

Johnston starts her fascinating study with a short history of the evolution of the beliefs in the dead. In Homeric poems the dead were a collective in a state of eternal boredom, only mythic figures had special afterlives. In Late Archaic and Classical periods the dead needed more than proper funeral rites, when the dying and the Underworld became more complicated with *post mortem* rewards or punishments. In the literature there is clearly a new idea of the active dead who could disturb the living either by their own volition or because they were compelled by the living. Johnston shows that interaction with the dead and the experts specializing in it, *goetes*, were not anathema to mainstream Greek culture and religion. Proper rituals for the dead were also a civic concern, as ghosts could endanger the community.

The restless dead had three main categories: the unburied (*ataphoi*), the untimely or prematurely dead (*aoroi*), and those who had died violently (*biaiothanatoi*). Special attention is given to ghosts like Gello and other ghosts of the prematurely dead chasing young maidens. Johnston interestingly links the way a society marginalizes that which is undesirable by associating it with the demonic world with its normative function and its meaning to the integrity of the emerging *polis*.

The last part of the book deals with divinities and death. The restless dead led to the emergence of new sort of goddess and new rituals. Johnston gives an exciting interpretation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, where the Goddess Athena is seen acting like a *goes*. Sarah Iles Johnston has written an enjoyable book with thorough scholarship, gives excellent footnotes and a bibliography. Evidently ghosts are essential to Ancient Greek culture!

*Julia Burman*

MARY BEARD – JOHN NORTH – SIMON PRICE: *Religions of Rome*. Vol. I: *A History*. Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1998. 454 p. ISBN 0–521–31682–0. GBP 15.95 (P/b). – Vol. II: *A Sourcebook*. Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1998. 416 p. ISBN 0–521–45646–0. GBP 15.95 (P/b).

*Religions of Rome* I–II is a product of the collaboration between three outstanding scholars of ancient religions, Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price. The writers promise to offer a radical new survey on the religions of Rome, written in a dialogue with ancient writers. Since this dialogue is crucial to their work, the documents discussed in the *History* are provided in English in Volume II, the *Source Book*.

*Religions of Rome* is an up-dated synthesis of more than a thousand years of Roman religious life, particularly in the city of Rome. Because religion was central in Roman life and in the fabric of power, politics and warfare, as the writers rightly stress throughout their work, it is studied in its full cultural context. In their massive synthesis Beard, North and Price summarize the recent scholarship on the religions of Rome. *Religions of Rome* of course cannot treat every subject very thoroughly but it is an important mine of information, and the *Source Book* is a fantastic thesaurus of ancient religions. There are vast bibliographies in both books even though they are dominated by Anglo-Saxon scholarship.

Beard, North and Price do not provide any definition of 'religion' in their work because modern categories for thinking about religion are coloured by Christian ideas and therefore would not be applicable for understanding the religion in ancient Rome. Previous historians of Roman religion have often been looking for elements that they have postulated as essential to all religions and the Roman religion seems to lack, e.g. personal contact with the divine. Instead, the writers have accepted that the religious experiences in Rome were different from modern ones and so they have come up with some kind of compromise between their own preconceptions, readings of cross-cultural theory and the Romans' own representations of religious life.

The first chapter, *Early Rome* surveys how the Romans explained their own religion to themselves and interpreted the origins of their rituals and festivals. Their myths and stories are not adequate in modern standards of historical 'accuracy' but they offered the Romans a way of understanding, justifying and re-interpreting their own religious system. The writers criticize views that have labelled the changes in Roman religion as a deterioration. According to these views Roman religion was polluted by foreign influences from outside and the urban population of Rome was alienated from a true and pure religious tradition. However, as the writers demonstrate, recent scholarship, particularly in archaeology, has shown the untenability of the idea of a genuine and uncontaminated Roman religion. Instead, Roman religion was a multicultural amalgam of different traditions. This is why the writers have not even tried to reconstruct a real Roman religion which is a wise solution since there is no such thing as Real Pure Native Genuine Original in human history.

One of the most important issues discussed in *Religions of Rome* is the relationship between religion and the changing politics of Rome during the Republic and particularly the question of religious neglect during the late Republic. For modern historians the Republican religion in Rome has often been in decline and manipulated for 'purely political' ends. The writers want to problematize this classic case of neglect since neglect is always a matter of interpretation. The narrative of the Republican religion in decline originates from ancient writers themselves and from the Augustan propaganda. The imperial propaganda that represented Augustus' restructuring of the Republican religious system as restoration and revival of old traditions and rituals has deceived even modern scholars. *Religions of Rome* offers plenty of material (e.g. archaeological evidence) to show that the religious environment of the late Republic was not in a state of complete neglect. Furthermore, the writers criticize the modern idea of separating religion and politics because in Roman public life religion and politics were closely tied together. Thus, rivalry for power and control in Rome was always associated with rivalry for religious expertise and privileged access to the gods.

In chapter five Beard, North and Price discuss the construction and transgression of religious boundaries. As they remark, Roman paganism was not completely tolerant (toleration being a modern concept) but it rather defined the limits of the acceptable. As a matter of fact, *Religions of Rome* as a whole is a narrative of how the Roman élite defined proper and improper religious activity, *religio* and *superstitio*, and how these definitions changed over centuries. Christian cults transgressed the Roman definition of *religio* because Christians did not perform sacrifice to the gods and thus did not participate in the Roman sacrificial system: it was sacrifice, not any particular god or emperor, that was at stake.

The main emphasis of *Religions of Rome* is on traditional Roman religion but other religions in the Roman Empire are also surveyed. It is refreshing that various religions (cults of Magna Mater, Isis, Mithras, Judaism, Christianity etc.) are approached, not cult by cult or in chronological order, but thematically, it is for example discussed how visible they were in Roman urban life, how they were treated in literature, how they appealed to people and what they offered to their adherents. It is also praiseworthy that Christian cults are not paid any particular attention to, but are treated here as one among other religions.

The last chapter in the *Religions of Rome* discusses the most important aspects of the Constantinian revolution and the triumph of Christianity quite briefly. The eternal questions concerning Constantine's conversion to Christianity and his relationship with the Christian church are left open. Constantine's conversion changed the religious situation in Rome: the concepts of *religio* and *superstitio*, the acceptable and the unacceptable, were redefined, though – the writers claim – Constantine and his successors may have deliberately kept the term *superstitio* ambiguous in the legislation. Nevertheless, from now on 'being Roman' was understood as 'being Christian'. The Constantinian revolution affected the Christian religion and Christian self-consciousness as well. In the fourth and fifth centuries Christians had to define what was to count as Christian, that is: for example were the traditional rituals and festivals of Rome pagan or could a Christian attend them and were Roman literature and Greek philosophy to be regarded as pagan or could a Christian enjoy them? The writers have decided to use the term 'pagan' in spite of its derogatory connotations. I regard this as a good solution since there is no neutral term; every word will always be loaded with various connotations. They also point out that it is possible to speak of 'paganism' as a system rather than as an amalgam of different cults virtually only from the fourth century on, in opposition to Christianity and under the influence of Christianity. In the last pages of *Religions of Rome*, Beard, North and Price assert that the traditional cults of Rome were far from being mere fossilized survivals in the fourth century and continued into the fifth century. As the Lupercalia case at the end of the fifth century shows, 'pagan' festivals continued to be celebrated and the boundary between paganism and Christianity was not very clear for the inhabitants of Christianized Rome.

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LILIANA MERCANDO – GIANFRANCO PACI: *Stele romane in Piemonte*, con una Appendice di *Giovanni Colonna*. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei: Monumenti Antichi. Serie Miscelanea, vol. V (LVII della Serie generale). Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, Roma 1998. ISSN 0391-8084. 344 p., CL tavole. ITL 600.000.

In questo volume monumentale vengono raccolte tutte le 229 stele di età romana ritrovate nell'odierno Piemonte (che comprende parte di due regioni augustee, la *Liguria* e la *Transpadana*). Tale suddivisione geografica è dovuta al fatto che l'opera di tutela della Soprintendenza Archeologica si svolge nell'area che corrisponde al territorio della regione attuale (cfr. p. 18, fig. 1). Come già rilevato da altri, l'arte monumentale – e quella scultorea in generale – risulta relativamente povera in Piemonte, se si escudono i rilievi sulle stele e sulle are funerarie, cioè, appunto, il materiale del presente catalogo.