

CHAPTER 1

Archaeology of Religion, Material Religion, and the Ancient World

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Problems of an Archaeology of Religion

What was it like to enter a sacred cave? Ruth Whitehouse undertook it to reconstruct such an experience for the Grotta di Porto Badisco, a cave in the Southeast of Italy intensively painted in the fifth or fourth millennium BCE:

Thresholds are of great importance in rites of passage and the caves offer a series of natural thresholds from one zone to another, with the most significant being the cave entrance, where one turns one's back on light and the familiar world and climbs into a dark unknown reality. As individuals bend, twist and wriggle along the dark corridors of the cave, listening to the strange cave sounds, feeling the rock pressing into them, the sharp wetness of the stalactites, the yielding softness of areas of silt deposits, the sudden release of constriction as they move into a chamber large enough to stand up in, they learn through their bodies of the importance of the experience they are undergoing and its transformative nature. (Whitehouse 2001: 166)

Whitehouse is quite aware of the difficulties of reconstructing emotional experiences from archaeological material, pointing not only to cultural mediation, but also to the “impact of individual personality and biography on bodily behaviour” (161). Similar insights can lead to very different conclusions, as a second and everyday example may teach us:

The three ways our bodies determine what shows up in our world—innate structures, general acquired skills, and specific cultural skills—can be contrasted by considering how each contributes to the fact that to Western human beings a chair affords sitting. Because we have the sort of bodies that get tired and that bend backwards the knees, chairs can show up for us—but not for flamingos, say—as affording sitting. But chairs can only solicit sitting once

we have learned to sit. Finally, only because we Western Europeans are brought up in a culture where one sits on chairs, do chairs solicit us to sit on them. Chairs would not solicit sitting in traditional Japan. (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1999: 104)

A certain reluctance to delve into such problems and perhaps a feeling that religion loses in importance anyhow has for most of the twentieth century kept attempts at an archaeology of religion at bay. But things have shifted significantly. Today, archaeology data pertaining to religion and ritual actions are taken as seriously in Religious Studies and History of Religion as religion is taken seriously within Archaeology. This is as much driven by professional research as by public demand. Caves, or more generally, sites taken as religious sites by local users and likewise by foreign visitors feature high on the list of touristic top locations. Religion fascinates in this rapidly-changing world where distant regions of the world are much more closely connected, but where cultures, traditions and religions still are very different and practiced differently from region to region and even within regions. Chairs, on the other hand, and objects of routine or occasional religious usage demand explanation and justification in museums and expositions or in religious display. Here, archaeological and religious historical research meet, even if they have two very different lines of ancestry in scholarship.

The functional approach within processual archaeology left many questions relating to religion unanswered. Too often, “religion” served as a final interpretive resort once instrumental, and thus rational, explanations had not led to any result. When one was not able to explain an archaeological phenomenon, it was often labelled dissatisfactorily “cultic”. Here, post-processual archaeology, in particular since the 1990s, has opened up new paths. Archaeological data might be used in order to reconstruct rituals and inquire about ideology or belief systems underlying social action. Descriptive accounts of “Christian” or “Islamic Archaeology” or “Archaeology of the Holy Land” have been supplemented and supplanted by “Archaeology of Belief”, “Archaeology of Cult” or “Archaeology of Religion”. These archaeologies are still characterized by a big divide (Petts 2011: 40–50). They flourish for illiterate societies, in particular prehistoric cultures. In contrast, “world religions” are seen as being characterized by textual traditions. Addressing material culture, archaeology is not seen as getting to the heart of such religions, but rather as an expression of already-existing and well-defined ideologies. Archaeology is often reduced to and taken for face value. Functional and spatial analysis, analysis of cult images to explain perceptions of deities as well as interpretation of votives as payment for participation in religious rituals have dominated the field of archaeology and historical disciplines using archaeological sources to illustrate points. Thus, the archaeology of belief is reduced to verify dogmatics, important notions of the belief system, in everyday religious cultures, even if they do not any longer restrict themselves to “high culture” like “Christian art” (e.g., Insoll 2001; Steadman 2009). Reconstructing collective systems of symbols (to follow the definition of anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973: 90)) is seen as a substitute for a textual theology.

The primacy of belief against practice and institution has a complicated history in Western scholarship, crossing confessional polemics of Protestant and Catholics with colonial issues of hierarchizing Western and non-Western religion (if present at all in the discourse) (briefly, Orsi 2011). Without denying the importance of discourse and systematic reflection on and in texts, it is not only the material dimension of religious



Figure 1.1 Relief from the Nationalmuseum, Copenhagen, depicting sacrificial scene. The gods are shown larger than the human beings, who are sacrificing. Photo by Rubina Raja.

practice *and* belief which has been underrated. It is above all the local, situational, and individual dimension of religion which has been neglected (balanced: Culley 2008: 67–70). The primacy given to the systematic and the dogmatic is a normative decision. It is a decision to describe religion, as it should be rather than as it is.

There are two ways out of the problem. One group of researchers opts for a scientific approach. They base their claims on cognitive studies and attempt to reach firm ground by starting from “conceptual metaphors” of self and superhuman powers supposedly grounded in universal ways of perception and an evolutionary theory of religion (Whitehouse and Laidlaw 2004; Whitehouse and Martin 2004; several contributions in Whitley and Hays-Gilpin 2008; based on, e.g., Boyer 1994; Whitehouse and McCauley 2005). This way will not be followed in this Companion. Instead, we opt for a cultural and historical approach, lived religion.

Lived Ancient Religion

The concept of “lived religion” has been developed for the description and analysis of contemporary religion, countering the stress on institutionalized religion and its norms (McGuire 2008). Here, it is proposed to employ this concept within the field of archaeology of religion also for past cultures as “lived ancient religion” (see Rüpke 2011). In its application to contemporary social analysis, the concept of lived religion does not address how individuals replicate a set of religious practices and beliefs preconfigured by an institutionalized official religion within their biography – or, conversely, opt out of adhering to tradition. Of course, considering the relationship of individuals to

tradition, such an assumption could in principle work in a religiously pluralistic and a mono-confessional society. Instead, “lived ancient religion” focuses on the actual everyday experience, on practices, expressions, and interactions that could be related to “religion”. Such “religion” is understood as a spectrum of experiences, actions, and beliefs and communications hinging on human communication with super-human or even transcendent agent(s), for many, but not all societies conceptualized as “gods”. Material symbols, elaborate forms of representation, and ritualization (Bell 1992) are called upon for the success of communication with these addressees. By including such a spectrum of human ways of communicating with super-human or transcendent agents along with an analysis of the role of material culture in this spectrum, a new way of approaching archaeological material is opened.

It is important to keep in mind that such practices are not entirely subjective. For the purposes of historical research, the existence of religious norms, of exemplary official practices, of control mechanisms and enforcement should be taken into account. It is precisely such institutions and norms that tend to predominate in the surviving evidence. The term “appropriation”, taken from the French historian Michel De Certeau (1984), plays a key role here. The specific forms of religion-as-lived are barely comprehensible in the absence of specific modes of individual appropriation (to the point of radical asceticism and martyrdom), cultural techniques such as the reading and interpretation of mythical or philosophical texts, rituals, pilgrimages and prayer, and the various media of representation of deities in and out of sanctuaries. The notion of agency is implicit in the notion of appropriation. The methodology suggested by “lived ancient religion” offers a frame for a description of the formative influence of professional providers, of philosophical thinking and intellectual reflections in literary or reconstructed oral form, of social networks and socialization, of lavish performances in public spaces or performances run by associations with recourse to individual conduct in rituals and religious context.

However, the analysis does not merely describe the contrast between norms and practices or the influence of one on the other. What is more, even the intersubjective dimension of religious communication can be accessed through the records of the individuals by enquiring into their communication, their juxtaposition, their sharing of experiences and meaning, their specific usage and selection of culturally available concepts and vocabulary. Thus, meanings constructed by situations rather than coherent individual worldviews should and will be identified. Logical coherence is secondary to the effectiveness of religious practices for the purposes desired (“practical coherence” *pace* McGuire). Instead of aiming at reconstructing a system of belief, lived religion offers the possibility of viewing religion and religious practice as a part of everyday life in Antiquity and discuss in which ways effectiveness was most successfully achieved.

Material Religion

If lived religion is an import into archaeology from religious studies, it is not the only one. “Visible” and finally “material religion” have been perspectives developed within a discipline, which had been dominated by philological approaches (Kippenberg 1990; Lubtchansky and Pouzadoux 2008; Uehlinger 2006; Boivin 2009). Fundamental is the



Figure 1.2 Tondo from the Arch of Constantine in Rome depicting a statue of a god. An altar is placed in front of the statue base. Photo by Jörg Rüpke.

notion that the very construction of gods as super-symbols and communication with them as well as communication among humans and a whole range of related religious practices is not only using, but is shaped by, the very material and sensory basis to these activities. In the course of thinking about the social conditions of ascribing individual agency and about the networks in which individuals are acting, the analogical concept of the agency of things has been developed and also introduced into the field of religion (Latour 1993, 2005; Droogan 2013: 151). “A monument in the landscape, such as a temple, is at once a real solid material thing, a social agent, a support for ideology and a contested site of varying narratives of mythology” (Droogan 2013: 166). Things are not any longer seen as being determined by stable (even if perhaps unavailable to the researcher) meanings, but as elements which are culturally and situationally activated (Morgan 2010: 2011; Raja 2013). By being visible they elicit response (Gaskell 2011: 40).

The material dimension includes the spatial. Archaeologist David Clarke had sketched three levels of spatial dimension which could be easily referred to religious sites: the micro-level of objects and their immediate spatial contexts (often irretrievably lost); the semi-micro level of sites; and the macro-level of spatial relationships between sites (Clarke 1977: 11–7). Space is highly differentiated, being made at times or permanently “sacred” in various degrees, it is moving between actors and related to different areas of cultural activities, political as well as social. As such, space is productive, of meaning, of relationships, of roles (see Tweed 2011 and Chapter 23, this volume).

Material religion and archaeology of religion have integrated theorizing on the body. They have taken the body as an extremely productive metaphor, in particular in the imaginative realm of religion (e.g., Douglas 1973). But starting from the French anthropologist Michel Foucault, they have also taken the body as a place for practices on



Figure 1.3 Relief from Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, depicting an epiphany scene. Photo by Jörg Rüpke.

and with the body (Couzens Hoy 1999; Zito 2011). Embodiment and experience have developed into key concepts in this area. On that basis, Rüpke (2015) suggests to conceptualize religion as the enlargement of the situationally relevant environment beyond the immediately plausible social environment of co-existing human beings (and frequently also animals). This enlargement is practiced in thereby specifically religious forms of agentical action, communication, and formulation of collective and self-identity. What might qualify as “not immediately plausible” is different from culture to culture and even situation to situation and defies universal generalization.

Archaeology of the Ancient World

Archaeology and History of Religion are characterized by their preferences of generalizations of a middle range. It is necessary to theorize, but it is with reference to definable bodies of evidence, for periods and regions of material culture and religious practice, that theorizing is called for. Thus, this Companion is not a handbook for world archaeology (cf. Insoll 2011). The necessity to address the new and growing field of archaeology of religion in the open, but comprehensive format of a Companion is met by a structure touching upon a wide range of themes from a topical approach. This volume aims to give an overview over the extensive amount of topics relating to the archaeology of religion, in particular in the Greco-Roman world. The chapters take their point of departure in concepts, aspects and the empirical material relating to central themes within the archaeology of religion.

For the ancient world, “archaeology of religion” has established itself as a field of interdisciplinary research that presupposes basic methodology on the part of the archaeologists



Figure 1.4 Altar depicting hands signifying worship, prayer or vowe to the god who is not named. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. Photo by Rubina Raja.

and basic knowledge of the history of religion on the part of ancient historians and scholars of religion during the past decade. As a consequence, a Companion could neither aim to explain archaeological methodology using religion as an example nor to explain the structure of ancient religions concentrating on the relevant archaeological sources. The interest and the difficulties of the field lie in the interpretive problems, i.e., when scholars of various disciplines attempt to relate archaeological evidence to social actions and structures that are specific by being classified as or seen through the lenses of “religion”. This companion to the archaeology of religion does not aim at reifying religion, but at understanding the role of objects in cultural practices of constructing religion and encountering and appropriating such a “religion” as objectified representations of the sacred. The concept of “archaeology of religious experience” (which avoids a too-pervasively constructivist perspective) seems to catch this perspective. It serves as a thread pervading all the chapters as an interpretive perspective, that is, a pervasive *problem* of interpretation. Thus, it is not used to exclude any material from consideration or any interpretive perspective (like ritual, organization, gender, power) that proves more fruitful in a given case.

In terms of geographical and chronological range, the chapters cover the whole Mediterranean area including distant Roman provinces, but not systematically from the archaic period down to late antiquity, insofar as Jewish and Christian material is covered as well. At the center stands the aim to cover a wide range of topics, which cannot be covered as comprehensively throughout all periods, but which give crucial and important insight into these topics and offers methodological approaches to the material,

which can be applied in other connections as well. So treatment of material on the color scheme of the Arch of Titus (Fine) may help us to conceptualize in which ways color impacted the ancient viewer in other situations. The treatment of the northern provinces (Woolf) will encourage us to think differently about the eastern and western provinces and give possible other ways of viewing the available archaeological sources.

The chapters are focused on problems of reconstructing religion in the sense of experiences, actions, structures, occasionally beliefs, and offer exemplary case studies and discuss their generalization, thereby employing material from all over the ancient world. However, the Companion is not exhaustive and does not claim to cover all aspects or regions which are relevant.

The Structure of the Companion

The Companion, comprising in total 35 contributions, is structured around the following themes: Archaeology of ritual; Embodiment; Experiences; Creating spaces of experiences; Designing and appropriating sacred space; Sharing public space; Expressiveness; Agents and Transformations. These themes allow for exploration of a wide range of material covering a wide geographical scope as well as a wide chronological span.

The volume aims at developing an appreciation of the different dimensions of religiosity in antiquity as well as room for reflection on the relationship of material evidence and religious practices and beliefs in different perspectives. Furthermore, it relates



Figure 1.5 Funerary portrait of priest from Palmyra. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. Photo by Rubina Raja.

features of sanctuaries, instruments and representation to basics such as complex ritual procedures. It is also the aim that the reader should be presented to a broad range of methodological approaches to seemingly intransigent phenomena and that the presuppositions and limits of these approaches will be made explicit. Furthermore, one should be able to acquire knowledge about presentations and analysis of the usage of various sites. Last but not least, the volume offers basic information about the most important types of religious localities and institutions which is facilitated by a detailed index.

Methodology

The first section, on the Archaeology of Ritual, addresses various methodological issues and is comprised by four contributions written by scholars coming from various branches of the archaeological and historical disciplines.

Van Andringa's chapter on the archaeology of sanctuaries addresses the extent to which we can access and reconstruct various aspects of ancient religions from the perspective of the society. He gives a broad introduction to central themes which a sanctuary might enlighten us on based mostly on examples from the western part of the Greco-Roman world. He underlines that cult places were defined and modelled by the communities themselves as proper frameworks for religious experiences and not least controlled interactions with the divine. In this respect, before using the archaeological data and questioning the very numerous and scattered pieces of material given by excavations, he highlights that awareness of the nature of the evidence is crucial for further interpretations. Seldom will a sanctuary reveal information about all the aspects which he mentions in his contribution, such as religious practice, rituals, festivals, votives, decoration, cult images and architectural layout (also see Chapter 23, this volume). However, for each of these categories one might, if the circumstances are suitable, be able to find information through the archaeological evidence.

Ritual activities, processions and pilgrimages are the subjects of Luginbühl's contribution in which, through a taxonomic approach, he reveals diverse levels of meaning in a concise manner. He then continues to integrate the results of the taxonomic classification with archaeological findings and methods for identifying and attempting to reconstitute the corporal, physical and sensorial aspects, also known as embodiment. His contribution is organized in three sections, in which he firstly confronts the question of ritual practices in a global manner (excluding funeral rites) by adopting different seriation or classification criteria (functions, community level, sacrality, etc.) and by concentrating on the different types of activities and their physical implications. In the second section, he narrows his focus to processions: their contexts, practical modalities and embodiment. In the third section, he examines "pilgrimages", which are known principally through literary sources but certain examples can be deduced from archaeological and topographical information. The conclusion evokes the potential to be gained through ethnoarchaeological procedures that allow a more exact evaluation of the lacunae in current documentation, a finer analysis of the available information and to confront the question of embodiment among ritual practices in a less theoretical or more practical manner.

Coming from an Egyptological perspective, Weiss tackles issues of perpetuated actions in her contribution. Through a focus on three main strategies of interaction with the otherworldly she suggests a model for religious interaction with the divine in Ancient Egypt. There, the three main foci were: written speech acts; speech acts; and pictorial acts. The primary strategy of approaching the otherworldly, according to Weiss, was by means of the speech act. Though difficult to trace in the archaeological record, indirect evidence indicates the significance of the written speech act. The absence of written speech acts in the archaeological evidence from the domestic sphere would, according to her, confirm that written speech acts were primarily to be found in areas inaccessible for the regular performance of cultic activities, i.e., places inaccessible to living human actors. In the ancient Egyptian context, such inaccessible places were tombs, but also temples that showed the king ideally taking care of the order of the cosmos by means of written speech acts and offerings to the gods, whereas in practice, he was of course represented by the respective priesthood of a given temple. The pictorial act could serve to support the written speech act by showing and thereby enacting the offerings and/or prayers on the stelae. Speech acts accompanying pictorial acts remain less likely since a model offering became a pictorial act only at a later stage, that is, through placement in an inaccessible space where it could perpetually re-enact the act of offering. Such a model as the one Weiss suggests might be able to open for new ways of viewing the various categories of material available to us and to give new insights into ways of approaching archaeological and epigraphic evidence, which sometimes seem to have been much closer linked than we usually take for given.

Parker addresses one of the most pervasive interpretaments in the ancient history of religion, that is, public and private. Paying special attention to phenomena which might be qualified as private, Parker concentrates on the blurring of the lines, on the conceptual problems in keeping the distinction suggested by the pair. Thus, he proposes to use the category of “domestic religion”, i.e., rites performed within the individual household, though one should not suppose that the gods worshipped inside houses were unknown outside them, nor that domestic cults were a more important part of the individual’s religious life than public rites.

The methodological section of the volume thus deals with concepts of sacred spaces, various ritual and perpetuated actions as well as the concepts of private and public in ancient religion. Through these themes the scene is set for the following sections which delve into these topics in more detail and on the basis of case studies – specific as well as broader conceptual ones. The methodological introductory chapters give insight into how a variety of empirical evidence may support, challenge and refine our views on topics which are all related to the archaeology of religion in Antiquity, when carefully analyzed and discussed.

Embodiment

In the section on embodiment are four chapters which deal with, respectively, amulets, dress and ornament, ritualized movement and issues of gender.

Being a concept which is wide-ranging and not always possible to pin down in ancient contexts, embodiment constitutes a central concept to which scholars of ancient history,

archaeology, and history of religion need to engage with in their endeavors to understand ancient society to a more refined degree. Therefore the incorporation of physical embodiment through objects like amulets as well as dress and ornaments is seen to be just as important as the treatment of subjects such as representations and reception of gender in Antiquity. Objects do not stand alone without the treatment of subjects and viceversa.

Bohak treats the use of amulets in the Greco-Roman world, displaying it on the one hand as a universal phenomenon in human societies from a very early age until today and on the other hand as a phenomenon which is not quite easy to decipher due to the nature of the evidence. For archaeologists, as Bohak states, excavating the remains of people who died long ago means that, whereas some objects may securely be identified as amulets, others are much harder to classify. For example, when we find in a Roman-period grave in a small village in Austria the remains of the body of a young child, and next to it a silver tubular case inside which is a thin sheet of gold on which is inscribed one of the most important verses from the Hebrew Bible, transliterated in Greek letters, one has no doubt that this object must have served as an amulet. However, when one finds in an Early-Byzantine grave in Samaria an inscribed silver amulet in a copper case, as well as a bronze bracelet with a bell, one is less certain about the nature of the second object. It could easily have served as an amulet, but could just as easily have been a piece of jewelry.

In such situations lies the ambiguity and difficulties in interpretation of objects – as well as most likely the multiple meanings of such objects. What may have served for one purpose in a certain situation may have served another purpose in another situation. Its appeal lies in our assumptions that certain objects have the power to protect, heal, or assist those who carry them, and from the general human need of health, protection, and success. However, the nature of the objects used, the manner of their use, the assumptions as to why they possess such powers, and the identity of their producers and users, vary greatly from one human society to the next and even among specific individuals in any human society, which are important points to keep in mind when dealing with such objects. Amulets seem to have been an extremely common feature of the Greco-Roman world; they were used by people from every societal layer and for many different purposes. Some were produced by common people for their own use and others were produced by experts who served their clients for a fee, or by religious entrepreneurs in search of new followers. Some were extremely durable, and survived in great numbers, whilst others were far more fragile, and decomposed long ago, with only one or two specimens, or none at all, available in our archaeological records. And yet, whenever we can compare the archaeological and the literary remains of the Greco-Roman world we can see that, when used cautiously, both types of sources complement each other in offering a remarkably detailed image of the use of amulets in the Greco-Roman world. Nonetheless, as also showed by this contribution, amulets are not a topic which has been exhaustively researched as yet.

Gawlinski treats another topic which deals with a core theme and much understudied topic of ancient religion – namely dress, dress fashion and ornaments. While the ranges of priestly dress vary greatly throughout the Greco-Roman world and throughout time there is no doubt that this was of central importance to the representation of the religious representatives and therefore also to the recipients of the various religious situations/actions. Whereas we might speak of dress codes for certain deities as well as for

certain priesthoods, we might also speak of cults for which we do not have any evidence that dress codes played a large role. How come that this seemed more important in some cults than in others? Or perhaps, rather, why was it underlined in the representations of some cults rather than others? We know that dress and ornaments played a large role in ancient society. Much recent research has testified to this – both in “secular” and “religious” contexts. However, in many contexts we still do not comprehend exactly how these mechanisms of understanding, encoding and decoding functioned. In some cases, it is clear that the simple clothing, unclothing, wrapping and rewrapping of the deity itself was a central element in the cult. In other cases, it is unclear to which extent the priestly dresses played a role in the rituals of the cults, although they are represented as being set apart from other participants’ clothing in religious situations. Gawlinski’s contribution draws attention to these tensions in how to read clothing and dressing in ritual situations, which truly is a topic that has not been exhaustively researched.

The subject of Naerebout’s contribution is embodied ritual. He focuses on bodily movements performed within a religious context and in particular dance. His point of departure is that all religious ritualized behavior is an instance of embodiment and that such behavior is performed by humans, which *do* ritual with their bodies. Therefore the corporeality of ritual is an important part of its efficacy. Bodies performing will have a certain appearance, including the ways in which they are dressed, they take up a position in space relative to their surroundings and to other bodies, and are in movement – gesturing, posturing, travelling through space: the most important components of what is called nonverbal behavior. All religious rituals, he argues, include the nonverbal. He addresses the evidence, but also the lack of evidence for dance in ancient society. His conclusion stresses that we can say quite a lot about the position of dance (singular) in society, and its functions within a ritual context, but that we cannot speak about dances (plural), let alone the actual realizations of such dances in performance. He goes as far as to conclude that we might have to realize that there are no dances to know, but only individual performances – which are completely beyond our grasp (unless an image would commemorate a specific performance and a specific performer). Importantly, his contribution points to the difficulties in generalizing on the basis of evidence connected with specific situations, which remain a basic problem when dealing with archaeological evidence.

Varhelyi’s contribution deals with the matter of gender in Antiquity – a topic which has received much attention over the last decades. Nonetheless, she manages to pinpoint how gender may not at all have been viewed through the lens which would be most helpful for scholars of Antiquity – namely through its seemingly extremely varied nature – just like religion – which differs, changes and might even be fluid in specific situations. She underlines the argument that gender may not be a useful *pre-established* category of analysis in historical studies, which has recently been put forward by Boydston, who has argued that “there is no social subject whose experience is solely constructed through the processes of gender (however we define gender) [...] even an identity as male or female is in constant and inseparable interplay with other processes of status and identity” (Boydston 2008: 576). On this view, how gender functions will be distinct in varied cultures or at different times as well as that it will always be enacted in relation to other social distinctions. Such a perspective forces us to question, at the outset of our studies, how our notion of “gender” may relate to the societies we study. This is an important observation as far too often modern conceptions of themes, topics and conceptions are imposed on

ancient material. Here Greco-Roman Antiquity offers the opportunity to view such concepts with more refinement than in many other cases and this should be taken seriously.

Experiences

This section of the Companion consists of seven contributions dealing with various aspects of experiences in religion in the ancient world. Ranging from watching rituals to how water was used to create certain experiences, this section aims at substantiating the basic fact that experiencing through the senses was an essential part of ancient religion. In many ways, defining and discussing experiences is one direct way of accessing ancient Greco-Roman religion and rituals based upon our knowledge of them as situational-focused (experience focused). In the section on experiences, scholars deal with explicit empirical material in order to establish ways of interpreting and understanding various situational meanings which may sometimes have covered more than one occasion and even been extended in place or space. The chapters of this section generally deal with case studies in order to give the reader insight into the particular situations in which these various experiences were brought into play. Furthermore, they deal mostly with material from either the East or West of Italy. This is due on the one hand to the rich nature of the material which does not allow for a comprehensive treatment of all aspects of these issues and, on the other, to the importance of giving insight into particular situations through the treatment of particular situations in the acknowledgment that experiences were nonstatic situations created in specific moments in time.

Fine examines in which ways polychromy in the ancient world might have impacted the individual in various situations relating to rituals. He deals with the notion of color in the depiction of Jewish paraphernalia in non-Jewish contexts, in particular the Arch of Titus in Rome which commemorated the Roman triumph over Judaea. He rightly reminds us of the fact that Antiquity by far was not colorless, and that this fact is an important one to observe when dealing with religion and rituals in the ancient world. The impact of color could change the experience of a certain space at a certain point in time and we need to remind ourselves that cult statues, temples, and temene were decorated with colors and other materials (precious stone, for example) as well as various motives which could have supported the experience which one had in a certain setting.

Huet's contribution addresses rituals and their impact on the participants in the various situations in which these took place. Furthermore, just as importantly, she addresses issues dealing with the various groups and individuals involved in rituals, both as participants and as spectators. In this way she brings to the front of our minds aspects of ancient rituals which are not usually central when rituals and their meanings and impacts are discussed, namely the way in which rituals were used as a means of communication in ancient society. Huet argues that watching rituals in Antiquity was about claiming a place in Roman society, thereby also displaying various degrees and types of hierarchy, identity and belongings. One of her arguments is that we cannot separate the experience of watching a ritual from experiences of hearing, smelling, touching and tasting, which went along with rituals in Roman religion. In this way, the spectator got an almost actively engaging role in any ritual he or she watched even if he or she was not central to the ritual. She also rightly brings up the issue of visibility or rituals when one was not at

the core of the group (standing close by or one of the participants/performers) watching gestures at public sacrifices. Therefore, Huet argues that one way for the ancient viewer to have understood how rituals functioned and what they involved included watching and reading the many representations of rituals in stone, in particular reliefs. The gestures and acts encountered on these, she argues, are not merely representations but in some ways are also manuals for understanding situations, gestures and meanings.

Animal sacrifices were a central element to Greco-Roman ritual and Méniel focuses on various aspects of animal sacrifice ranging from the selection of animals to the deposition of the animal bones. The contribution highlights not only the importance of the animal sacrifice for its ritual purposes, but also indeed the very practical circumstances which had to be taken into consideration, such as places for the sacrifice, preparation of the meat from the dead animal and deposition of the animal bones. It makes very clear that animal sacrifice – apart from holding an important ritual position in ancient society – also held a very practical function which was related to everyday concerns and that, although taking place in sacred environments, had to be dealt with in a practical way. Furthermore, it highlights the absolute crucial point, which is the danger involved in the slaughtering of animals and the therefore desired divine or sacred protection of the sacrifice as such.

Marten's chapter follows upon Méniel's contribution well in that it deals with the sacred meal, the banqueting, which in many cases took place on some scale after a ritual animal sacrifice had taken place in a sanctuary. Martens points out that a united perspective would not have existed in the vast and dynamic territory of the Roman Empire. Today, we prefer to see Greco-Roman banqueting as dynamic and variable events, where each specific case had singular properties. However, feasting, including banqueting, holds cultural universal elements and has been described by anthropologists as unique human behavior. The system of communal dining may have originated already during the Upper Palaeolithic period; however, it appears to have become more widespread only during Mesolithic and subsequent food-producing periods. Also in later periods, up till now, centrality of the feast in human gatherings extends far beyond special occasions and the marking of important life events. Banqueting in religious and ritual settings played a central role in ancient Greco-Roman religion and many sanctuaries bear witness to having hosted such events on various occasions – more or less frequently. Furthermore, banquets were in many cases also the focus of the meetings of smaller cult groups, such as those worshipping Mithras, who met in smaller sanctuaries. Banquets may be interpreted both as instances of controlling the offerings made (the animal sacrifices) as well as controlling social settings (who was allowed to take part in the in feasting). Therefore, again an ambiguity in the situation might be detected, which pertains to the fact that religion, ritual and everyday life in some instances was difficult or not even necessary or desirable to differ between in Greco-Roman Antiquity. We may here speak of a certain degree of entanglement such as introduced by Hodder in his recent monograph on the subject (2012).

Water as a central element in Greco-Roman religion is surveyed by De Cazanove who categorizes its use in three different groups: purification of the body; purification of the cult places (and cult images); and spring sanctuaries. Water held a pivotal role in Greco-Roman cults for various numbers of reasons; one crucial one was the element of cleanliness and purification. Water installation may therefore be found in most sanctuaries or in connection with most sanctuaries from the regions of the Greco-Roman world. For the

experience of both the visitor and the cult personnel, water was also important and the ways in which water was treated in sanctuaries and incorporated into architectural layouts testify to this importance. De Cazanove exemplifies this through his case study of the sanctuary of Apollon Moritasgus at Alesia.

Temporary deprivation is the topic of Gordon's chapter, defining it in a way which allows focus upon a selection of different ways in which the natural body could be used to generate subjective religious meanings in Greco-Roman antiquity. "Temporary", in his definition, denotes a period that may be short or relatively long, but by definition of a different order from permanent or semi-permanent deprivations for religious ends, such as life-long abstentions (notably virginity, or the food-, and even naming-, taboos imposed on the *Flamen Dialis* at Rome), long-term ascetic practices such as Christian anachoritism, protracted beggary and vagrancy, emasculation, infibulation and other forms of permanent mutilation. His chapter is structured around these themes: boundary marking; fasting and other forms of self-denial; initiation; the endangered body. His overview of and insight into the material gives the impression that this topic has yet to be taken up by scholarship and he highlights important issues which must be considered. Furthermore, his contribution also shows that in order to begin to deal with this material one needs a firm grip of the available evidence.

Creating Spaces of Experience

The section on spaces of experience does not exclusively deal with what may be termed "sacred space". This section also deals with ambiguous spaces or spaces which could change meaning according to the point in time or according to users/producers of the space. All too often, spaces of experience in religious contexts are limited to looking only at the traditional "sacred spaces" such as temples, sanctuaries, shrines, churches, synagogues and mosques. However, when looking at the content of this section it becomes absolutely obvious that many other spaces were spaces in which experiences that had to do with religion, religious rituals and experiences connected to such situations.

Religious experience in the ancient home has, as Bowes states, often been termed "private" religion. However, the tendency to label ancient domestic religion "private" presents considerable problems. Ancient houses were not "private" in the modern sense of the word at all but permeable to all kinds of non-family persons while, conversely, the "public" religion of temple, synagogue and church affected domestic practices in complex ways. In most of the periods considered in Bowes' chapter, textual information on domestic practices has been considered over material remains, in many cases reinforcing the notion of a public/private binary. Bowes deals with aspects of religion and religious experiences in the spaces which we may term "domestic" for the lack of a better word and in opposition to public spaces. She analyzes in which ways religious experiences were intentionally created in these spaces through the elements which were either incorporated into the architecture or were movable. She examines through which means such experiences were staged and how they might have impacted the participant at various points in time and how complex reality was in this sphere that was not private in the modern sense of the word.

The chapter by Neudecker covers the topic of gardens as spaces of religious and sacred experiences. He deals with the layout and implications that such layouts could have had in a variety of situations – both intentionally created and less intentional. He speaks of “sacred idyll” as a concept of allusions to religious settings and situations. Central to the concept of “sacred idyll” he also addresses the topics of obligations and even juridical rules for how to upkeep sacredness in, among other things, controlled natural settings. The religious implicitness of nature is another theme which Neudecker also takes into consideration, basing his observations on literary sources. Throughout the chapter he brings together, through both thematic sections as well as sections involving case studies, aspects that are important for our understanding of how nature, and not the least nature under control, played a crucial role in various religious settings in the ancient world.

Hesberg, Nowak, and Thiermann give an overview of various burial customs and interpretations of these. They span the period from the eighth century BCE to the High Imperial period, which allows an insight into the changing patterns and some of the reasons which were agents in these processes of change. Among other things, they examine changes in patterns of belief and, in particular, belief in an afterlife as well as rituals connected to the cult of the dead. However, prominently in the chapter stands the argument that graves were media for the communication of societal ideas about the structural relations between the living and the dead, the present and the afterlife as well as the representation of the community ideals of how to commemorate and stage the deceased.

Designing and Appropriating Sacred Space

This section is comprised of four chapters that all treat various ways and ideas of how to design and appropriate space in specific cultic and religious contexts. Furthermore, the focus of the chapters are the ways in which these spaces influenced and shaped the religious experiences of the involved actors, performers and participants.

Jensen’s chapter concerns the archaeological remains pertaining to early Christian baptism rites which, although sharing some elements with certain Greco-Roman rites of initiation and cleansing, also was unique in central respects. Until recently, historians of Christian liturgy have relied primarily if not exclusively on evidence drawn from written sources such as sermons, treatises, and descriptions of or instructions for actual practices. However, the archaeological evidence for these rites has not been wholly taken into consideration until recently. While these purpose-built structures provided discrete and functional shelters for the early Christian ritual, their overall plan and décor conveyed baptism’s religious purposes and shaped its actual practice. In other words, the basic design elements of light, space, orientation, focus, and form created more than a context for ritual performance. These elements also influenced how baptism’s actions were accomplished and how the participants experienced them. Furthermore, because the ritual was enacted within a local context or physical setting, it also was influenced by sensory elements that were particular to that place. Thus, archaeology plays an important role in assessing the performance and meaning of the rite at a certain time or place.

Kindt's contribution on oracular shrines considers what it might have been like to visit an oracle in the ancient world. She does this through not only considering the conventional and very well-known oracular sanctuaries such as that of Apollo at Delphi, but also takes into consideration the many smaller and not that well-published oracular sanctuaries across Greece and Italy. Until relatively recently, as she states, the picture of the great oracular institutions of the Greco-Roman world sketched in classical scholarship was based almost exclusively on the literary evidence. The archaeological remains of these smaller oracular shrines received little attention beyond specialist archaeological studies. She argues that the selective use of evidence is unfortunate because the archaeological evidence presents a rich picture of these shrines that complements, and occasionally even challenges, that of the literary. What the epigraphic evidence reveals rather well is the rules and conventions surrounding a visit to a given oracular shrine. Literary evidence hardly tells us anything about the day-to-day administration of such sanctuaries. Therefore archaeology presents an important material group through which we might analyze religious experiences in these oracular sanctuaries, which held a central role both in Greek and Roman religion.

Building of religious communities stand at the center of the chapter by Nielsen, who argues that membership of and in religious groups required specific rites. Initiations in Antiquity related to changes of status or levels of expertise involving more intentionality and commitment on the part of the initiated. Such religious associations were primarily an urban phenomenon of the cosmopolitan Hellenistic and Roman periods. They were private in the sense that they were independent of the city and the state, but they could be closely related to a sanctuary of their deity. The contexts for initiations, assemblies and sacred banquets for religious communities varied greatly and were dependent on numerous variables including cult, type of association, economy, chronology and region, which is one aspect that she examines in her analysis of the buildings of religious groups. There were specific similarities in all cult buildings, she argues, namely a hall of some kind with seats and a chapel or the like for the god in question. The structures belonging to religious associations placed outside a public sanctuary often belonged to private houses, which were first only little changed. When independent structures serving the associations are found, they were often different depending not so much on the functions they served, which were very similar, as on the size, the location and the money at the disposal of the group. Throughout her chapter she brings out both similarities and differences in ways of configuring cult buildings belonging to specific groups.

Arnhold's chapter on small sanctuaries in Ostia and their meaning within the urban space of the city seeks to explain a possible way to understand and integrate the so-called small sanctuaries into the religious landscape of the Roman Imperial city. Her main line of enquiry is not only to re-evaluate the differing roles of single cult sites within urban life, but rather to examine how urban space was shared and acquired both in and through sanctuaries and how it consequentially was conceptualized. Many studies based their selection of sites for investigation on the identification as *sacra publica* and *sacra privata* and, as Arnhold rightly points out, both terms often lack precise definition; even when understood correctly, they are not suitable for all contexts. Thus, the differentiation in *sacra publica* and *sacra privata* does not give any information about the accessibility of a sanctuary, the status of the cult adherents, or the function of the cult. Through

architectural analyses she shows how the smaller sanctuaries in fact were not to be overlooked in the urban landscape, but could figure as prominent features and suggests that they may have played a much more central role in the urban life of Ostia than earlier thought, and created ways of sharing urban space in a different way.

Sharing Public Space

This section is comprised of five contributions that deal with central concepts and spaces in the Roman city. Complex sanctuaries, temple interiors, theaters, processions and ways of creating spaces of remembrance in the Roman city are dealt with in the contributions.

Raja argues that complex sanctuaries in a traditional sense may have conformed to ideas and ideals about architectural design and decoration for a large part across the Roman Empire. However, through case studies she shows that what we may term traditional sacred complex spaces in fact were compiled by a series of elements, which could vary to a large extent. These spaces, the sanctuaries, might at first sight look strikingly similar to each other in architectural layout and plans, but when looking at the details they turn out to be quite different from each other. On the one hand, generic layouts and architecture in the Roman period made sure that the viewer could orient themselves within these spaces and would know instantly that they were approaching or were in a sanctuary. However, they would not necessarily be able to tell from the layout or the architecture what sort of sanctuary they were in or to whom the sanctuary was dedicated. These messages were conveyed through other means such as decoration and inscriptions, as well as the active parts of the cult, involving rituals and processions. The chapter shows how diverse these experiences could in fact be although the spaces conformed in many cases and were planned on something which can be termed as a canonical plan or a traditional sanctuary layout. Raja argues that through various architectural differences we might be able to trace a variety of ways to stage religious experiences.

Hesberg's chapter on temple interiors through case studies underlines the impact which these spaces had on the viewers, the participants and the performers of the cult. Through a number of case studies spanning both Greece and Italy and beyond as well as the period between the eighth century BCE and Late Antiquity, Hesberg argues that Greek and Roman cult images acquired their qualities through their interaction with their worshipers in the cult but, on the other hand, it is also clear that they had an aesthetic or semantic quality of their own. An enormous variety of forms are found, both of images and ways of venerating, which markedly contrast with Egyptian and Oriental traditions and with later Christian forms. This variety emerges as an expression of the concept of divinity in Greek and Roman culture. The main room in a temple or sacred building usually contained a cult image, which in turn was publicly worshipped. The tension between space and image, which mainly exists between the participants in the cult and the idea of the numinous within the cult image, starts at the boundaries of the sanctuary and not with the interior of the temple. However, the numinosity of a temple interior was not only created by visual perception, but involved a number of senses, such as the smell of burning incense or acoustic signals. Moreover, the acts of worship that took place in its context included acts of ritual performance, which brought together the revered, temple staff and the public. A temple interior was thus a complex

phenomenon with many different aspects, some of which may be examined through archaeological evidence.

Gödde's chapter on ancient theaters shows that throughout Antiquity, Greek and later Roman periods, theater was closely tied to religious practice due to its integration into religious festivals and its spatial proximity to temples and altars. Whereas in classical Athens the performances of tragedies, comedies, and satyr plays had been restricted to the cult of Dionysus, this exclusivity gradually dissolved, with the result that plays could, especially in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, also be performed at festivals in honor of other gods. Performances, masked and dramatic, were integrated into festivals of gods throughout Antiquity, not only because drama was considered sacred action, as she shows, but rather because festivals also provided a suitable festive frame that attracted a large audience, which to a Greek or Roman mind certainly included the gods. Furthermore, festivals of the gods expressed the politico-religious self-understanding of the celebrating cities, to which the theater made substantial contributions. Her case study-based look at the connections between cult and drama, religion and theater in Greco-Roman Antiquity, from archaic Athens to the Roman Empire, reveals a remarkably high degree of continuity in the institution itself as a setting for performances, which held complex societal and religious implications.

Processions are the topic of Stavrianopoulou's chapter. Since we know from ancient texts that processions were central to ancient religion and were ways of creating spaces of experience, this theme is absolutely crucial to cover when looking at spaces of experience. Through processions, a "moment" in time was created which could turn any space that a procession moved through into a sacred space – this goes for streets, open spaces and spaces not usually connected with sacred situations. Processions are difficult and in most cases impossible to grasp archaeologically, but Stavrianopoulou's chapter contextualizes the sources which we have for processions in their original archaeological contexts, thereby creating one axis upon which we are able to approach the concept of processions. Processions were constituent feature of different societies and historical periods. Nonetheless, they were also dynamic elements, which Stavrianopoulou underlines to have been shaped through and by the bodily performance of their participants in a specific time and space and therefore are culturally and historically contingent. Processions, when defined as ritual events creating and mediating interpersonal communication, unfold their full potential in the interplay between actors and spectators as well as that between staging instructions and experienced performance. Understanding the relationship between processions and their (spatial and medial) settings not only sheds light on their meaning and function, but also allows us to trace changes and adaptations in their message over time. Stavrianopoulou's chapter and the chapter by Huet complement each other in the way that watching ritual in some cases may be viewed as a key to interpreting processions and ritual actions taking place over time.

Smith's chapter on urbanization and memory treats a number of topics which are central to the ways in which memory was constructed, upheld and changed in the ancient city. With a point of departure in specific case studies taken from the city of Rome, Smith shows how that, for the most part, the persistence of the *sacra*, the presence and visibility of the priests, the city as spectacle may have been sufficiently reassuring, although the rise of individual votive offerings and the persistence of mystery and ecstatic cults suggests a need for something more. He argues that collective memory may better be sought

amongst the recursivity of repeated sacrifice or the sense of how things should be done that could lead to the repetition of festivals, or the desire to memorialize achievements through a temple foundation. Cultural memory relates better to the deeper stories of foundation and redemption. Neither determines any lack of change, and we should not assume that either operated at a high degree of specificity, except for the elite. The transition from Republic to empire, which was a point of transformation for what it was to be a Roman, the interruptions and challenges to shared memory in a city which was being transformed, may have made memory more important and contested. Within the context of the religion of the city, as seen in archaeology, the instrumentalization of religion can be seen in the Augustan fascination with origins and the deep past, but this may only be a part of the story. Further use of memory as an explanatory or heuristic tool in ancient history needs to remain fully alive to its theoretical ambivalence, and temporal instability, which makes it a useful way of emphasizing the potential for change even in allegedly changeless rituals, and a challenge to locate the creation and preservation (or loss) of memory in specific urban and social constructions.

Expressiveness

Three contributions make up the section on expressiveness, a concept which balances the notion of experience, both seen as being based on an active role of the individual. The chapters focus on religious instruments and vessels, anatomical *ex votos* and monumental inscriptions.

The sacrifice and the instruments and vessels involved in this action stand at the center of Siebert's chapter. The act of giving a gift to the gods was one focal element in a sequence of complex ritual acts, including prayers, processions, music and communal banqueting in Roman religion. In Roman culture, the sacrifice was an omnipresent and routine act that could require a large number of instruments of sacrificial and cultic nature as well as religious experts, priests and performers, who knew how to handle these instruments. Sacrifices were performed in the house and at temples, at festivals celebrating events in the lives of individuals and families, on occasion of political and military actions, or out of gratitude for, for example, one's recovery from an illness or for a smooth journey. Siebert gives an introduction to a number of vessels and instruments and their function in the ritual acts. She does so through the analysis of sacrifices on images, such as reliefs and scenes displayed on a number of items which were in circulation, such as cups and plaques. She shows in which ways these vessels and instruments used in the ritual acts were important to understand in order to be able to decode the message of the ritual acts. Therefore the depictions of them in themselves also hold messages about the function of sacrifices and ritual acts in Roman religion.

Anatomical *ex votos*, depictions of body parts used as votives, are treated in Schörner's contribution to the Companion. He describes how a visitor to a sanctuary might have seen a large number of reliefs depicting faces, eyes, ears, feet, arms, hands, buttocks and female breasts and pelvises and how this experience may have made impressions important for the religious experience in the sanctuary. Although many of these were naturalistic in appearance so that they hold great expressiveness, evoking the idea of body care and healing in a modern biomedical sense, the meanings of them are not clear. Schörner

questions and explains in which contexts these body part votives were used and what they communicate about ancient religious rituals and thought. Body part votives or anatomical *ex votos* are an ill-defined group of votive offerings. Fundamental in order to label a votive as a body part votive is that they were found in a sacral context, mainly in sanctuaries, and that they form part of the human body (for animal body part reliefs see below) in a more or less naturalistic manner. In common use all representations of limbs, of external and internal genitalia, and of viscera are named as body part votives. Despite these seemingly clear-cut conditions the classification remains ambiguous in many cases.

All these approaches are eligible but should be integrated in a web regarding rituals, dedications and health care and healing procedures. It should be questioned which role body part votives played in the more basic conception, that body, disease and cure are all socially constructed. Schörner addresses several of these various approaches and shows how the mere existence of body part votives allows no conclusions about how health care or fertility rituals were performed because they only attest the need for divine help. In which way this help was invoked is beyond our interpretational possibilities, but setting out the questions and problems is one way of avoiding the pitfalls of this category of material evidence.

Votive monuments differ in nature from other votive gifts as their purpose was not to serve the sacrifice itself but rather to commemorate a ceremony. Although they could be part of a sacrifice, they also had the purpose of indicating a sacred action to gods and men, which should remain in the forefront of the mind of any viewer. Such monuments include in particular votive inscriptions, which were found in Greece from eighth century BCE onwards and at Rome from the sixth century BCE, but appeared in large numbers from the Hellenistic period onwards and at Rome from the early imperial era. The latter is particularly true for the western Roman provinces, where the earliest religious inscriptions dating to the Augustan period are found. For the period from 150 to 250 CE an almost explosive increase in votive inscriptions took place, particularly in the Roman provinces. Spickermann analyzes this development in his contribution and concludes that it was due to the economic prosperity of the second century CE. The phenomenon corresponds with the so-called “epigraphic habit” coined by MacMullen and which is observed all over the Roman world in the second and third centuries CE. The chapter is mainly concerned with the Latin monumental votive inscriptions. The votive inscriptions in Greece developed differently and peaked during the Roman Empire, particularly in Asia Minor. The dedication of votive monuments with inscriptions in all cults was a public act of social relevance, Spickermann explains. This required, apart from the financial means of the donator, adoption of the new language (Latin) and culture (Roman). In turn, this meant that the epigraphic form of consecration also had the purpose to document and to increase the social prestige of the donator in his community. Outside of Rome and Greece, this phenomenon was first practiced by high officials, soldiers and members of latinized or hellenized provincial elites, but it increasingly found more and more imitators in economically potent circles, especially in the provinces. The greatest density of the find spots of votive inscriptions is wherever soldiers were stationed. Spickermann highlights many crucial factors pertaining to this phenomenon, including the issue of literacy in ancient societies and visibility of the inscriptions, showing their central importance to the religious life in urban settings in the Roman period.

Agents

In the section on Agents, three chapters give their take on various aspects of how religious identities, individuality, groups and communities may or may not be discerned in archaeological evidence and in which ways we can approach material evidence in order to understand issues of identity formation and expressions.

Rebillard's contribution is a case study of the ways in which material culture has been used in order to establish a "Christian archaeology". He brings into play newer studies which are critical of the earlier confidence that a discernable "Christian" material culture exists and can be archaeologically defined. These new studies bring into focus the degree to which religious affiliation is reflected in the material record, and highlight the problems and misleading quality of pagan/Jewish/Christian categorization. Along this line of enquiry, Rebillard questions the link between material culture and religious identity, proposing a set of theoretical considerations that can help formulate the question on better grounds by situating religious identity within the "plural actor". He also analyzes some of the failings of the traditional approaches, particularly within "Christian" archaeology, in order to suggest a new set of questions. At the heart of his theoretical considerations stands the criticism by Rogers Brubaker of "groupism"; the program devised by Bernard Lahire of "a sociology at the level of the individual"; and the vocabulary provided by identity theory for understanding the handling of multiple identities. He suggests that instead of seeking to identify religious affiliations, we need to understand the processes of religious self-identification. Material culture provides a body of evidence more closely related to the everyday social experience of individuals than texts usually do, leaving aside a few narrative sources. Thus, as he concludes, an archaeology of "lived religion" should try to understand when religion matters in everyday life and to look for contexts in which religion might be at work.

The contribution by Rüpke focuses on the role of the individual, in particular the role of the individual for the distinction of "individual" and "society" within the cultural phenomenon which is addressed as "religion" in this volume. As he rightly states, the archaeology of religion has rarely used approaches in which the individual stands at the center, when not in a central role. This is surprising as religion represents a central instrument of individuation by individual prayer, vows or confessing methods in many cultures. Much of the archaeological evidence of religion from Mediterranean antiquity has been produced in the course or in reflection of individual religious action, such as sacrifice, the offering of votives to the gods and the construction of sacred spaces. Religious individuality becomes clear in the "sources", which we use, through evidence for durable institutionalizations, but also as a media of communication. Rüpke's chapter points to chances and problems with an approach within the archaeology of religion, which makes use of "individualization" and "individuality", because such concepts, although being useful, have also been heavily used as stereotypes of auto-description and ascription by others today and in the history of scholarship.

Imagined communities is the topic of Mol and Verschuyls' contribution, which underlines, in the words of Scheid, "that without doing there is no faith – without ritual no group, no community, no belonging". Here ritual and process stand at the center. Furthermore, both authors underline the centrality of material culture as a constituent in the making of religion and religious ritual. Whereas this may be the case in the

Greco-Roman world, other cultures may have dealt differently with religious rituals. In their discussion of community or group construction they especially put emphasis on the importance and difference between the meaning and agency of material culture. From the point of departure in material from the Mithras cult and that of Isis they demonstrate various ways in which community building was undertaken.

Transformations

Transformations in a large-scale perspective are the theme with which the two last contributions are concerned. They both look at regional changes outside the core area of the Roman empire, respectively the northern provinces and North Africa. Through combining the bird's eye view with case studies, careful consideration is given to ways in which generalizations may or not be made about material culture in a religious setting.

Woolf's contribution is on the ritual traditions of non-Mediterranean Europe. Late prehistoric societies of temperate Europe shared a broad set of ritual traditions. Until recently, these were known largely through accounts provided by first Greek and Roman and later Christian outsiders which emphasized elements they found exotic and interpreted ritual in terms derived from their own societies. Woolf's chapter is based largely on archaeological evidence of cultic acts, most of which took place within domestic and funerary contexts in societies that were largely decentralized and lacked extensive monumental landscapes, in this way standing very much in contrast to the Greco-Roman world. Most characteristic are rituals that resulted in the deposition of elaborate assemblages of human and animal skeletal material and/or metalwork, especially weapons and coinage. A small number of sacred places have been identified where similar rituals took place, perhaps in combination with feasting. Rare items with rich iconography hint at elaborate cosmological and mythological beliefs but they are largely inaccessible to us today. The limitations of the textual evidence from these regions mean that archaeology provides by far the best evidence for ritual and cosmology among the northern peoples and Woolf introduces a string of case studies which all give insight into various interpretations of ritual and possible relationships between groups, individuals, ritual and belief. However, it remains difficult on the basis of archaeology to be certain about how ritual activity in fact related to belief. Woolf highlights the even more difficult task of linking these practices with the cosmologies attributed to various northern peoples by classical and Christian writers. It would be bizarre if there were no continuities between Iron Age practice and the ways in which their religious world views were translated in Antiquity and the middle ages. These issues are also some which scholars working on the Near East are struggling with (Blömer, Lichtenberger, and Raja, forthcoming). All the same, the energy devoted to the Roman translation of prehistoric deities into familiarized hybrids reminds us of the enduring hold of these deities on the imagination and of the great gap there was to be bridged between the religious traditions of the Mediterranean world and those of temperate Europe.

Gasparini's chapter, *Tracing Religious Change in Roman North Africa*, takes as a given that ancient North Africa cannot be treated as a monolithic block. Its history was closely linked to its Mediterranean shores, whose coastline reached a length of almost five thousand kilometers from eastern Libya to the Atlantic Ocean, thus representing a sort of "bridge" connecting the East to the West. Several factors shaping the local cultural

networks changed significantly over time and according to regions. Local traditions may have had nothing to do with each other from one end of the coast line to the other. Gasparini highlights the ways in which geography, topology and landscape also marked the limits and underlines that there were no sharp frontiers marking off the wide area which comprised Roman North Africa. The coast line, which was exposed to and involved in a very intense movement of goods, people, ideas and cults, constituted, from this point of view, a link more than a boundary. Even the southern Roman *limes* has to be interpreted as an elastic zone of local contacts, exchanges, interactions and, sometimes, clashes, rather than a clear dividing line. Finally, inside of the extensive territory, the population was the complex result of a rich stratification of ethnic and cultural layers. Through selected case studies, Gasparini analyzes and discusses religious change and continuity in this vast region, offering new ways of approaching the material.

Conclusion

The 35 contributions cover a wide range of topics and material. Together, if not giving an overview, then they at least make an attempt at giving insight into areas of research and study which provide crucial information about the religion and ritual practice in Antiquity. They tackle all the complex issues which are inherent in these aspects, such as the question of group formation and the role of the individual in everyday religious life and lived ancient religion, which in many ways should stand at the center of any study on ancient religion in Antiquity. With this Companion, we hope to give students, scholars and interested readers an opportunity to discover new ways of engaging with material culture and archaeological evidence through careful consideration to detail and case studies shedding light on various aspects and periods in Antiquity.

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