



Review

Roman Religion in the Danubian Provinces: Space Sacralisation and Religious Communication During the Principate (1st–3rd Century AD). By C. Szabó. Oxbow, Oxford & Philadelphia, 2022. Pp. xiii + 298, illus. Price £38. ISBN 9781789257830; 9781789257847 (eBook).

Following a monograph on the Sanctuaries of Roman Dacia (2018), Szabó, with this volume, expands his geographical scope to embrace the vast territories of the Danubian provinces, which include Reatia, Noricum, Pannonia, Dacia and the Moesias, while maintaining the same temporal focus to the period between the first and third centuries A.D.

The theoretical framework of the volume is permeated by the lived ancient religion approach, which focuses on action and agency of individuals and groups, while at the same time interjecting several elements of the current glocalisation debate. The evidence presented is mostly epigraphic and archaeological, mainly architectonic. The book is divided into six chapters.

The first introduces the Danubian region from both a geocultural perspective and a religious studies one. Starting with the fascination of nineteenth-century travellers with this ‘mystical, exotic and ancient part of the continent’, the Danube is framed via a brief discussion of the Latin sources, highlighting that the region did not have a unique macro-regional identity initially, but rather it developed historically from the early nineteenth century onwards. The second half of the chapter presents a concise overview of the history of Roman religion studies culminating, for the author, in Rupke’s work on lived ancient religion. The methodological approach to the material is threefold: the lived ancient religion approach, for which the author suggests that the rich religious material from the Danubian provinces would provide a case study for its applicability; space sacralisation, where the interconnection between the three levels of macro-, meso-, micro-spaces structures different levels of religious communication expressed by different types of material evidence; and the glocalisation paradigm where ‘religiosity’ is customised based on the individuals and their interactions with varying levels of society changed after the Roman conquest.

The second chapter, ‘Emerging Roman religion: the beginnings’, illustrates examples of pre-Roman religious traditions dating back to the Bronze and Iron Ages, acknowledging their diversity also in the timing in which different areas of the Danube came under the Roman influence, resulting in a ‘reinvention’ of religious traditions.

The third chapter, ‘Lived Religion and its macro-spaces in the Danubian provinces’, covers the intersection of the presentation of religious macro-spaces with the ancient lived religion approach. The discussion of the macro-spaces is framed as the traditional arena of discussion of the centre *versus* periphery model which influenced how the local evidence for religion has been interpreted as marginal in the literature. The acknowledgement of the need for a shift in focus to the meso- and micro-spaces is stated, but is somewhat underplayed in the disproportion in discussion between this chapter (63 pages) and the following two (38 and 8 pages respectively). The typology of macro-spaces is divided, although not explicitly stated, in ‘large-scale mobilities’, ‘new spaces: cities and fort’, and ‘controlling and designing religion’, with a focus on religious representations in public *fora* and a nod to the epigraphic evidence for religious specialists.

The fourth chapter, ‘Space sacralisation in meso-spaces’, shifts the focus to smaller-scale religious areas (identified as where less than 100 individuals would participate) and provides a welcome opportunity to discuss the individual agency involved in the creation of these religious spaces, both architectonically and as communities, which populated the urban centres providing a bridge to the extra-urban (and provincial) networks.

The fifth chapter, ‘Religious experience in micro-spaces: housing the gods’, deals with religious communication on the most intimate level, whether personal or in the private sphere of houses, road

shrines and small military spaces. As is also acknowledged, small-scale religion is difficult to assess when the evidence for domestic architecture is limited or the provenance of objects related to 'private' religion is difficult to trace.

The sixth chapter is the 'Conclusion: beyond the materiality of the Roman religious communication', where the author ties together the main theoretical strands addressed in the previous chapters and provides more nuanced closing comments that were missing from the conclusive remarks in the original chapters.

The volume features three appendices. The first is a catalogue of the sacralised spaces ('sanctuaries') in the Danubian provinces, divided by region. The second is a list of the main theonyms epigraphically attested in the Danubian provinces. The third showcases diagrams visualising different sets of data, which are regrettably separated from the discussions they could have benefitted.

Roman Religion in the Danubian Provinces progresses the discourse on theoretical approaches to provincial religion framed through the lens of a constant exchange loop between local contexts of various sizes and multifaceted imperial influences. Clearly the author is deeply familiar with both the previous scholarly research and the material pertaining to the region. Its cultural heterogeneity makes it a very apt case study for the application of glocalisation approaches, especially when it comes to religion, where it is still somewhat in its infancy. The application of the threefold methodological approach could have benefitted from a more blended interconnection where the case studies would not seem to sustain one methodology or another. Given the length of some of the early chapters, a more detailed table of contents could have facilitated navigation within the volume.

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doi: 10.1017/S0068113X24000102