



Archaic Roman Religion

Professor Georges Dumézil

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When St. Paul and St. Peter reached Rome they encountered a state-sponsored religion that had been established for centuries. Amid the shrines and temples of Rome, the Romans sought to preserve and strengthen a religion especially suited to the ambitious city. But Roman religion had also proved permeable to many influences, from Greece, Egypt, Persia, and other parts of Italy. What then was truly Roman, and what had Romans done with their borrowings to stamp them with Roman character?

By exhaustive study of texts, inscriptions, and archaeology of Roman sacred places, Dumézil traces the formation of archaic Roman religion from Indo-European sources through the development of the rites and beliefs of the Roman republic. He describes a religion that was not only influenced by the other religions with which it came into contact, but influenced them as well, in mutual efforts to distinguish one nation from another. Even so, certain continuities were sustained in order to achieve a religion that crossed generations and ways of life. The worship of certain gods became the special concerns of certain parts of society, all of which needed attention to assure Rome's success in war, civil administration, and the production of food and goods.

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