Religion in the Roman Empire

The Roman Empire -- Religion and religions -- The sources -- Identifying religion in the Graeco-Roman tradition -- The nature of the divine -- Approaches to the divine -- Cult -- Myth -- Art -- Philosophy -- Conclusion -- Three problematic topics -- Authority -- Belief -- Morality -- Conclusion -- R...

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“Roman Empire” is meant as a focus, rather than a criterion for exclusion. Religious traditions existed and influenced individual and group behavior, but they were upheld and reworked in the constant interaction of individuals with the agents of traditions and providers of ritual services, “priests”, “holy men” or professionals in the various fields. Ancient Judaism thus provides an opportunity for enrichingly reciprocal study of Religion in the Roman Empire. On the one hand, Judaism was a pre-Roman ethnic practice transformed into a naturalized part of the Roman landscape. Roman Religion Challenged. Judaism and Christianity, while posing separate threats to the empire, had one thing in common - they both refused to participate in the worship of the Roman gods and make sacrifices at their temples. Although the Jews had firmly established themselves in the empire, they were often the target of the emperors, often blamed for any ills that befell the empire. Nero had them expelled from Rome, and Titus, the son of Emperor Vespasian, would continue his father’s war against the Jews in the Jewish Wars, eventually destroying the city of Jerusalem and killing thousands. As the Roman Republic, and later the Roman Empire, expanded, it came to include people from a variety of cultures, and religions. The worship of an ever increasing number of deities was tolerated and accepted. The government, and the Romans in general, tended to be tolerant towards most religions and cults. Some religions were banned for political reasons rather than dogmatic zeal, and other rites which involved human sacrifice were banned.