

Objects of Worship: The Place of Idols in Mediaeval Troy Narratives

From Late Antiquity onward, Christians sought to define their relationship with the physical remains of 'pagan' religion. As is the case with Christian receptions of classical text and narrative, this relationship is not static, but responsive to socio-political and cultural trends and shifts. Indeed, Greco-Roman places and objects of worship, especially temples and cult statues, have at certain times been incorporated into Christian landscapes, narratives, and identities, and at others kept separate and distinct reminders of the ancient world's 'otherness.' Yet despite this variation in reception, Christians consistently attempted to exert control over religious images and their reception, be that by notionally stripping them of their religious connotations, by binding or destroying them, or by recontextualising them within art collections under the control of Christian institutions, groups, or individuals. What such actions have in common is the process of redefining objects and places of worship according to Christian values and needs.

These changing responses to Greco-Roman objects of worship are reflected in Christian text and narrative, especially in Christian adaptations of classical myth. This paper examines the treatment of idols of pagan gods and their religious contexts in mediaeval Troy narratives, focusing on changes in language and attitude toward these objects. It discusses both relatively neutral presentations and explicit rejections of idols and their worship; it looks, for instance, at explicitly derogatory language (e.g., "mammet"), at commentaries on wealth and sacrifice dedicated to the gods, and at references to prostration before idols. The paper draws on theoretical frameworks concerning the power of images and the role of the idol in Christian thought and practice, and seeks to highlight the different ways in which mediaeval authors reflect on and shape contemporary responses to idols and their worship.