"naturally". The cultural sphere is undoubtedly formalized in the ideal *polis* as proposed in the *Laws,* insofar as certain behaviours that are normally not subject to any control are regulated and sanctioned.

Noack analyses three preludes: preludes to marriage (VI 772d5–774c2), preludes to rules pertaining to finding and obtaining treasures, which relates to the concept of inheritance (XI 913a1–914a5), and, thirdly, testaments (XI 922d4–8). Through these chosen examples, Noack argues that the concept of *homo economicus* in the NIE – that people are primarily interested in maximizing their personal benefit (see p. 78) – can be compared with the equally vague concept of pleasure in the *Laws* (cf. II 664b-c: a life of pleasure and a life of virtue are the same) as the basis for a person's decision making. However, the preludes to the laws in the *Laws* are mainly ethical rules, and they override the cost-benefit calculation and encourage citizens to take actions that run counter to their maximization of benefits – such as not accepting one's monetary inheritance. This argument does not solve the problematic "pleasure principle" in the *Laws* but, all in all, the NIE is an interesting tool for analysing the complexities of the many quite curious stipulations in the longest work of Plato's *oeuvre*.

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Natur – Mythos – Religion im Antiken Griechenland / Nature – Myth – Religion in Ancient Greece. Herausgegeben von Tanja Susanne Scheer. Postdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 67. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2019. ISBN 978-3-515-12208-5; ISBN (e-book) 978-3-515-12209-2. 297 pp. EUR 54.

The title of this volume, edited by Tanja Susanne Scheer from papers presented at an international meeting at the Georg-August Universität in Göttingen in 2015, is very interesting and immediately thought-provoking. What is 'nature' here, and how will the relationship between nature and religious-mythical spheres of ancient life and thought be understood in this book? This interesting and intriguing bilingual volume consists of fourteen articles divided into four sections. They are briefly discussed below and at the end I present a few thoughts which the volume provoked in me.

Scheer sets the scene with her informative opening introduction. She takes a brief and useful look into a research tradition in which religion has been variously conceptualised and interpreted in relation to nature. Nature is approached against a backdrop of the humanist or romantic ideas of *Naturreligion* and *Naturmythologie*, or as a concept mirroring evolutionary theories of religion

from the imaginary *Ur-religion* coined by the early ethnologists and historians rooted in 19th-century German Romanticism. Scheer proceeds to the more modern interpretations of ancient Greek religion, where the role of nature (or rather the environment) has shaped the understanding of religious practices through political and social influences and changes. She regards the interaction between nature, myth and religion as a central dynamic in the mythology and in the living world of the Greeks.

In her article, Katja Sporn promises to employ a diachronic perspective to explore the existence and role of natural features in the spatial and practical arrangements of cults in ancient Athens. She discusses the role of 'natural elements' (mountains, hills, rocks, rivers, springs, trees) and 'natural features' (e.g. trees, thunderbolts) in the spatiality and *praxis* of the cults. This contribution is a good introduction to the richness of the material that the concept of 'nature' can provide for a further understanding of the cultic arrangements in Athens. However, in this case it remains unclear where the usefulness of 'nature' as an analytical concept begins and where it ends. This ambiguity results in all-encompassing and rather general statements which are self-evident: "all sanctuaries are situated in one part or the other of the physical landscape…" (p. 30). Similarly, the terms 'natural element', 'natural feature' and 'natural place' come across as overlapping here, and hence the reader may well ask where lies the difference between a natural feature in the landscape and a man-made use and reuse of it?

Richard Gordon's contribution excellently contextualises the place of nature in relation to religion in German neo-humanist discourses from Romanticism to Early Industrialisation. Gordon first explores how the notion of nature resonated in German academic discussions relating to contemporary university education. Secondly, he investigates how this new ethnographic information shaped the views of Greek religion not as a place inhabited primarily by godly pseudo-people but rather as an 'organic' socio-cultural system in its own right. Thirdly, he analyses the effects of early industrialisation, when nature was regarded as something to be conquered and tamed. The author follows the shifts in the representation of nature in Greek religion. In the late 18th century, nature was seen from the perspective of aestheticizing graecophilia. It was filled with godly beauty and people themselves were regarded as *Naturvölker*, holding innocently and rather naïvely to *Naturreligion*. By the mid-19th century, nature was treated as a target for superior action by humans, who could take control of it and use it for their own benefit. Its place in Greek religion was now within institutions and practices and was no longer merely found in myths. Gordon points out that there is not necessarily a direct causal connection between these discourses. His examples also fascinatingly echo the shifts in the tradition of the study of ancient Greek religion during the last 100 years, when we have observed various 'turns' in the focus of research from the emphasis on the 'cultural' to the 'social' role of religion in ancient Greece.

Jennifer Larson's article is an interesting and enjoyable inquiry into the views and beliefs that the Greeks might have held towards nymphs and natural phenomena associated with them. In her case study, Larson first reviews the old Taylorian concept of animism and then places it in the framework of theories developed in the cognitive science of religion. This implies, for example, a question whether it is possible (and if so, how) to hold beliefs which are logically contradictory. Based on the so-called dual-process model of cognition, Larson argues that the Greeks could have perceived nymphs and the cultic complex relating to them as both physical entities in nature where a cult *praxis* could have been realised, and as animistic entities endowed with mind. This was enabled by the perception of nymphs as existing in a mythological realm of reflective cognition. Larson's article is an important case study which builds on carefully studied primary material interpreted in an innovative interpretative framework. Her results illustrate the mechanism in which a folktale (mythology) may exceed the logic resulting in coherent, sustainable beliefs.

In his article, Jan Bremmer pays attention to the rivers and river gods. He provides a very useful survey of the river gods worshipped in Greece and provides polynomic evidence of rivers and cultic activities connected with them. He calls this 'conceptual hydrology' and interestingly discusses the anthropomorphic deities associated with rivers as well as the role of rivers as a border between the domain of the living and the dead. Bremmer uses the term 'river cult' on various occasions and here the question arises as to what a 'river cult' might have been in practice: were rivers themselves objects of worship or was it rather a more abstract personification of a river that was used in local identity building and was accordingly ritually addressed?

Esther Eidinow discusses winds in the ancient Greek imaginary. Since winds are not stable natural phenomena, and may present risks, the author places them into 'hazardscapes' which created both opportunities and hazards. When personified, winds tended to be characterised as threatening, even monstrous, with powers beyond human control. Eidinow remarks that we have surprisingly few myths about winds as actors and agents, regardless of the personifications of specific winds appearing rather frequently in written and visual sources. It is perhaps not surprising that there is relatively little evidence for the cult of specific deities whose *epikleseis* suggests control over winds (p. 120). Possibly the reason could be in the nature of the winds themselves: as ubiquitous, changeable elements of nature, they would not be easily pinned down to a specific local cult.

In her article, Renate Schlesier takes us to the kingdom of fauna and flora by looking into the fragments of Sappho. She provides a good survey of references to animals (dogs, chickens, bovines, sheep, pigs, horses, goats, various birds and fish) and plants (flowers, especially roses, trees, fruits and herbs) in Sappho's texts. In these texts, fragrant flowers and clothing made of materials from animals, are associated with the sensual aspects of the goddess Aphrodite through references to seeing, hearing and touching. The poetess paints a mythical world as a 'dreamscape' of drowsiness (p.

140) in its closeness of nature, where the goddess could wander about, in contrast to humans who are tied to a human-made, constructed environment. This reflects the implicit relationship between the goddess of love and nature in Sappho's fragments.

Julia Kindt's contribution on divine zoomorphism and the anthropomorphic divine body beautifully draws together the central themes of this volume. The author takes an informed look at how these two phenomena intersect in Greek religion. Kindt argues that the animal body provides a supplementary code to the more widespread anthropomorphism of the Greek gods. She examines so-called 'shape-shifters', the deities who temporarily take an animal form through self-transformation, either to camouflage themselves or to show off their powers to transgress the boundaries that humans are tied to. Kindt's thesis is that divine zoomorphism allows increased opportunities for a divine body to navigate the compromise between divine immanence on the one hand and divine transcendence on the other. Divine zoomorphism supplements the set of symbols for divine qualities in the more prominent anthropomorphism by either defamiliarising or temporarily depersonalising the god by allowing him or her to become a member of a specific species. Kindt argues that this "presents the ultimately insurmountable ontological gap separating humanity from divinity". This might well be the case, but we could also argue that such transgressions between divine, human and animal form and spheres reflect the idea of multiplicity in totality, where boundaries are not insurmountable ontological gaps.

Dorit Engster writes on dolphins and dolphin riders, concentrating on the human-animal relationship. Anthropomorphism is a central theme here, too. Since the Archaic period onwards, dolphins were often attributed with human-like characteristics; they were believed to have an ability to express emotions, love poetry and music and to build strong emotional bonds with each other. Engster shows that dolphins go beyond mere anthropomorphism: as manifestations of godliness and as human helpers they were mediators, building a connection between the realms of gods, humans and animals, and standing between these categories themselves.

Marietta Horster addresses the recently much-discussed questions concerning pollution and purity as well as cleanliness in communal and religious life. She draws mainly from the classical Athenian tragedies and the epigraphical material from sanctuary sites, and takes up the notion of *eukosmia*, good order, as a requirement in Greek sanctuaries, ensuring that tidiness and external appearance of space was met with the right disposition towards the holy place. This leads to her notion (p. 214) that "nature is a man-made concept of divine order", itself an interesting and rather provocative suggestion, which could have been further developed in the article.

David G. Romano's contribution provides an archaeological perspective. Romano describes the material evidence from the sanctuary of Zeus at Mount Lykaion in Arcadia that he discovered during the archaeological project he had been co-directing since 2004. Romano's article projects the

themes that often pertain to archaeological investigations at cult sites: the question of (and search for) continuity of cultic activity from prehistory onwards, and the identification of remains and finds that correspond with textual evidence, Pausanias in particular. Mount Lykaion as the birthplace of Zeus, as described by Pausanias and Callimachus, has been one of the driving forces in the project. Romano sees a long continuity of cult activity at the site: "we have at Mt. Lykaion a likelihood of the continuity of a cult from the 16th century BC through the Iron Age and as far as the Hellenistic period", and adds, "it was Zeus who was worshipped here in the Mycenaean period from the 16th century onwards" (pp. 227–8). Romano's article is informative in its own right, yet it fails to address the concept of nature as an operational and fruitfully interpretive concept in relation to Greek religion. This results in a self-evident notion: "The combination of nature, mythology and cult is certainly present at the Sanctuary of Zeus at Mt. Lykaion" (p. 231).

Arcadia is also the main context in Anna C. Neff's article on the use and roles of water in Arcadian myth building and local identity formation. Neff points out that changeability and the unpredictability of the rivers and waterways add to their cultural and religious importance in Arcadia, which is prone to both flooding and droughts. Therefore, the power (and vitality) of rivers was regarded to be the work of the gods and was explained by specific local mythology. As a consequence, cultic handlings were employed to ward off risks. Neff interestingly describes how local cults affected both the landscape and the cultural memory of the people.

Angela Ganter's contribution to the volume is a short, enjoyable and innovative study on Theban identity, seen as being between nature and religion through an 'encoding', a dichotomy between (civilised) *asty* and (wild, untamed) *chora*. Ganter explores the relationship between *ethne* and the landscape/environment in Theban myths and shows, for example, that the building of walls around a city can be regarded as a process of pacifying the surroundings and defining space for social life by excluding the dangers from the outside. Ganter handles the three core concepts of the book in an impressive and balanced way.

The last article in the volume is Tanja Scheer's study on the concepts of autochthony through discourses about earth in myths and cults in ancient Arcadia. The author considers the meanings of autochthony, which generally implies a thought that the Arcadians (in this case) were earth-born, possessed their own soil and as inhabitants had always been there. She discusses the concept interestingly from its mythical meaning to the construction of ethnic and social group entities, since autochthony endows a strong sense of distinctive, location-specific regional identity. The author notes that being born from the earth is a norm in Greek thinking. It refers to the primeval past and the origin of mankind, but it was harnessed to function as a building block in local traditions. Sheer skilfully considers autochthony as a means to emphasise specificity both politically and historically by extending its mythological content to sanctifications of legal claims. This concluding article

successfully draws together the main themes of the book and provides the reader with an enjoyable case study in which nature, myth and religion form a triad of interconnected concepts.

Edited contributions from international meetings often portray the usual problem: the uneven quality of the contributions is their usual downside, and this volume is no exemption. The interaction between nature, myth and religion is addressed extremely well in some of the articles, while others leave the reader wondering what was their interrelational role in the argumentation. 'Nature' is conceived variously as the environment, the landscape, or space, as spatial and even as mental space. It is, of course, difficult to define such a huge concept as 'nature' for specific interpretive purposes, and in this volume it is occasionally taken as self-evident (e.g. "sanctuaries were situated in physical landscape"). However, as we have seen, nature as an analytical concept does provide highly interesting possibilities to further our understanding of ancient Greek religion, but its content has to be carefully considered on a case by case basis.

A couple of fascinating recurring themes emerge as focal points in the articles of this volume. First, the question of the formation of local identities through myths relating to landscape, nature and natural features in the wild or the built environment. Nature is indeed a surprisingly central entity in the process of forming the conception of *ethne*. This notion was often associated with taming the wilderness of (mythicised) nature and rendering it into a suitable landscape for the needs of organised social life. Second, anthropomorphism and zoomorphism are the most commonly shared thread in nearly all of the contributions. Anthropomorphism is closely related to personifications that also encompass more abstract entities, such as heavenly bodies and seasons, which are not covered in the current volume. We can probably consider nature to have been perceived as a pre-existing and eternally present, albeit continuously changing, backdrop to gods and deities who appeared in it with their powers and spheres of dominion. In this view, anthropomorphism itself would function as a means to take hold of things, to control and in one way 'humanise' nature. Therefore, we encounter another interpretive possibility to consider the joining together of nature, myth and Greek religious *praxis*, namely a potential pantheistic (under)current crystallised in the concept of nature. As Greek polytheism is on the surface centrally theistic, I do not wish to claim that it should be regarded as pantheistic. In theological argumentation and in the philosophy of religion, pantheism is often regarded as incompatible with a theistic belief system. The demarcation of powers would render the omnipotence, omniscience and infinite powers of the Greek gods impossible. However, on the basis of this volume the view that Greek religion can be seen to be marked by at least pantheistic currents is unavoidable. Pantheism itself as a concept has porous and disputed boundaries, but its main core starts from the assumption that there is a similarity and even uniformity between gods and nature, and that divinity is thoroughly immanent in nature. We frequently encounter this idea in Greek thought, although in ritual *praxis* it is more difficult to pin down. Perhaps future research would

benefit from a thorough look into pantheistic ideas in Greek religion. This volume certainly paves the way for that project and it is recommended to anyone interested in the relationship between religion, myths and nature.

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Mattias P. Gassman: *Worshippers of the Gods: Debating Paganism in the Fourth-Century Roman World*. Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity. Oxford University Press, New York 2020. ISBN 978-0-19-008244-4. XI, 236 pp. GBP 55.

The religious and intellectual milieu of Late Antique Rome in the fourth century has increasingly been the focus of classical scholars during the last couple of decades. The Christianization process of the Roman Empire, in particular, has fascinated numerous scholars. Some scholars tend to emphasize religious toleration and the pluralism of the period between the reigns of Emperor Constantine and Emperor Theodosius, while others see conflict and competition. Such concepts as 'pagan revival' and 'pagan resistance' have had a long life in classical scholarship. In recent scholarship, the Christianization of the Roman Empire has been seen as a long process of accommodation. There were religious tensions and even violence, but 'pagans' and Christians were no longer obvious enemies. Social class, tradition and shared values united them despite the religious differences.

In his monograph Mattias P. Gassman focuses on definitions of religion and, in particular, on views of traditional polytheistic religion in Late Antique texts. One central theme of his book is the range of attitudes of Roman emperors to traditional cults, going into greater detail with texts by Lactantius, Firmicus Maternus, Symmachus, Ambrosius, Praetextatus and Paulina. The book is chronologically structured, beginning with the tetrarchic era and ending at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries. Gassman first analyses some essential concepts he uses throughout his book, such as 'religion' and 'paganism', the latter being defined as an artificial structure created by Christian authors in the course of the fourth century. He also pays attention to the division created by Franz Cumont in the early 20th century between 'traditional Roman religion' and 'oriental mystery cults'. This division has been much criticized and largely abandoned by scholars of Roman religion during the past few decades. Such a division can obviously not be seen in Late Antiquity.

Gassman starts by analysing the earliest author of his study, Lactantius. Lactantius is an interesting example, since he started his career as a teacher of rhetoric during the reign of Diocletian, when he converted to Christianity, and he wrote his most important works after the tetrarchic period,