

D. MACRAE, *LEGIBLE RELIGION: BOOKS, GODS, AND RITUALS IN ROMAN CULTURE*.

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At the core of Duncan MacRae's endeavour lies the ambition to provide a full-scale discussion of the rôle of books in Roman religion, against the background of the recent emergence of debates on individualization in Roman religion, and the strong (if by no means uncontroversial) shift of focus away from civic religion. M. is not interested in the rôle of writing in the ritual dimension, but concentrates instead on the development and impact of theological reflection in ancient Rome through a mode that he calls 'bookish' (a term that is arguably not entirely helpful in its potential ambivalence): Cicero's religious trilogy, of course, but also the treatment of sacred matters in Servius Fabius Pictor, in L. Cincius' *Mystagogicon* and in legal literature. Varro is central throughout: the book starts, in fact, with a lucid discussion of Augustine's reading of the *Divine Antiquities*. M. posits the emergence of a new breed of writers in Republican Rome, the 'civic theologians', and makes a coherent and valuable case for their significance in the Roman intellectual discourse from the late second century B.C. onwards. The contents of this theological reflection receive little attention (the notorious crux of Varro's *theologia tripertita* is hardly discussed at all; cf. 28, 158), and many of M.'s general contentions are not novel. The view that religious culture and practice is highly diverse (26–7) is already spelled out in the title of the reference handbook on the subject in English, now nearly twenty years old. Yet, M. is truly Varronian in the ambition to enable his readers to find their whereabouts through a disparate and fragmentary set of ancient evidence, which he has read with great sensitivity, and a complex and sometimes factionalized historiographical debate, with which he is thoroughly conversant (one quibble: Aldo Schiavone's argument on the formalization of the Roman legal tradition was not made 'recently', but about four decades ago; cf. 51). He rightly identifies the onset of monarchy as a major transformative factor in the ways in which religion is 'written down' and debated. Before moving to that discussion in the third part, he engages in a comparative exercise, and explores the similarities and differences between Roman 'civic theology' and the Mishnah, a body of written work that was produced in Jewish circles in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Both sets of texts present and engage with problems of religious authority and expertise, and M. articulates his exercise of 'disciplined comparativism' (81) tersely, duly pointing out the differences between the contexts in which those two clusters of material took shape, and the fundamentally different approaches to the relationship between theology and scripture. The morphological analogies yielded by his analysis are elegant, but it remains unclear what explanatory power it carries, beyond drawing attention to what is distinctive about the Roman experience.

The third part takes us back to Rome and the impact of monarchy. Good use is made of much recent work on the Augustan strategy, and the *princeps* and his court are understood as perceptive readers of layers of traditions of civic theology. Claudius and Verrius Flaccus are rightly given their dues; the A.D. 22 debate on the prerogatives of the *flamen Dialis* is helpfully discussed as an episode of considerable significance (116: more could have been made of the discussion that the matter prompted in the Senate; Maluginensis and Tiberius were not the only ones who had done some background reading on that problem of *ius diuinum*). M. also offers some fine remarks on Seneca and his critique of civil theology (118–20). After some illuminating comments on Statius' *Silvae* 5.3, where M. locates a precise reference to the process of transmission of religious knowledge across generations of the Roman élite, the discussion moves on to late antique readers and writers of civil theology, who are, in different ways, eminent experts in Varro: Macrobius, Tertullian, and finally back to Augustine, the starting point of the book. Here M. makes an important part of his argument, which, like other aspects of his discussion, is surely not ground-breaking, but thoughtfully scene-setting: the distinction between Scripture and religious texts that do not have scriptural status is a late antique one, and must be overcome if one is to attempt an historical understanding of the place of writing and reading — of 'the book', with a small b — in Roman religious practice and thought. To resort to a well-rehearsed textual metaphor, this study has irreversibly put that material on the map, and has made a major contribution to charting the boundaries and reach of that category of writing.

Two final points, of form as well as substance. The choice of printing endnotes in such a learned and wide-ranging book is nothing short of lamentable. The lack of an *index locorum* is a missed

opportunity, and does not do justice to M.'s ability to find valuable evidence where many have failed to look hard enough.

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T. S. WELCH, *TARPEIA: WORKINGS OF A ROMAN MYTH*. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2015. Pp. xii + 331, illus. ISBN 9780814212813. US\$68.95.

Tara Welch's study of Tarpeia is a thoughtful and engaging account of this rather neglected figure, the treacherous young woman who opened Rome's walls to the attacking Sabines during the reign of Romulus. In this treatment, Tarpeia becomes a case study for myth-interpretation that repudiates the goal of a definitive analysis. W. describes her approach as 'staunchly synchronic' (9), and looks for explanations of the myth not in putative origins or evolution, but in the resonances which each retelling has with social and political issues of the period in which it was produced. So the book consists of a series of synchronic studies that themselves build into a diachronic interpretation. Throughout, W. is eager to avoid pinning down the significance of the story, aiming rather for an account that keeps a range of responses alive, even though these are sometimes hard to historicize. W. grants a stabilizing rôle to the act of writing or representing. But such stabilization can never eliminate the pluralities inherent within the myth, for which it then produces more. So W.'s analysis can range widely without losing touch with its central themes. A preliminary chapter outlines them: moral problems centred on gender, money and national identity. The book then examines nine renderings of Tarpeia: Fabius Pictor (ch. 2), coinage (ch. 3), Varro (ch. 4), Livy (ch. 5), Propertius (ch. 6), Valerius Maximus (ch. 7), Simylus (ch. 8), Dionysius of Halicarnassus (ch. 9) and Plutarch (ch. 10). The brief conclusion contains less canonical material that reinforces the mutability of the central character in later periods, and situates W.'s own project within a tradition.

As the first account, Fabius Pictor's has an important place in W.'s argument, and W. boldly circumvents the problems posed by a text so badly preserved. Specialists in the annalistic tradition will have their own views; while some will accept W.'s confidence to analyse Pictor as described by Dionysius, others will be more sceptical. Had W. devoted more care to methodological self-justification, that result would not have been different. That said, the book does not seem to be aimed at the specialist, although it is not easy to say who the intended readers are. They care about Fabius Pictor, but are unable to locate Hannibal without an explanatory gloss, while Cincius Alimentus requires no such explanation (45). Later on, they will need a Greek text of Dionysius to be able to evaluate W.'s argument (243). These may just be manifestations of an energetic style, with precision an occasional sacrifice. At the same time, I would hesitate to recommend to students a book that introduces Fabius Pictor as if his text could be read directly (45–8), and, although then describing his tradition (48–50), is able to say that, 'the historian seems to confront greed in many forms throughout his history' (68). This is the dark underbelly of the backlash against *Quellenkritik*, and as an approach, has as much, or as little, to recommend it. In similar vein, can we really take Livy's account of the debate over the Lex Oppia as reliable enough for the job that W. requires of it, that is to link Pictor's vision of a greedy Tarpeia to a widespread concern with female materialism? These are problems specific to the discussion of the mid-Republic, but in this area too, the creativity of W.'s readings can outweigh scepticism. Arguments about an increase in women's political prominence in this period are exciting, as is an excursus on gender and materialism at Tarentum (70–5); illuminating, even though tangential to, the central topic.

The next chapter forges a link between the next annalistic landmark, Calpurnius Piso Frugi, and coins minted during the Social War. This produces a nuanced social history, connecting money to politics and religion, in which Tarpeia acts as a focus for debates about economics and national identity. In a dramatic final sentence, W. imagines that the striker of the coin depicting Tarpeia's death 'became a Sabine, crushing Tarpeia anew to the service of a pluralistic Rome' (102). Stimulating close readings of a section of *De lingua latina* and the friezes from the Basilica Aemilia make up the next chapter, with W. exploring the political and mythographic ramifications of the analogy/anomaly controversy. The iconographic discussion brings this fascinating monument to life in a new way. These friezes are, incidentally, no longer in the National Museum