



Aniconism in Greek Antiquity (Oxford Studies in Ancient Culture & Representation)

Milette Gaifman

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In this volume, Millette Gaifman explores a phenomenon known as aniconism -- the absence of figural images of gods in Greek practiced religion and the adoption of aniconic monuments, namely objects such as pillars and poles, to designate the presence of the divine. Shifting our attention from the well-known territories of Greek anthropomorphism and naturalism, it casts new light on the realm of non-figural objects in Greek religious art.

Drawing upon a variety of material and textual evidence dating from the rise of the Greek polis in the eighth century BC to the rise of Christianity in the first centuries AD, this book shows that aniconism was more significant than has often been assumed. Coexisting with the fully figural forms for representing the divine throughout Greek antiquity, aniconic monuments marked an undefined yet fixedly located divine presence. Cults centered on rocks were encountered at crossroads and on the edges of the Greek city. Despite aniconism's liminality, non-figural markers of divine presence became a subject of interest in their own right during a time when mimesis occupied the center of Greek visual culture. The ancient Greeks saw the worship of stones and poles without images as characteristic of the beginning of their own civilization. Similarly, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the existence of aniconism was seen as physical evidence for the continuity of ancient Greek traditions from time immemorial.

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