CHAPTER 9

Emperor Worship and Greek Leagues: The Organization of Supra-Civic Imperial Cult in the Roman East¹

Fernando Lozano

1. This paper presents arguments to support one main idea: supra-civic emperor worship in the Roman East was not usually organized by ‘provincial koina’. Admittedly, leagues with a provincial scope did indeed exist—and, therefore, it is also possible to talk about ‘provincial cults’—yet many of the so-called koina were not really provincial, in the geographical or political sense of the word. Neither had they the legitimacy nor, for that matter, the will to speak on behalf of a province, but only for the sake of its members, which were usually a privileged selection of the communities from a certain region. Hence, this paper suggests that the general term ‘provincial cult’ should be abandoned in favor of more appropriate terms, such as ‘koinon cult’, ‘league cult’ or ‘federal cult’. Nevertheless, this change in terminology is really of secondary importance, as the real aim of this work is the shift in focus from provinces to leagues and the possibilities that this approach may offer for understanding the Greek East under Roman rule. In order to state this case: (1) testimonies of several leagues² of the eastern part of the Roman Empire are herein reviewed, with the hope that this brief scrutiny will highlight the shortcomings of the intellectual framework usually used to explain the organization of supra-civic

¹ This paper has been written with support from the Andalusian regional government (‘Pensamiento y religión en el Mundo Antiguo’ [HUM-545]), the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Finance (‘Adriano y la integración de la diversidad regional / Hadrian and the integration of regional diversity’ [HAR2015-65451-C2-1-P, MINECO/FEDER]), and the Research Plan of Seville University (research personnel mobility grants). This is a revised version of the paper presented at the workshop, Imperial Dynamics and Religion in the Greek cities of the Roman Empire (Seville, November 2014). I am grateful to all the participants for their helpful observations and remarks. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. M. Melfi for her kind support and help at Oxford University in 2015, where the final version of this paper was drafted.

² For the sake of convenience, I have employed both the term koinon and ‘league’ as equivalent in meaning in this paper. However, see the remarks in Larsen 1968, xiv–xv and, more recently, in Rizakis 2008, n. 1, where the issue is covered in greater detail.
emperor worship in the East during the Principate; and (2) an explanation of the reasons behind the appearance of these alleged ‘provincial cults’ in historiographical works dealing with the Greek East is put forward.

1 Emperor Worship and Greek Leagues

2. In 1984, the late Simon Price in his influential book *Ritual and Power* wrote that ‘the Roman empire is too large and too diverse to allow us to examine the imperial cult throughout the empire. The value of an area study is that it permits proper attention to be given to the historical, social and cultural contexts.’ Shortly after, Duncan Fishwick expressed a similar view. Both opinions are used here to illustrate the main line in imperial cult research in recent years. Nowadays, in fact, the bulk of scholarly work dealing with the imperial cult is devoted to regional and local studies. This stress on the regional and local aspects of emperor worship has strengthened the idea that it was a multiplex, heterogeneous phenomenon. So much so that some researchers now talk of imperial cults in the plural to indicate that ‘there is no such thing as “the imperial cult.”’

3. When we consider the relevant information about and the particularities of the cult in each of these regional imperial cults, an overall review of the evidence allows us to conclude that a good part of the Eastern Empire never had a *koinon* that organized emperor worship at a provincial level, viz. a cult practiced by an organization, usually a gathering of prominent cities, geographically corresponding to a Roman province. According to Burrell's useful definition, a *koinon* was neither ‘a subset of official imperial administration, nor did its geographic lines have to correspond exactly to the borders of a Roman province. Instead, it was an organization of cities of similar ethnic background and

5 The literature is truly vast. A proper account cannot be given here, but, limiting the scope to monographs, see the following examples: Liertz 1998; Gradel 2002; Kantiréa 2007; Witulski 2007; Lozano 2010a; Pfeiffer 2010; Bru 2011; Camia 2011a; Reitzenstein 2011; Frija 2012; Fujii 2013.
6 The idea of the diversity of emperor worship is by no means new. See, for instance, Bickerman 1973, 9 and 26. On imperial cult diversity, see also: Herz 1988; Bergmann 1998; Lozano 2011, 494–510; Brodd, Reed 2011.
7 Beard, North, Price 1998, 348. I have found particularly thought-provoking the new approaches to emperor worship and ruler cult in: Gordon 2001; Brodd & Reed 2011; Versnel 2011, 439–492; Woolf 2012.