups.

While these points are interesting, neither their essential parts nor the distinctions they imply (i.e. non-aggressive non-Greek religious habits and membership versus aggressive Greek habits and membership) are substantiated in the core chapters of the book, where the content of inscriptions is often summarized without being subjected to critical scrutiny (e.g. 38 with n. 69). No analysis of the documents on the *orgeones* worshipping Bendis in Attica, for example, supports Steinhauer's view that a group of citizens was established prior to the mixed group of citizens and Thracians (34-5) - *pace* Steinhauer (118 n. 54), *IG II 2 1255* does not attest to 'civic *orgeones* ', but to two Athenian citizens honoured by a group of Piraeus-based *orgeones* (possibly those devoted to Bendis) for their meritorious service as *hie* [*ropoioi*]. Indeed, Steinhauer's view conflicts with the statement, in *IG II 2 1283*, ll. 4-6, that 'To the Thracians alone of all the other *ethne* has the Athenian *demos* granted the right to own land and to establish a shrine (*hieron*)', which if true would date the origin of the Thracian *orgeones* and their sanctuary to a year before 333/2 (the year in which Kitians, and before them the Egyptians, got the same kind of permit: *IG II 2 337*) and even before 404 (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.11: *Bendideion*). Likewise, a closer analysis of the inscriptions would have shown that the *orgeones* who worshipped Amynos, Asklepios and Dexion owned one sanctuary which they called 'the *hieron* of Amynos and Asklepios' and another one which they called 'the *hieron* of Dexion' (*IG II 2 1252*; 1253 refers to one *hieron* , without giving its name), but not any *hieron* of Amynos or an *Amyneion* (31, 142 n. 3).

Steinhauer's understanding of 'assimilation' is never defended or placed in the context of currently debated alternatives, e.g. 'integration': see Dorothea Rohde, *Zwischen Individuum und Stadtgemeinde. Die Integration von collegia in Hafenstädten* , 2012, cf. Andreas Bendlin, in Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser and Alfred Schäfer (eds.), *Religiöse Vereine in der römischen Antike. Untersuchungen zu Organisation, Ritual und Raumordnung* , 2002 (both works are absent from the bibliography). Moreover, 'religious association', as the designation of a distinct class of associations, can no longer be used without at least some justification, especially so when its appropriateness has been questioned by several scholars, including one of the editors of the series in which this book is published (John Scheid in Nicole Belayche and Simon C. Mimouni (eds.), *Les communautés religieuses dans le monde gréco-romain. Essais de définition* , 2003; cf. also Véronique Dasen and Marcel Piérart (eds.), *Δημοδοὶ* ^{1 F 3 8} ^{4 F 6 3} *Les cadres 'privés' et 'publics' de la religion grecque* , 2005); neither work is in the bibliography. Absent from the bibliography is also Marcus N. Tod, *Lecture III: Clubs and Societies in the Greek World*, in *id.*, *Sidelights on Greek History: Three lectures on the Light Thrown by Greek Inscriptions* , 1932, a work which, like Steinhauer's book, maintains that over time the focus of associations changed from religion to sociability. Steinhauer defines religious associations as groups of people who voluntarily gathered to worship a deity (16) and explains her distinction between traditional Greek gods (i.e. those mentioned in Homer and Hesiod [71]) and 'new' / 'foreign' gods (i.e. deities introduced by non-Greek settlers [18]). However, when long-term developments are hypothesized (25 *et passim*), the religious associations constituting the subject of this book are narrowly perceived as groups of non-Greek immigrants worshipping one or more 'new' deities. The unfortunate results of this approach are exemplified, firstly, by Steinhauer's exclusion of the *Eikadeis* (whose *hieron* of Apollon Parnessios is attested by *IG II 2 1258*) from the group of Attic 'religious associations', an omission exacerbated by the erroneous belief that *Eikadeis* , like other names indicating meeting days (e.g. *Enatistai*), were Syrian and Egyptian features brought to Greece by immigrants (58, 87; cf. e.g. see the *Neomeniastai* in sixth-century Olbia: *IGDOLbia* 96); and secondly, by Steinhauer's claim that 'religious associations' on Delos appear only in the late third century BC (151), an assertion that is based on the unsupported (and probably wrong) assumption that groups with a name combining religious and occupational elements - such as *to koinon Berytion Poseidoniaston emporon kai naukleron kai egdocheon* and *to koinon ton Tyrion Herakleiston emporon kai naukleron* , both attested as early as 153/2 or 149/8 BC (*I.Delos* 1520, ll. 27-8; 1519, ll. 35-6) - are not 'purely religious associations' (66,

70; at 139 they are contrasted to religious associations); and incidentally, the use of the terms *Poseidoniastai* and *Herakleistai* by these associations of Phoenicians render Steinhauer's distinction between 'traditional' and 'new' deities questionable.

Even more problematic is Steinhauer's approach to the epigraphic evidence (141). Having found the inscriptions incapable of documenting the true but hidden characteristics of religious associations (i.e. their non-aggressive nature and innovative ritualistic character), Steinhauer resorts to speculation (e.g. 144, 147). The same applies to the view that citizens and wealthy metics through local [read: Greek] honorific practices were enticed to become members only in order to ensure the associations' survival. Similarly one looks in vain for some support for the contention that associations, contrary to what is usually held, did not imitate the *polis* because their 'offices' [*grammateis* , *tamiai* , etc.] were not actually defined as the names might suggest' (143).

But Steinhauer's problematic approach is most clearly exemplified by the methodological quandary created by the glaring discrepancy between the book's cardinal theses (25-6) and its main conclusions, and by the way this discrepancy is explained away. One of Steinhauer's main findings is that, according to our inscriptions, memberships consisted of citizens and foreigners, with the citizens sometimes being the dominant element. To reconcile this correct observation with her thesis that, at their establishment, religious associations were mostly or only manned by foreigners (non-Greeks), Steinhauer invents a first and second 'generation' stage in the lifetime of associations (108, 162), at which this original (but unattested) situation supposedly prevailed. Steinhauer thus conveniently situates most of the extant epigraphic evidence within a presumed third generation stage, during which the composition of the group allegedly had changed through the entrance of citizens and wealthy metics (108). In the opinion of this reviewer, this is not good scholarship.

There are further deficiencies. The book's organization entails much repetition; some worrying inaccuracies occur (142: 'ephebies'); more care should have been devoted to the reproduction of epigraphic documents in the notes; and *e silentio* arguments and self-contradictions abound: *Syll.* 3 985 is said to concern 'a truly religious association' at 73, but that was doubted only a page earlier at 72 n. 6; the *klinai* of Sarapis are called an Egyptian practice at 86, but then 'an essential ritual of almost every cult' at 106.

All in all, while it conveniently collects and discusses some of the epigraphic and archaeological evidence relating to the topic and presents some interesting ideas, Steinhauer's book does not advance our knowledge about the ancient religious associations. A good opportunity has been missed.