

**Jörg Rüpke/Greg Woolf (eds.), *Religion in the Roman Empire*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2021 (Die Religionen der Menschheit, 16, 2), 23,5 × 16 cm, 323 p., fig., 89 €, ISBN 978-3-17-029224-6.**

In their introduction, the editors, J. Rüpke and Gr. Woolf, precise that their goal is to explore the religion in the Roman Empire “as a lived religion, a bundle of practices and attitudes, habits and routines, practiced and understood by members of Roman society and subjects of the Roman state. The term *Lived Religion* acknowledges the inspiration of a broad set of approaches very different to the structuralist and post-structuralist anthropologies that inspired most accounts of Roman religion as a system. [...] The notion of agency is important here. Agency is not about the lonely individual, but about the interaction of individuals with structures, structures, which are themselves the result of individual actions. [...] This volume implies a methodological reorientation in order to achieve a richer description of ancient religious practices and concepts and their interaction and change in space and over time” (p. 13-15).

In the chapter “The City as a Field of Religious Action: Manufacturing the Divine in Pompeii” (p. 43-60), W. Van Andringa emphasizes how people at Pompeii were surrounded by gods. In a sanctuary like this of Apollo, “the visitor was confronted with a crowd of divine statues”, not only Apollo (patron of the temple), but also Diana, Venus (patron goddess of the city), Hermaphrodite, Mercury and Maia (p. 44). The gods were present not only in the great temples, but in all public spaces (p. 45): Mercury and the *genius* of the *macellum* in the market; the divinity of the spring and three nymphs in the water tower; Minerva, the guardian of the city’s walls and gates, in a sanctuary of the Porta Marina; *Lares compitales* (sometimes associated with other gods, as the Twelve Gods on a *compitum* of the *via dell’Abbondanza*) at the crossroads of the city (sanctuaries of urban *uici*). “Well-being and daily happiness were obviously based on the presence of the familiar gods of the neighbourhood” (p. 46). There were also images of the gods on the facades of houses and shops (p. 47; ex. Venus Pompeiana, a procession scene with Mater Magna, and four paintings of Sol, Jupiter, Mercury and Luna on the wall of the workshop IX, 7, 1). “Some of these deities were closely related to the commercial activities of the shops and workshops in question. [...] others guarded the entrances of the houses” (p. 48). The same omnipresence of gods can be noted inside the houses: mythological scenes adorned the interior walls (not with a decorative or a religious function, but with a cultural role); *sacraria* or *aedicula* of the Lares, protective gods of the house par excellence (sometimes with other gods, as the Capitoline triad and Mercury in the House of the Golden Cupids); the tombs, domain of the *Di Manes*, gods of the Netherworld, in the necropolises. “The

nature of the gods encountered in the public square, in the streets and houses of Pompeii seems to show [...] that free choice was closely controlled by the omnipotence of the great public gods, by community and civic constraints (the control of the authorities and the *paterfamilias*) without forgetting the involuntary servitude of the representatives, the *implicit belief* as defined by sociologists” (p. 55-56).

In the chapter “Sanctuaries – places of communication, knowledge and memory in Roman religion” (p. 61-106), R. Raja and A.-K. Rieger seek to approach sanctuaries not only “as physical spaces in which ritual practises took place”, but also as “places where the senses were stimulated” (p. 61). On this aspect, see p. 84-92 (“Costs, events and experiences: Visitors, users and religious specialists in a sanctuary”): “impressive spectacle” (p. 85), “architectural layout based on axuality, hierarchy, and vast open spaces” (p. 85); “Every new visitor came across the former consecrations, dedications or traces of religious practices” (p. 86); “Nature and natural topography played a central role in many oracular sanctuaries” (p. 88); “Such parades consisted of many participants, musicians, mimes, actors, carriers” (p. 91). The authors insist on the absence of >Reichsreligion< and on the growing “diversity of micro-regional elements, socio-cultural groups and religious customs” in the first centuries A.D. with the expansion of the Roman Empire (p. 67). In the provinces, despite a certain architectural uniformity (square, temple, porticoes) linked to the Roman influence, “the practices were often very much bound to the local ideas and religious concepts.” (p. 73; cf. p. 72, on the increasing focus on monumentality and architectural linearity of sanctuaries; p. 74, on the prominence of an archaic style in the early imperial period). The local influence that small sanctuaries had was rather independent of the Roman administration (p. 77), contrary to sanctuaries in administrative centres and provincial capitals, where the religious developments, as the cult of the divinised Roman emperor, were also shaped by military personnel, local elites and merchants (p. 78-83).

In the chapter “People and Competencies” (p. 107-140), G. Petridou and J. Rüpke focus on priests and religious specialists – p. 108-113: public priests of the different *collegia* and *sodalitates*, recruited among the members of the political and social elite, and credited with ritual functions and particular knowledge in religious matters; p. 113-119: diviners (“The imperial period was characterised by a market of well differentiated religious entrepreneurs. [...] Apparently the religious regulators of the early Principate were not only concerned with organising existing divinatory practices, but also expanding their areas of systematised knowledge (*cognitio*) to foreign (but otherwise popular) cults and mastering their new, specialised areas of expertise.”, p. 114 and 116); p. 119-121: oracular officials in the Eastern

Roman Provinces, at Delphi, Oropos, Claros and Didyma; p. 121-122: elite groups of religious entrepreneurs in healing cults of Isis and Sarapis, Asclepius and Zeus Hypsistos; p. 122-126: religious entrepreneurs in the Dionysiac cults of the western Asia Minor, in the Mithraic cults (widely disseminated), in the veneration of Jupiter Dolichenus at Rome; p. 127-129: development of a priestly role in Christ-centred imaginations; p. 129-133: the philosophers as religious experts (“The advent of the different strands of Christianity was, to an extent, facilitated by inherent henotheistic tendencies in Greek philosophical tradition, Judaism, and a number of old Greek mystery cults, such as that of Demeter and Kore, whose popularity was revived in Imperial period.”, p. 129); p. 133-134: *magi*.

In the chapter “The Gods and Other Divine Beings” (p. 142-165), H. Wendt, after proposing a definition of religion that is neither Christo-centric (p. 143) nor only civic (which would “exclud[e] and marginaliz[e] the human-divine interactions of the vast majority of the empire’s population”, p. 148; see p. 152-155, on household, neighbourhood, and associations’ cults), considers “the possibility that ostensibly heno- or monotheistic phenomena amounted to a competitive strategy that enabled individual experts to make totalizing and exclusive religious claims to privilege their own offerings at the expense of rivals [...], among not only Jewish and Christian, but also >pagan< groups of the first three centuries.” (p. 161). This would have caused a shift in discourse about divinity, which was imitated, in some of its trends, by the institutions of Roman civic religion (the Syrian solar deity of the emperor Elagabal, the Sol Invictus of Aurelian and, finally, Constantine’s official recognition of Christianity (p. 162).

In the chapter “Managing problems: Choices and solutions” (p. 166-209), R. Gordon explores “how families and individuals in the Roman Empire used religious forms as a response to contingent threats to their physical and social integrity” (p. 166). Roman domestic religion – “whose >mutual tracking< with public cult is clear” (p. 168) – was well integrated into the public festive calendar at Rome, but with a real margin of freedom in the details and specific practices. The combination of low life-expectancy, high rates of illness, poor nutrition and medical ignorance explains that there was a wide variety of healers and healing practises in the Roman Empire –>popular medicine<, public undertakings in the face of epidemics and famines, healing-shrines (“ritualisation might well be understood both as a reassurance and as a form of pressure”, p. 174), incubation (“ritualisation in such cases should be understood as one among several means of re-valuing dreams so as to make the basis of personal therapeutic authority”, p. 177). Institutionalised oracles, mainly in Italy and in the eastern Mediterranean, were “major reference-points for individuals and families in need of advice about anxieties, illness, and especially prospective decision of some importance.” (p 177). Given the costs of

having recourse to public oracles and healing shrines, magic and astrology specialists, or rather “minor ritual specialists”, were probably widely consulted (p. 188-194).

In the chapter “Artefacts and their humans: Materialising the history of religion in the Roman world” (p. 210-233), M. J. Versluys and Gr. Woolf want to show “how objects played their part, together with human agency, in constituting Roman religion” (p. 229) – p. 220-222: the innovation of votive stone and >monumental writing< in the western Europe conquered by the Romans; p. 222-225: terracotta figures as the condition of possibility of an intimate relation with the divine, at home and on a daily basis; p. 225-226: marble and *caementicium* as enabling durability of religious monuments, of a new range of religious iconography and of embellishment and monumentalization of sanctuaries; p. 227-228: lead, that made possible complex water systems for religious activities, curse tablets and coinage as religious *instrumentarium*.

In the chapter “The Impact of Textual Production on the Organisation and Proliferation of Religious Knowledge in the Roman Empire” (p. 234-261), G. Petridou and J. Rüpke ask “how religious ideas and practices were constructed in and disseminated through literary and epigraphic texts.” (p. 234) – through calendars (in the form of parchment or papyrus roles, codices, or, in the first century CE, monumental marble inscriptions: p. 236-239); through epigraphic chronicles associated with representations of the calendar (the work of M. Fulvius Nobilior or Ennius in the Temple of Hercules and the Muses in the 160s B.C.); through monumental inscriptions, as in the sanctuary of the Arvals (p. 240); through the literary production, in particular after the >cultural revolution< of the Augustan period: “In addition to the processes of canonisation of religious knowledge and action [...], we may also like to think of exegesis as yet another process that facilitated individual and group appropriation, extensive re-framing, and, above all, selective dissemination and preservation of earlier religious ideas.” (p. 244-245). Sacred texts of Early Christianity and Martyrologies, Lucian’s >Alexander, the Pseudo-Prophet< and the Second Sophistic are discussed p. 246-256.

In the chapter “Economy and Religion” (p. 262-305), R. Gordon, R. Raja and A.-K. Rieger seek to provide “an impression of the scale of expenditure on religion during the Roman Empire, up the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., taking account of civic practice, of associations and other small private groups, and ending with a brief survey of the resources invested in pilgrimage into Late Antiquity” (p. 263), a real challenge in the light of the available sources. As the material aspect of religion in the Roman Empire reflected wider economic factors, there was “a steep hierarchy of authority and significance between different temples, shrines, meeting places, and domestic arrangements within the same city” (p. 292).

It would certainly be fruitless to reopen here the historiographical debate around the *Lived Religion* and its philosophical, theological and cognitive issues in the era of the globalized liberal world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – on which see N. Belayche, « Aborder “la religion” dans le monde romain aujourd’hui : paradigmes renouvelés et nouveaux outils », *Pallas* 111 (2019), p. 31-33. The author of the review will therefore content himself with emphasizing that, while it is quite obvious that the religious identity of the citizen do not exhaust and do not oppose religious manifestations in a private, associative or other context, the state of the documentation itself, apart from exceptional cases such as that of Pompeii or Ostia, quickly imposes limits on this type of investigation.

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