

Religion in the Roman World: Gods, Myth and Magic in Ancient Rome



The Romans had a persisting and voracious appetite for myth, magic and ritual. They invoked the local gods to rain down punishment on adulterers or thieves. They burned fragrant resin for the protecting deities of hearth and home. They sacrificed at temples to bring glory to the divine person of the emperor. And they conducted secret rites of initiation into cults like those devoted to Isis, Cybele, Dionysus and Mithras. Juliette Harrison shows ancient Rome to have been a hive of religious experimentation. In her new and comprehensive survey, she takes her readers from the turmoil of the Late Republic to the high point of imperial rule (133 BC-AD 235), thereby exploring the many facets of religiosity in the Roman world. She examines, among other topics, worship of the state-sanctioned Olympian gods and the role of religion in Roman politics; the impact of mystery cults focused on Greek, Near Eastern and Egyptian deities; attitudes towards witchcraft, superstition and the early monotheists; and evidence for ancient atheism. An epilogue discusses the rise of Christianity in the third and fourth centuries.

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