A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion is an engaging and enjoyable book with significant pedagogical merits (depending on the type of course one is looking to teach, of course). Martin’s prose is approachable and unpretentious on the whole, and there is no lack of realistic, ordinary examples. One particularly notable instance of this strength is his explanation and use of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (71-91, esp. 73-84). There are two aspects of the book that could be construed as weak points. First, there are no broad surveys of any religious traditions. And second, Martin culls most of his examples from Christianity. As it happens, however, these features are intentional—after all, it is impossible to include everything in one volume. To borrow an expression Russell McCutcheon uses to describe his own introductory book, Martin’s book is meant to set the table—it is up to instructors to supply the spread. Furthermore, Martin notes that his training has rendered him most familiar with Christianity, and he “suspects[s] that many readers will similarly have at least a minimal prior familiarity with Christianity” (xiv). Having dismissed these potential criticisms, however, another arises—the examples from conservative/evangelical Christianity seem to outnumber those from more progressive/ecumenical forms. In the fifth chapter, for example, Martin uses evangelical Christianity to illustrate how religion can function to maintain social order, yet he does not provide many concrete examples of how Christian tools in particular can be used to challenge the status quo. This subtle imbalance, though not a damning problem by any means, has the potential to rub some readers the wrong way, possibly even obscure the point that the very same set of tools can be put to use for conflicting purposes. In the end, however, the strengths of Martin’s book far outweigh any weaknesses. With admirable clarity, Martin accomplishes what he set out to do—and that is to introduce readers not to religious traditions themselves, but to a critical mode of investigation that seeks to uncover their social functions. Highly recommended.

Adam T. Miller
University of Chicago


Anna Collar applies modern network theory to the archaeological examination of three religious movements within the Roman Empire. She begins with an explanation of network theory and a history of its use in archaeology. Network theory examines the mechanisms by which information, in this case religious innovation, spreads through connected nodes. Much of the explanation is devoted to the application of the theory to social networks, concerned largely with the role of opinion leaders and early adopters, and how effectively they transmit information through their connections and form new connections. Networks may be conceived in a variety of configurations of connectivity, such as small, tightly bound clusters of nodes, connected to other clusters by long-distance, “weak” connections, or as a series of overlapping clusters. Transmission of information depends primarily on the vulnerability of connected nodes to adoption of the new information, and the number of connections each node has. Analysis of a network may entail the identification a tipping point for setting off an information cascade, in which information suddenly suffuses the network. In such cases, the structure and connectivity of a network are a greater

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determinant of an innovation’s potential for success than the apparent superiority of the innovation itself. Thus one of the primary advantages of network theory is that it avoids subjective and teleological attributions of superiority to successful innovations. By providing a deep understanding of how innovations can “percolate” through society, Collar proposes, “using network theory [...] precludes the need for judgments about why change occurred” (36, emphasis hers).

Network theory is applied to religious movements in the Roman Empire largely through evaluation of the epigraphic record. In chapter two, Collar discusses the role of religion and religious networks in the Roman Empire, and the considerations this requires for the application of network theory. Roman expansion brought Romans into contact with many foreign cultures, and perhaps more importantly, brought many of these cultures into contact with each other. Collar considers the degree to which the Roman Empire acted as a global network, setting it against the modern conception of globalization, that is, the imposition of hegemony from a cultural “centre”. Rome did exhibit some elements of cultural diffusion from a centre but the spread of Roman culture often resulted in an “extension, rather than replacement, of a native culture” (50). Many religious cults, once localized, attracted new adherents throughout the empire, and there was a great increase in religious innovations.

Scholarly explanations for this era of innovation have often focused on the ways new religious ideas responded to a structural-functionalist imagining of individual needs. Social networks offer an alternative to this, moving emphasis away from the individual toward an examination of identity construction through group affiliation. In this vein, Collar discusses the application of sociological and anthropological hypotheses to the religious environment of the Roman Empire.

Roman occupation resulted in factors known to be conducive to religious innovation. Breaks between the dominant religious tradition of a region and the hierarchy of the socio-political elite can result in an increase in religious innovation. The same is the case for rapid cultural and social changes, such as often followed on Roman occupation. Social networks of new cults are subject to pressures of tension with their environment and isolation from the surrounding society. Cults either find ways to manage these tensions and expand along their social networks, or die out. Social interaction is the key factor for the success or failure of religious movements. Examination of social networks therefore provides “a more rounded picture of the place of the individual within the diffusion, success, or failure of religious movements” (74).

The remaining three chapters apply social network theory to three religious movements in the Roman Empire: the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus; the Jewish rabbinic reforms following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem; and the cult of Theos Hypsistos. The analyses depend on epigraphic evidence, plotting the growth of cults over time, and applying network theory analysis. Collar tends to use these analyses to confirm or refute competing theories for how the religious movements spread, for example, arguing that the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus was spread through a network of officers within the Roman army, rather than through foreign traders that followed and interacted with military encampments. This tends to work well where the connections between sites can be clearly shown in the epigraphic record, but is less convincing when the connections are more hypothetical, and more difficult to defend.

Collar’s application of network theory does excellent work showing the mechanisms of the spread of religious movements in antiquity. It works with a clear
methodological framework that is honest about its limitations, and can add a great deal to the study of the spread of ideas and change in the ancient world where a sufficient body of evidence exists for examination. It fails, however, to reveal why some cults appeal to networks, and others do not. Why, for example, was Jupiter Dolichenus adopted by Roman military officers and not some other cult? Although Collar makes no claim to answer this question, she does not diminish its importance, as she ambitiously proposes to do.

Mark Mueller
Department for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto


Religious Associations in the Post-Classical Polis by Julietta Steinhauser is published in Franz Steiner Verlag’s series Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge edited by Pedro Barceló, Peter Riemer, Jörg Rüpke and John Scheid. This series publishes an international assortment of dissertations, monographs, and edited volumes on a range of topics in Greek and Roman religion. This book contributes to the renewed scholarly interest in the networks of small collectives in the ancient Mediterranean world. Often referred to as “associations.” These collectives include guilds, professional groups, neighbourhood-based associations, and cult groups among other variations, that left a substantial amount of material evidence by way of honorific inscriptions, epitaphs, regulations, and membership lists. The main thrust of Steinhauber’s work is signalled in the title; she attempts to argue that “religious” associations became a distinct category, “a novel religious form” (15), with respect to the other kinds of associations, such as professional associations, in the urban context of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. Focussing on a the delimited but archaeologically rich sites of Athens, Delos, and later, Rhodes, Steinhauser examines the main evidence for each site and argues that 1) there is more diversity than previously assumed in associations that venerated the same deity 2) associations of new deities were integrated in to the polis at an incredible rate and 3) these associations attracted members by assimilating to civic norms rather than exuding “exoticism” or “aggressiveness” (25).

The introduction provides a general description of the phenomenon of Greek associations and Roman collegia and a brief argument for demarcating “religious” associations as a distinct subset of such groups. Steinhauser defines religious associations as “groups of people who voluntarily gather regularly, at a specific place to worship a common choice of deity” (16). These types of groups were derivative of “elective” cults which developed in opposition to civic ones (22-3). Delos and Athens are chosen as cases studies because of the rich evidence available and because they have contrasting conditions under which associations developed and flourished in each city.

The second and third chapter provide summaries of the some of the different kinds of associations in Athens and Delos. Steinhauser covers many of the well-known associations including the orgeones, eranistai, and iobakkhoi in Athens and the therapeutai, dekatistai, and serapiastai of Delos. From these association-laden sites, she argues for an increasing diversity of groups during the Hellenistic era, primarily with respect to the variety of deities which are used as groups names. This diversification occurred, according to Steinhauser, as associations shift from focussing on civic sacrificial festivals to