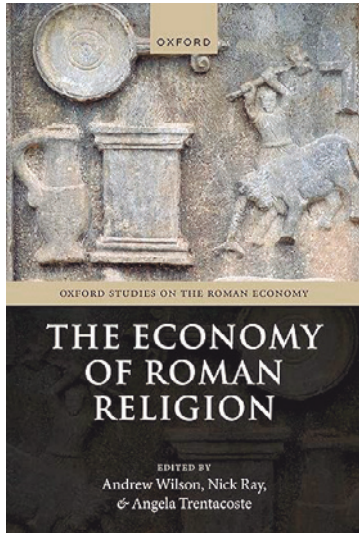


## THE ECONOMY OF ROMAN RELIGION




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WILSON, ANDREW, RAY, NICK &  
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Most of the articles in this volume derive from a conference sponsored by the *Oxford Roman Economy Project* held in September, 2016, and the volume itself fits well into the series *Oxford Studies in the Roman Economy*. Twelve papers are provided, including an introduction by one of the volume editors Andrew Wilson, a paper from Jörg Rüpke updating a paper presented in 1995 that represents one of the first attempts to bring Roman religion and economy together, nine papers from the conference, and a concluding discussion from Greg Woolf offering his thoughts on the state of the field. All in all, the volume achieves its goal of sparking consideration of

the interrelationship between Roman religion and the Roman economy, showing clearly that these subjects can no longer be treated independently and that we are at the very beginning of the process of thinking about them together.

Wilson's introduction argues strongly that Roman religion and Roman economy have been treated separately for far too long. As he notes, it is a commonplace for scholars to claim that religion permeated all aspects of ancient life, and yet while Greek religion has seen its share of studies concerned with religious aspects of economic life, until 2019 there was almost no attention paid to the economic aspects of religious behavior, or the religious aspects of economic behavior. A special edition of the journal *Religion in the Roman Empire*, co-edited by Claudia Moser and Christopher Smith in 2019, followed by the publication of Dan-El Padilla Peralta's *Divine Institutions* in 2020 which examined the economics of temple-building and religion more generally in the Middle Republic, have hopefully begun to swing the pendulum towards action.

Wilson's introduction suggests that not only would Roman religion scholars benefit from considering economic aspects and Roman economy scholars benefit from considering religious aspects, but that the Roman world can contribute usefully to broader discussions about "the economics of religion". He cites the work of Laurence Iannaccone in particular who has suggested that "private" religions depend on fee for service activity while "collective" religions depend on membership fees and donations. The papers in this collection suggest ways in which this model might need to be modified. Not only is the line between "private" and "collective" difficult to draw in the ancient world – should mystery cults be considered private or collective? – but the model does not easily accommodate ancient euergetic practices or state sponsorship that could occur alongside fees for services rendered and membership fees. Rüpke's chapter that immediately follows the introduction substantiates this point. Rüpke attempts to outline the scale of revenues and expenses for public religion in Rome and notes that revenue from leased land almost certainly provided the single largest source of revenue to Roman priesthoods, a category not included in other calculations of the economy of religion. In addition to suggesting that the broader field needs to take account of a greater diversity of behavior, Rüpke's calculations, even though approximations, demonstrate that religion formed a relatively small part of the Roman economy, such that changes in religious behavior cannot be ascribed to purely financial factors. Scholars of the Roman world may be late to the party, but these articles make clear that we have much to offer the field of economy of religion once we begin to ask these questions, and the nine essays that follow in this collection offer a smorgasbord of possibilities.

Charlotte Potts examines Archaic Etruria and Latium to demonstrate that many of the features often associated with Roman religion were present even before the arrival of Roman influence. Sanctuaries with their often-monumental temples represent the largest expenditure, but evidence of metallurgy and ceramic production associated with sanctuaries suggests that other types of both production and expenditure were present at an early date. Both literary and archaeological evidence indicate that sanctuaries played a role in trade, perhaps at festivals but perhaps also throughout the year, given the location of many sanctuaries along known trade routes. If the Forum Boarium served as the first location that brought trade, sanctuary, and ceremonial together in Rome, such behavior reflects practices already in existence in central Italy. Potts suggests that the questions worth asking are not about the existence of a relationship between these elements, but how that relationship changed as Rome moved from an archaic city to Mediterranean hegemony to an imperial power.

Javier Domingo builds on a model developed to estimate construction costs to suggest that the cost of building a monumental temple in the western provinces might have been roughly half of the cost of a similar temple in Rome. Domingo provides several tables to help document the costs while also acknowledging that costs can only be estimated and that many factors including the elaborateness of the decorative scheme will have affected the final cost of a building. Nonetheless, understanding some of the basic construction costs can allow us to better appreciate the behavior of the builders. Temple construction played an important role in civic euergetism, and the competition between individuals as well as between different cities can be comprehended more fully by understanding the economic cost.

The papers of David Wigg-Wolf (on coinage and religion), Marietta Horster (on the Eastern provinces) and Marie-Pierre Chaufray (on Egypt) focus on more detailed questions that are necessary to address if we are to confront the connections between religion and economy. Wigg-Wolf discusses the iconography on Roman coinage and then moves to explore the role of temples as treasuries, while Horster and Chaufray explore the impact of Roman conquest on the religious economies of the eastern provinces and Egypt respectively. These papers all present valuable information about administration, revenues, and expenses; at the same time reading these papers is a reminder of how many questions still need answers. For example, once we accept that different iconographical habits took hold in different areas, one wants to know how the use of coins to promote different ideologies played a role in the economic systems of those areas. Horster raises interesting questions about the expenses for new imperial cults and the extent to which they might have drawn resources away from the traditional cults;

she leaves open the possibility that there was sufficient funding for all of this religious activity until social and cultural conditions changed. Chaufray similarly highlights administrative changes that occurred with the arrival of the Romans and asserts that their arrival did not prevent temples in Egypt from continuing to play an active part in the economy, but precisely how the situation may have changed remains to be uncovered. These questions are precisely what we should hope further economic analysis of Roman religion can help to resolve.

Two chapters deal with animals for sacrifice, Michael McKinnon mostly on Italy and Anthony King on Romano-Celtic sanctuaries. In light of the fact that animal sacrifice was one of the most common religious acts of the ancient world, understanding which animals were used and the economics of how they came to be sacrificed offers an opportunity to enrich our understanding of the ritual. McKinnon's analysis of faunal remains suggests that chickens may have been used in "private" ceremonies, and especially at gravesides, more than scholars have previously acknowledged. King focuses attention on rural sanctuaries that may have lacked easy access to markets for animals and describes a series of strategies available, from the sanctuary raising its own herds to simply using its land as a corral to hold animals brought to the sanctuary for the purpose of sacrifice; presumably in both cases the animals would be sold to worshippers as the need arose. These papers lay out foundational points clearly and also point the way towards future questions almost begging to be addressed: can we trace the routes by which animals arrived at rural sanctuaries, or find firmer evidence of animal husbandry at sanctuaries, and can we understand better the reasons why certain sanctuaries employed one solution or the other? How far indeed can we quantify the financial aspect of a personal sacrifice? To what extent did financial concerns impact the choice of sacrifice as opposed to concerns about what the divinity might deem appropriate, or are these two factors indissolubly intertwined? The economics of animal sacrifice would seem to have much to reveal about Roman religious mentality more broadly.

Questions of gifts in sanctuaries and of the relationship of occupational guilds to religious practice occupy Marta Garcia Morillo and Koenraad Verboven respectively. Both papers provide substantial background on the topics under investigation. Morillo recounts the philosophical and legal approaches to gift-giving in Rome before turning to the issue of gifts given to sanctuaries. Since the evidence seems to show that when items given to sanctuaries were utilized for their cash value, the money was spent on the sanctuary itself, there is further work to be done to understand the broader economic impact: were these resources withdrawn from circulation or did they free up funds to be spent elsewhere? The work of Ulrike Ehmig

on gifts to sanctuaries might be relevant here: what difference might there be either morally or legally between a gift (*donum*) and an ex-voto dedication? Verboven highlights the challenge of identifying *collegia* whose functions may have been primarily professional or primarily religious, including the complicated case of the *dendrophori*. Both types of colleges engaged in religious practices and both helped individuals integrate into their local civic communities.

These papers raise the question, one relevant to the collection as a whole, of whether it is even possible to separate out a purely, or even primarily, religious purpose from a non-religious one. As Woolf notes in his concluding chapter, “there were no secular spaces in the ancient world within which economic activity might have been confined, and no religious ones from which it was excluded”. In a typically cogent chapter concluding the collection, Woolf highlights several ways in which scholars might further explore the interrelationship between religion and economy. He uses the data from the studies presented here to take a step back and attempt a view from afar. He suggests that while the Roman propertied classes developed several mechanisms, such as the development of corporate structures, that allowed for economic development, Roman temples seemed to have aimed for more modest returns, seeking primarily to support their own activities. Woolf suggests while they engaged in economic activity and did not hinder economic development, they seem not to have been major contributors to economic growth. He also highlights how the decentralized nature of polytheism may have limited the economic impact of religious activity, where the difference may be most notable by comparing how the Church in Rome centralized authority and managed economic resources in specific ways. The chapter provides not just a summing up of the papers, but points to broader conclusions that are often left unstated in the individual pieces.

Hopefully this valuable collection further helps to integrate considerations of religion into broader rethinking of Roman history. Scholars often assert links between religion and law in archaic Rome, and recently these links have begun to be explored more closely; given the obvious connections between economic matters and Roman law, legal issues might profitably be brought into these discussions. These integrated discussions can help reframe our knowledge of the Roman world, in the way that Dan-El Padilla Peralta’s *Divine Institutions* used economic analysis to provide a new way of understanding the Middle Republic. If no aspect of ancient life was untouched by the divine, as asserted by Wilson in his introduction, then our future studies of the Roman world should always be taking account of the religious element. This volume marks a good start in that direction.