IV

PERFORMING RELIGION IN THE EMPIRE
1. Republican Religion as Archetype

A broad consensus exists that public cults lay at the heart of Roman religion, and that at the ritual heart of most of these cults lay sacrifice. This short paper does not set out to challenge either view, but asks how we must nuance it when we write of the religion of Roman communities in the provinces, rather than that of Rome itself. The centrality of the public cults of the city is certain, at least as far as recent scholarly literature is concerned. The best studied cults are those of the Roman Republic and the Augustan age. Debates over conservatism and change have been played out in relation to the expulsion of the Bacchanales and the reception of Magna Mater Deorum. Our common understanding of priesthoods is very largely based on testimony referring to the Pontiffs, the Vestals and the Arval Brethren. Central concepts of modern scholarship, such as the idea of cult as designed to ensure pax deorum, the distinction between religio and superstitio, the social embeddedness of religion,