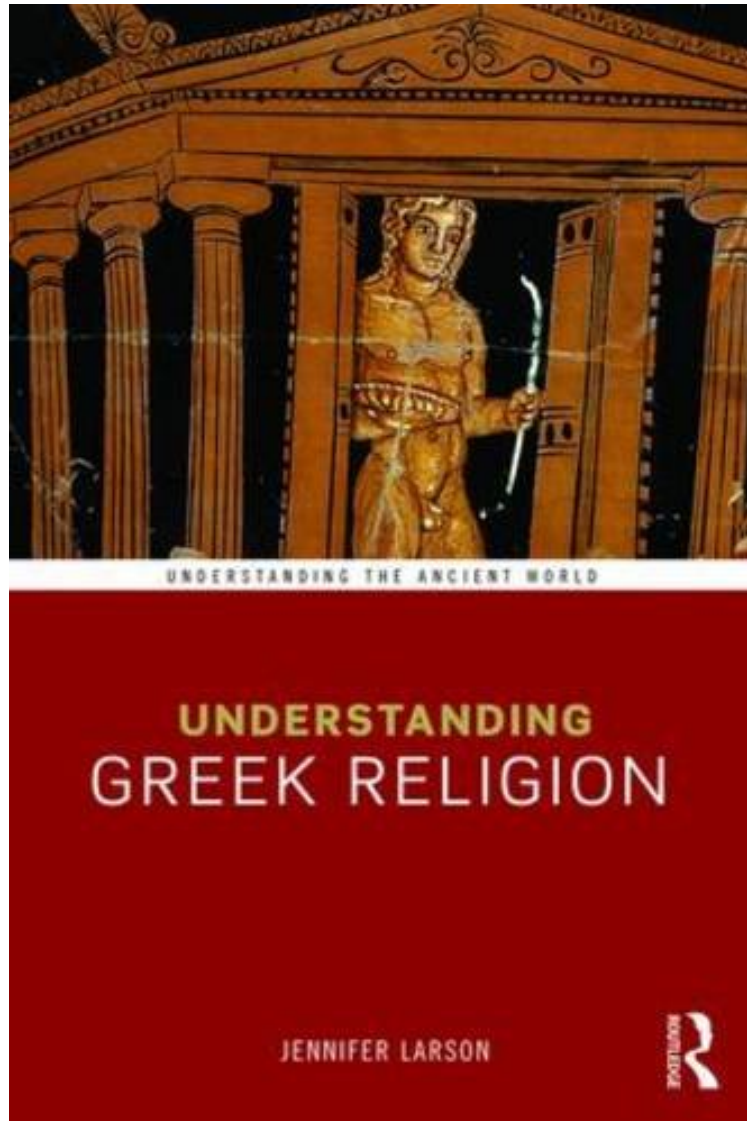


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Understanding Greek Religion (Understanding the Ancient World)

Jennifer Larson

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Understanding Greek Religion is one of the first attempts to fully examine any religion from a cognitivist perspective, applying methods and findings from the cognitive science of religion to the ancient Greek world. In this book, Jennifer

Larson shows that many of the fundamentals of Greek religion, such as anthropomorphic gods, divinatory procedures, purity beliefs, reciprocity, and sympathetic magic arise naturally as by-products of normal human cognition. Drawing on evidence from across the ancient Greek world, Larson provides detailed coverage of Greek theology and local pantheons, rituals including processions, animal sacrifice and choral dance, and afterlife beliefs as they were expressed through hero worship and mystery cults. Eighteen in-depth essays illustrate the theoretical discussion with primary sources and include case studies of key cult inscriptions from Kyrene, Kos, and Miletos. This volume features maps, tables, and over twenty images to support and expand on the text, and will provide conceptual tools for understanding the actions and beliefs that constitute a religion. Additionally, Larson offers the first detailed discussion of cognition and memory in the transmission of Greek religious beliefs and rituals, as well as a glossary of terms and a bibliographical essay on the cognitive science of religion. *Understanding Greek Religion* is an essential resource for both undergraduate and postgraduate students of Greek culture and ancient Mediterranean religions.

"*Understanding Greek Religion: A Cognitive Approach* is the best possible introduction to ancient Greek religion. There is more to the Greek religion than poetic myths and strange rituals. Jennifer Larson starts from the crucial idea that the ancient Greeks were like us, in that they shared the same mental processes and lived in the same world. She shows how this means that there is a lot more that can be said about the role of religion in their lives than simple studies of the ancient texts can reveal. Anyone at all interested in ancient Greek religion should read this book." - Professor Hugh Bowden, King's College London "Providing a comprehensive introduction to ancient Greek religion, Larson (classics, Kent State Univ.) examines the customary topics myths, rituals, deities, mystery and hero cults, divination, festivals, games, processions, pollution, sacrifice, and so on from a thoroughly new perspective: cognitive science ... Larson shows how the dynamics of religious thought and behavior involve agency, dual processing (distinguishing intuitive and reflective processes), and counterintuitive concepts (making concepts memorable) and how mental tools enable humans to construct representations as the basis of religion. The glossary and bibliographical essay will guide students as they explore this new approach to Greek religion. This volume is a model for the study of the ancient world." - L. J. Alderink, Concordia College

About the Author Jennifer Larson is Professor of Classics at Kent State University. Her research interests include Greek poetry, mythology and religion. She is the author of *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult, Lore* (2001) and *Ancient Greek Cults: A Guide* (2007).