

ABSTRACT OF PROPOSAL FOR FIEC CONFERENCE, AUGUST 2009

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Preferred Panel: 4

Title: Was Vergil's *Aeneid* the pagan Bible?

The wider context of this paper is the question of how the influence of Vergil, *poeta maximus*, should be envisaged in the religious contexts of Late Antiquity. Vergil was considered an authority on many things: he was, at least to non-Christians, a *poeta doctus*, indeed *doctissimus*, and was without doubt greatly revered by those conveniently now called 'pagans'.

Studies of Christian and other authors have examined a wealth of detail and shed much light on particular writers: most recently, the contributors to the collection edited by Rees under the title *Romane memento...* (2004) and various writers on Augustine and other Church Fathers, and many more. Such studies as these offer material for a broader and deeper interpretation of the ways in which we may model and understand religious relations in this crucial period. At the same time, it is evident in many more general studies that rather simplistic models, in essence of 'Christian versus Pagan', are applied, while on the other hand some recent writing suggests that the confrontational element has been exaggerated.

The issues are extensive, but in a short paper I hope to make a small contribution by interrogating the belief still often explicitly or implicitly held, that the works of Vergil, especially the *Aeneid*, functioned for pagans rather as the Bible did for Christians; as, roughly speaking, an infallible and divine source of truth, or as it were, an equal and opposite force to the Christian books. Since views of the status and functions of the Christian Bible are themselves fluid, it is my aim to uncover the origins of this idea of the pagan 'Bible', and also to ask if it is a helpful way to approach the question of pagan reception of Vergil.

Roger Green

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