

Two series, Thames and Hudson's 'Aspects of Greek and Roman Life', and the newer 'Ancient Culture and Society', issued by Chatto and Windus, have given us books on religion in the Roman world; although they are quite different in aim and character, it is perhaps admissible to deal with them under one heading.

The aim of Ogilvie's book, which is attractively produced and yet sells at a very low price, is to show what the traditional religion (he omits altogether the 'Oriental' religions) meant to a Roman of the Augustan age, and what part it played in his life — though he rightly points out that generalization is particularly dangerous in a field such as this. His primary attitude is that 'concern for religion did go deep into Roman society', and that 'most Romans did believe in (the) efficacy of religious activities. He is also convinced that there was a spontaneous religious revival in the time of Augustus, which he attributes largely to a sense of guilt, a feeling that the disasters and agonies of the years preceding Actium could be due to the neglect of the gods: after quoting the opening lines of Horace, *Odes* III,6, he comments: 'Horace is not here mouthing some party line. It is a general and genuine belief.' And yet it is extremely difficult to guess at the religious consciousness of the 'average' Roman, simply because the bulk of our evidence comes from a highly articulate and intelligent minority.

An opening chapter entitled 'The Gods' sets the scene. The Romans had an astonishing multiplicity of gods and spirits, quite separate from the more or less Graecized Olympians. Virtually no human activity seems to have been without its presiding deity, from ploughing to opening and closing doors, and *numina* also proliferated in connexion with springs, woods and other natural objects, a way of thinking which the author sees partly as a substitute for scientific enquiry: 'A scientific law was not an abstraction but a concrete manifestation of divine activity.' He also
makes the point, vital for understanding the subject, that ‘Roman religion was concerned with success not with sin’ — the gods were involved with material events and were not in the least interested in the state of a man’s soul. However, their influence could be seen in every single material event, and here Ogilvie calls in the Stoic world-soul, which, he claims with some justification, helped to make the traditional religion, with its spirits everywhere, intellectually respectable.

Religious observance was a matter of ceremonies not beliefs, and many of those ceremonies could be performed by one priest on behalf of the population in general — yet the ‘secular’ nature of the Roman priesthoods prevented the rise of a priestly class. It was important that the gods should be approached, and there were three ways of doing this (whether publicly or privately), prayer, sacrifice and divination; these are the subjects of the next three chapters. Here a large amount of material is digested, to give fascinating and coherent accounts of the practices in question, and the various difficulties, hazards and complications attendant on them; this part of the book is extremely valuable, and shows that there was a real meaning in procedures that to us often seem either superficial and senseless or grotesque. There follows the longest chapter of the book, on the religious year. Here we follow the Roman through his religious festivals month by month (naturally with considerable help from Ovid as far as June), in a vivid and readable account. Private religion and the priesthoods are briefly covered before a chapter on religion in the time of Augustus and a short conclusion; the subject of Emperor worship is dealt with disappointingly briefly.

There are faults in this book. The restrictions of space were doubtless imposed by the publisher rather than by the author, but the result is that there are too few source references, and the reader finds it impossible to pursue some of the author’s most provocative and interesting statements. Even if the books in this series are intended mainly for the ‘general reader’ (whoever he may be), it is a pity if they are thereby to be made less useful for the specialist. I detected one incorrect reference (p. 21 — Satires I, 114 should read Satires I, VI, 114); and like Aristotle, if with less justifica-
ion, Ogilvie seems to rely on his memory for quotations — the sufferers are Housman (p. 9) and Shakespeare (p. 77). But these are trivial, if irritating failings in a book that shows real insight into a difficult subject.

Ferguson's book, The Religions of the Roman Empire, is completely different; he is concerned more with the externals of religion and instead of investigating the mind of the Roman he gives a survey of the various religions and cults which were to be found in the empire around a 'notional' date of 200 A.D. The book might be criticized on the grounds that the 'wood' is lost sight of in the wealth of detailed information about the 'trees' — but there is no doubt of the value of this detailed information. Ferguson takes his subject apart, and most of the book consists of chapters dealing with particular religions or deities. Thus we start with the Great Mother and the Sky-Father, and the bewildering multiplicity of their manifestations, from Britain to Egypt. A chapter on the Sun-God shows how this deity rose in favour until in the third century Aurelian was able to use him as a supreme deity under whom to unite the empire; and Constantine's Christianity had strong relics of solar worship in it, to say no more. These three deities tended towards monotheism; but the numina which had been so important to the Romans were still powerful, and their effect was in the opposite direction. A chapter on Tyche precedes an examination of Emperor worship, treated (as indeed it was) more as a political than as a religious phenomenon.

Ferguson next discusses personal religion, where he is concerned mainly with the mystery religions. Here the Greek and oriental influences are very strong, in a large selection of religions that range from the Eleusinian mysteries to Christianity. While he acknowledges that 'the impersonalities of state-religion could not satisfy the religious needs of the individual', it is a pity that he does not pursue this subject, and ask why this should have been so, and why these religions should have risen to such prominence and importance during the first centuries of the Christian era. Connected with this phenomenon are the increase in what we can call superstition and the flourishing of magical practices, which are described in fascinating detail, including witches from Horace, Tibullus, Ovid, Lucan and
Apuleius. A chapter on beliefs concerning the soul after death shows how in this period, as in most, men swayed between the ideas of extinction and survival, and how the change from cremation to inhumation was responsible for the wealth of sarcophagi that cast such light, with their decoration, on beliefs. Mystics and mountebanks, from St Anthony to Alexander of Abunoteichos, make an appearance; but perhaps the most interesting part of the book is its last two chapters. ‘Philosophers and the Gods’ summarizes the views of the principal schools of the age, discussing several individual philosophers (Marcus Aurelius is harshly judged) and showing in particular the impact of Platonism on both Christian and pagan thought. The last chapter is called ‘Syncretism and Confrontation’. Ancient religions were on the whole tolerant and ‘accommodating’, and happily absorbed features of each other; local divinities could usually be identified with some personality of the pantheon. The exceptions were Judaism and Christianity; but even here the influence of other religions can be seen. The Virgin Mary takes over titles and functions from Isis and Cybele; Zeus was once worshipped on many a hill now dedicated to the Prophet Elias. And the influence of Greek philosophy is obvious. The conflict of Christianity with paganism and the arguments used by both sides are briefly described, and we see Christianity emerging triumphant — celebrating the Saviour’s nativity on the Sun’s birthday and his resurrection at the festival of Attis.

This is a book full of information, some of it of general interest, some too detailed to be of use to any but the specialist. It is well documented, with a separate bibliography for each chapter and plentiful references to ancient sources; though one wonders how many readers will share the author’s ‘idiosyncratic dislike for little numerals in the text as well as for footnotes’. There are 32 pages of plates, some of marginal relevance but all interesting. In approach this book could be described as complementary to Ogilvie’s, and much of what one misses in the one can be found in the other.

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