

Review

EMMA-JAYNE GRAHAM, *REASSEMBLING RELIGION IN ROMAN ITALY*. London and New York: Routledge, 2021. Pp. 251, illus., maps, plans. ISBN 9781138282711. £120.00.

The study of Roman religion often focuses on elite literary texts to interpret how ritual activities were understood. Emma-Jayne Graham introduces a ‘new materialist’ approach to the archaeology of Roman religion by aiming to remove hierarchies between humans and ‘things’. Case studies are used to reveal relationships between different assemblages that generate what the author calls ‘religious knowledge’ allowing G. to move beyond textual evidence. The overarching theme is a refocusing on human experience and the formation of this knowledge. This aids in understanding religious practices by introducing new ways in which material evidence can be understood, such as considering the material itself rather than the object it creates.

Chs 1 and 2 introduce the topic, set parameters and flesh out G.’s approach. Tyrrhenian Italy, particularly Latium, is analysed, allowing a targeted discussion. The chronological parameters are broad, from the fifth century B.C. to the fifth century A.D., permitting the identification of changes over time and hinting at the broader utility of G.’s approaches. G. also convincingly outlines why her approach justifies a new book on Roman religion, suggesting that the subject is ready for a new interpretive framework.

Chs 3–6 focus on places, objects, votives and divinity. Terrace sanctuaries from the late Republic such as Fortuna Primigenia at Praeneste and Juno Gabina at Gabii are discussed. G. outlines how individuals may have moved through these places leading to the creation of ‘lived experiences’ that result from the unique characteristics of each site. G. highlights the differences between her earlier book and previous studies that catalogue sites without considering these experiences (e.g. F. Coarelli, *I santuari del Lazio in età repubblicana* (1987)), arguing that her approach allows deeper interpretations to be generated from the same evidence. The new materialist approach is also applied to objects such as incense boxes, ritual hats and votive offerings. G. considers the relationship between objects and users, concluding that the physical characteristics of objects impacted how individuals understood the religious landscape. These objects were not simply symbolic but helped create ‘religious knowledge’.

G. also argues that less anthropocentric approaches should be taken when discussing divinity. Instead of identifying which god was worshipped at a site, we should focus on how and why divine qualities mattered. G. discusses a variety of examples such as a trio of statues including Demeter from Ariccia and, importantly, the sacred water at Pantanacci. This allows G. to apply her non-anthropocentric approach, providing a new way of understanding the gods, considering what they mean rather than just their identity. Ch. 7 discusses magic, summarising the themes of the book. The fountain of Anna Perenna is utilised as a case study, analysing figurines, curse tablets and the location. G. argues that magical and religious agency were produced in the same way, indicating a close relationship. This provides insight into how new materialist approaches may help answer questions that have long interested scholars. This chapter also indicates how the themes discussed earlier combine to build a fuller picture of how religion can be interpreted.

G.’s book is therefore an important work in the current trend of scholarship that shifts focus away from privileging literary evidence. G. highlights Jessica Hughes, whose focus on the complexity of the functions of anatomical votives forms an important aspect of the argument (*Votive Body Parts in Greek and Roman Religion*, 2017). Scholars including Nicole Boivin (*Grasping the Elusive and Unknowable: Material Culture in Ritual Practice*, 2009) are also important as they argue that material objects were more than symbolic. G.’s innovation is to apply these ideas to Roman religion specifically. The Lived Ancient Religion project is also relevant as G. utilises the concept of ‘lived religion’ throughout the work. She states that, despite taking a different, non-anthropocentric approach, she shares a similar goal. G.’s approach also leads to a focus on the individual, another current trend in modern scholarship; for example Jörg Rüpke (ed.), *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (2013).

Overall, G.’s approach is highly innovative as the reader is guided through a variety of case studies that illustrate how archaeological materials can be interpreted to understand how individuals experienced religion. However, the volume of technical terminology can sometimes be overwhelming. Sentences such as ‘Humans and more-than-human material things of all types are

equally thingly in nature' (40) may be confusing to readers with no prior knowledge of the approaches presented. A variety of technical terms employed such as 'thingliness' are defined in earlier sections, but these explanations could benefit from more direct language to convey the author's meaning more simply. Nevertheless, G.'s book provides insight into how a variety of materials can be reinterpreted to generate new ideas about Roman religion. G. is able to build an overall convincing argument that may benefit the understanding of scholars of all levels. New materialist approaches could be applied to other areas of study. For instance, similar ideas could be applied to Etruscan bronze mirrors where G.'s understanding of divinity may provide insight into how the handlers of these objects experienced the gods that they depict. This is one simple example, but similar methods could be applied to most rituals or places the reader can think of. This makes the book a strong entry into the scholarship of ancient religion.

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