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The Mediterranean Seminar Review

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Review Editor: Andrew Devereux (History: University of California San Diego)

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Dijkstra, Jitse H. F., and Christian Rudolf Raschle, eds. *Religious Violence in the Ancient World: From Classical Athens to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020). Pp. xiv + 432. ISBN 9781108494908 Hardcover \$120.00: ASIN : B08BKX7PZ9 eBook \$96.00.

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**Date posted:** 01 June 2021

This volume brings together seventeen essays examining religious violence among Greek and Roman pagans, Jews and Christians in the Mediterranean world from Antiquity to the period just preceding the rise of Islam. The collection begins with two chapters on methodology, followed by seven essays on “Religious Violence in the Graeco-Roman world” and eight on “Religious Violence in the Late Antiquity.” Drawing on Peter Brown’s critique of Gibbon’s presentation of a clean and violent break between the worlds of pagan Rome and Christian Late Antiquity in the fourth century, the contributors emphasize the dynamic and complex range of religious interactions that characterize this age – one in which religion, whether pagan or Christian, was neither monolithic nor clearly defined. Consequently, many of the contributions emphasize intra- rather than interfaith violence – a phenomenon that the editors point out has remained largely untheorized until recently. Nor is violence defined strictly as physical; a whole gamut of modes of coercive aggression are considered. Such violence can be direct, structural or symbolic, three interrelated but distinct modes that must be distinguished. Equally problematic for this period is the concept of “religion”; here the authors draw on recent developments in Religious Studies to push back against the established interpretation of religious violence as being particular to monotheistic cultures and societies in part by reassessing the (later) sources referring to Christian-pagan violence that have until now been analyzed rather uncritically. Instead, we are presented with a world in which religious violence is both fairly ubiquitous and deep-rooted. It can be traced back at least to the time of pre-Christian Antiquity and was anchored in part in the transformation of the region’s sacred landscape and the tensions and stresses associated with this. The book will be of interest to scholars of the Ancient World and Late Antiquity, as well as historians researching the intersections of religious violence in any period.



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