

Valerie M. Warrior. *Roman Religion*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Nichole Sheldrick, University of Alberta

182 |

Valerie M. Warrior's *Roman Religion* is published as part of the 'Cambridge Introduction to Roman Civilization' series and is meant to provide a "first point of reference" (iii) for students new to the subject. The material is grouped by theme rather than chronologically, producing "a patchwork of disparate sources of different dates" (xiii). As an introductory volume the coverage of each topic is necessarily narrow in scope but Warrior has managed to convey the general sense of each theme at hand in a style that is accessible and easy to understand.

In this thin volume Warrior has tackled a wide variety of topics which are divided into very broadly themed chapters such as 'The Gods and their Worship' and 'Religion and the State'. Due at least in part to the nature and availability of the evidence, the author has focussed mainly on the middle Republican to the middle Imperial periods and she ends her discussion by only briefly introducing the rise of Christianity in the Empire. In general, Warrior has dealt well with the difficult task of compressing a large amount of information into a short space, finding a good balance between summarizing the information and providing individual examples of ancient testimony to illustrate her points and avoid simply making general statements.

One problem that arises from the limited length of the book is that it loses room for the in depth contextualization of religion into the wider sphere of Roman history. It is stated explicitly at the front of this volume that the series "is designed for use by students who

have no prior knowledge of or familiarity with Roman antiquity” (iii) and as a part of the series it may achieve this goal. However, even though there are a few glossaries for the quick identification of major figures and important Latin terms, this book on its own could potentially be hard to follow for a new student as the material is used only “more or less chronologically within each theme” (xiii), sometimes moves quickly through various events and time periods and is by no means comprehensive. It would be much more realistically useful for students with a basic grounding in Roman history who are looking for a quick reference of major concepts, rather than a first introduction to the subject.

| 183

Warrior has drawn together a variety of ancient sources, both written and visual, to support her arguments and her emphasis on the importance of the ancient evidence is admirable. The literary evidence chosen by Warrior has been included in such a way that it is relevant and instructive, lending strength and ancient authority to her descriptions of the various religious rituals and activities practiced by the ancient Romans. She has incorporated testimony from a wide range of authors and subjects and the English translations are clear and appropriate to the level of the intended reader.

One of the main flaws of the book, however, is the manner in which Warrior has used and presented the visual sources. Throughout the book there are a number of colour images of sculptures, paintings, coins and more, which are used to illustrate and support the textual evidence. However, therein lays the problem: these excellent visual sources have been relegated to the status of mere illustration for the text rather than given their place as important sources of information unto themselves. They are, in many cases, barely referenced or integrated into the text, if at all; in some

cases they could just as easily be removed without affecting Warrior's narrative.

Furthermore, Warrior's choice of illustration is, at times, questionable, if not completely inappropriate. One example of this is her use of a description of a *suovetaurilia* written by the Republican author Cato the Elder in the mid 2nd century BCE, accompanied by a depiction of the ritual in a relief sculpture which dates to the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (14-37 CE), almost 200 years later (20-21). In other cases the author does not even include any information about the image except to describe what it shows. For example, Image 52 is accompanied by the uninformative caption, "Relief with scene depicting chariot-racing in the Circus Maximus" (76), with no reference to its provenance or date. For someone who has made special mention that students should remember to "consider the source" (xiii) when using ancient testimony, this is a serious oversight. By failing to acknowledge the equal importance of visual sources in Roman religion, Warrior provides only limited coverage of the topic and in this way her representation of the discipline is somewhat misleading.

Despite some of the problems that have been identified, Warrior has successfully produced a book which achieves its first and foremost goal by being informative and accessible to new students. It provides basic explanations of the fundamental concepts of Roman religion in a clear and uncomplicated manner and ultimately has the potential to inspire students to do further research into the discipline.