

# A COMPANION TO ROMAN RELIGION

*Edited by*

Jörg Rüpke

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A COMPANION  
TO  
ROMAN RELIGION

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BLACKWELL PUBLISHING

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK

550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

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First published 2007 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2007

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A companion to Roman religion / edited by Jörg Rüpke.

p. cm. — (Blackwell companions to the ancient world)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-2943-5 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Rome—Religion.

I. Rüpke, Jörg.

BL803.C66 2007

292.07—dc22

2006025010

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12pt Galliard

by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

Printed and bound in Singapore

by Markono Print Pte Ltd

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

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# Acknowledgments

Very few pages of this book were written by me. My first thanks go to my colleagues, who agreed to collaborate in this project, and made the bricks of this building. Their contributions combined the attempt to give an overview of the field, to introduce methodological problems of research into historical religions, and to give an individual face to each chapter. More reliably than in many projects before this, deadlines were held, limits kept to, questions quickly answered, and suggestions taken up or (for the benefit of the reader) rejected. The result attests to the various traditions of research in Italy and Greece, in Northern and Southern America, in Britain and France, in Germany and Switzerland. At the same time it attests to the coherence of an international scientific community that is willing and able to read and react to contributions in each other's languages. I am grateful to those who provided English texts, to those who translated texts, and to those (mostly anonymous) who helped in improving these texts.

It was Al Bertrand who contacted me on July 30, 2003, about embarking on this project and who accompanied the Companion through all its stages, in particular the early phase of defining the project. Ben Thatcher, Sophie Gibson, Kitty Bocking, and Angela Cohen accompanied it at important steps along the way; Fiona Sewell as copy-editor was extremely helpful, sensible to intentions and mistakes, and last but not least efficient.

From the staff at the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Erfurt, Diana Püschel, Mihaela Holban, Blossom Stefaniw (for translations), Astrid Willenbacher (for the bibliography), and Elisabeth Begemann (who compiled the index) must be gratefully mentioned.

As our daughter started to read my last book, I felt I should dedicate this one to her, thus finally providing my excuse for missing a number of sunny afternoons and cozy evenings.

The cafeteria of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, Paris and Rome, Córdoba and Los Angeles, the Villa Vigoni on the Lago di Como, Munich and Erfurt offered places to discuss the book as a whole or individual chapters. I hope that it will find its way back to these places and many others.

Erfurt, *Terminalibus anno Domini MMVII*

# Abbreviations

## Journals and Works by Modern Authors

<i>AE</i>	<i>Année épigraphique.</i>
<i>AJAH</i>	<i>American Journal of Ancient History.</i>
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology.</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	Temporini, Hildegard, and Haase, Wolfgang (eds.), <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt.</i> Berlin 1972–.
<i>BEFAR</i>	Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome. Paris.
<i>BHG</i>	Socii Bollandiani (eds.), <i>Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca.</i> 3 vols. Brüssels 1909 <sup>2</sup> . Halkin, F. (ed.), 1957 <sup>3</sup> .
<i>BHL</i>	Socii Bollandiani (eds.), <i>Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis.</i> 2 vols. Brussels 1898–1901. Suppl. editio altera, 1911.
<i>BMC</i>	Mattingly, Harold et al. (eds.), <i>Coins from the Roman Empire in the British Museum.</i> London 1923–.
<i>CCL</i>	<i>Corpus christianorum, series Latina.</i>
<i>CFA</i>	Scheid, John, <i>Commentarii fratrum Arvalium qui supersunt: les copies épigraphiques des protocoles annuels de la confrérie arvale (21 av.–304 ap. J.-C.).</i> Collection Roma antica 4. Rome 1998.
<i>CIJud</i>	Frey, Jean-Baptiste, <i>Corpus inscriptionum Judaicarum.</i> 2 vols. Rome 1936–52 [repr. New York 1975].
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum.</i> Berlin 1863–.
<i>CIMRM</i>	Vermaseren, Maarten J., <i>Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithriacae.</i> The Hague 1956–60.

CP	<i>Classical Philology.</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly.</i>
CR	<i>Classical Review.</i>
CSEL	<i>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum.</i>
CstipiVot	<i>Corpus delle stipi votive in Italia.</i> Rome.
CW	<i>Classical World.</i>
EJ <sup>2</sup>	Ehrenberg, Victor, and Jones, Arnold H. M., <i>Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius.</i> 2nd edn. Oxford 1955.
EPRO	Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain.
FIRA <sup>2</sup>	<i>Fragmenta iuris Romani antejustiniani.</i>
FIRBruns	Bruns, C. G., Mommsen, T., and Gradenwitz, O. (eds.), <i>Fontes Iuris Romani Antiqui.</i> 3 vols. Tübingen 1909–12.
FPL	<i>Fragmenta poetarum Latinarum.</i>
FRH	Peter, H. W. G. (ed.), <i>Historicorum Romanorum fragmenta.</i> Leipzig 1883. Repr. 1993.
GL	<i>Grammatici Latini</i> , ed. Keil.
GRF	<i>Grammaticorum Romanorum fragmenta.</i>
HABES	Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien.
HLL	Herzog, Reinhart, and Schmidt, Peter Lebrecht (eds.), <i>Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur.</i> Munich 1989–.
HSCPh	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology.</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review.</i>
ICUR NS	<i>Inscriptiones christianae urbis Romae. Nova series.</i>
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae.</i> Berlin.
IGLS	<i>Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie.</i> Paris.
IGRR	Cagnat, René, <i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes.</i> Paris 1906–27.
IGUR	Moretti, Luigi, <i>Inscriptiones Graecae urbis Romae.</i> Rome 1968–90.
ILCV	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae christianae veteres.</i>
ILLRP	Degrassi, Attilio, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae liberae rei publicae.</i> Florence 1957–63.
ILS	Dessau, Hermann (ed.), <i>Inscriptiones Latinae selectae.</i> Berlin 1892–1916.



<i>JdI</i>	<i>Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts</i> . Berlin.
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i> .
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i> .
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> .
<i>MEFRA</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Antiquité</i> . Ecole française de Rome. Paris.
<i>NGSL</i>	Lupu, Eran, <i>Greek Sacred Law: A Collection of New Documents</i> . Leiden 2005.
<i>NP</i>	Cancik, Hubert, et al. (eds.), <i>Der Neue Pauly</i> . Stuttgart 1996–2002 (English trans. Leiden 2004–).
<i>ODB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> .
<i>OGIS</i>	<i>Orientis Graeci inscriptiones selectae</i> .
<i>Orph. fragm.</i>	Kern, O. (ed.), <i>Orphicorum fragmenta</i> . Berlin 1922. Repr. 1963.
<i>P&amp;P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i> .
<i>PawB</i>	Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge. Stuttgart 1999–.
<i>PCPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i> .
<i>P. Dura</i>	Welles, C. Bradford, Fink, Robert O., and Gilliam, J. Frank, <i>The Parchments and Papyri: The Excavations at Dura-Europos. Final Report 5.1</i> . New Haven, CT, 1959.
<i>PG</i>	Migne, <i>Patrologia graeca</i> .
<i>PGM</i>	Preisendanz, K., and Henrichs, A. (eds.), <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i> . Repr. Stuttgart 1973–4.
<i>PGMtr</i>	Betz, Hans D. (ed.), <i>The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation</i> . Chicago 1986 [2nd edn. 1992].
<i>PL</i>	Migne, <i>Patrologia latina</i> .
<i>PLRE</i>	Jones, Arnold H. M. et al., <i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire I: A.D. 260–395</i> . Cambridge 1971.
<i>RDGE</i>	Sherk, Robert K., <i>Roman Documents from the Greek East</i> . Baltimore 1969.
<i>RE</i>	Wissowa, Georg (ed.), <i>Paulys Realencyklopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaften: Neue Bearbeitung</i> . Stuttgart, 1893–1980.
<i>REA</i>	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i> .
<i>RG-RW</i>	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World. Leiden.
<i>RGVV</i>	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten.

- RIB* Collingwood, Robin G., and Wright, R. P., *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain. I, 1: Inscriptions on Stone*. Oxford 1965.
- RIC* *Roman Imperial Coinage*. 10 vols. London 1923–94.
- RICIS* Bricault, Laurent, *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques*. Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 31. Paris 2005.
- RPAA* *Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*. Vatican City.
- RPC* Burnett, Andrew M., and Amandry, Michel (gen. eds.), *Roman Provincial Coinage*. London 1993–.
- RRC* Crawford, Michael H., *Roman Republican Coinage*. 2 vols. Cambridge 1974.
- SC* *Sources chrétiennes*.
- Schanz/Hosius Schanz, M., and Hosius, C., *Geschichte der römischen Literatur bis zum Gesetzgebungswerk des Kaisers Justinian*. 3 vols. Munich 1927.
- SEG* *Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum*. Leiden 1923–.
- SGG* Mastrocinque, A. (ed.), *Sylloge gemmarum Gnosticarum, I*. Rome 2003.
- SIRIS* Vidman, L. (ed.), *Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae*. RGVV 28. Berlin 1969.
- Syll.*<sup>3</sup> Dittenberger, W. (ed.), *Sylloge inscriptionum Graecarum*. 4 vols. 3rd edn. Leipzig 1915–24. Repr. Hildesheim 1984.
- TAM* *Tituli Asiae Minoris*.
- TAPhA* *Transactions of the American Philological Association*.
- ThesCRA* *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum*. 5 vols. Los Angeles 2004–6.
- WUNT* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament.
- YCS* *Yale Classical Studies*.
- ZPE* *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*.

## Works by Ancient Authors

- Amm. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Historiae*.
- App. *Civ.* Appian, *Bellum civile*.

Apul.	Apuleius.
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologia.</i>
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses.</i>
Arnob.	Arnobius, <i>Adversus nationes.</i>
Aug.	Augustinus.
<i>Civ.</i>	<i>De civitate Dei.</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones.</i>
Aur. Vict.	Aurelius Victor.
Cass. Dio	Cassius Dio.
Cat. Agr.	Cato, <i>De agricultura.</i>
CI	<i>Codex Iustiniani.</i>
Cic.	Cicero.
<i>Div.</i>	<i>De divinatione.</i>
<i>Har. resp.</i>	<i>De haruspicum responsu.</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>De legibus.</i>
<i>Leg. agr.</i>	<i>De lege agraria.</i>
<i>Nat.</i>	<i>De natura deorum.</i>
Const Imp.	Constantinus I imperator, <i>Oratio ad sanctorum coetum.</i>
<i>Or. ad sanct.</i>	
CTh	<i>Codex Theodosianus.</i>
Dion. H.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, <i>Roman Antiquities.</i>
<i>Epist.</i>	<i>Letters.</i>
Eus.	Eusebius.
HE	<i>Historia ecclesiastica.</i>
<i>Theoph. syr.</i>	<i>De theophania</i> (Syrian fragments).
<i>V. Const.</i>	<i>Vita Constantini.</i>
Fest.	Sextus Pompeius Festus, <i>De verborum significatione.</i>
Hdt.	Herodotus, <i>Historiae.</i>
HE	<i>Church History.</i>
Hist. Aug.	Historia Augusta.
Hor.	Horace.

Jos.	Flavius Josephus.
Lact. <i>DMP</i>	Lactantius, <i>De mortibus persecutorum</i> .
Lib.	Libanius.
Libanius, <i>Laud. Const.</i>	Libanius, <i>Laudatio Constantini et Constantis</i> .
Livy, <i>Per.</i>	Livy, <i>Periochae</i> .
Macr. <i>Sat.</i>	Macrobius, <i>Saturnalia</i> .
Mart.	Martial, <i>Epigrams</i> .
Min. Fel.	Minucius Felix.
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes</i> .
Ov.	Ovid.
<i>Am.</i>	<i>Amores</i> .
<i>Fast.</i>	<i>Libri fastorum</i> .
<i>Pont.</i>	<i>Epistulae ex Ponto</i> .
<i>Rem.</i>	<i>Remedia amoris</i> .
<i>Trist.</i>	<i>Tristia</i> .
Paul. <i>Fest.</i>	Paulus Diaconus, <i>Ex Festo</i> .
Plin. <i>Nat.</i>	Pliny the Elder, <i>Natural History</i> .
Plut.	Plutarch.
Sall.	Sallust.
Seneca, <i>Epist.</i>	Seneca minor, <i>Epistulae morales ad Lucilium</i> .
Sozomenus, <i>HE</i>	Sozomenus, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i> .
Suet.	Suetonius.
Tac.	Tacitus.
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annals</i> .
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Histories</i> .
Tert.	Tertullian.
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologeticum</i> .
<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Ad nationes</i> .
<i>Spect.</i>	<i>De spectaculis</i> .
Val. Max.	Valerius Maximus.

Varro

*Ling.*            *De lingua latina.*

*Rust.*           *Rerum rusticarum de agri cultura.*

Vell.            Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana.*

Virg. *Aen.*     Virgil, *Aeneid.*

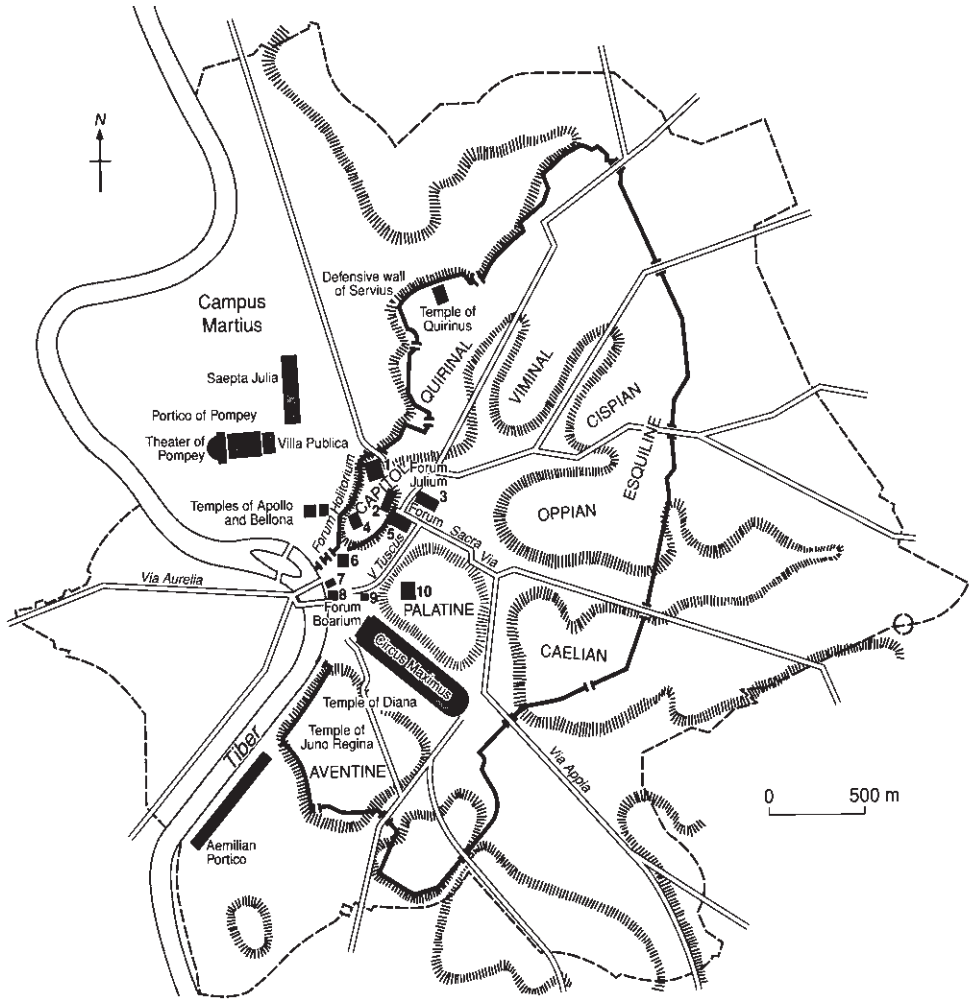
Vitr.            Vitruvius, *De architectura.*

## Dates

In dating, BC/BCE and AD/CE are used.







1 Temple of Juno Moneta 2 Tabularium 3 Basilica Aemilia 4 Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus 5 Basilica Julia 6 Temples of Fortuna and of Mater Matuta 7 Temple of Portunus 8 Temple of Hercules Olivarius 9 Ara maxima 10 Temple of Cybele or Magna Mater

The center of Rome, late republic.



## CHAPTER ONE

# Roman Religion – Religions of Rome

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*Jörg Rüpke*

### Roman Religion

Why dedicate a book of over five hundred pages to a religion as stone-dead as that of one of thousands of ancient Mediterranean cities?

For the choice of the city, it is easy to find arguments. Rome was one of the most successful cities ever to build an empire, which comprised millions of square kilometers and lasted close to a millennium. It was and is a cultural and religious center, even if the culture was frequently Greek and the religion is known nowadays as Catholic Christianity. Finally, Rome remains a tourist center, a symbol of a past that has succeeded in keeping its presence in school books and university courses. And yet, what has this all to do with Roman religion?

“Roman religion” as used here is an abbreviation for “religious signs, practices, and traditions in the city of Rome.” This is a local perspective. Stress is not given to internal differences between different groups or traditions. Instead, the accent is placed on their common history (part I) and range of media (part II), shared or transferred practices (part III), and the social and institutional context (part IV).

Many religious signs were exchangeable. The fourth-century author of a series of biographies on earlier emperors (the so-called *Historia Augusta*) had no difficulties in imagining an emperor from the early third century venerating Christ among the numerous statuettes in his private rooms. Gestures, sacrificial terminology, the structure of hymns were equally shared among widely varying groups. Nevertheless some stable systems, sets of beliefs, and practices existed and were cared for by specialists or transported and replicated by traveling individuals. They were present in Rome, effective and affective, but a set of beliefs, a group, or even an organization had a history of its own beyond Rome, too. Here, the local perspective is taken to ask how they were modified in Rome or the Roman period (part V).

“Rome,” the name of the city, finally, is merely a cipher for the Roman empire. In the long process of its expansion and working, the religious practices of the center were exported, in particular the cult of the living or dead emperors and the cult of the dominating institutions, the “goddess Rome” (*dea Roma*) or the “Genius of the senate” (*Genius senatus*). This was part of the representation of Roman power to its subjects (see chapter 22), but at the same time it offered space for the activities of non-Roman local elites to get in touch with the provincial and central authorities and to distinguish themselves from their fellow-citizens (chapter 23). As communication between center and periphery – and other attractive centers in a periphery that was marginal in administrative terms only – these activities touched upon the religious practices in the city of Rome, too. “Roman religion” cannot be isolated from the empire, at least for the imperial period, if we take for granted the character of earlier Rome as a Hellenistic city on the margins of Hellenic culture (Hubert Cancik, p.c.). Again, that perspective holds true in both directions. The history of Mediterranean religions in the epoch of the Roman empire must acknowledge the fact that Persian Mithraism, Hellenistic Judaism, and Palestinian Christianity were Roman religions, too. It is the final section of this book that explicitly takes this wider geographical stance (part VI).

## An Ancient Religion

Roman religion did not grow out of nothing. Italy, above all in its coastal regions, was already party to a long-distance cultural exchange in the Mediterranean basin in a prehistoric phase. The groups that were to grow into the urbanization of the Roman hills did not need to invent religion. Religious signs and practices were present from the ancient Near East, via Phoenician culture, at least indirectly via Carthage, and via Greece and the Etruscans. Speaking an Indo-European language, these groups shared a religious “knowledge” in the form of names or rudimentary institutions in the area of cultural practices that we call religion. Even if historians of Roman religion do not any longer privilege the distant common heritage of Celts, Romans, Greeks, Persians, and Indians over the intensive cultural exchange of historical times and the immense diffusion of practices from the non-Indo-European Near Eastern cultures, some constellations might find an explanation in those distant areas by comparing cultures more isolated from each other in later times.

Cultural exchange – as said above – was not restricted to the founding phases. It is hard to overestimate the diffusion of religious practices within and from the Latins, Umbrians, and Etruscans. In detail, the range is not clear at all. There are definite similarities, a shared culture (or, to use a Greek term, *koine*), in votive and burial practices. To say the same for the architecture of sanctuaries is neither contradicted by the evidence nor massively supported. We can suppose that many characteristics of the gods, the fascination of statuary and anthropomorphic representation, were shared. The very few longer non-Latin texts demonstrate surprising similarities in calendrical practices (the Etruscan *tegula Capuana* from the fifth century BC) or in priestly organization and ritual detail (the Umbrian *tabulae Iguvinae* from the second

to first centuries BC). Unfortunately, non-Latin Italian languages ceased to be spoken (and especially to be written) in the first century BC and the first century AD as a consequence of Roman domination. Latin antiquarian writers adduce many instances of the borrowing of middle Italian practices and symbols in order to explain contemporary Roman institutions.

The continuous presence of self-conscious Greek writers is not the only reason to pay an ever-growing attention to Greek influences and their (frequently deeply modifying) reception. From the beginning of the great “colonization” – that is, especially from the eighth century – onward, Greeks were present in Italy and served as translators of the achievement of the earlier civilizations of Egypt and the “fertile crescent” of Anatolia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine. Anthropomorphic images, temple building, and the alphabet came by this route. Influences were extensive and continuous. Despite the early presence of the alphabet it was not before the third century BC that Rome started to adopt Greek techniques of literary production on a larger scale. Many of the rivalries of Italian townships of the second century BC – frequently resulting in large-scale temple building – were fought out in terms of Greek cultural products. Competing with Roman elites meant being more Greek. Much of what provincials thought to be Roman and adopted in the process of Romanization during the following centuries stemmed from Greece.

The “Greece,” however, of this intensive phase of cultural exchange – intensified by Roman warfare and plunder in Greek territories – was Hellenistic Greece, a cultural space that faced large territories. In the aftermath of the expansion by Alexander the Great (d. 323 BC) and on the basis of the earlier establishment of Greek ports and trading centers on Mediterranean coastlands, this Hellenistic culture had developed techniques of delocalization, of universalizing ancient Greek traditions. It offered grids of history, a mythic geography that could integrate places and societies like Rome and the Romans. Greeks thought Romans to be Trojans long before Romans discovered the usefulness of being Trojans in talking with Greeks.

## **Religion for a City and an Empire**

Roman religion was the religion of one of hundreds of Mediterranean cities. It was a Hellenized city and religion. Yet it found many a special solution, for reasons of its geographic location, local traditions, immigrants. The most important contingent factor, certainly, was its military success. At least from the fourth century BC onward, Rome organized an aggressive and efficient military apparatus, managing hegemony and expansion first within Italy, then within the Mediterranean basin, finally as far as Scotland, the northern German lowland plain, the southern Carpathians, the coast of the Black Sea, Armenia, Arabia, and the northern edge of the Sahara. Preliminary to that was the orchestrated growth of the Roman nobility through the immigration of Italian elites.

These processes had consequences for the shape of religion at Rome. There is a strong emphasis on control, of both centralization and presence (see chapters 21 and 16). Public rituals were led by magistrates, priestly positions filled by members

of the political elite, mass participation directed into temporary and then more and more permanent architectural structures in the center of Rome. At the same time, religion remained independent in a peculiar sense: gods could be asked to move, but not ordered to do so; priesthoods could be presented with candidates, but co-opted them in their own right; the transfer of public property to imported gods was the subject of political decisions, but their rituals were not. Being not directly subjected to political decision, religion offered a powerful source for legitimizing political decisions; it remained what Georg Simmel called a “third authority.”

The dominant Roman model for religion was not expansionist; it was rather absorbing. Numerous “gods” – that class of signs the centrality of which within a set of social interaction makes us term these practices a “religion” – in the forms of statues, statuettes, images, or mere names, were imported, and – what is more – stories about these gods, practices to venerate them, molds to multiply them, knowledge about how to build temples for them, even religious specialists, priests, accompanied them or were invented on the spot.

For the ancient metropolis, a city growing to the size of several hundred thousand inhabitants, maybe close to a million by the time of the early empire, the usual models to describe the religions of Mediterranean cities do not hold. Surely, publicly financed cult – *sacra publica*, to use the ancient technical term – held an important share. The large buildings of public temples did provide an important religious infrastructure. So did the publicly financed rituals. Yet the celebrations of many popular rituals were decentralized. This holds true for the merrymaking of the Saturnalia (not a public holiday in the technical sense!) lasting for several days, and for the cult of the dead ancestors and the visits to the tombs during the Parentalia. We do not know how many people fetched purgatory materials from the Vestal Virgins for the decentralized rituals of the Parilia, the opening of the “pastoral year.” Many “public” rituals might have remained a matter of priestly performance without a large following. The life-cycle rituals – naming, leaving childhood, marrying, funeral – might utilize public institutions, but were neither spatially nor temporally coordinated. In times of personal crises, people often addressed deities and visited places of cult that were not prominent or were even outside of public ritual. Indeed, the growing importance of the centralized rituals of the public games – to be witnessed especially from the second half of the third century BC onward – were meant to compensate for these deficits of “public religion.” Hence the “civic cults” (or “polis religion”) does not form a sociologically useful category.

Neither does “pantheon.” The idea of “pantheon” as a concept for the history of religion derives from the analysis of ancient Near Eastern and especially Greek mythological text. These seem to imply the existence of a limited group of deities (around ten to twenty) that seem to be instituted in order to cover the most important needs of the polity. Internal coherence is produced by genealogical bonds or institutions by analogy to political ones: a council of the gods, for instance. For Greece, the omnipresence of the Homeric poems gives plausibility to the idea that local deities were thought to act within or supplement the circle of the around twelve most important gods, even if these were not present in the form of statues or individually owned

temples. For Rome and Italy this plausibility is lacking. The aforementioned centralizing rituals might further the idea of such a “pantheon” – technically, by the way, a term to denote the exceptional case of a temple owned by “all the gods.” In contrast to the frequently used term *di immortales*, designating the gods as an unstructured ensemble, the circus processions would present a definite number of gods. Yet we do not know whether the order of the gods was fixed or subject to situational and individual decisions. Even if tradition – that is, precedent – had its share, there was no codified body of mythological tales that would constitute an order of gods or even an inner circle of divine figures. The multitude of gods venerated in the city of Rome was always increased by individual decisions – those of generous members of the nobility and victorious generals investing parts of their booty, as well as those of immigrants with a foreign ethnic background. Likewise the decrease in number was due to individual neglect of cultic performances or lack of interest in maintaining and repairing sanctuaries.

These findings corroborate the earlier characterization of Roman religion. Of course, Roman religion was an “embedded religion” (see the introduction to chapter 25 for further methodological considerations). That is, religious practices formed part of the cultural practices of nearly every realm of daily life. Banqueting usually followed sacrifice (chapter 19) and building a house or starting a journey implied small sacrifices and prayers, as did meetings of the senate, parades, or warfare. Religion, hence, was not confined to temples and festivals; it permeated, to repeat this point, all areas of society. Yet politics – to concentrate on the most interesting realm in this respect – was not identical with religion. Many stories, the huge number of non-public rituals, individual “superstitions” (doing or believing more than is necessary), the complicated procedures for installing priests: all this demonstrates the independence of the gods and the possibility of distinguishing between religion and politics, between *res sacrae* and *res publicae*, in everyday life. It was religion thus conceptualized, thus set apart, that could be used as a seemingly independent source of legitimization for political action. This set the guidelines for liberty and control and explains the harsh reaction to every move that seemed to create an alternative, a counter-public, by means of religion. To define these borders of religion – one might say, from without – the technique of law was employed, developing a body of regulations that finally appeared as an important part of the law collections of late antiquity (see chapter 29) and were of the utmost importance for the history of religion in Europe.

If the Romans did not export their religion, they certainly exported their concept of religion. Of course, the outcome varied from area to area. The impact of particular Roman religious signs (names and images of deities, for example) and practices (rituals, festivals) was small in the Hellenized territories of the Hellenistic east, even if Mishnaic Judaism can hardly be imagined without the impact of Roman law and administration. Yet for parts of northern Africa and the more northern European provinces of the empire, the diffusion of stone temples and plastic images, of writing and permanently individualized gifts to the gods, the permanent visibility of votives, and the self-representation of the elite by means of religious dedications – these traits (by no means exclusively Roman practices) fundamentally changed

the shape of religion and its place in provincial societies, shaping Christianity no less than paganism. Roman religion became an inseparable strain of the history of religion in the Mediterranean world and what much later came to be termed “Europe.”

## Religion

In terms of the history of religion the afore-mentioned process is no “history of reception” or *Wirkungsgeschichte*. For reasons of disciplinary traditions and political history, the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century offer an easy borderline for this book. Publicly financed polytheistic religion was ended, and non-Christians (with Jews as a special, frequently not privileged exception) were discriminated against for the filling of public offices. Yet cultic practices continued for centuries, Christians being perhaps not willing or able to stop them or to destroy the architectural infrastructure on which they were the performers. As transmitted by texts, ancient – that is, Greek and Roman – religion, together with the polytheistic practices in Judah and Israel described in much less detail in the Bible, offered the typological alternative to Judaism and Christianity and formed an important pattern on which to describe and classify the practices of “heathens” in the colonial expansion of Europeans. Thus, “religion” could be coined as a general term encompassing Christianity and its illegitimate equivalents: Asian, American, African, and Australian idolatries.

The latter process, to be dated to early modern times, implied that our perspective on religion is informed by Christianity, a religion that developed from antiquity onward, and furthered by centuries of theological faculties within European and (in this perspective) lately non-European universities, a complex and well-ordered theory to reflect on its beliefs and practices: theology. Yet the ancient history of religion is no field to be analyzed within the framework of the standard topics, the *loci communes*, of Christian dogma, even if many of them found their counterpart (and origin) in ancient philosophy. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the independent discipline of “comparative religion” or “history of religion” tried to supplant this scheme with series of topics like gods, beliefs, temples, rituals, priests. These are helpful as appealing to common sense, but ahistorical if applied as a system.

What is described as “Roman religion” in this book is of an astonishing variety. Various are the phenomena, from Mithraic caves to hilltop Capitolia, from the offering of paid services by divinatory specialists (*harioli*) to colleges of freedmen whose members met on a monthly basis. Various are the social functions, from the *pater familias* who led the sacrifice to his own *Genius*, and thus underlined his position as head of the family, to neo-Pythagorean convictions that informed the preparation of one’s own burial and offered the prospect of a post-mortal existence.

For the purpose of a historical analysis, “religion” is conceptualized by the authors of this book as human actions and communication. These were performed on the

presupposition that gods existed who were part of one's own social or political group, existed in the same space and time. They were to be treated by analogy to human partners and superiors. That offered space for wishful projections and experiments. What was helpful as regards human superiors should be useful in dealing with the gods, too. What was assumed to function among the gods should offer a model for human behavior, for consuls and kings.

Without doubt, "gods" were important symbols, either in direct representation or by their assumed existence behind the attempts to communicate with them ritually. Methodologically, however, it is important neither to engage in a debate about their existence nor to expect to find them or their traces empirically. Thus, the lack of a chapter on "gods" is intentional. Analyzed as "signs," the "gods" have neither an essence nor biographies. To represent the immortal god in social space, one has to produce new or use established signs, and these signs vary according to the media used. Narratives are an important medium, for example in historiography or epic (chapter 10); images could appear on coins (chapter 11), on reliefs (chapter 12), or independently as sculptured statues (chapter 15); and conventions of representation, of the use, and of the audience vary from genre to genre. Rituals (part III), too, are an important – perhaps the most important – means of not only communicating with the gods but demonstratively, publicly performing this communication, of defining the respective god by the strategy and content of the communicative approach (animal or vegetable sacrifice, female or male name, choice of time and place). Rituals stage-manage the gods' existence and one's own piety at the same time. Thus, it seems important to concentrate on the human actors in the center of the book (part IV): on ordinary individuals, on members of the changing elites, on those, finally, who made a living out of religion.

If the renunciation of a chapter on the gods prompts an explanation, the lack of a systematic treatment of "cults" should prompt another. "Cult" as applied to ancient religions is a very convenient term, as it takes ancient polytheism to pieces that are gratifyingly similar to the large religious traditions like Christianity: defined by one god, be it Venus or Mithras, supposed to be connected to a specifiable group of persons, be it loosely or densely organized, characterized by common interests or social traits, be it women or members of the military, Syrians or freedmen. Without doubt, voluntary religious associations existed, but they were not necessarily exclusive, they did not necessarily concentrate on one god, and certainly, the sum of their activities did not comprise all or even most of ancient religious practices. According to socio-historical research, there was hardly a significant difference between the followers of the god Silvanus, a forest-god by name, sometimes venerated by colleges, and the god Mithras of Persian origin, whose exotic features were thematized in the cult of small and strictly hierarchical groups. Neither the sum of individual choices, ever changing or keeping within the limits of familiar or professional traditions, nor the identity of the name of a god from one place to another justifies speaking of "a cult" in the aforementioned sense. Thus, part V deliberately illustrates the wide spectrum of religious groups or options and does not attempt to map ancient polytheism as the sum of different "cults."



## FURTHER READING

Any further reading should start with ancient *sources*, many of the literary texts being accessible in the bilingual editions of the Loeb library. There are no “scientific” accounts of Roman religion from antiquity, but some extensive descriptions exist in different literary genera. The most fully preserved account of Roman ritual is given in Ovid’s commentary on the Roman calendar (*Libri fastorum* VI), written in late Augustan times and trying to integrate traditional Roman worship, the cult of the emperors, and the natural cycle of time. His near contemporary, the Greek Dionysius of Halicarnassus, dedicated a long section in his *Roman Antiquities* to religion (2.63–74, trans. E. Cary). Varro’s *Antiquities of Divine Things* survived in fragments only (a shorter self-quotation might be found in his *On Latin Language* 6); the polemical usage of it by the Christians Tertullian, in his *To the Nations*, and Augustine, in his *City of God* (books 4–7), give the best idea of its contents and later reception. From the first half of the third century, Minucius Felix’s dialogue *Octavius* offers another polemical and informed view on early (rather than middle) imperial Roman religion (trans. and comm. G. W. Clarke, New York 1974). The most important documentary texts are the acts of the Secular Games (new ed. and comm. for the Augustan games: Schnegg-Köhler 2002) and the protocols of the Arval Brethren (ed., comm., and French trans. Scheid 1998b).

Religion is central for a number of institutions discussed by the Greek politician and philosopher Plutarch in his *Roman Questions*; his account of *Isis and Osiris* (trans. and comm. J. Gwyn Griffiths, Cambridge 1970) is not only an ethnographic piece, but a contemporary perspective on a cult flourishing widely in the Greek and Roman world. Tacitus’ *Germania* shows how a Roman viewed foreign cultures (and religion) at the turn of the first to the second century AD (trans. and comm. J. B. Rives, Oxford 1999).

For the religion of the imperial period the most interesting texts stem from genera of fictional literature: book 11 of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* on the cult of Isis (comm. J. Gwyn Griffiths, Leiden 1975), Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Lucian’s *Alexandros* and *The Syrian Goddess*, and Aristeides’ autobiographical *Hieroi Logoi*. One should not forget the Christian New Testament, in particular the Acts of the Apostles, and the early acts of martyrs, which narrate the confrontations of Christians with the Roman administration in provincial centers. Finally, the emperor Julian’s *Letters* attest the project of an anti-Christian revival and Neoplatonic modification of traditional cults.

Cicero, prolific author, rhetor, politician, and philosopher from the late republic, deals frequently with religion, yet his *On the Nature of the Gods* (comm. Andrew R. Dyck, Cambridge 2003–) is more revealing for the history of Hellenistic philosophy than for Roman practice. The same does not hold for the subsequent *On Divination* (comm. A. E. Pease, Cambridge, MA, 1920–3, repr. Darmstadt 1963). The speeches *On His House* and *On the Reply of the Haruspices* do give interesting insights into the fabric of religious institutions. Other important sources are less easily accessible. Livy’s Roman history remains basic to the history of republican religion. Religious information, however, is widely scattered. The lexicon of Festus, abridging the Augustan Verrius Flaccus’ alphabetic account of his linguistic and religio-historic research, has not been translated so far. Beard et al. (1998) offer good commentary on a selection of sources for the late republican and early imperial period; Valantasis (2000) does so for late antiquity.

Literary as well as archaeological sources are extensively documented in the *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum* (*ThesCRA*) (Los Angeles, 2004–6). For reliefs Ryberg (1955) remains essential, frequently supplemented by Fless (1995). Schraudolph (1993) and Dräger (1994) publish numerous Roman altars; sarcophagi are shown and interpreted by G. Koch