Household and Family Religion in Antiquity

The Ancient World: Comparative Histories

Series Editor: Kurt A. Raaflaub

Published

War and Peace in the Ancient World
Edited by Kurt A. Raaflaub

Household and Family Religion in Antiquity
Edited by John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan

Household and Family Religion in Antiquity

Edited by
John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan

Contents

List of Figures

Notes on Contributors

Susan Ackerman is the Preston H. Kelsey Professor of Religion and Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Dartmouth College. She is the author of *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (1992); *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (1998); and *When Heroes Love: The Ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David* (2005).

Rainer Albertz is Professor of Old Testament in the Protestant Theological Faculty of the University of Münster, Germany. He received his Dr theol and *venia legendi* (Habilitation) from the Heidelberg University. His primary area of research is the social and religious history of ancient Israel including the history of its literature. His most recent books are *Elia, ein feuriger Diener Gottes* (2006); *Geschichte und Theologie: Studien zur Exegese des Alten Testaments und zur Religionsgeschichte Israels* (Berlin 2003); *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century BCE* (2003; German 2001).

John Bodel is Professor of Classics and History at Brown University. His main areas of interest in research are the history, literature, archaeology, and epigraphy of the Roman empire. His most recent books are *Dediche sacre nel mondo greco-romano: Diffusione, funzioni, tipologie* (co-edited with Mika Kajava, forthcoming), *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History from Inscriptions* (2001) and (with Stephen Tracy) *Greek and Latin Inscriptions in the USA: A Checklist* (1997).

Deborah Boedeker is Professor and Chair of Classics at Brown University. From 1992 to 2000, she co-directed Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies. Her books include *Aphrodite's Entry into Greek Epic* (1974) and *Descent from Heaven: Images of Dew in Greek Poetry and Religion* (1984), as well as a number of edited and co-edited volumes, including *Herodotus and the Invention of History* (1987); *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts in Fifth-Century Athens* (1998); and *The New Simonides: Contexts of Praise and Desire* (2001). She is currently working on traditions about the Persian War, Greek poetry and historiography, and the "new Sappho" fragments and their transmission.

Christopher A. Faraone is the Frank C. and Gertrude M. Springer Professor of Classics and Humanities at The University of Chicago. He is co-editor (with D. Dodd) of *Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals and Narratives: New Critical*

Perspectives (2003) and (with L. McClure) of *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World* (2005), and author of *Talismans and Trojan Horses: Guardian Statues in Ancient Greek Myth and Ritual* (1992) and *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (1999). His *The Stanzaic Architecture of Ancient Greek Elegiac Poetry* will appear in 2008.

Daniel E. Fleming is Professor of Assyriology and Hebrew Bible at New York University. His research spans the ancient Near East from Mesopotamia across Syria to Israel, with focus on social and cultural patterns. His most recent books are *Democracy's Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance* (2004), and *Time at Emar: The Cultic Calendar and the Rituals from the Diviner's Archive* (2000).

Barbara S. Lesko's Egyptological career spans almost fifty years, beginning with degrees from the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute and employment at the University of California, Berkeley and later at Brown University where she was Administrative Research Assistant in the Department of Egyptology from 1982 until her retirement in 2005. Mrs Lesko is the author and co-author of several books, such as *The Great Goddesses of Egypt* (1999) and was collaborating editor, with her husband, of *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian*, 2 vols. (2004). She has contributed numerous articles to anthologies, encyclopedias, and journals, and specializes in lexicography and women's studies.

Theodore J. Lewis (PhD, Harvard University) is Blum-Iwry Professor and Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Studies at The Johns Hopkins University. He is also an academic trustee of the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem. His research focuses on the religions of ancient Israel and Syria. He is general editor of the book series Writings from the Ancient World (SBL/Brill), and past editor of the journals *Near Eastern Archaeology* and *Hebrew Annual Review*. He is the author of *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (1989), and co-author of *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (1997). He has recently co-edited (with Gary Beckman) *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (2006). He is currently writing *The Religion of Ancient Israel* for the Anchor Bible.

Saul M. Olyan is Samuel Ungerleider Jr Professor of Judaic Studies and Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University. He received his PhD from Harvard University. His primary areas of research are the history, literature and religion of ancient Israel, and the history of biblical interpretation. His most recent books are *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (2008), *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (2004) and *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (2000).

Robert K. Ritner is currently Professor of Egyptology at The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago and was from 1991 to 1996 the first Marilyn M. Simpson Assistant Professor of Egyptology at Yale University. He is the author of the books *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (1993), *The Libyan Anarchy: Documents from Egypt's Third Intermediate Period* (forthcoming), co-author of *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (2003), and author of over

100 publications on Egyptian religion, magic, medicine, language and literature, as well as social and political history.

Rüdiger Schmitt is currently research assistant at the University of Münster, Germany. He received his doctorate from Groningen University (1994) and his Habilitation from the University of Münster (2004). His research and teaching *foci* are the history and archaeology of Ancient Israel and the history of ancient Israelite religion. His current project is an investigation of family religion and domestic cult remains. Recent publications include *Alles fauler Zauber?: Zur gegenwärtigen Attraktivität von Magie* (forthcoming), *Magie im Alten Testament* (2004), *Bildhafte Herrschaftsrepräsentation im Alten Israel* (2001).

Stanley K. Stowers is Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University. He received his PhD from Yale University and is the author of *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews and Gentiles* (1994) among other books and articles. Most recently he has published "The Concepts of 'Religion,' and 'Political Religion' in the Study of Nazism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42.1 (2007) and written a paper, "The Ontology of Religion." He teaches and publishes in the areas of ancient Mediterranean religions, especially early Christianity, and in the theorization of religion.

Karel van der Toorn, a specialist in Israelite and other ancient West Asian religions, is President of the University of Amsterdam. He is author of *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (2007), *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (1996), and *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (1985), among other books.

Series Editor's Preface

The Ancient World: Comparative Histories

The application of the comparative approach to the ancient world at large has been rare. The new series of which this is the second volume intends to fill this gap. It will pursue important social, political, religious, economic, and intellectual issues through a wide range of ancient societies. "Ancient" will here be understood broadly, encompassing not only societies that are "ancient" within the traditional chronological framework of c. 3000 BCE to c. 600 CE in East, South, and West Asia, the Mediterranean, and Europe, but also later ones that are structurally "ancient" or "early," such as those in pre-modern Japan or in Meso- and South America before the Spanish Conquest. By engaging in comparative studies of the ancient world on a truly global scale, this series will throw light not only on common patterns and marked differences but also illustrate the remarkable variety of responses human-kind developed to meet common challenges. Focusing, as it does, on periods that are far removed from our own time and in which modern identities are less imme-diately engaged, the series will contribute to enhancing our understanding and appreciation of differences among cultures of various traditions and backgrounds. Not least, it will thus illuminate the continuing relevance of the study of the ancient world in helping us to cope with problems of our own multicultural world.

Topics to be dealt with in future volumes include geography, ethnography, and perspectives of the world; recording the past and writing history; and the preservation and transformation of the past in oral poetic traditions.

Kurt A. Raaflaub

Acknowledgments

In the transliteration of Akkadian, Greek, Hebrew, and other languages, we have adopted a simplified system that does not indicate vowel length. Biblical citations follow the original Hebrew, the versification of which sometimes differs from that of Christian translations into English (though not from that of Jewish translations).

Atlantic Ocean

Black Sea

Mediterranean Sea

Red Sea

see p. 260 Fig. 14.4

Tiber River
Rome
Ostia
Alba Longa
Lavinium
Pompeii
Mt. Vesuvius
Bay of Naples
Taras

Acheron River
Thasos
Piraeus
Troy
Antissa
Athens
Eleusis
Ithaca
Mycenae
Argos
Corinth
Sparta
Epidauros
Keos
Kos
Delos
Cyrene

Nuzi
Tigris River
Akkad
Kish
Uruk
Sippar
Babylon
Dilbat

Tuttul
Aleppo
Ebla
Emar
Siyannu
Euphrates River
Ugarit
Jordan River
See Inset
Kuntillet 'Ajrud

Giza
Gurob
Kahun
Nile River
Amarna
Qau
Asyut
Abydos
Deir el-Bahri/
Deir el-Medina/
Luxor
Thebes
Valley of the Kings
Elkab

500 English miles
0   100   300   500

Inset:
0   40 km
0   30 km

Dan
Sea of Galilee
Hazor
Megiddo
Taanach
Tirzah
ISRAEL
Shiloh
Jordan River
Amman
Tell Jawa
Aphek
Tel Qasile
Gezer
Bethel
Ai
Gibeah
Jerusalem
Bethlehem
Khirbet Raddana
Tell en-Nasbe
Ashdod
Tel es-Safi
Ekron
Lachish
PHILISTIA
Tell 'Eton
Tell Judeidah
Khirbet el-Qom
JUDAH
Tell Bet Mirsim
Ziklag
Beer-sheba
Dead Sea

Introduction

JOHN BODEL AND SAUL M. OLYAN

This volume grows out of a conference held at Brown University during the winter of 2005. Its purpose, like that of the event which preceded it, is to advance our understanding, both contextually and comparatively, of a distinct and widespread ancient religious phenomenon – household and family religion – within a number of discrete cultural and historical settings of Mediterranean and West Asian antiquity. In order to achieve these goals, we invited a paper, and begin with a chapter, outlining the salient theoretical and methodological issues raised by the study of household and family religion in itself and showing the importance of cross-cultural comparisons for effective theory-formation. A series of essays follows, addressing the phenomenon of household and family religion in a number of different cultural contexts: Second Millennium West Asia (Mesopotamia, Emar, Nuzi, Ugarit); First Millennium West Asia (including Israel); Egypt; Greece; and Rome. A comparative essay by the editors concludes the volume.

Family and household religion is a cutting-edge topic in several of the fields represented here. In some it is just emerging as a distinct subject of interest. In others it has long been studied, but often with a teleologically Christianizing bias that has obscured its essential nature. Past emphasis on religion as manifested in state-sponsored or civic temple cults has tended to give way in several fields to a new recognition that religious expression outside the physical and social contexts of national, regional, or civic worship – expression associated with household, family, and domicile – is also significant and must be investigated in a serious way. Such religious expression might include supplication of a household's patron deities or of spirits associated with the house itself, providing for ancestral spirits, and any number of rituals related to the lifecycle (rites of pregnancy and birth, maturity, old age, and death). And it might occur in a number of different *loci*. For a number of the cultures represented here, the domicile was evidently a central locus for petition

of family gods and, in some settings, for contact with dead ancestors. But for some of the cultures of interest to us, the domestic locus hardly exhausts the phenomenon we are calling household and family religion, for the household and family are social units, and the religious activity of their members might also occur in places other than the home, such as at extramural tombs and local sanctuaries. Furthermore, as Stanley Stowers emphasizes in his essay in this volume, the temporal dimensions of household and family religion cannot be ignored. Lifecycle events occur at particular stages of life, in a particular sequence. Thus, any study of household and family religion ought to be shaped by considerations of where a given ritual took place, in the presence or interest of what social group, and when – not only at what time of day (if that is known) but, in certain cases, at what times of year and at what stage in the life of either the participant or the property itself.

Readers might find redundancy in our title and wonder why we have chosen to refer to the phenomenon of interest as "household and family religion" rather than simply "family religion" or "household religion." Because usages within disciplines vary, and because the phenomenon itself takes different forms in different cultural contexts, we did not want to prejudice the issue by imposing a single name, nor did we wish to become overly distracted by debate about nomenclature. Our primary interest is the phenomenon itself, how it was constituted and how it functioned within the cultures under consideration, rather than achieving a consensus regarding terminology. With the goal of approaching the subject from that perspective, we invited our contributors to use whatever terminology they preferred for the phenomenon in question but asked them to justify their usages by explaining the parameters of the territory that each term covered. We asked them, in other words, to begin to theorize the phenomenon for their own fields, thereby providing us with a basis for comparison among cultures.

Most contributors tend to prefer one term or the other, but some are inclined to speak of a "domestic cult" or "popular religion" instead of "family" or "household" religion. Predictably, perhaps, definitions of "household" and "family" vary by cultural and disciplinary context, but most can be broadly classified according to a few basic oppositional categories: families are generally conceived of either broadly, as comprising all descendants of a single male ancestor (a clan), or more narrowly, as constituting a smaller group of closer relatives. Within the latter category, the family can be further defined as either nuclear, having the triadic configuration of mother, father, and offspring, or extended, including also more distant relatives and often spanning several generations. Households, similarly, can be classified as either simple, consisting exclusively of biological kin, or complex, comprising household dependents (principally but not only domestic slaves) as well as blood relatives – in short, all who live within the house (or, more accurately in certain contexts, all who fall within the power of the head of the family). Within these basic categories much variation, of course, is possible – the compositions and configurations of complex households, for example, differed substantially among the cultures under consideration – and practically there is often considerable overlap among them, but fundamentally "family" and "household" characterize different realms,

one primarily biological with an important temporal element, the other architec-tural with an important physical component. The terms chosen for our title may thus be seen to represent two related but essentially different ways by which the phenomenon of interest can be identified and, in a preliminary way, defined.

In addition to textual representations of cultic activity outside of the major sanctuaries, whether epigraphic or literary, relevant materials for reconstructing household and family religion include the material remains of distinct domestic or other loci, related utensils understood to serve cultic purposes, and pictorial repres-entations of cultic acts, deities, or other relevant phenomena. For some cultures, the onomasticon forms another distinct class of pertinent data (e.g., Egypt, Emar, Israel). In some fields, recent archaeological discoveries have increased considerably the material available for study and have stimulated further investigation into the phenomenon. The evidence of Ammonite Tell Jawa, for example, has had con-siderable impact on discussions of Levantine household and family religion. Our authors draw on various kinds of sources, and their treatments of them are shaped both by the range of evidence available to them and by the questions they ask of it. Some privilege texts in their investigations, others material remains, including visual representations. Still others strive to balance the different classes of evidence. What they share in common is a focus on a distinct religious phenomenon attested cross-culturally and through time.

Why contextual *and* comparative perspectives? Studying family and household religion from the viewpoint of each individual cultural context of interest to us requires little justification. Such a contextual approach has been and remains routine in all of the fields represented in this volume and, what is more important, provides the requisite material for any attempt at comparison. In fact, there can be no worthwhile comparison without a detailed consideration of the phenomenon in each individual context. Thus far, such contextual work has been attempted in only a few of the settings under consideration here (e.g., Second Millennium Babylon, First Millennium Israel, classical Rome). For a number of other cultural contexts, the essays collected in this volume represent a significant initial step, a first attempt at a comprehensive understanding of household and family religion in a particular setting. In contrast to contextual work, which is uncontroversial in itself, being at worst harmlessly antiquarian, comparison has sometimes elicited resistance from scholars in the various fields represented in this volume, as Stowers notes in his essay. Whatever the reasons for such resistance – there are probably more than a few – comparison strikes us as particularly welcome and even necessary when the phenomenon under study, however it is to be more precisely defined, is attested as broadly and cross-culturally as is household and family religion. Comparison has the potential to generate new questions and novel insights; it can lead us to a more nuanced understanding of the category of religious behavior that interests us by revealing points of similarity as well as difference; and it can enable us to distinguish that which is common to a larger Mediterranean and West Asian cultural sphere from that which is particular to one or another cultural setting. First, however, we must explore the nature of the phenomenon in its various manifestations across the

region. We therefore begin with a series of studies of household and family religion in individual civilizations, arranged chronologically and consequently moving (roughly) from east to west, in order to gain insight into the phenomenon of interest as it is evidenced in a number of discrete cultural settings over time. These individual studies are followed by an essay in which a preliminary attempt is made at comparison, in the hope of advancing our understanding of the nature of household and family religion across the larger Mediterranean and West Asian world of antiquity.

2

Theorizing the Religion of Ancient Households and Families

STANLEY K. STOWERS

For areas of academic study with deep philological and humanist roots, the title of this volume announces a bold and important venture. The interest in method, and especially in theory and comparison, reflects a growing awareness that even particularistic fields like Classics, Biblical Studies and Egyptology are not self-justifying and autonomous domains of knowledge. Rather, they belong to the universe of knowledge and accountability named in the very concept of a university. I take my task as that of saying something about religion, household, and family in light of the tasks of comparison and theory formation. Although I believe that the principles of domestic religion that I discuss have a broad relevance, I admit up-front that I know almost nothing about many of the cultural areas represented in this volume. I do know a little bit about Greece and Rome and so will use examples from there. I will first make some remarks about family and household and then focus upon religion.

A massive bibliography from several fields exists on the family and household.[1] Those categories are far from unproblematic, but only limited discussion about them is feasible here. Understanding the conjunction of the categories family, household, and religion stands as central to the project of this volume. The difficulty of the task finds illustration in one problem. If religion of the family is defined as the religion that any member of the family might practice, then all religion is religion of the family, since in theory everyone belongs to a family of some sort. Another approach and account is needed to treat religion of the household and family. The vast contemporary literature on the family is a highly political minefield. On one extreme, evolutionary psychologists simply posit that the nuclear family consisting of heterosexual monogamous husband and wife with biologically related children all residing together, and the man working outside the home with the wife tending the hearth and raising the children, is hard-wired in the brain, genetically

determined.[2] On the other extreme, some sociologists and cultural anthropologists argue that actual patterns of social relations are so varied that there is no family, but only culturally specific ideologies of the family.[3] Unlike the evolutionary psychologists, at least, the anthropologists have evidence – too much of it.[4] They can point to types of societies in which husbands and wives never live together, or where biological paternity is impossible to know and not taken into account in locating and raising children, and on and on with variations.[5]

In the nineteenth century and the early part of the last century, pan Indo-European evolutionary theories of the family pictured a development from pervasive large extended families in societies based on blood ties toward smaller families in societies based on rational organization finally realized in modernity. These ideas affected writing on Greek and Roman families.[6] After the mid-twentieth century, there was a general reaction against these views and a movement among historians of European and the Mediterranean cultures to show that the nuclear family had always been the norm, including in Greece and Rome.[7] There has been some criticism of this trend, but it still dominates.[8] I find the pioneering work of Andrew Wallace-Hadrill that focuses on various kinds of residences as social places particularly suggestive for thinking about new directions.[9] I will not challenge the consensus about the nuclear family and its focus on "blood ties" except to point to some methodological flaws in the way that the case has been mounted. Noting these flaws will be useful for theorizing the conjunction with religion.

It seems to me that the case for the nuclear family has often been made by using an implicit scheme of analysis that made the husband, wife, and biological children an essence in opposition to slaves, resident workers, freedmen, and other relatives who are treated as non-essential. But, for example, were slaves in Roman households during the later Republic and Empire non-essential? Greece and Rome were cultures that did not even have words for the nuclear family. They were indeed societies in which husbands, wives and their children residing together were important. But making family trump household misses the lesson from the massive work of the anthropologists. The sum and intensity of actual social relations is what counts. Families in which those who make up the supposed nuclear essence have relations and even lifelong emotional attachments to resident slaves, for example, *are* different from the nuclear family. Families in households in which slaves and nurses rather than the nuclear mother do most of the child-rearing *are* different. A household in which there is no distinction between work and home, and in which public and private, insiders and outsiders blur *is* different from the nuclear family that evolutionary psychologists find to be universal. Households in which members of the nuclear family regularly have children with slaves and do not allow slaves to form families *are* different. The examples could be multiplied. The lesson for the task of this volume is that place and residency must be given their due weight. Who lived together and what were their relations? What configuration of relations did the people who lived in that place have with other places? What were the dynamics and cycles of changes in the compositions of those households? Family should not be abstracted from household. Ideologies of household and family

should then be analytically distinguished with the awareness that ideology and actual relations affect each other.

Because theory and method have been understood in various ways within and across fields, some comments about my assumptions are in order. I understand theory formation as the activity of critical definition, classification, comparison, and interpretation that aims toward explanation.[10] Explanation is a form of redescription. Most often it involves taking a subject matter described in native, folk, and local terms and redescribing it in terms designed by the researcher to answer the researcher's questions, to broaden the scope of the data, and to understand it systematically, if possible. Theory possesses whatever explanatory power it has by virtue of its difference from the local and native terms of the subject matter. Theory formation is a process that presupposes the fullest possible description and understanding of the local native point-of-view, but is itself a distinct intellectual activity. As Jonathan Z. Smith reminds us with Jorge Luis Borges's parable of the mapmakers, a map is only useful to the extent that it differs from the territory to which it refers.[11] A map that covered every inch of Rhode Island and exactly corresponded to every feature of its topography would be of no use at all. Description and paraphrase are not yet mapmaking. In my estimation, fields like those represented in this conference have wanted too much method without the theory that justifies the method and gives it sense. Someone might teach me the technique of replacing a certain circuit board in my computer but, without the theoretical knowledge of how the computer works, I will never understand why it burned out or the function it performed within the larger system of the computer. Method without theory can be dangerous. Classics and Biblical Studies are replete with examples of literary and social theories that have been imported and turned into methods of reading texts with a loss of the contexts and questions that generated the theories.[12]

The interests and social practices of the scholar make her way of thinking different from the native and local thought, but the scholar's explanation and theory formation is only a specialized version of ordinary human cognitive practices. When Aristophanes said "even the barbarians have gods" (*Birds* 1525) and Herodotus compared the religion of the Greeks to that of the Egyptians and Scythians, they were engaged in rudimentary theory formation about religion. To define and classify, as both Greek writers do, requires comparison. Definition, classification, and comparison are inseparable.[13] Even ordinary folk description involves classification and comparison. The theorist adds a broadened scope, systematic reflexivity, and organized public critique. For Herodotus, the similarity and difference that he described in non-Greek religion required explanation and he provided several. The modern academic adds vastly more data, a potentially universal horizon, and an apparatus of critical reflexivity about those activities that includes the history and state of theory formation across fields of knowledge. Thus comparison is not an extra inquiry that the scholar might want to add to his supposedly more basic practices, but a requirement for anyone who aims at explanation. Indeed, it is fundamental to thought as such. The anti-comparative ethos of some

fields is only maintained by a regime of rules and practices that valorize limiting
inquiry to descriptive paraphrase so as to strictly control the scope of the data that
may be entertained, and the kinds of questions that can be asked.[14] As soon as a
scholar seriously considers the thesis that the people in question were not just, say,
Greeks or Judeans, but also residents of the ancient eastern Mediterranean region or
members of a type of pre-modern society or that they belong to the species *homo
sapiens*, then comparison goes hand in hand with such classification.

In my view, the object of study that presents the most difficulties is religion.
These difficulties stem not from some special epistemological or ontological status
of the object, but from the fact that religion has been treated as special, unique,
not subject to the norms of inquiry presupposed for other human activities.[15]
That the academic study of religion has only recently and partially been made
semi-autonomous from the religious study of religion is one sign of this situation.
In the fields that study western antiquity, I am amazed at how rarely writings
that treat religion define or in any way specify what the scholar holds religion to be.
This means, for one thing, that local intuitive folk assumptions of the scholar
about religion often shape studies in ways that cannot easily be the object of
critical scrutiny.

One step toward rectifying this problem would be the use of explicit definition.
A definition should be a starting point for further work and for revision of the
definition. A definition is a theory *in nuce* and thus extremely useful for orienting
the writer and the reader. Desiderata for useful theoretical definition include the
following. It should specify the ontological status of the phenomenon. In the case
of religion, I see it as a human activity, a social/cultural phenomenon. A definition
should encompass all or as much as possible of the phenomenon in question. A
definition tells one what the researcher, at least initially and tentatively, counts as the
limits and boundaries of the phenomenon. A definition should not simply be any
particular local perspective. A specification that said religion is belief in the one true
god and his son and false variants of sorcery, magic, and heresy might encompass
most of the world's religion, but it would represent it from one local perspective.
Many of the folk assumptions about religion among scholars who write about
antiquity suffer from some, albeit more subtle, form of this problem. Qualifiers such
as a system of beliefs, the feeling of awe and reverence, the sacred, transcendence
and on and on are examples of attempts to define religion that centrally involve
local religious norms about religion. Usually these derive from Christianity and the
traditions of nineteenth-century Romanticism.[16] Definitions should be polythetic
rather than monothetic.[17] Monothetic is closely related to what people often mean
by essentialistic, and involves classification by a single supposedly invariant feature
or bounded bundle of features.

I will offer the following definition, by way of illustration and in order to stimu-
late thinking about the religion of the household and the family. Religions are
the often linked and combined practices (i.e., doings and saying) of particular
human populations (e.g., imagined as cultures, societies, ethnicities, groups, global
movements) that involve the imagined participation of gods or other normally

non-observable beings in those practices and social formations, and that shade into many kinds of anthropomorphizing interpretations of the world. Religion is the unfolding activity (including thinking and believing) involving those practices that postulate participation with and make reference to gods, normally non-observable beings and anthropomorphizing interpretations of the world. This definition rests on claims of some reliably generalizable, if not necessarily universal, characteristics of religious activities. Such activities directly or indirectly involve "culturally postulated" beings with human-like agency and other human-like features, especially of human mind.[18] Normally non-observable here should not be taken in a positivistic way. It is not a claim about the reality and epistemological status of these beings, but about a characteristic of native conception. Gods, ancestors and such are typically conceived as not in public view most of the time for various reasons, even if emanations, incarnations, visible instantiations, and representations of the full reality are common.

The beings in this theory can be human-like in a number of ways, but such non-obvious beings usually have attributes of mind such as purposes, will, and intentions.[19] They may have bodies or be bodiless and immaterial. They may be powerful, immortal and beyond every order of existence conceivable to humans or they may be mortal and rather fragile. They may be thought of as agents with whom humans want to communicate and please or they may be conceived as agents that humans want to avoid and keep at a distance. It is a distinctly modern idea to think them supernatural in the sense that there is a split between a natural order of cause and effect by uniform physical laws acting on qualitatively uniform matter versus an entirely other realm of the spiritual. Even the God of the Bible is not beyond the physical and the natural order.[20] The power of the theory, then, comes from, first, allowing for precise discriminations about what is religious and what is not, and, second, from enabling fine discriminations about historical types of religion.

Some reflections on the definition will, I hope, point to its utility. To begin with, religion is a class of practices that involve a broader, species-wide cognitive propensity. This makes it difficult to think of religion as something autonomous in relation to other classes of human activity.[21] This also makes religion a matter of more and less. That religion draws upon the phenomenon of anthropomorphizing allows one to see that there are not clear boundaries at the margins for what is religious and that cases may shade off into areas usually thought of as philosophies of life, folk science, folk psychology, and so on. But why call it a class of practices?[22] Talking of practice provides a way of thinking about the social that avoids the individual/social and thought/action dualisms that have caused so much mischief in our intellectual history. Most of human life unfolds in kinds of activities based on practical skills that the individual did not invent. As such, practices are the primary unit that a culture or society reproduces over time. On this view, a society or culture is not greater than the sum of its parts, but a large number of practical skills assembled and linked in characteristic ways that are passed down from generation to generation. This means that I reject totalizing abstractions like society and social structure in functional analysis.

This way of thinking about religion is polythetic. The human-like beings and characteristics that agents attribute to the world comprise a massive class of thought/action. The class is precisely as complex as human ways of thinking about and acting toward human beings, at least as these can be involved in imagining the non-human world. No single property of the class can apply to all instances of religion, even if characteristic combinations of properties might apply widely across instances.

I will choose the issue of religion's frequently supposed autonomy from other social domains to illustrate this way of theorizing religion for the study of antiquity. Fortunately, there is now wide recognition that religion was organized differently in antiquity as compared to western modernity. A division into semi-autonomous domains such as the economy, politics, high culture, and religion characterizes modernity. It is from this large-scale field and individual life-sphere arrangement of modernity that we get the idea that religion is something essentially separate from areas such as the economy and politics. In antiquity, religion was embedded in a rather seamless social and cultural whole. This means that religion was not a matter of meaning for the individual in a distinct portion of a person's life. It has been typical in modernity to view religion as a sphere of meaning and economy as a sphere of instrumentality, two opposites.

But what happens when we consider the religion of the ancient household and take seriously our way of theorizing it as a class of practices that are continuous with other practices and patterns of human thought? Most economic production in antiquity took place within the household and on land owned and/or worked by members of households, including slaves.[23] Households in the Greek and Roman worlds were organized so that the work of women, children, slaves and other dependents supported the leisure of male heads of households so that they might have freedom for management, cultural (e.g., religion), and political activity. The house was not a place of leisure that one came home to after work at the office, but the center of work and production. Moreover, the domestic economy, based on the idea of non-market exchanges of goods between members of the family, was the ideal model for the outside economy of equals and citizens.[24]

Religious practices and economic practices were intertwined in antiquity and to adequately theorize ancient religions the scholar must understand how practices that made reference to gods and similar beings also involved the economy and politics and so on. It is no accident that the most important religious practices and institutions had to do with land, the wealth from the land and food. The central religious practices in the historical period of the ancient Mediterranean concerned the fruits of the land that landowning heads of households offered back to deities who gave the products and legitimated the ownership and social order. As places of animal, plant and other offerings, temples were centers of massive consumption, redistribution and storage of wealth that competed with households, the other major locus for economy and religion.[25] Scholarship from the social sciences on gift giving, reciprocity and non-market economies are highly relevant, but under-exploited by scholars of antiquity, and especially of religion. One could take art or

politics and also show how the practices that comprise these categories of social analysis were also embedded with religious practices.

One central theoretical and methodological lesson from the embeddedness of religious practices is that the analysis of meaning should not be separated from the analysis of power and action. Meaning and power are mutually implicated. The researcher should ask two questions: What were the culture's schemes of classification and how did individuals and groups act with or against those schemes so as to produce and distribute social capital? I will illustrate these two moves with reference to some points at which the theorizing work of two critical heirs of Claude Levi-Strauss, Jonathan Z. Smith and Pierre Bourdieu, touch on domestic religion. Much of Smith's important work on religion has concerned classification and comparison. For a conference that treated an area from Iran to the Aegean and south to Egypt over the course of literate antiquity, Smith was given the unenviable task of making some useful generalizations about religion.[26] He did so by means of a taxonomy of religion from that territory and time span with terms inspired by lines from Dr Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*: "I will not eat them here or there; I will not eat them anywhere." Thus his taxonomy took a form particularly appropriate for antiquity, a topography.

The religion of household and family, located primarily in the home and at the family tomb, is the ultimate religion of place. The place of domestic religion is "here" because it is not "there." "There" is the religion of public, civic, and state religion epitomized by the temple. A temple is centrally defined by occupying a separated sacred space in contrast to the home. Put a little differently from Smith's language, "here" is the primary place of human occupation and one crosses over "there" to enter a temple, a place dedicated especially to the occupation of the gods.

One might develop an idea of categories and implicit comparison inherent in Smith's schema with the example of the temple. The temple is a place constructed in such a way that it draws attention to itself as extraordinary over against the ordinariness of the house. Thus in some cultural spheres the temple is explicitly a house for the gods. But even if not explicit, a temple is usually a place with walls or columns, roof, a door or entrance, and so on: in other words, a version of house-building, but very different from any mundane house.[27] This disparity is marked in the archaeological record. While the remains of temple religion are quite striking, traces of domestic religion are difficult to recognize. A household vessel used for libations is likely to be an ordinary cup, while a temple vessel is one made precisely to display its difference from the ordinary household utensil.

The most important form of the religion of "here" was the family or household meal, both every day and for special religious occasions.[28] Codes of hospitality and patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and differentiated participation defined degrees of membership and relatedness to the family. Expressed in an idiom closer to Bourdieu than to Smith, the place, say a dining table and hearth or a courtyard altar, gave structure to practice. The practical skills that those in the household required in order to participate both shaped the participants and gave them capacity for

endless elaboration and strategic action within the constraints of the game. Slightly modified versions of food preparation, eating, drinking, serving, pouring, and table talk marked the practices as religious, as involving some relation to gods, ancestors, non-obvious beings, or purpose and value attributed to the non-human world. The religion of "there" in the temple borrowed the everyday practices of "here," but greatly elaborated and exaggerated them to mark them precisely as not everyday. It is not just an everyday dinner, but a sacrificial feast in the house of a god. I will argue that, for the periods and areas in question, both meaning and power involved the mutual opposition and interaction of the "here" and the "there."

Smith writes, "Domestic religion, focused on the extended family, is supremely local. It is concerned with the endurance of the family as a social and biological entity."[29] What I find interesting in this passage is that, although Smith's taxonomy concerns spatial place, he must also speak of, even conflate, spatial place with temporal place.[30] Just as in Greek religion, the sacrifice of an animal at the household hearth in order to introduce a newborn into the household took place at a spatial site, so it also occupied a temporal site in the life of the family, clan and individual in question.[31] Even the title of this volume suggests this key duality of place in speaking of "household and family religion." In the religion both of "here" and "there," ritual had a marked temporal sequence at a marked spatial site, and myth and genealogy coordinated spatial and temporal place.[32] The founder of the city's lineage sprang from this land. The father's father lived and was buried here. I would generalize by saying that a central characteristic of ancient domestic religion was the coordination of spatial and temporal place. Thus the most distinctive rituals of domestic religion in the ancient Mediterranean were rites of passage, of birth, death, and stages of life. Smith points out that the chief threats to the religion of "here" were extinction, dislocation and forgetfulness.[33] Again these involved the conjunction of temporal and spatial place. Extinction is the end of a particular string of connected temporal sites that a group of humans have linked to a story about a spatial place. Forgetfulness is a threat to that activity of genealogical conjunction. Dislocation separates the sites in the life-course of the family and its members from the spatial place to which they are thought intrinsically to belong. Thus the dilemma of the family that is exiled from the burial sites of its ancestors: Reburial and pilgrimage are possible, but will always serve as reminders of a loss of place considered intrinsic to the family. This situation can lead to the creation of a homeland/diaspora culture.

The importance of this conjunction of the spatial and the temporal for the character of domestic religion can be seen by way of contrast with the religion of "anywhere." This is religion that is bound to no place in particular.[34] Examples include many kinds of clubs and associations, wandering religious specialists, religious specialists without official legitimacy, and eventually Christian groups in the first centuries of the Roman Empire. I would argue that this kind of religion typically centers on specialists in books and in writing. The example of Christianity in its first two centuries shows that it is possible for temporal place to entirely