



# On Greek Religion (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology)

*Robert Parker*

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“There is something of a paradox about our access to ancient Greek religion. We know too much, and too little. The materials that bear on it far outreach an individual’s capacity to assimilate: so many casual allusions in so many literary texts over more than a millennium, so many direct or indirect references in so many inscriptions from so many places in the Greek world, such an overwhelming abundance of physical remains. But genuinely revealing evidence does not often cluster coherently enough to create a vivid sense of the religious realities of a particular time and place. Amid a vast archipelago of scattered islets of information, only a few are of a size to be habitable.”—from the PrefaceIn On Greek Religion, Robert Parker offers a provocative and wide-ranging entrée into the world of ancient Greek religion, focusing especially on the interpretive challenge of studying a religious system that in many ways remains desperately alien from the vantage point of the twenty-first century. One of the world’s leading authorities on ancient Greek religion, Parker raises fundamental methodological questions about the study of this vast subject. Given the abundance of evidence we now have about the nature and practice of religion among the ancient Greeks—including literary, historical, and archaeological sources—how can we best exploit that evidence and agree on the central underlying issues? Is it possible to develop a larger, “unified” theoretical framework that allows for coherent discussions among archaeologists, anthropologists, literary scholars, and historians? In seven thematic chapters, Parker focuses on key themes in Greek religion: the epistemological basis of Greek religion; the relation of ritual to belief; theories of sacrifice; the nature of gods and heroes; the meaning of rituals, festivals, and feasts; and the absence of religious authority. Ranging across the archaic, classical, and Hellenistic periods, he draws on multiple disciplines both within and outside classical studies. He also remains sensitive to varieties of Greek religious experience. Also included are five appendixes in which Parker applies his innovative methodological approach to particular cases, such as the acceptance of new gods and the consultation of oracles. On Greek Religion will stir debate for its bold questioning of disciplinary norms and for offering scholars and students new points of departure for future research.



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