# Introduction:
# Tangible Religion from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period

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In ancient and premodern societies – from archaic Greece and imperial Rome, through the Middle Ages up to Reformed Northern Europe – most homes contained at least some select objects with a religious or ritual significance. Such objects, with a variable degree of sacrality, would range from altars, household shrines, and statuettes of divinities to incense burners, relics, pendants, rosaries and religious imagery of gods and saints represented on wall paintings, decorative tiles, textiles, furniture or everyday utensils, and even substances contained in the 'consecrated' vases, such as incense, salt, honey, water and wine. Such objects differed from the most venerated sacred cult items safeguarded in temples and churches, and seen only during certain ceremonies: domestic cult objects may have been seen, touched and used on an every-day basis. Inhabitants, visitors, servants, and slaves of the households therefore had a close, physical – and arguably more direct, personal and emotive – relationship with these objects with which they shared the living space and with which they were in daily interaction, than with the objects of the official cult. In domestic space, holy and everyday activities and objects mingled and were closely interwoven, to such an extent that it is impossible to distinguish the borders between the 'sacred' and the 'profane'.

Material culture, with its non-language-like qualities, has always offered very specific ways to express abstract religious ideas and emotions.[1] Tangible objects – cult images, ritual paraphernalia, offerings, relics and sacred mementoes – have made it possible to vest ethereal religious beliefs in a material form, to render abstract ideas concrete and tactile, and made them ownable and capable of being contained in one's home.[2] Thus, religious performances – prayers, votive promises, and sacrifices – can have, to a certain degree, material proxies reflecting these ephemeral acts of speech and gesture.[3]

In the Roman world, cult and sacrifice were prescribed in minute detail, and their material equipment too had to meet certain formal standards.[4] Such objects and images had also, in turn, the capability to render certain domestic spaces (more) sacred and give to the entire Roman *domus* a sacral aura.[5] The Roman house, as a homestead, was therefore, in a certain sense, regarded as a holy place and therefore was well protected by Roman law. The violation of someone's house was regarded as an attack not only against property and person, but also against the Roman state and its religion. In theory, the same 'sacred aura' attached to the Roman elite house also protected the humble homes of the poor.[6]

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1 Boivin 2008.

2 Rowan 2012.

3 Swetnam-Burland 2018, 591.

4 Siebert 1999; Marchetti 2016b, 172–73.

5 Scagliarini 2011; Albrecht et al. 2018, 572.

6 Treggiari 2002, 108

On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that all domestic objects could, potentially, be 'religious' – for example, a water basin could, on occasion, contain water for nuptial ablutions, or, in other moments, just be a sink for daily washing.[7] Money-boxes were simple utensils, but, when decorated with images of Mercury and Fortune, and entrusted to the custody of the domestic deities, the Lares, they also became symbols and protectors of the whole family fortune. Similarly, all domestic spaces and activities may, at times, have been considered sacred, making it more difficult to identify them within the domestic setting. In Antiquity, divinities were, in fact, present in every aspect of domestic life in a capillary way, since every action had to be sanctified and approved by their good omens.[8]

In a different way, the inner religious devotion and personal spiritual commitment typical of Christianity made it, potentially, equally omnipresent in daily life. The great places of formal and public worship, monasteries and cathedrals, are still visible in the European landscape, but we know that many medieval Christians heeded Jesus's words "But thou when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret".[9]

The meaning of the domestic setting for family cult practices can hardly be underestimated: the home was the setting of the most important events in the family life through the generations, conception, birth, child-care, illnesses, coming of age, weddings, business enterprises, departures and returns, deaths. The closest objects at hand in such moments were private and domestic cult items, through which protection was sought in the critical periods in a human life-cycle. Sometimes, different, quite particular divinities, or saints, were thought to supervise these domestic aspects of the human existence, such as, in Antiquity, the uterine amulets in red hematite with images of Hercules and Omphale that helped in childbirth, and, in later periods, specific icons or images of the Madonna with child.[10]

The relation of domestic or private vs. official or public religion is a delicate and much discussed question, and varies considerably at different historical periods. Domestic and public religious realms were interpermeable and each affected the other. However, the domestic cult practices have often been seen as reflections of the public and official ones, on a smaller scale: For example the *lararium* shrine, *aedicula*, often reproduced the Roman temple, in its most essential features, the frontal pediment sustained by columns, and later on, similar chapel-like shrines framed images of saints (**Fig. 1**). Cult images of the temples were reproduced in miniature in the collections of statuette figurines inside the *lararia*, and Madonna figures or crucifixes were copied from altar pieces, or icons and rosaries.

There were both private and public elements in the rituals associated with medieval sacramentals, that is, blessed objects and matter such as blessed salt, candles, or herbs. A priest or bishop blessed them on certain feast days, but their use, often for healing, was located in the home.[11]

In ancient Greek and Roman homes, the religious map may be more 'individualistic' and multifaceted, and more varied and heterogenous behaviour is to be expected, than in the official cults.[12] In private, traditions based on the ethnic origin or on personal beliefs of the inhabitant may be more visible and religious expressions even be in disaccord with official religious tendencies and power struggles. Sometimes such individual practices were deemed negatively as 'magic', such as the use of amulets and various natural

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7 Insoll 2004.

8 Kaufmann-Heinimann 2007a, 188; Santoro 2013.

9 Matth. 6:6; Deane 2013, 67–68.

10 Dasen 2008.

11 On sacramentals, see Franz 1909, vol. 1; Scribner 1984.

12 Belayche 2007, 276.

**Fig. 1:** A domestic cult place, *lararium*, containing the statuettes of the household divinities (Lares, Bacchus, Mercurius), and a lamp (After F. Niccolini – F. Niccolini, *Le case e i monumenti di Pompei disegnati e descritti*, 1896, vol. IV, tav. V).

substances like snake skins and herbs in domestic healing; the fine line between religion and superstition was ever a matter of definition and redefinition. The same applies to medieval Christianity: the laity was encouraged to engage in personal devotion, but private worship always risked being suspected of heretical opinions or superstitious and magical practices.

One specific question is the relation between domestic and funerary practices. In Antiquity, the tomb was conceived as an eternal domicile, and (for example) the Etruscan tombs were designed and furnished to look like contemporary homes. In the Roman period too, assemblages of grave goods could imitate domestic contexts, and some tombs had architectural features typical of the Roman house such as *cubicula* or alcoves with beds or a U-shaped arrangement of three couches in the dining room (*triclinium*).

Yet another question to keep in mind is the relation between collections of religious art and art in general. Roman elite homes abounded in Greek sculpture and paintings, many representing divinities and sacral settings, and Egyptian religious images too were often present. They may have been chosen for a variety of motives: to exhibit the owners' knowledge of the Greek culture, mythology and history, or exotic tastes, cosmopolitan lifestyles and the ability to acquire rare and imported items; however, genuine religious feelings may also have been felt for *objets d'art*.[13]

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13 Kaufmann-Heiniman 2007a, 192–93.

In recent years, premodern cult practices from Antiquity to the early modern period have been intensively researched from the perspectives of materiality, sensorial and emotional experience, and lived religion. This volume expands the focus, not only taking into consideration sacred objects used in domestic ritual and cult, but also exploring the sacrality inherent in everyday utensils or domestic decorations; the questions include the relationship between the inhabitants, domestic cult objects and other objects in the household, the interrelations of religious objects with space and movement, as well as temporal changes in attitudes towards such objects, the criticism and the defence of such material cult practices; the role of objects in expressing religious change or resistance to change. The papers in this volume discuss these topics through interdisciplinary approaches ranging from cultural history, archaeology, history of religion, and art history.

**Studies on Premodern Domestic Cult**

The evidence for domestic religion in the Greek world is relatively scarce. Literary sources mention some domestically worshipped deities of the domestic hearth (Hestia), family and family line, like Apollo Patroos, and of the house itself and its propriety, like Zeus Herkeios (protector of house limits) and, in particular, Zeus Ktesios (of the acquisitions).[14] The last of these may have been represented and worshipped in the aniconic form of an *amphora* jar, placed in the domestic storeroom, or as a snake. Literary sources also mention sacred images and objects (*hiera*) among the heirlooms at home, venerated through sacrifices, offerings of incense and cakes, ritually cleaned and crowned with garlands.[15] Private small processions of the family, carrying such sacred objects, also took place at funerals, weddings and feasts like the rural Dionysia.[16]

The scholarly interest in the Greek home as a religious locus first surfaced in the 1950s in works of an anthropological tone,[17] and in the writings of A.-J. Festugière, who famously saw in Greek religious thought an evolution from communal towards ever more individual belief, ultimately leading to Christian inner devotion.[18] Subsequent research has likewise, in general, followed the trail of contrasting spheres of ‘state’ vs. ‘individual’, ‘public’ vs. ‘private’ cult, discussing them together as two aspects of one conceptual whole, only on a different scale.[19] The domestic cult, headed by the father of the family, has often been seen as a miniature reproduction of the civic cults. Since both textual and archaeological evidence remains very scarce, even the very existence of a specific ‘domestic cult’ in the Greek world has been questioned.[20] However, K. Bowes has noted how this may be due, in part, to the fact that much of the evidence, like cult niches and painting on the walls, is simply missing from the archaeological record together with the high-standing walls; the hearth, another locus of cult, was mostly portable and has not left permanent traces.[21] In particular, the better-conserved sites like Olynthus and Delos have, however, yielded material evidence, such as masonry altars and cult niches, that mark the central courtyard as the focus of domestic cult practices; also

14 Soph. *Ant*. 487; Pl. *Euthyd*. 302c; Ath. 473b–c; Philostr. *Imag*. 2.23; Schol. Pl. Euthyd. 302d; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.41; *Suda* s.v. Ἑρκεῖος Ζεύς. See Sjövall 1931; Faraone 2008, 10–17; Bowes 2015, 211–12.

15 Porph. *Abst*. 2.16.

16 Isae. 8.15–16.

17 Nilsson 1954; Rose 1957.

18 Festugière 1954; Faraone 2008, 210; Kindt 2015.

19 Morgan 2007; Faraone 2008; Scheid 2011; Portale 2014.

20 Sourvinou-Inwood 2000.

21 Bowes 2015, 209–10; 214.

the entrance, as a potentially dangerous liminal space, was often protected with cult niches.[22] The study by C.E. Barrett concentrates on Egyptianizing terracotta figurines connected with domestic cult practices of the multicultural port city Delos.[23] Her study reveals how Egyptian religious traditions were both understood and followed, as well as interpreted in a new way. Numerous façades of Delian houses were decorated with a unique kind of religious paintings which scholars (erroneously) have called *lararium* paintings. They testify to innovative domestic cult practices.

C. Faraone has examined the *topos* linking women with Greek domestic ritual practices bordering on magic, in literary sources that mention, in domestic contexts, women and the infirm members of households vowing altars and resorting to amulets. Plato, taking a radical position, would have forbidden such a household cult in his ideal state, because it encouraged deleterious magical practices. He recommended that sacrifice be left to the professional figures of temple priests and priestesses.[24] Plutarch too associates women with domestic healing magic, exemplified by his famous account of how women hung amulets around the neck of the unwilling Pericles, as he lay dying of the plague.[25] However, Faraone has underlined that the study of Greek domestic religion should increasingly widen its focus to include not only the male 'head' of the family, but also the activities of the whole family unit (*oikos*): women, children and slaves.

In the ancient Roman world, the textual and material evidence is much more abundant. The private cults, *sacra privata*, included principally those of the Lares, protectors of the family, the Penates, protectors of the domestic stocks and storerooms (*penus*), Vesta of the fireplace, *Genius* of the *paterfamilias*, Juno of the *materfamilias* and other divinities preferred by the household members.[26] Also many inanimate elements of the domestic space, such as the fireplace, doors and passages, could be honoured as divinities or have their specific divine protectors.[27] Domestic deities were venerated on the occasions of family celebrations, but also many public festivals, such as the *Lemuria*, *Parentalia*, *Caristia* and *Liberalia* included rituals in the domestic environment.[28] In the study of Roman religion, scholars have traditionally regarded the cults practiced in public sanctuaries and the private and domestic religious practices as quite distinct realities. Among the studies of the more general picture of Roman domestic religion, besides the works of G. Wissowa, must be mentioned the early publication of De Marchi in 1896, claiming the importance and the independence of the domestic cults from the public ones. This started a long debate about the *sacra privata* as opposed to *sacra publica*.[29] The differences between private and public religiosity have recently been re-analysed, for example, by J.R. Brandt and by J. Bodel and S.M. Olyan in their introduction to the collective volume *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*.[30] The domestic ritual, as earlier in the Greek world, has often been seen as reproducing on a smaller scale the forms of the public cult, since the *pater familias*, the most central agent in the domestic religiosity, performed sacrifices at the domestic altar, just like the official cult priest in the temples. Less attention, again, has

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22 Cahill 2002.

23 Barrett 2011.

24 Pl. *Leg*. 909d–e–910b.

25 Plut. *Vit. Per.* 38.

26 For the Roman domestic pantheon, see Dubourdieu 1989; Bodel 2008; Dubourdieu 2012, 43; Gury 2016, 60–62.

27 See Bassani p. 108 in this volume.

28 Gury 2016, 62.

29 De Marchi 1896; Wissowa 1912.

30 Bodel – Olyan 2008a and b; Brandt 2010.

been given to the cultural functions of the other members of the domestic *familia*, in the everyday cult praxis. However, it is well known that the slaves too had an important, almost central role in Roman domestic cult of the Lares.

The centerpieces of Roman family cults were undoubtedly the specific domestic gods called *Lares familiares*, at whose altars offerings of wine, grapes, food, honey and honey-cakes, spelt, garlands, perfume and incense were made.[31] Literary sources have numerous mentions of their domestic cult, both at daily domestic mealtimes and monthly celebrations and at specific crucial moments of family life: on their altar were offered the childhood dress and *bulla* of the son and his first beard at his coming-of-age ceremony, a coin by the bride at the wedding, and weapons by the veteran soldier.[32] The image of these archaic divinities, depicted as two youthful, dancing gods with wine goblets in their hands, and dressed in short tunics, were borrowed from the late Hellenistic Dionysiac iconographic repertoire.[33] Their cult was materially located at the so-called *lararia*, household shrines composed of a niche or masonry *aedicula*, sometimes with a separate altar in front, where the worship of the other domestic deities also took place. The word *lararium* is rare and first appears only in the *Scriptores historiae Augustae*; before that period, the domestic shrine was simply called *sacrarium* or *sacellum.* But *lararium* will be used in this book by several writers as a conventional term to describe such household shrines.[34]

The *lararia* of the Vesuvian towns buried by Vesuvius in 79 CE constitute the most comprehensive and massive source material for Roman domestic religion. Their first catalogues appeared already in the second half of the 19th century,[35] and the monumental *corpus* of G.K. Boyce, in 1937, comprised 505 such domestic shrines.[36] The Lares and *lararia* have continued to be a prolific field of studies that has interested scholars of successive generations, in particular with the studies of D.G. Orr, T. Fröhlich and F. Giacobello.[37] The spatial aspects of their positioning in the atrium, peristyle, or the kitchen were examined by P. Foss, who pointed out the importance of the visual view lines connecting *lararia* with the other spaces.[38] W. van Andringa has elaborated this discourse, studying how the collocation of *lararia* both in the atrium, the old locus of the hearth, and its later collocation in the kitchen, depended on the centrality of food, with meals in common as the defining basis of the family unit, shared by family members of all statuses, ages and genders.[39] He has also underlined, in this context, the centrality of the sacrifice of a pig, and its preparation and consumption, a conspicuous element in the iconography of the *lararia*.[40]

The *lararia* of Ostia have received relatively little attention, in comparison to Pompeii, but they are discussed in the monograph of J.Th. Bakker as part of the religious landscape of this multicultural harbour town; R. Brand has also catalogued and discussed the Ostian *lararia*.[41]

31 Plaut. *Aul*. 23; Iuv. 9.138; Tib. 1.10.21–25; Petron. 29.8.

32 Plaut. *Aul*. 1–5; Cato *agr*. 43.3. On the figure and the cult of the Lares, De Marchi 1896 (2003), 155–62; Wissowa 1897, col. 1868–1898; Laforge 2009, 153–55; Torelli 2011, and most recently Flower 2017. For sacrifice in a domestic context, see Bassani 2017b.

33 Santoro 2013, 52–53.

34 *Hist. Aug. Aurelian*. 3.5; *Hist. Aug. Alex*. 29.2; 31.4; *Hist. Aug. Tac*. 17.4. Laforge 2009, 20, n. 11; Gury 2016, 63; for a critique of the term, see Bassani in this volume, p. 209.

35 Jordan 1862; Helbig 1868, 11–29, cat. 31–95; Sogliano 1879, 10–19, cat. 9–71.

36 Boyce 1937.

37 Nilsson 1954; Orr 1978; 1994; Fröhlich 1991; Giacobello 2008. See also Bettini 2012.

38 Foss 1997.

39 Van Andringa 2009, 217–44.

40 Van Andringa 2011.

41 Bakker 1994; Brandt 2010.

Numerous publications have continued to draw attention to the wealth of evidence of the domestic cult in Pompeii, such as the specific studies by A. Krzyszowska, V. Catalano, M.-O. Laforge, A. Maiuri, and, more generically on Pompeian religion, but also considering the domestic sphere, the works of W. van Andringa and M.T. d'Alessio.[42] In the Cisalpine region, another important centre of studies of Roman domestic religion has emerged, culminating in the important volume of the University of Padua, edited by F. Ghedini and M. Bassani, *Religionem significare*, in 2011. Similarly, the prolific series of seminars organized by the University of Trieste, *Sacrum facere*, have touched in several works on questions related to the private cult.[43] M. Bassani has also expanded the spatial and contextual research of Roman domestic cults to comprise all the sacred rooms and spaces denoted by the presence of *podia*, niches and *aediculae*, which she defines as the *sacraria* (cult rooms) and the *sacella* (cult buildings), in houses and villas of Pompeii and Central Italy.[44] L. Anniboletti has examined the niches on the outside of the Pompeian houses that guard the passage between indoor and outdoor space, with a strategic placing of apotropaic deities.[45]

The relation of Roman domestic wall-paintings to the sacred has also been a particularly fruitful field of study. K. Schefold famously saw the wall-painting systems as integrated wholes, transforming Roman homes into veritable domestic sanctuaries.[46] More recently, the question has been examined in more segmented ways, especially through single divinities and their iconographies. A. Coralini has made a seminal iconographic study of one important deity, Hercules, in the *corpus* of Pompeian imagery, and more recently, studies by C. Brain on Venus, and S. Hales, M. Scapini and I. Kuivalainen on Liber-Bacchus have appeared.[47] We should also mention the studies by F. Gury on the question of the 'sacralising' effect of wall-painting, in general, and images of aniconic divinities, *baetyli*, in particular, in Vesuvian domestic paintings.[48]

There is at present a considerable scholarly debate about the meaning of images and objects alluding to Egypt in Roman Italy. For example, I. Bragantini and M.J. Versluys have divided specific domestic images into different genres, such as religious Egyptianizing images and objects presumably related to performing of a domestic cult and images showing Egyptian subjects or settings that are unconnected to cult and have a decorative function or communicate political messages.[49] In contrast, C.E. Barrett underlines that "the meaning of many Roman images of Egypt resists reduction to any single fixed interpretation, remaining open to contestation, renegotiation, and reinterpretation according to changing circumstances".[50] The meaning of a specific figure depends, indeed, on numerous factors such as its architectural and social context as well as its assemblage among other items and images. Besides this, different viewers interpreted specific images according to their earlier experiences. But is it possible to be more precise in specific cases? L. Hackworth Petersen argues that it is time to problematize our dependence on the political meaning of Isis, and to regard Isis as a truly Roman deity, as one of many gods that individuals could invoke, just as with

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42 Krzyszowska 2002; Catalano 2002; Laforge 2009; Van Andringa 2009; 2011; d'Alessio 2009; Maiuri 2013. For a bibliographical overview, see Santoro 2013.

43 Ghedini – Bassani 2011; Fuchs 2016; Gury 2016; 2018; Marchetti 2916 a.

44 Bassani 2008; 2012; 2017a.

45 Anniboletti 2008.

46 Schefold 1972.

47 Coralini 2001; Hales 2007; Scapini 2016; Brain 2017; Kuivalainen 2020.

48 Gury 2016; 2018.

49 Bragantini 2012; Versluys 2002.

50 Barrett 2017.

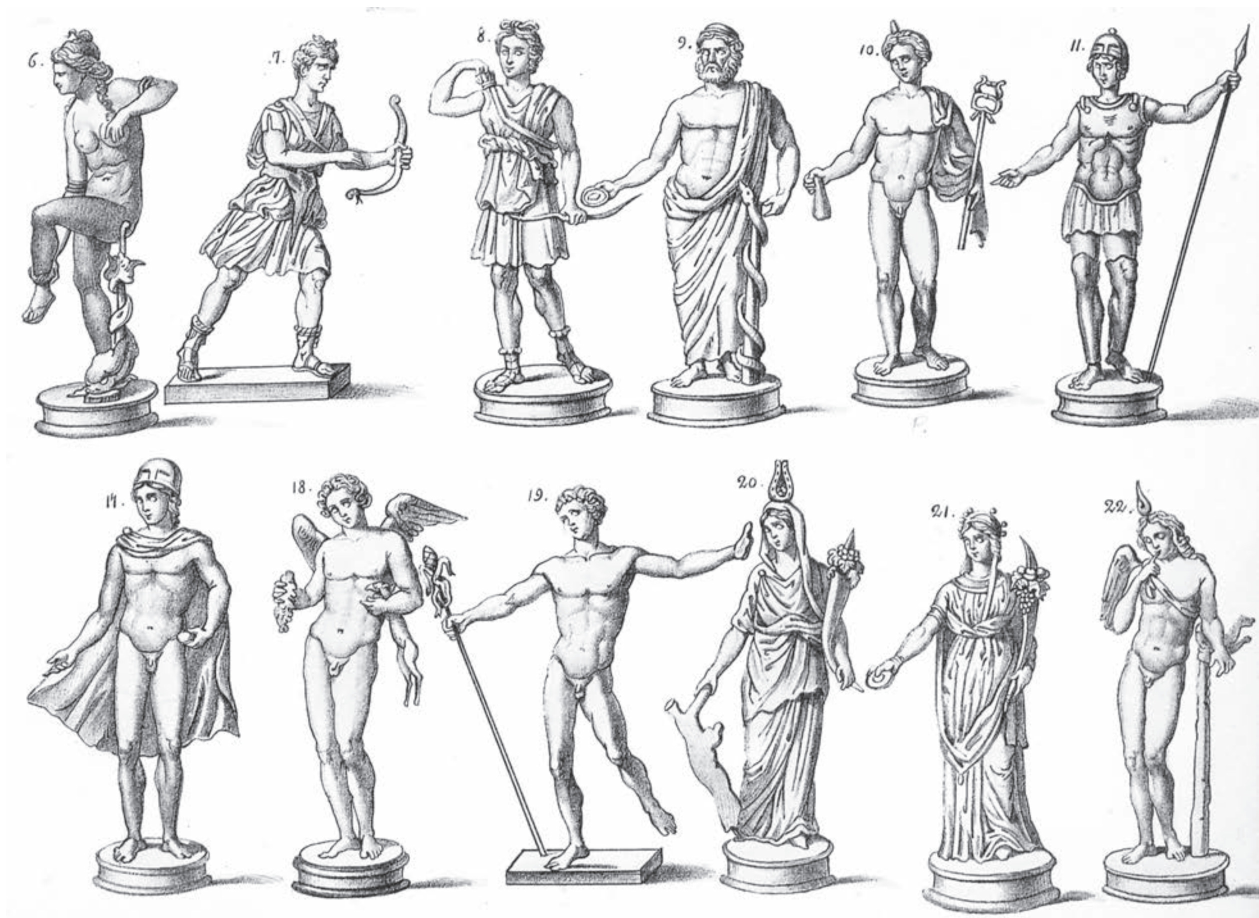

**Fig. 2:** Domestic cult statuettes in the Archaeological Museum of Naples (After C. Ceci, *Piccoli bronzi del Museo Nazionale di Napoli*, Napoli 1858, pl. V).

any Roman deity.[51] On this point, a firm foundation for further studies on Roman imagery alluding to Egypt in general could be the unquestionable material evidence of Egyptian cults in a Roman context, recently discussed in the works of M. Swetnam-Burland, L. Beaurin and I. Bragantini (to name only a few).[52]

Decidedly less attention has been paid to the material cult objects placed on the altars (**Fig. 2**). An important study by S. Adamo-Muscettola examined collections of divinities on the altars in Pompeii, and A. Kaufmann-Heinimann studied these in Augusta Raurica.[53] Among other sacred paraphernalia, the Pompeian incense burners and small altars (*arulae*) have been examined first by O. Elia and then by A. d'Ambrosio and M. Borriello.[54] C.M. Marchetti has discussed these and other material instruments of Pompeian religious ritual both in domestic contexts and in sanctuaries.[55] A. Sofroniew has attempted to bridge the gap between the material objects of religious practice, examining statuettes in the collection of the Getty Museum, and their location in domestic spaces.[56]

Since late Antiquity, and the rise of Christianity, royalty and nobility had founded their own private chapels in their palaces; in the later Middle Ages, domestic altars could be found in ordinary homes. Medieval

51 Hackworth Petersen 2016.

52 Swetnam-Burland 2007; 2018; Beaurin 2013; Bragantini 2012.

53 Adamo-Muscettola 1984; Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998; Kaufmann-heinimann 2007b.

54 Elia 1962; d'Ambrosio – Borriello 2001.

55 Marchetti 2016b.

56 Sofroniew 2015.

domestic devotional objects included, *inter alia,* rosary beads, images of the saints, prayer books, and relics. Sacramentals, that is, blessed objects and matter such as salt, candles, wax or herbs, entered from public to domestic worship. A priest or bishop blessed them on certain feast days, but their use, often for healing, took place at home.[57] Amulets, carried usually for general protective purposes, combined specific matter such as herbs with related prayers and invocations. Their use was widespread, but was often regarded with suspicion by clerical authorities. Amulets thus occupied a place between the holy and the superstitious.[58] In addition to actual devotional objects, religious decorative motifs were omnipresent, ranging from rich frescoes and tapestries to simple *Ave Maria* engravings on plates and buckles. The sixteenth-century Reformation brought a change to Christian material culture, but especially in Scandinavia, this change was gradual, taking place over decades or even centuries (**Fig. 3**). Yet, even the most rigorous Protestants were not satisfied with God's word alone. The new confession created its own religious imagery. It was expressed in everyday objects such as stoneware and stove tiles, and it spread through the Hanseatic trade network.[59]

**Fig. 3:** A fifteenth-century tin flagon, German origin. The flagon has two religious text excerpts: *In Maria Muter reine* and *Mane surgemus cum Kristi* (Photo: Museum Centre of Turku).

The study of domestic cults has not remained unaffected by new theoretical currents. After the 'spatial turn', the 'material turn' of the early twenty-first century, in archaeology, has kindled a new type of interest, shifting the interest from production to the use and context of the object, not only seeing things as passive recipients of human agency, but emphasizing how material things have an active role in the relationships with human beings, shaping people's behaviour and identities. The 'sensorial turn' of the last decade, then, has added to the parameters to be considered the senses, touch, smell and sound of objects, considering also the aspect of 'embodiment'. All these approaches offer important viewpoints for the study of religious objects and images located in domestic space, to be considered their 'materiality', and 'sensoriality', as items to keep in the hand and touch, the smell of the incense, associated with chants by voices, giving direct emotional responses through such multisensorial experiences. A fuller overview of the surge of the 'material' turn in religious studies, and its relations with the 'lived religion' approaches can be found in the article by Simona Perna in this volume.

Recently, the Max Weber Centre of Erfurt University has hosted a project on 'Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning "Cults" and "*Polis* Religion" ' (2012–2017), directed by J. Rüpke.[60] The members of the project

57 On sacramentals, see Franz 1909, vol. 1; Scribner 1984.

58 Bailey 2007, 84–86.

59 See the articles by David Gaimster and Kirsi Majantie articles in this volume.

60 See the article by Simona Perna in this volume in part. p. 54-55.

have utilized the concept of 'lived religion' to study Roman religion from a new perspective, focusing on concrete daily cult activities, embodied devotional performances, material evidence of such practices and actions, and interactions in religious social networks.[61] This approach too has offered very fruitful new viewpoints for the present study.

The material and sensorial turns mentioned above have not left medieval and early modern studies untouched. In the course of the past decade, disciplines traditionally focusing on textual sources, such as history, literary studies and historical anthropology, have broadened their field of enquiry into objects, matter and sensorial experience. The perspective of material culture (that is, "'stuff' and what it means to people," in J.K. Deane's wonderfully concise definition),[62] has also brought together previously separated scholarly traditions, such as the study of objects and of consumption in the premodern world.[63] C.W. Bynum's *Christian Materiality: an Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (2011) has been a ground-breaking study, exploring both theological discussion and practical issues of holy matter in the Middle Ages. Bynum's ideas have resonated in subsequent scholarship, including essays in this volume. However, one should not exaggerate theoretical turns. Material aspects and sensory experiences have long been a part of the cultural historical study of premodern religion, for example, in M. Rubin's classic study of the Eucharist in medieval culture.[64] Cultural and social historians' interest in material culture, such as consumption and everyday objects, can be traced back much further, to the programme of the *Annales* school and K. Lambrecht's *Kulturgeschichte.*[65] Some scholars have even proposed that the material turn has done little to advance the actual study of objects and material culture. The material turn has generated intense theoretical discussion in keeping with the broader phenomenon of post-humanism. J. Keupp, himself a historian engaged in the study of matter and objects, has claimed that this deluge of theoretical meta-texts has contributed mainly to the theoretical debate itself, rather than to the empirical study of concrete objects.[66] There is no denying, however, that scholarship on material and domestic premodern religion has greatly flourished in recent years. The study of material culture has also become established to such an extent that it features in companions and textbooks on topics such as medieval Christianity or early modern emotions.[67] It has earned thematic issues in general historical journals, for example the centennial issue of *The Catholic Historical Review* in 2015.[68] While it is impossible to cover every publication in this lively field, some should be pointed out.

The written word and literary expressions of devotion in premodern Europe were dominated – although not monopolized – by men. Consequently, focusing on material culture and domestic piety can make expressions of female piety visible.[69] An illustrative example are the crowns with which the Wienhausen nuns used to adorn statues of saints, studied by C.W. Bynum. Removed in a 1469 reform of the monastery by male reformers as superfluous luxury, the crowns nevertheless had profound spiritual meaning for the monastic identity of the nuns, who experienced anguish upon their loss and sought new ways to adorn statues of the Virgin.[70] Women also had a crucial role as arbiters of new cults of relics, such as the veneration

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61 Rüpke 2015; Raja – Rüpke 2015b; Albrecht et al. 2018; Gasparini et al. 2020.

62 Deane 2013, 67.

63 Schmidt-Funke 2019.

64 Rubin 1991, esp. 35–82.

65 Miller 2015, 6–8.

66 Keupp 2017.

67 Williamson 2014; Hamling 2017; Laven 2017.

68 Miller 2015

69 Deane 2013, 67–68.

70 Bynum 2015.

of Byzantine relics sent home by crusaders in the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople to the Latins in 1204.[71]

Material devotion is entangled with two other aspects of human experience that cultural historians have intensely studied in recent years: emotions and senses. M. Rubin has explored how Virgin Mary was made more familiar, tender and motherly in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. In this process, depictions of Mary entered domestic spaces and fostered a new 'exploration of emotion and empathy.'[72] Sensory experience and materiality are the themes of a recent edited collection focusing on devotion in late medieval Northern Europe,[73] and in 2016, the *Scandinavian Journal of History* published a special issue on 'Gender, Material Culture and Emotions in Scandinavian History'. The issue contained articles by A-C. Eriksson on materiality and emotion of fifteenth-century Swedish Pietà images,[74] and by R.M. Toivo on emotions associated with rosaries in the seventeenth-century Finland.[75] In an edited collection, *Feeling Things* (2018), H.M. Hickey surveyed the changing practices of emotions around the Holy Tear relic in medieval and early modern France,[76] and S. Randlers studied pilgrimage tokens from the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres.[77]

For the present volume and its chapters on late medieval and early modern tangible religion, the most relevant scholarly tradition is the study of domestic devotion. In addition to the study of material culture, this scholarship draws on the long tradition of what previously was the study of 'popular' and nowadays 'lived religion', as well as from the spatial turn of the early 2000s. J.K. Deane, summing up the scholarship on medieval domestic devotion up to 2013 and setting the course for future studies, defined three core elements: 'prayer, rituals, and the use of material objects to enhance spiritual activities at home'.[78] While our emphasis is on the last of these, all three elements are present in the essays of this volume, and indeed they cannot be separated. In her essay, Deane urged future scholars to conduct comparative studies between domestic devotional practices of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and to look into how domestic influenced the formal religious practices (not only vice versa). Furthermore, she pointed out the need to look beyond the binary division of heresy and orthodoxy in medieval Christianity, and to explore the supposed great divide of the sixteenth-century Reformation in domestic devotion.[79] In the years that have followed, scholarship has indeed advanced roughly according to the lines Deane proposed. Several studies have emphasised the continuity of medieval material devotion in Reformed Northern Europe, especially in domestic settings.[80] The Reformation was not, however, only about continuity, but was in many ways a real break and a transition to new forms of devotion. In this book, David Gaimster and Kirsi Majantie participate in the discussion with their essays demonstrating that household ceramics and stove tiles were updated to match the new religious convictions and tastes of their owners.

Although late medieval and early modern Italy with its rich and varied source materials remains one of the favourite areas in the study of domestic devotion,[81] the geographical focus has expanded significantly.

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71 Lester 2014.

72 Rubin 2009, 79–104, at 98.

73 Laugerud – Ryan – Skinnebach 2016.

74 Eriksson 2016.

75 Toivo 2016.

76 Hickey 2018.

77 Randlers 2018.

78 Deane 2013, 67.

79 Deane 2013, 71.

80 Toivo 2016; Bø 2018; Zachrisson 2018; Zachrisson 2019; Ellens 2019; see also several chapters in Martin – Ryrie 2012.

81 Musacchio 1999; Musacchio 2000; Musacchio 2005; Morse 2007; Corry – Faini – Meneghin 2018; Brundin – Howard – Laven 2018; Lawless 2020.

The ERC project 'Domestic Devotions' (2013–2017) focused on Italy in 1400–1600, but the project also published an edited volume with a global perspective. The chapters in the volume treat domestic rituals in sixteenth-century Korea,[82] early modern Damascus,[83] and among Ottoman Jews,[84] to give some examples. This trend continues in the recent thematic issue of the journal *Religions*. Entitled 'Domestic Devotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe', the issue (or rather, several issues) has also essays on rituals in the early modern Ottoman world,[85] as well as on beds in high medieval Jewish devotion.[86] A few essays look beyond Western Europe, to the Balkans[87] and Russia.[88]

Writing in 2013, Deane could justifiably claim that 'only a bare beginning has been made in scholarship on medieval domestic devotion'.[89] Now in 2020, much more has been accomplished, and a lively community of scholars continues to explore the elusive nature of domestic and material religious practices. This volume contributes to the ongoing discussion and urges readers to contemplate long-term continuities and changes in religion and the domestic sphere.

**The Structure of the Book**

The volume is opened by the article of Meritxell Ferrer, who examines Sicilian domestic religion of the Greek, Phoenician and local communities in the eight – fifth centuries BCE, with the lens of gender studies. The main aim of this paper is to recover the role of women in ritual practices carried out in the household, both in Greek (Himera), Phoenician (Mozia) and local Sicilian (Monte Polizzo) contexts. The study of these practices in a cross-cultural perspective highlights the importance of the female agency in the domestic cult, their centrality in the ritual and practical maintenance of their homes, and their role as feeders, careers and keepers of the house and the household and, by extension, of their communities.

Simona Perna's paper discusses a specific type of Roman vessel, the funerary urn named 'tureen', which is essentially connected with both domestic and sacred spheres. The tureens are ash containers of a complex form carved mostly from alabaster, which came into use in the Augustan age and peaked in the Julio-Claudian period; sixty-five examples are known. Their basic form is derived from mundane Greek vessel forms with archaic ancestry, the crater and *lebes/stamnos*. These large containers were originally used for mixing wine and for cooking, but gradually took on a more sacral connotation through their use in feasting and sacrifice. The association of food, banquets and symposia with death is, in Antiquity, quite a normal occurrence, and thus the use of a cooking pot as a funerary urn can be explained by this connection; the preparation and consumption of food, and their ritual version, the sacrifice on the altar, could be symbolically connected with the cremating procedure and the container of the ashes. The Augustan renovation brought similar forms again into auge, possibly bearing a cultural or ritual memory of these earlier traditions. The use of similar forms as religious signifiers in domestic and funerary wall-painting points to a deeper eschatological meaning also in the choice of funerary urn.

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82 Soyeon 2018.

83 Katz 2018.

84 Arad 2018.

85 Allen 2020.

86 Kohn 2019.

87 Ulčar 2019; Marušić 2020.

88 Sulikowska-Bełczowska 2019.

89 Deane 2013, 71.

The following group of four papers examines domestic religion in Imperial-age Pompeii. A study of Pompeian *lararia* is mandatory for an interpretation of Roman domestic worship. In their paper, Aude Durand and William Van Andringa re-examine from a fresh viewpoint the central cult of the Lares and *Genius* of the *paterfamilias*, according to the literary evidence and archaeological material, which was the basis of domestic religion in Pompeii. The Lares were the sovereign rulers and protectors of the territory of the house, and guardians of the family. The Lares also define the *domicilium* legally and moved together with the family. This leads Durand and Van Andringa to enquire into the relationship between the presence of the gods in the domestic space and the occupation of houses, especially in the last phase of Pompeian history before the eruption of 79 CE. Their questions are: Is the presence or absence of gods in the house significant? Does it reflect transfers of populations or properties in the urban space? The challenges of investigating the urban organization of Pompeii before the eruption are expounded through representative examples. Similarly, the observation of *lararia* closed by walling raises the problem of changing ownership within the same house.

The contribution of Maddalena Bassani proposes some methodological observations for the study of domestic cult objects from the mid-late Republican age to late Antiquity, juxtaposing material finds and ancient literary evidence. Firstly, the subjects taking part in sacred ceremonies are taken into consideration (the *dominus* and his family, the *clientes* in the case of aristocratic homes, the servant *familia*), along with their role in the rituals and the artefacts that could suggest their participation, both in daily house rituals and in special occasions. Secondly, some reflections will be offered on the possible difference between types of cult objects found in the sacred spaces of urban dwellings or mansions, and those from countryside residences, in the light of literary evidence too. The central hypothesis discussed in the paper is the consideration that all the objects found in the spaces recognized as family *sacraria* in Pompeian houses might be connected with cult purposes. Thus, for example, one has to consider whether common tools and everyday utensils might in fact be 'cult objects' or even, at a certain level, aniconic 'personifications' of the archaic and less-known minor domestic deities that did not have figural images of their own.

Ria Berg's paper observes Roman domestic cult practice through the lens of one type of object between utensil and amulet, exclusively in female use, the hairpin. In general, the decorations on these pins – Venus figurines, female busts, hands, hoofs, pine-cones – have been seen mostly as decorative, and also as allegories of beauty and lucky charms. In this paper, the decorated hairpins of Pompeii are catalogued and their imagery and their iconography are analysed in greater detail in relation with the gestures and contexts of their use. The study argues that the iconography of the amulet-like finials points quite precisely to amorous and nuptial imagery; in the Roman wedding ceremony, hairpins also played an important role in the construction of the coiffure of the bride. Pointed objects, like wands and nails, also had an inherent 'magical' quality in Roman cult practice. Thus, such pins may have been specific utensil-amulets used in this family ritual, and afterwards in daily use as mementoes and talismans protecting the family unit, promoting amorous success and fertility. The case study demonstrates how the categories of cult image, amulet and utensil can be overlapping in the Roman domestic context.

Antonella Coralini's paper concentrates on the presence of one divine figure, Hercules, in the pictorial world of Pompeian homes. Like other divinities of the Greco-Roman *pantheon*, Hercules enters the domestic space, with particular frequency and intensity, through two routes, that of the myth and that of the cult. The dividing line between these two spheres is quite subtle and fluid: neither the collocation nor the subject of a divine figure suffices on its own to define the exact nature of the images connected with religious thought. Consequently, even in the rich and varied material offered by the Vesuvian cities, the interpretation of cult figures must be integrated with the reading of the whole contextual data, which differ from case to case. In

this approach, the concept of materiality can offer new methodological support. This also confirms how, in the sphere of the *sacra privata*, approaches looking only for general lines of single phenomena can be inadequate to understand the complex ancient realities.

Anu Kaisa Koponen's paper presents all the surviving or visually documented cult images of Egyptian deities or their attributes painted on walls of Pompeian houses. This study is based on Koponen's earlier statistical study on images alluding to Egypt in wall paintings of Pompeii. Although the Egyptian cult images are only eight in total, they are important evidence of religious attitudes of Pompeians towards Egyptian deities in their homes. In contrast to object finds whose exact original context is often obscure, these cult images can be studied in their original architectural and decorative contexts. In addition, the relationship between Egyptian cult images and other Egyptian motifs of frescoes is discussed. According to this study, visual allusions to Egypt were spread sparsely and homogenously in Pompeian domestic architecture. Most houses with Egyptian cult images did not present other Egyptian motifs in their wall decoration, and these houses were often also embellished with traditional domestic shrines or *lararium* paintings. As a result, the study suggests that in the Pompeian domestic sphere Egyptian deities were well adapted to the religious Pantheon of Roman gods and goddesses. This contrasts with the modern idea of the Roman followers of Isis as separate groups of initiates.

The second paper by Maddalena Bassani is based on her preceding mapping of the religious items and spaces in forty-seven dwellings in central Italy, ranging from urban *domus* extra-urban villas with the *floruit* between the second century BCE to the fourth century CE. The indicators of private worship include interior rooms and exterior buildings identifiable as *sacraria* and *sacella*, furnished with altars, niches, *aediculae*, paintings, artefacts and inscriptions; worship furniture found inside the house (altars, niches, pedestals), associated with cult-related artefacts like sculptures and reliefs, *arulae*, *thymiateria* and also other domestic utensils. The article concludes by looking at sculptures that bear evidence of imperial worship in private habitations, offering a novel outlook on *sacra privata*.

The second section of the book collects four papers, discussing the late medieval and early modern period in Northern Europe.

Claire Renkin's paper examines some of the paradigms that surround analysis of late medieval devotional objects (Books of Hours, rosary beads, domestic reliquaries etc.). They were seen, both at the time and by subsequent scholars, as expressions of a self-indulgent hyper-sensual spirituality that clashed with an increasingly urgent reform agenda of movements like the *Devotio Moderna* and Savonarola that voiced a hostility to the materiality of late medieval spirituality. In contrast, the material exuberance of many objects evokes visually a passionate delight in the tangibility of the sacred. This emotional response finds support in the writings of various authorities from Gregory the Great to Catherine of Siena. Central examples of this 'exuberantly incarnational spirituality' discussed by Renkin range from late-fifteenth-century illuminations from Books of Hours to early-sixteenth-century Flemish prayer-nuts with scenes from the Life of Mary Magdalen.

Reima Välimäki's essay is an attempt to look beyond the binary division of 'heresy' and 'orthodoxy' in medieval Christianity.[90] He explores the ways in which the laypeople with Waldensian affinities in late fourteenth-century Germany negotiated between conflicting theological and pastoral instructions from their dissident lay confessors, the Waldensian Brethren, and the surrounding mainstream Catholicism. The article's focus is on the Waldensians' relationship to material practices of medieval Catholicism. Waldensian Brethren taught their followers that practically all material aspects of worship were invalid and superfluous.

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90 See Deane 2013, 71.

Thus, holy water or blessed salt was considered to be nothing more than ordinary water and salt. When interrogated by an inquisitor, Waldensian followers demonstrated knowledge of this condemnation of material cult, but many of them had nevertheless continued for example the aspersion of holy water. Sometimes this was done in order to assimilate into the surrounding community, but some of those interrogated explicitly stated that they believed in the beneficial effects of blessed material objects, despite the teachings of the Brethren. Medieval Catholicism's relationship to holy matter was problematic and contested, and Välimäki demonstrates that laypeople's opinions did not necessarily follow the lines of heresy and orthodoxy as imagined by inquisitors and polemicists.

Kirsi Majantie discusses ceramic tile stoves as a source to study the private devotion in the 15th–16th century in Northern Europe. The finest of these were decorated with moulded images which were copied directly from ecclesiastical art and architecture, and from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, models were taken also from printed media. The most typical motifs on the fifteenth-century stove tiles were the devotional themes of the Catholic Church, especially the Passion of Christ and images of the saints. Religion and piety were however entangled with aspirations for demonstrating one's power and status, and in the houses of nobility, religious motifs were often mixed with portraits and coats of arms of their owners and depictions of their elite pursuits, such as hunting. Although there is no written evidence suggesting that tile stoves were used as instruments of private devotion, their biblical stories and depictions of saints must have aroused veneration both in their owners and in other household members, and they could have acted as private altar shrines and allowed prayers to the saints. The Reformation with its abolition of the doctrine of purgatory brought visible changes to the decoration of stove tiles. The themes which had related to the veneration of saints or had emphasised suffering were replaced by portraits of the secular supporters of the Reformation and by themes linked to forgiveness and salvation. This article discusses the devotional nature of tile stoves and how their transformation from verifications of their owners' Catholic piety to showcases for the support of the Reformation is manifested in archaeological material.

The book closes with the final reflections by David Gaimster. It takes further the discussion begun in Gaimster's 2003 article 'Pots, prints and propaganda' in the volume *The Archaeology of Reformation 1480–1580,* which established an archaeological connection between the long-distance Hanseatic trade in 'iconographic' domestic ceramics (relief-decorated stoneware and stove-tiles together with moulded figurines) and the spread of the Protestant faith and changed political loyalties around the Baltic and North Seas. Since then, the increased archaeological distributions of these products have transformed the historical picture of sixteenth-century religious and social change from the Gulf of Finland to the English Channel. Stonewares, stoves and figurines contributed to a visual and sensorial sacralisation of the domestic interior in post-Reformation Europe, with the urban merchant class leading the trend. Gaimster's paper considers the extent to which Hanseatic trade communities employed the moulded ceramic medium to cement and communicate changed confessional, cultural and political identities within the urban domestic sphere.

**Conclusion**

The prolific recent literature on the theme of private cult practice show that the theme of domestic religion is still relevant, and offers new approaches and questions. One of the main goals of this diachronic book is, in fact, to confront such unasked questions, which can be presented in different time periods.

Several writers in this volume have noted the need to reinforce the viewpoints and experiences of the other household members, slaves, servants, children, ethnic and religious minorities, women – their

presence and agency is more likely to be documented in material culture, minor objects and imagery, than in written sources and the architecture of official sanctuaries.

Questions anchored within the spatial approach have inspired enquiries about the mobility of the domestic cult objects inside the house, and from one domicile to another. Among the domestic spaces, in what ways do sacred objects sanctify living space, or *vice versa*, consecrated spaces or chapels give sanctity to ordinary utensils kept within? To what degree are the domestic divinities identified with the family unit and help to form their collective identity, and what is their relationship with the material homestead – what happens when the family unit moves?

Questions related to the long-standing debate about private vs. public religiosity surface in several contributions. In Antiquity, religious plurality was relatively unproblematic, and the arrival of new cults, divinities and ritual practices was relatively well-tolerated. The differences between official *religio* and private cult, sometimes mingled with *superstitio* and often negatively judged, were questions pondered upon by ancient authors and often connected with political power struggles. Multiple cults, both traditional Roman gods and newer arrivals, for example the Hellenized Egyptian divinities, could flourish simultaneously in one and the same household. Christianity brought a different official monopoly of creed and cult, although this was continuously challenged by inner movements of reform and change, some of whom were regarded as heretical by the orthodox mainstream. Domestic religiosity, in particular, permitted uniquely multifaceted expressions of religious devotion that found their material form in domestic furnishings. These material features can also bear evidence of opportunism, syncretism, creativity, neglect and indifference to accepted public religious modes. Significant new religious currents can also originate in such private initiatives; at times, if the public domain sees them as a threat, there may be efforts to control more strictly domestic behaviour too. In the home, there can be earlier symptoms of a shift between religious tides can give earlier symptoms, although the home can also retain conservative and old-fashioned habits.

An important question to consider in the framework of domestic, material religion, in all epochs, is the complex relation between 'pattern' and 'agency'. Whereas religious ritual is inherently something repetitive, traditionally given, and therefore forming consistent patterns also in material culture, the home is also the sphere of action par excellence of individual agency – in this case, the possibility for the individual inhabitant to pick and mix cults, divinities and ritual practices he/she preferred. In this volume, examples show, for example, how painted cult images and statuettes of Egyptian deities were combined with more traditional Roman gods in Pompeian domestic shrines, and the changing imagery on the domestic decorative relief tiles continued to insist on certain Catholic figurative motifs even after the Reformation, while also adopting a new pictorial repertoire. A person who was deemed a heretic by Church officials could nevertheless hold perfectly Catholic opinions about blessed objects, even against the instructions of his or her dissident masters.

The tangible realities of religious objects offer a large prism of approaches through the concept of materiality, in particular from the point of view of their identity building effects. For example, the Roman hairpin performs ritual grooming gestures, and its pointed nail-like form may be seen to reinforce its magical effect. The gesture of manipulating the prayer nuts in one's hands, reiterating or reproducing by touch the sacred image carved onto it, is also a fascinating example of combining object with ritual gesture. What is the meaning and origin of specific sacral vessel forms that can be found, in painted or material form, in ancient homes as well as in tombs and sanctuaries?

In premodern times, material objects were fewer and more precious, and this too may have influenced their religious significance. For example, at least in poorer households, it was not possible to have distinct

sets of plates for sacred offerings and for common mealtimes, or for sacral ablutions and hygienic washing. On the other hand, the object that did not exactly correspond to one's religious *credo* might have continued to be used, since it was not financially possible to acquire new ones. Also, in some cases the decorative or memory value of domestic items may have been more important than their religious meaning. Thus, traditional gods of the ancient period continued to be represented in late antique and medieval times as allegories, and Catholic images too may have remained in use in some Reformed homes. A similar (or same) image, object or gesture could also have been given different meanings and interpretations at different historical periods. Some powerful images, like the mother-goddess holding a baby, can even form a strong continuum from Antiquity to modern religious imagery; households, at all historical periods, needed to tackle similar problems related to the critical moments of birth, maternity and early infancy.

In sum, religion is a dynamic and ever-variable complex of parallel beliefs and a spectrum of material practises. Comparing the physical presence of cult objects in domestic space, in different epochs, offers possibilities for reflection on *longue-durée* continuities, gradual changes and points of complete breakage of tradition. Domestic viewpoints are an important addition to the research that questions traditional ideas of clear-cut watersheds in religious history, such as the change in Antiquity from traditional Roman 'formal' religion to more personal so-called 'Oriental' and Christian beliefs, the medieval distinction between heresy and orthodoxy, and the early modern transfer from Catholic to Reformed Christianity. According to the material and pictorial evidence from domestic contexts, such transpositions may not have been so radical and abrupt. The multiformity of cult was, arguably, more tolerated in private contexts, but the interpenetrating levels of public/private religious practice still offer numerous stimulating challenges to interpretation.

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