

Material Religion in Classical Contexts

The recent ‘material turn’ in the study of ancient religion has resulted in publications highlighting the potential of physical objects and built structures to shed light on practices and attitudes across the Mediterranean. This important new focus on material religion, as it is sometimes termed, is well-illustrated in the two 2017 edited volumes of C. Moser and J. Knust, *Ritual Matters: Material Remains of Ancient Religion*; and L. Bredholt, L. and J. Tae Jensen, *Religion and Material Culture: Studying Religion and Religious Elements on the Basis of Objects, Architecture, and Space*, each of which takes a multi-cultural perspective. Through observing trends in the material record, and in particular from secure excavation contexts, it is possible to find expressions of religious activity - including cult and devotion, magic and superstition, public festivals and private worship - in both urban and rural locales. The papers in this panel explore a range of case studies from several cities and settlements of the Greek and Roman worlds: Athens, Corinth, Sicily, and Pompeii. Each one presents evidence that is unique to its time and place, leading to questions about the regional aspects of ancient religion as well as the agency of artist and viewer. For example, when looking at the evidence of deviant burials from one Greek colonial site in Sicily, or at a variety of painted spaces in Pompeii, lived religion that is grounded in the written sources comes to light. Equally compelling is a group of unusually decorated pouring vessels (*oinochoai*) from the Athenian Agora, or a series of ritual deposits at a temple in Selinunte, and what such assemblages reveal about practices in their own right. Finally, the comparison of an ancient shrine of 5th century date at Corinth to a modern American monument demonstrates how the past informs the present, and supports creative ways of using contemporary spaces and structures to enliven the Classics classroom. Key themes in this panel will include, but are not limited to, retrospection, display, sacred space, movement, sensory

experience, and interaction. Both individually and collectively, the papers question how religion relates to the material world, and how best to define the dynamics between things, people, and the divine.