

## BOOK REVIEW

*Rethinking Greek Religion*. By JULIA KINDT. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xiii + 235. Paperback, \$30.99. ISBN 978-0-521-12773-8.

By any definition of the word, the ancient Greeks were a religious people. Through processions and sacrifices, hymns, dances and prayers, statues and offerings they honored their gods. Each of these areas has by now been the subject of intensive investigation in the form of monographs, articles, and conference volumes. Thus, the time is ripe for reflection on the bigger picture of ritual practices and presumed beliefs, as well as for closer attention to “the personal dimension of ancient Greek religion” (5). In this study Kindt combines her ongoing interests in religious activities, materials, and spaces with the research methodologies of classics, social anthropology, and *Religionswissenschaft*. Her careful attention to ancient textual sources is evident on every page, yet she is aware of the importance of images and objects as documents in their own right. What emerges is an interdisciplinary exploration of a once “marginal topic” (2) and a specialist reader’s state-of-the-field.

By way of introduction, Kindt selectively reviews key scholarship from Jane Ellen Harrison to Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood. Although references are made to a few others (e.g. Burkert, Vernant), she views the articles of Sourvinou-Inwood on ‘polis religion’ as especially important to the current understanding of public group worship and considers them the most influential. Missing from this preliminary discussion are references to such luminaries as Robert Parker and Jon Mikalson whose collective contribution to the study of ancient Greek religion (both private and public), at least for English-speaking audiences, surely rivals Sourvinou-Inwood’s in terms of impact, not to mention Jan Bremmer and Henk Versnel, whose publications have appeared in several languages and are widely cited. The problem is solved, however, in Chapter 1, where the author attempts to move discussion “beyond the polis” and, as a result, must grapple with the concept of polis religion and its broad scholarly landscape. While not claiming to rival or replace existing subject introductions such as W. Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (1985) and S. Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (1999)—in fact, it

would be best for non-specialist readers to have these books on hand,—Kindt boldly suggests that “in order to appreciate the full spectrum of Greek religious beliefs and practices we need to redefine our notion of the religious culture of ancient Greek itself” (98).<sup>1</sup>

The remaining chapters of the book (2–5) build on the concepts and criticisms laid out in the Introduction and Chapter 1, and take the form of case studies. Each may be read as a stand-alone essay concerned with a specific topic (i.e. statues, votives, processions, magic) or they may be read in tandem. Common to all chapters is attention to the personal experience of religion through a range of past and current scholarly notions, among them cognition, the senses, perceptions of divinity, representation, and symbolism. For example, in Chapter 2, “Parmeniscus’ Journey,” a certain amount of space is devoted to the idea of “the religious gaze”, also called (by Elsner) ‘religious visuality’ or here a “ritual-centered way of looking” (40), and connected (by Rutherford and others) to the ancient Greek word *theoria*. This is one of the most interesting discussions in the book. It reminds us of the ritual function of objects, such as statues, as opposed to their style or aesthetic quality; it prioritizes the viewer and the unique experience of spectatorship; and it carves out a place for sacred sightseeing and pilgrimage in the ancient Greek sanctuary. Equally as inspiring is the presentation in Chapter 6 on *agalmatophilia* or ‘statue love’ at it is translated by the author. Citing a now lost play of Alexis in which Cleisophus of Selymbria is locked inside the temple of Hera at Samos in order to make love with the cult statue, and the better known account by Lucian dealing with Aphrodite of Knidos, the author questions what such encounters reveal about divine representation and human bodily functions.

In Chapter 4, ‘Rethinking Boundaries,’ readers are treated to something of an overview of the study of Greek magic, how magic and religion have been related in past scholarship, and what might have been their connection in reality. Quite rightly, the author points to the problem of ‘Christianising assumptions’ (though Judeo-Christian might have been more accurate) as well as the desire of past generations to view Greek culture as valuing “reason and rationality” (92). Incorporated into her discussion are personnel concerned with healing and magic, and material manifestations such as amulets and curse tablets (*katadesmoi*). Rather

<sup>1</sup> The new German edition of Burkert’s book *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche. Zweite, überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage* (Kohlhammer, 2011) should be added to the bibliography, as should D. Ogden (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Religion* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

than supporting a separation by categories of rational/irrational or reasonable/superstitious, Kindt prefers to give magic a much-deserved seat at the spiritual table: “The ancient Greek conception of magic can best be understood as a series of culturally and socially constructed locations of the religious” (115).

Chapter 5 is similarly forward-thinking with its attention to and questioning of local and Panhellenic as “frames of reference” for “religious beliefs and practices” (123). It is a refreshing change for a generation of scholars reared on de Polignac’s 1984 *Naissance de la cité grecque*. Many ideas put forward elsewhere in the book (i.e. symbolism, display, viewing, identity) remerge here and stress the lived experience of the individual through the visit to the sanctuary and the setting up of dedications. Here again, despite such attention to the tangible and familiar, there is no denying that this is an intelligent book for a learned reader.

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