and oikia for example. It is also important to remember at all times that the civic context controlled the citizen's life to a far greater extent than in our 'free, democratic' societies.

This book is a mine of information, but the context of the family is underexplored, and the relentless sociological language makes for hard reading. The publisher's work is exemplary.

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There was a time when modern commentators saw the public ceremonies of Roman religion as formal, cold and uninspiring. As a result, it was thought, most Romans sought emotional fulfilment in a multiplicity of family deities and foreign cults. Roman religion was a pale imitation of Greek religion (and, implicitly, Christianity) and Romans seemed to contradict themselves in expressions of belief. Scholars felt compelled to deal with these 'contradictions' in Roman religion by eliminating other possibilities in favour of a single, 'true' belief. More recently, 'ambivalence' has come into focus, the idea being that the kind of definitive resolution practised by modern scholars was not so much a priority in the ancient world. In this book, Denis Feeney advances the interpretive method a stage further: there was positive and deliberate 'dialogue' taking place between competing ideas and contexts, at a pace and intensity which sustained the vitality of the Roman religious system.
F’s book is compact but immensely rewarding (note the generous bibliography, 144-56). It concentrates more upon argument than lengthy illustrations, and it deals with a relatively limited range of literature (much of it Augustan), in spite of the breadth implied by the title. Yet the argument is characteristically convincing, and this reader felt constantly that he was being taken to the cutting edge of scholarship in the field.

Rather than asking how religion is transmuted into literature, as scholars have done commonly before now, F asserts in his Introduction (1-11) that ‘we should instead be thinking in terms of a range of cultural practices, interacting, competing, and defining each other in the process’ (1-2). Literature, then, is another form of religious expression, another religious context or practice. Given the circumstances of hellenization, F sees his book as ‘another chapter in the ceaseless debate about the Greek and the Latin in Latin literature’ (8 n. 19), and in this connection there is a firm desire to recast the familiar ‘Greek/Roman’ antithesis in such a way that the Romans are not secondary, passive and inert, but ‘participants in a dynamic and revolutionary cultural process’ (8). Much of this derives ultimately from Paul Veyne’s view that, instead of searching for the definitive or the standard, we need to think in terms of diverse religious discourses in Greece and Rome (9; cf. 15, which sees the approaches of Versnel, Sperber, Gouldner, and Foucault as being ‘in the spirit of Veyne’s eclecticism’). Things have significance in relation to a particular context rather than a general standard.

There are five chapters. The first (12-46) addresses that most intractable of topics, belief. F draws attention to the myriad assumptions which have inhibited modern understanding, especially the idea that religious activity requires belief and that ancient religions had a central or unitary ‘something’ to believe in. On the contrary, there were diverse religious discourses which interacted both with each other and with the various literary discourses. These ‘genres’ of belief interacted in a
competitive and energetic way, and thus the process was productive of meaning. Considerable attention is devoted to interaction between Augustus' *ludi saeculares* and Horace's *carmen saeculare* in order to show that literature was not parasitic or self-deprecatory in the production of meaning, but was self-consciously aware of its potential in relation to other discourses (28-38).

In the chapter on myth (47-75), deeply imbedded prejudices are once again highlighted, especially those which privilege Greek mythopoiesis. Greek myth (supposedly) is oral and primary; Roman myth by comparison is literate and secondary, even derivative and adaptive. F questions the hellenocentric model and emphasizes the vigour and competitiveness of the Roman construction of myth which appears, for instance, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (70-4). Following in the footsteps of Versnel (57, 115), F is clear that the common practice of tracing the origins of Roman myth in the Greek world has limits: 'origins' and 'meaning' are not the same thing. On this point, however, although he is right that it tends to deny vitality to Roman myth, it might be said that origins were often emphasized by ancient writers (*Origines, Ab Urbe Condita*), and F himself sees the interstitial 'beginning of Roman literature' (52) as an index to its 'transcultural' nature (52-3, 67-70).

The next chapter deals with divinity (76-114). Once again, insights abound in a field of apparent contradictions. The gods were personalities as well as powers; divine power was both recognised and used; an abstract deity like Concordia was a force from outside, a force from within, and even the 'work' of a figure like Augustus; living human beings could worship and also be worshipped. A wide range of literary and non-literary means were used to express these divergent conditions and to test the connections between them for the purposes of the particular genre or context. The excitement surrounding this process, and its momentum to a fair degree, were heightened when Roman nobles and emperors took to concerted probing at the limits of divinity, becoming objects of cult themselves (108-14). The activity and
energy of the age of Augustus, in particular, represented 'a new phenomenon' (110).

With regard to ritual (115-36), F rejects as a matter of course the traditional idea of Roman public cult as being 'sterile and frigid, an empty formality, a poor substitute for the corporate self-expression of the festivals of the polis' (10). Ritual certainly meant something, as those who emphasize the social function of religion to define and stratify have shown so well. Richard Seaford, for instance, thinks that 'ritual both represents and at the same time constructs an ideal reality' (119, Seaford's emphasis). Yet this does not exhaust its significance, and it was not immutable, as previous work often seemed to imply (building, it should be said, on Roman cues, especially from the age of Augustus). F shines a light on Tibullus 2.1 (121-3) and Ovid's Fasti (123-33) to illustrate how meaning could be constructed and modified through the interplay between ritual and literature.

Ultimately, in dealing with knowledge ('Epilogue: Knowledge', 137-43), F begins with the fundamental observation that the Romans' religious system had no revealed text at its core and no governing body for the whole. In fact, there was no one Roman religious system but a 'system of systems' (141). There were 'different forms of religious knowledge, from the performative to the philosophical, literary or antiquarian' (140). Once again, F finds competition, interactions, energy, the ongoing construction of meaning, and so on. The situation is consistent with his conclusions about competing genres of belief at the book's beginning. Literature is one form of religious knowledge.

It will be obvious that I am very much drawn to the approach outlined in this book, but it is of course overtly polemical, and I wondered where the doubters might concentrate a reply. Three questions arose: what is 'belief', what is 'meaning', and did the 'contexts' coincide equally? In F's view, the interaction of apparently different 'beliefs' from different 'contexts' at Rome actually generated 'meaning' rather than contradiction. 'Belief'
is presumably something you would defend, or something you at least have a firm persuasion about, or something that guides your behaviour in some way. A theoretical discussion of the criteria which might permit the acknowledgement of ‘belief’ is, however, absent from this book. ‘Meaning’, on the other hand, is explicitly said to be ‘generated in the interaction between various genres of belief’ (141). So ‘meaning’ occurs, for example, when you have the carmen saeculare interacting with the rituals of the ludi saeculares (28-38) in a way which signals strength of commitment, judgement of importance, emotional uplift, or ‘cognitive and emotional power’ (30). A ‘context’ is the setting (e.g. intellectual, social, political) for a ‘set of discourses with distinctive capacities’ (141). But can contexts simply be allowed to coexist without any ranking in matters of belief and meaning? Were the Romans really so untroubled by (what we would see as) contradiction? Are we now sponsoring a situation where we simply allow everything to mean something because we can’t find order among the apparent chaos? My own inclination, in support of F, is to say no, for it seems that such a situation of tolerance is quite understandable in the absence of dogma, or of the repressive, controlling mindset which seeks to enforce a definitive standard and thereby risk alienating those who would prefer degrees of flexibility. Perhaps this is part of the reason why, in such a flexible system (or system of systems) with so many possibilities, the traditional framework for understanding the gods’ relations with man was maintained for so long.

There is no doubt that this is a provocative and successful theoretical work which throws into high relief a raft of traditional assumptions which have proved impediments to modern understanding. This is the major positive feature of the book and it will prove a stimulus to debate. One can only hope that F will now move on to further detailed studies of the ways in
which literature and religion interact to create meaning.

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MARCEL LE GLAY, JEAN-LOUIS VOISIN, YANN LE BOHEC A
History of Rome, trans. Antonia Nevill (Cambridge, MA and
0631 194576; $US62.95, £54.00; paper: ISBN 0631 194584;
$US34.95, £14.99.

This book is the translation of the second edition of a work
published in 1994 by the Presses Universitaires de France. It forms
part of a series of translations undertaken by Blackwell of recently
published introductory works by French ancient historians. The
translation in this case has been done well and reads very easily.
The book is divided into three parts covering respectively the
history of Rome from its origins to the end of the Republic, the
period of Augustus to the Severans, and the third to fifth centuries
AD; each of the authors undertook the editing of a different part.
Each part is prefaced by a short chapter outlining the available
sources of evidence, and the first chapters of Parts II and III take
the form of a review of the state of the empire both as a whole
and in its individual constituents. It would therefore be possible
for new students who were primarily interested in the early or
late Imperial periods of Roman history to read Part II or III in
isolation without missing too much in the way of general context.
At the end there is an extensive chronological table with separate
columns devoted to military events, political and social events
and cultural and religious events respectively; a useful glossary of
technical terms; a guide to further reading in English organised
both by period and by subject category (the only significant