

*Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*. Edited by JOHN BODEL and SAUL M. OLYAN. The Ancient World: Comparative Histories. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. Pp. xvi + 344. Cloth, \$99.95. ISBN 978-1-4051-7579-6.

Bodel and Olyan have gathered a group of international of scholars to produce this volume, which grew out of a conference held at Brown University in 2005 and is the first book to explore the religious practices of the family and the household—not state-sponsored or civic religion—in Egypt, Greece, Rome, Israel, Mesopotamia, Ugarit, Emar and Philistia. It explores many household and lifecycle rituals, looks at religious practices relating to the household within the home itself, and examines other spaces such as extramural tombs and local sanctuaries.

Stanley K. Stowers, in “Theorizing the Religion of Ancient Households and Families,” maintains that understanding the connections between the categories family, household, and religion is central to the project of the volume. He argues that the most important practices and institutions in the ancient Mediterranean involved land, wealth from the land, and food, all of which could be offered back to deities who gave the products and legitimated the ownership and social order.

In “Family Religion in the Second Millennium West Asia (Mesopotamia, Emar, Nuzi),” Karel van der Toorn makes three solid contributions to the volume. He surveys the gods of the family in Southern and Western Mesopotamia and Northern Syria, with an excursus on the god and goddess of the house; the cult of the ancestors; and the sociology and psychology of family religion. Mesopotamian family religion fosters a sense of identity in those who practice it. Family religion, for example, provided the Babylonians of Southern Mesopotamia with both a topographical and an historical sense of place.

Daniel E. Flemming, in “The Integration of Household and Community Religion in Ancient Syria,” focuses on evidence from ancient Syrian religion, mainly textual evidence from Late Bronze Age Emar. He proposes one general conclusion: that the religion of household and family was integrated deeply into the religious life of the larger community.

In “Family, Household, and Local Religion at Late Bronze Age Ugarit,” Theodore J. Lewis argues that study of the religion of families and households is long overdue and is encouraged by the recent study of the non-elite (non-royal, non-priestly) communities that were slighted in the past in favor of the religion of the privileged. Religion played an important role at the local/community level and in local sanctuaries, such as the so-called Rhyton Sanctuary, one of the best examples in the ancient Near Eastern world of community religion. Lewis concludes that the religion of the family (*betu*) was important at Late Bronze Age Ugarit among individuals of all social standings, especially the non-elite.

Rainer Albertz tackles pluralism within Israelite religion in “Family Religion in Ancient Israel and its Surroundings,” by treating three main concepts that are often mixed together: syncretism, popular religion and internal religious pluralism. Up to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, most private religious practices performed by Israelites took place in the family’s dwelling, where the so-called “modal shrines” housed divine figurines. Israelite families also had their own religious practices and beliefs which differed considerably from those of contemporary official religion. A good indicator of the symbolic world of Israelite family religion is provided by theophoric names. After the Babylonian exile, official and family religion came closer together, resulting in early Judaism looking like a religion in which families constituted one of the load-bearing pillars.

Continuing the theme of household and family religion in Israel, Saul M. Olyan, in “Family Religion in Israel and the Wider Levant of the First Millennium BCE,” claims that family religion is becoming a hot topic in biblical studies and cognate fields. Susan Ackerman, in “Household Religion, Family Religion, and Women’s Religion in Ancient Israel,” argues that the terms family and household function basically as synonyms. In this environment women probably took primary responsibility for domestic pottery and textile production. Moreover, ancient Israelite women prepared food and drink for the god or gods venerated within their households and then presented these offerings. In doing so, women also acted as the theologians who gave voice to household and family religious beliefs.

In "Ashdod and the Material Remains of Domestic Cults in the Philistine Coastal Plain," Rüdiger Schmitt identifies archaeological features that point to religious activities in the household or in the neighborhood, and refines the typology of cult places and cultic activities in Iron-Age living quarters in Philistine settlements. Schmitt studies the typology of seven main types and several subtypes of Philistine terracotta figurines, mostly of the "Ashdoda" type, and the archaeological contexts of these figurines from a potters' sanctuary at Ashdod. The archaeological evidence provides additional proof for the international character of family religion in the Ancient Near East.

Robert K. Ritner, in "Household Religion in Ancient Egypt," and Barbara Lesko, in "Household and Domestic Religion in Ancient Egypt," look at household religion from different perspectives. Ritner begins with Herodotus' famous assessment that the Egyptians were "religious beyond measure, more than any other people" (2.37), a statement supported by an abundance of artifacts and a prodigious history of scholarly publication. Ritner asserts that many ancient Egyptian household religious practices are concerned with issues of birth. Lesko argues that in current Egyptological literature "domestic religion" is identified as "religious conduct undertaken strictly within the confines of the house." Thus the average household and family were all the more important for the perpetuation of religious beliefs, practices and moral teachings from generation to generation.

With "Household Religion in Ancient Greece," Christopher A. Faraone notes that ancient Greek familial and household religion have not attracted much scholarly interest except from those with deep interests in comparative folklore such as H.J. Rose and Martin P. Nilsson. Faraone first distinguishes between *oikos* and *genos*, and then looks at the household cult overseen by men and finally at women and magic in the *oikos*.

In "Family Matters: Domestic Religion in Classical Greece," Deborah Boedeker examines the ancient Greek household or family as a locus of religious practices. To do so, she studies domestic cults at home and in the *polis*. She also points to one potential source of religious friction between "family" and "state" (*polis*) religion in classical Athens: competition for religious authority between the increasingly democratic *polis* and elite families.

John Bodel assesses Roman domestic religion in "Cicero's Minerva, *Penates*, and the Mother of the *Lares*: An Outline of Roman Domestic Religion." In his second book *On Laws*, Cicero dedicates his private Minerva as "Guardian of Rome," casting his personal cult image into a public role even as he transported her physically to her new "home." At the same time, by describing the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus as "my father's house," Cicero reinscribed both the image and his act of devotion into the world of domestic cult. Cicero also informs us that the *Lares*, like the *Penates*, though closely tied to location, were portable.

Finally, in "Comparative Perspectives," Bodel and Olyan move beyond an individual consideration of household and family religion to Mediterranean and West Asian household and family religion from a comparative perspective. Onomastic data raises difficulties and must be used cautiously; gender is also a concern. It is important to distinguish the importance of women as ritual actors in some cultures and the central position of leading males in others. We thus cannot generalize about gender patterns in household and family religion in Mediterranean and West Asian antiquity, given the diversity of the evidence and the variety of ways in which it has been read. Ultimately the comparative method helps sift the evidence into different categories, and theory allows us to consider old problems differently and to see the evidence in new ways.

In sum, this volume will find its place on the bookshelf of anyone looking for an authoritative treatment of religion and society in Mediterranean and West Asian antiquity.

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