

ESTABLISHING SELF-WORLD RELATIONS IN
SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PRACTICES.
LOOKING AT ROMAN RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION*

ESTABLECIENDO RELACIONES ENTRE EL MUNDO
Y EL YO EN LAS PRÁCTICAS SOCIO-RELIGIOSAS.
UNA MIRADA HACIA LA COMUNICACIÓN RELIGIOSA ROMANA

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the notion of religion as communication and resonance, this article analyses the details and varieties of religious communication in ancient Rome. Decentring the traditional focus on “sacrifice” by admitting that *sacra facere* was far more than “sacrifice”, allows us to use the rich evidence for the many facets, pragmatic relationships and cognitive associations of such rituals for an analysis focused on the self-world relations that were established in such performances. The article

RESUMEN

Partiendo de la noción de religión como comunicación y resonancia, este artículo analiza los detalles y las variedades de la comunicación religiosa en la antigua Roma. Ampliar el foco de atención tradicional en el “sacrificio” admitiendo que *sacra facere* era mucho más que “sacrificar” nos permite utilizar la abundante documentación que atestigua las múltiples facetas, relaciones pragmáticas y asociaciones cognitivas de los rituales para analizar las relaciones entre el mundo y el yo individual que se establecen

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will model religious ritual as a triangular relationship between human agents (in active as well as passive roles), their “special” or “divine” addressees and animals or objects not just casually employed but constitutive for such communication. It will further argue that such religious practices have a specific relational quality which makes them particularly important for establishing relationships, foregrounding the reflexive, self-observing character of such “intensified” practices. Against this background, the body of this article follows the many conceptual and material associations and implications of Roman religious ritual, thus arguing for the individual and cultural malleability of ritual relations. It is construing a heuristic grid and on that basis plausibilizes the claim that self-world relations are established and habitualized in practices that are characterized by their inclusion of not unquestionably plausible addressees and hence more intensively mediatized and more self-reflexive than many other social practices.

en la ejecución de tales ceremonias. El artículo aborda el ritual religioso como una relación triangular entre los agentes humanos (tanto en papeles activos como pasivos), sus receptores “especiales” o “divinos” y los animales u objetos empleados en dicha comunicación no simplemente de manera casual, sino como elementos constitutivos de la misma. Sostiene, además, que las prácticas religiosas tienen una cualidad relacional específica que las hace particularmente importantes para establecer relaciones, poniendo en primer plano el carácter reflexivo y auto-observante de estas prácticas “intensificadas”. Con este telón de fondo, el cuerpo del estudio investiga las numerosas asociaciones e implicaciones conceptuales y materiales del ritual religioso romano, defendiendo así la maleabilidad individual y cultural de las relaciones rituales. Se construye un marco heurístico dentro del cual es posible afirmar que las relaciones entre el mundo y el yo se establecen y se vuelven habituales en prácticas que se caracterizan por incluir destinatarios no incuestionablemente plausibles y, en consecuencia, por ser más intensamente mediatizadas y más autorreflexivas que muchas otras prácticas sociales.

KEYWORDS

Habitualization; Resonance; Ritual; Roman religion; Sacrifice.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Habitualización; religión romana; resonancia; ritual; sacrificio.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Starting from the notion of religion as communication and resonance, this article analyses the details and varieties of religious communication in ancient Rome. This field goes far beyond sacrificial rituals. Animal sacrifice was an important element of ritual practices in ancient societies. Yet, the aspect of killing initiated critical discourse from antiquity onwards and has captured a disproportionate amount of interest in modern scholarship. Decentring this focus by admitting that *sacra facere* was far more than “sacrifice”, allows us to use the rich evidence for the many facets, pragmatic relationships and cognitive associations of such rituals for an analysis focused on the self-world relations that were established in such performances. Due to our evidence, the image is dominated by elaborate, elite-practiced ritual communication at the end of the Republican and early Imperial periods, but it is of course not possible to reconstruct any historical instances of performance in all details.

This article does not aim at fully mapping the different types of relationships that are established in ritual performances. When stressing the relational perspective, as provided e.g. by actor-network-theories,¹ the aim is not to register each manual, visual or instrumental touch between humans, between humans and things or humans and larger imaginative frameworks. Instead, it is the quality of the relationship and the changes brought about at both ends that are at the centre. With such a purpose in mind, the treatment here is preliminary only. By employing an approach that analyses religious action as communication, I will model religious ritual as a triangular relationship between human agents (in active as well as passive roles), their “special” or

1. On which see Latour, 2005.

“divine” addressees and animals or objects not just casually employed but constitutive for such communication. I will further argue that such religious practices have a specific relational quality which makes them particularly important for establishing relationships, foregrounding the reflexive, self-observing character of such “intensified” practices rather than any “emotional energy” and the wish to renew it, as Randall Collins argued.² I do follow the latter, however, in his micro-sociological account of the concatenation of performances, the “ritual interaction chain”, not necessarily, but potentially leading to repetition and institutionalization, that is, the establishment of “traditions” by means of habitualization (4).

Against this background, the body of this article (3) restricts itself to follow the many conceptual and material associations and implications of Roman religious ritual, thus arguing for the individual and cultural malleability of ritual relations. It is construing a heuristic grid rather than arriving at a full description of individual instances of such relationships and their character. It is on this basis that I try to plausibilize the claim that self-world relations are established and habitualized in practices that are characterized by their inclusion of not unquestionably plausible addressees and hence more intensively mediatized and more self-reflexive than many other social practices. These I call “socio-religious practices”.

2. DISSOLVING “SACRIFICE”

2.1. MODERN AND ANCIENT CONCEPTS

As I stated at the beginning, “sacrifice” is no historically useful descriptive term to start with for such an enterprise. “How do you do sacrifice?” Such a question would certainly have caused consternation on the part of an ancient Roman man or woman thus addressed. They would have explained that *sacrificium* is such a general term that nothing like a standard procedure existed. In fact, the answer would be quite similar to that of a Christian asked “How do you do religion?”. In Latin, *sacra* is the most general term for “religious rituals”, and *sacrificium* is just the – rather infrequent – nominal form of *sacra facere*, “performing rituals”. The same Roman might have asked the interviewer (as our contemporary probably would do) for clarification: What do you mean by “sacrifice”? As always in historical comparison, two strategies are in conflict. On the one hand, a narrow definition of the objects to be compared produces maps of analogies and minor differences, thus strengthening the universal applicability of the descriptive terms employed in the definition. On the other hand,

2. Collins, 2004.

tracing different contextualizations of the primary objects, its variations in shape and function in other culture opens new lines of research and weakens general terms by stressing cultural differences instead of producing concrete results.³ Neither is a priori better, but must be adapted to aims and materials.⁴

It is quite easy to produce a general account of what historians of religion denote as “animal sacrifice”. Georg Wissowa did so in his famous manual *Religion und Kultus der Römer*,⁵ John Scheid did so in his *Introduction to Roman Religion*.⁶ Whereas Scheid treats animal sacrifice as a complex ritual that might be (and usually is) enlarged by further ritual elements (vows, even games), Wissowa concentrates on it as just one, but the dominant, form of liturgical action (“*gottesdienstliche Handlungen*”) in public, i.e. a state ritual. Wissowa, as elsewhere in his handbook,⁷ tries to replicate the structure of Varro’s *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, the most comprehensive ancient manual of Roman religion known to have existed, a masterpiece of religious practice being converted into religious knowledge and a new form of authority thus acquired by the author.⁸ But “sacrifice” is not a structural unit known in Varro’s books (and neither a term defined in the extant part of his or Festus’ etymological works):⁹

Book 1 (= Book 26 of the complete work): Introduction and plan of the work

Books 2-4: *De hominibus*, on the priesthoods:

2: *Pontifices*

3: *Augures*

4: *Quindecimviri sacris faciundis*

Books 5-7: *De locis*, on cult-sites:

5: *Sacella* (open-air cult-sites and shrines)

6: *Aedes sacrae* (temples in the narrower sense)

7: *Loca religiosa* (tombs etc.)

Books 8-10: *De temporibus*, on festivals and the religious calendar:

8: *Feriae* (festivals that “belong” to a divinity)

9: *Ludi circenses* (chariot-races)

10: *Ludi scaenici* (stage performances)

3. See e.g. Rouwhorst, 2014.

4. See Rüpke, 2018a.

5. Wissowa, 1912, pp. 412-420.

6. Scheid, 2003, pp. 79-110.

7. See Rüpke, 2003.

8. On Augustine, see Rüpke, 2009a and 2012, pp. 172-185. For different types of ancient systematizations, see e.g. Georgoudi, 2015.

9. From August., *De civ. D. VI 3* = Varro, *Ant. r. div. frg. 4* Cardauns; quoted from Rüpke, 2007b, pp. 59-60.

Books 11-13: *De sacris*, on rituals:

11: *Consecrationes*

12: *Sacra privata*

13: *Sacra publica*

Books 14-16: *De dis*, about the gods, especially the etymology of their names:

14: Gods whose names have a clear significance (*di certi*)

15: Gods whose names have no clear significance (*di incerti*)

16: Select grand deities (*di praecipui atque selecti*)

The extant fragments give no hint of the internal organization of books 11 to 13. There is no reason to suppose that the notion or the facts of *animal* sacrifice¹⁰ served as an organizing principle. The importance given to “sacrifice” in the sense of immolation, that is the killing of animals, is rather a consequence of second-order observation. Within the spectrum of Roman ritual, the ritual killing of animals and humans provoked the attention of ancient intellectuals, eliciting explanatory myths as well as philosophical criticism.¹¹ It was, however, probably the Christian theological discourse about the sacrificial nature of the death of Jesus Christ that established an early comparative interest in this type of ritual, as shown in monographs such as “*de sacrificiis*” or “*de sacris*” from the 17th cent. onwards.¹²

2.2. EXAMPLES

Even if we focus on ritual practices featuring offerings or even killing, a few examples can provide a glimpse of the variety. Compared to Greece, there are few texts that prescribe in detail how Roman rituals are to be performed. The first of my examples are taken from the Elder Cato’s *De agri cultura*, “On agriculture”, written in the first half of the 2nd cent. BCE. Hence, they refer to private cult, which historiographical sources typically ignore. Their disadvantage, however, is that they say nothing about shifts of scene, about the procession, essential to many urban and extra-urban rituals, which takes the participants to the fixed site where the central ritual acts are performed, be it the area in some permanently sacralized place, for instance in front of a temple or a sacred grove, or on a spot of profane use.

Cato does not devote a separate section of his work to the religious prescriptions, which he associates closely with the guidance on farming. The first text refers to

10. Cf. Eckhardt, 2014.

11. Stroumsa, 2005; Astell and Goodhart, 2011; Auffarth, 2012; Bremmer, 2018; Ullucci, 2012.

12. E.g. Saubert, 1659. For ancient theorizing on Roman sacrifice see Prescendi, 2007. For the ancient history of intellectual critique of animal sacrifice, Ullucci, 2012.

the *daps*, the offering of food and wine to a deity, in this case on behalf of the plough-teams (*pro bubus*):

“The offering is to be made in the following manner: offer to Jupiter Dapalis a cup of wine of any size you wish, observing the day as a holiday for the oxen, the ox-masters, and those who make the offering. In making the (food-)offering use the following *formula*: ‘Jupiter Dapalis, it is fitting that a cup of wine be offered to you in my house, among my family and dependants, as part of your sacred feast (*daps*). Therefore, do us the honour (*macte esto*) of accepting this meal (*daps*) here’. Wash your hands, then take the (cup of) wine, and say: ‘Jupiter Dapalis, do us the honour of accepting this feast (*daps*): do us the honour (of accepting this) wine that we offer you here’. You may (also) make an offering to Vesta if you wish. The food (*daps*) offered to Jupiter consists of roasted beef or mutton and an ‘urn’ of wine. Make the offering (*profanato*) in a state of ritual purity, in the fitting form (*sua contagione*). Once the ceremony has been performed, you may plant millet, panic grass, garlic, and lentils”¹³

In practice, *profanare* means to sacrifice, to make an offering. The etymology of the word however indicates that something is actually being brought from inside a sacred place (*fanum*) to the area in front (*pro*) of it – into the “profane” world. In our case here, something is being “profaned” within a ritual context, which means it is being rendered available for human use. The 13.13 litres of wine the “urn” (half-ampora) contains can be drunk by the human participants, while Jupiter has to be content with the small cup of wine poured out for him onto the earth.¹⁴

The second example comes from the following section but one. §131 dealt with the spring ploughing, followed by the planting of millet and so on (in the last sentence of §132); §133 deals with layering and pruning fruit-trees and vines; and now we approach the harvest in autumn:

“Before harvest the sacrifice of the *porca praecidaneae* should be offered in the following manner: offer a sow as *porca praecidaneae* to Ceres before harvesting spelt, wheat, barley, beans, and rape seed; before offering the sow, address a prayer, with incense and wine, to Janus, Jupiter and Juno. Make an offering of finger-cakes (*strues*) to Janus, with these words: ‘Father Janus, in offering these cakes, I humbly beg you to be gracious and merciful to me and my children, my house and my household’. Then make an offering of cake (*fertum*) to Jupiter in these words: ‘In offering this cake, Jupiter, I humbly beg

13. Cato, *Agr.* 132 (tr. Hooper/Ash, adapted).

14. The same goes for the meat, of course; in an earlier passage Cato says, with reference to the same offering: *ubi daps profanata comestaque erit*, “when the *daps* has been offered and eaten...” (*Agr.* 50, 2).

that, pleased by this offering, you may be gracious and merciful to me and my children, my house and my household'. Then offer the wine to Janus saying: 'Father Janus, just as I prayed humbly in offering the cakes, so likewise do me the honour of accepting this wine offered to you'. And then pray to Jupiter thus: 'Jupiter, do me the honour of accepting the cake; do me the honour (likewise) of accepting the wine offered you'. Then offer up the *porca praecidaneae*. When the entrails (*exta*) have been removed, make an(other) offering of cakes (*strues*) to Janus, with a prayer as before; and an(other) offering of a cake (*fertum*) to Jupiter, with a prayer as before. In the same way, again offer wine to Janus and to Jupiter, as was previously directed for the offering of the cakes (*ob struem obmovendam*), and the consecration of the cake (*ob fertum libandum*). Afterwards offer the entrails, and wine, to Ceres".

This is a relatively complex ritual, in which various subsidiary offerings are made not to Ceres, the main addressee of this ritual communication, but to other deities. Janus is the god of auspicious beginnings (Varro, *Ling.* VI 34); Cicero's Stoic spokesman Balbus mentions that at sacrifices he was invoked first because "beginnings (and endings) are of the greatest importance" (*Nat. D.* II 67). Then comes Jupiter, the highest god in a political context (and then Juno, at any rate in the pre-ample). Similarly, an offering is made to Janus and Jupiter in Cato's description a few chapters later of the *lustratio agri*, the "muster of the land" (*Agr.* 141), which is directed primarily to Mars. In this case, where the sacrifice consists of three male animals: suckling-boar, tup-lamb and bull-calf, all still at teat and correspondingly cheap, I want to stress the rules laid down for the event that the *litatio* might fail. For if a sacrifice is to be deemed acceptable to the deity, the "noble" entrails of the freshly-slaughtered animal must on inspection be in best condition, flawless. Cato offers two possibilities in the event of the god "not being satisfied" (*si minus litabit*): if there is doubt in one or two cases, another of the same type of animal, say a piglet, can be offered (*te hoc porco piaculo*); if no positive response (*litatio*) at all is obtained, the entire ritual has to be repeated (*te hisce suovitautilibus piaculo*). Here we find ritual dramatization by appeal to the possibility of "external" disturbance: this is the function of divination, which always accompanies sacrifice.

Religious communication can also however be quite straightforward. One example of such simplicity is the direction a couple of chapters later to the farm-overseer's wife: "On the Kalends, the Ides and the Nones of each month, and at each religious festival, she is to hang a garland over the hearth, and on the same days she is to pray to the Lar of the family for plenty in the house (*pro copia*)" (*Agr.* 143, 2).

The *Equus october*, the "October horse", demonstrates the opposite end of the spectre. It was celebrated each year on 15th October, perhaps into the 4th cent. CE. The ritual began with a race, put on by the priestly colleges, between biga-teams, that is,

chariots pulled by a pair of horses. The lead (right-hand) horse of the winning pair was then killed by the *Flamen Martialis*, the priest of Mars, apparently by a lance-thrust. The head and tail of the dead horse were cut off. The tail was immediately taken to the *Regia*, the office in the Forum of the *pontifex maximus*, and the blood smeared over the sacred hearth or an altar. The head was decorated with a wreath made of bread-loaves, and then given to bands of young men, one from the *Subura*, the other from the *Sacra Via*, to fight over. The *Suburanenses* tried to nail the head to the wall of the *Regia*, the *Sacravienses* to the *turris Mamilia*, the tower of Mamilius, a prominent land-mark in the *Subura*. In other words, it was a staged scrimmage or donnybrook for youths or young adult males, in which each side had to penetrate to the heart of the other's territory in order to win.¹⁵

This ritual sequence is unique in the entire range of Roman rituals. The ancient interpretations latch onto the exceptional features. The horse's association with Mars is sometimes understood to be due to the use of the animal in warfare. Or it is killed in order to punish it, because in battle mounted soldiers can more easily run away. On the other hand, the loaves with which the horse's head is garlanded clearly belong to the realm of agriculture: by October, the harvest has long since been brought in, and the harvested grain is being turned into bread. Some indeed have it both ways, arguing that the bread recalls harvest home; but the horse warfare, and so Mars. The earliest known interpretation however was offered by the Greek historian Timaeus in the early 3rd cent. BCE. According to him, the Romans, descended from the Trojans, were taking revenge for the Trojan Horse: the annual sacrifice of a horse is to avenge the ignominy of Troy having been captured by the Greeks with the help of a "horse".¹⁶ In this case, the interpretation proceeds not by appeal to features of other Roman rituals, but to the Greek epic cycle. A Roman ritual is thus interpreted by a Greek in mythological terms familiar to him.¹⁷ M. Verrius Flaccus, the most important Roman antiquarian of the Augustan period, poured scorn on the idea; but a century later Plutarch still takes it seriously.

The examples quoted demonstrate that the sequence of animal sacrifice usually reconstructed – procession, *praefatio*, immolation, killing, extispicy, cooking, presen-

15. Festus, p. 190, 11-30 L. "*October equus*"; Paulus, *Excerpt. Festi* p. 71, 20-22 L. "*Equus*" and p. 246, 21-24 L. "*Panibus*"; Plut., *Quaest. Rom.* 97; see Rüpke, 2009b for further details.

16. Polyb., XII 4b.1 and 4c.1, with Walbank, 1967, p. 329-330.

17. There is other evidence that Timaeus was quite familiar with the Roman claim to be descended from the Trojans, which is clearly the starting-point for his explanation: Dion. Hal., I 67, 4 (Trojan pottery at *Lavinium*).

tation and meal¹⁸ – is nothing more than a model that should not be taken as a norm or generally valid description. After the procession, grand or minimal, up to the altar in a temple-area (in towns this was usual even in the case of private animal-sacrifice), water was sprinkled about to effect a symbolic cleansing. After the bloodless preliminary offerings had been made, the victim was sprinkled with *mola salsa*, sacred grain mixed with salt. The sacrificant, normally the person who is paying for the sacrifice, ran the knife along the animal's back. The butcher (*victimarius*, *cultrarius* or *popa*, which has a more general sense, "assistant at sacrifices") asked: "Agone? Shall I begin?" The answer "Age! Begin!" was the signal to start the slaughtering.¹⁹ The victim was killed, bled, turned on its back and opened up. The entrails were inspected. Then it had to be jointed, and the different parts assigned to different purposes, ending on the altar, being taken to the *mensa* in the temple or used for a banquet.

The prescriptive and interpretative texts presented or hinted at demonstrate the complexity involved in the basic triangle of socio-religious practices presented at the beginning. The living or "dead" objects employed are not just vectors or media to carry a message of gratitude, requests or declaration of piety between human religious actors and divine addressees. Instead, they involve multiple interactions and a complex web of relations established via and triggered by such objects. How could they be approached?

3. RITUALS AS RELATIONAL SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

There is no unmediated representation of historical actions, discourses or "things" in cultural studies. Scientific description is a distorted representation, but a conscious and explicitly reflected distortion. In the following, I opt for a relational perspective informed by the concepts of communication, ritualization, and self-reflexiveness, justifying the employment of these concepts by illustrating their ability to capture the experience and the effects of relationships.

3.1. COMMUNICATION

The perspective of communication shares the actors' declared intention to establish a relation with the divine.²⁰ Yet, the addressee is not simply given, even if plausi-

18. Documented in detail by Prescendi, 2007, pp. 31-51.

19. Ov., *Fast.* I 319-322; Varro, *Ling.* VI 12; cf. Sen., *Controv.* II 3, 19.

20. See e.g. Mylonopoulos, 2006; Rüpke, 2006; Stavrianopoulou, 2006; Rüpke, 2015. Differently: Pace, 2011.

bilized by current “knowledge” and affirmed by institutionalized traditions. The divine remains elusive and is construed as a elusive, thus restricting manipulation (above all by others). *Naming* is a task and a problem. The forms variate according to the situation. In daily speech, in oratory, or in letters the divine was frequently addressed in collective form as *di immortales* (immortal gods).²¹ Such a phrase did not do for a specific actor’s ritual. In the face of the opaqueness of the divine, at Rome traditionally conceptualized as a multitude of deities, the right one(s) for the present purpose had to be found and named as precisely as possible. But even in such a form of control, the superiority of such addressees had to be affirmed. As the addressee was not as visible or tangible in the interaction as human addressees normally were, the actor’s conception of the divine recipient had to be produced and confirmed, their qualities and personality, one of the most important features of religious ritual. The choice of place and (much less important)²² time helped to single out the addressee. As the diversity of addressees documented on inscriptions or even in the form of images within a sanctuary of a single deity attests, a prayer in front of a temple of Fortuna would plausibilize Fortuna as the addressee, but needed not be restricted to her. The examples presented above demonstrate the possibility to include further addressees by means of wording (praying), but also to leave open (and open for subsequent discussion) too narrow a specification. Burning at some temporary altar allowed for different interpretations.

Material objects could help to produce relevance and certainty²³ and thus form together with the human addressant(s) and the divine addressee(s) the third element of the aforementioned triangle. An important dimension of the relationship thus created is captured by Marcel Mauss’ concept of gift, *le don*.²⁴ This was a strategy built on social experiences between humans, in particular in unsymmetrical relationships.²⁵ Here, the object allowed close approach and even established a relationship beyond the situation in terms of expected (even if generalized) reciprocity. Whenever gifts were involved the choice of the gift was important. It had to be adequate in terms of kind, colour, quantity, or value – adequate to the situation, the request, the tradition established or the distinction sought. It must be pointed out, again, that animal

21. See the dominance of this phrase in Ciceronian letters.

22. See the mostly negative findings of Herz, 1975: in general, people did not align their addressing of gods to official festival dates.

23. On relevance in religious communication, see Rüpke, 2015; on the materiality of communication, see Rüpke, 2019b.

24. Mauss, 1925 and 2002; Schwartz, 1967; see also Auffarth, 2016; Moebius and Papilloud, 2006.

25. Cf. Crook, 2013, for further applications.

sacrifice – statistically – was not the standard form of sacrifice. Small gifts, many of them perishable, must have been the standard sacrificial objects of poor people, that formed the vast majority of ancient populations, even in non-routine situations.²⁶ We know about a wide variety of cakes that were given also by wealthy people engaging in ritual practices, and we know about a range of female religious specialists, called *sacerdotes*, “priests”, in Latin antiquity, who were not involved in animal sacrifice; however, they dropped out of the attention of early modern and modern male constructions of ancient religion.²⁷

The gift could at the same time (sometimes aggressively) define the addressee, as has been pointed out already by Mauss. At Rome, a deity given a male animal (for practical reason usually castrated) was probably male; a deity given a white animal might be associated with light (and was not just some “Olympian” deity). To ward off rust, a fungal disease that could easily ruin an entire harvest, you would sacrifice a red dog.²⁸ A connection is established between the unnamed god (identified as Robigo not in the ritual language but by commentators) and the victim through the colour (rust-)red. The deity can be further specified by the size, number and age of the animals. The following text from the *Acta* of the Arval Brothers of the year 60 CE illustrates this:

“During the same consulship L. Calpurnius Piso, son of L., magister of the college, sacrificed in the name of the Arval Brothers on the Capitol, by decree of the Senate, on the Nones of April (7th of April), in the context of the thanksgiving appointed [after the murder of Agrippina] for the well-being of Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus: an ox (*mas bos*) to Jupiter, a cow to Juno, a cow to Minerva, a cow to the Common Well-being (*Salus publica*), a cow to Providence, a bull to the emperor’s Genius, an ox to the deified Augustus.”²⁹

The list of animals killed construes correlations: Jupiter receives an ox (i.e. a castrated bull), Juno and Minerva, being goddesses, get cows, the Genius of the living Caesar is offered a bull (i.e. an uncastrated male), the deified Caesar Augustus an ox. Sacrifices of adult cattle are big news, providing up to two hundred kilograms of meat. In this text, nothing is said however about the age of the animals. The Genius

26. See Auffarth, 2008.

27. See Rüpke, 2018b, pp. 302-303, and in general Schultz, 2000; 2006; 2007 and Rives, 2013.

28. Festus, p. 358, 27-30 L.; Paulus, *Excerpt. Festi* p. 39, 13-16 L. Cf. Latte, 1960, pp. 67-68; Beard, North and Price, 1998, pp. 1-47. Dog-sacrifices: Smith, 1996.

29. *Acta Arvalia* no. 28A-C, ll. 10-14, ed. Scheid = *CIL* VI 2042 = *ILS* 230 (ignoring restorations), my translation.

of the living Caesar, Nero himself, is especially emphasized by being offered a bull. This detail shows that the other “males” (*mares boves*) are all oxen, that is castrated individuals, which are much easier to handle. We have here a rough ordering and even hierarchization of the gods through the sex of the victims, which underscores the socio-religious priority of the Genius of the reigning emperor.

The concept of gift does not cover all aspects of the relation construed via material objects. Within a communicative framework, material object might also serve as triggers of attention and meta-communicative markers, producing special attention with a wide range of tools and acoustic, visual, olfactory or emotional markers.

Communication between human participants and spectators in particular is also, now a second-order, trait of such communication with the gods. The multiple killings of animals just described were performed on the Capitoline Hill and probably highly visible. The sequence established a divine hierarchy, in which the Genius of Nero, for whose well-being – presented as an issue worthy to bother the gods about – the whole sequence of action is established. It is included in the list of gods and precedes even the deified Augustus. The killing of the uncastrated bull must have been particularly spectacular. Many socio-religious practices were prominently and intentionally visible. Secret ones (mysteries or cursing) did not play the same role at Rome as they did in Greece.³⁰ Nocturnal performances were prominent only in the ritual activities of women, for example the nocturnal prayers of women during the secular games of Augustus or the rites of Bona Dea organized by a leading magistrate’s wife.³¹ Marginalized social roles and temporal margins reinforced one other, which highlights some principles of agency and religious competence. Frequently, religious competence like political position depended on one’s social role. The *pater familias* (the head of the family) led domestic sacrifice, while the magistrate led public sacrifice, supported by noble children and public slaves.

The material and social relations established in religious communication have effects beyond the actual performance. Memories of such usages and constellations keep such relationships alive, repetition might renew them, as we will see below.³²

30. See Kippenberg and Stroumsa, 1995; cursing: Gordon, 2012 and 2015.

31. Schnegg-Köhler, 2002; Brouwer, 1989; in general, Schultz, 2006; Sterbenc Erker, 2013.

32. For a highly individualized appropriation of tradition, Gasparini, 2020.

3.2. RITUALIZATION

Like communication the concept of ritualization invites us not to start from some culturally fixed product “ritual”, but stresses the agents’ perspective:³³ How do people transform everyday action into special communicative action, into ritual, or realize that they take part in ritualized activities? Of course, repetition and stereotyping were and are the most usual strategies. But many rituals dealt with contingent, individual situations and problems and demanded different strategies to mark out the non-everyday character of the actions performed. For Roman ritual, spatial, bodily, acoustic, and temporal markers seem to have been most important, as the following examples may show.

Many rituals took place not just in any available spot. They could be conducted on land adjacent to a temple, that is, on land formally consecrated and thus transferred to a deity. The choice of location is an important part of an action, not only because of its functions as marker and boundary, but also because it makes clear whether the practice in question was one associated with a particular family, a social group or a political unit. Acting on the Capitol, for instance, was clearly about the polity as a whole or its representatives – or tried to make this very claim.³⁴

A further aspect of ritualization is the marking of the action and its setting by means of decoration of the body, that is mainly festive clothing. At Rome, this meant that the male citizen wore a *toga*, which, though traditional (cf. Verg., *Aen.* I 282; Suet., *Claud.* 15, 3), was not an every-day form of dress, being cumbersome to put on and hot in summer – Augustus repeatedly tried to persuade Romans to wear it more often (Suet., *Aug.* 40, 5). In the “Roman rite”, the *ritus patrius*, the clearest sign of participating in a ritual, for both men and women, was pulling up part of the *toga*, or in the case of women, the *stola*, to cover the head. The head was then said to be “veiled” (*caput velatum*).³⁵ One Roman interpretation of this custom is that it helped ensure that the communication was not disturbed because the celebrant could only take note of what he happened to be doing.³⁶ Thus, ritual action was clearly focused

33. See Bell, 1992.

34. For the ritual use of the Capitoline hill see Moralee, 2018.

35. E.g. Cic., *Nat. D.* II 10 ; Liv., I 18, 3; VIII 9, 5; X 7, 10. The earliest archaeological examples were found among the mid-Republican terracotta statuettes dredged up from the Tiber (Pensabene *et al.*, 1980), and in a temple at *Caere* (Mengarelli, 1935). Covered hands: Serv., *Aen.* I 292; VIII 636. Cf. too *Tab. Iguvinae* VIb, 49 (= §131 *Devoto*). Clothing more generally: Bonfante Warren, 1973; Edmondson and Keith, 2009; Várhelyi, 2015; Baird, 2016.

36. Serv., *Aen.* III 407; exceptions: Serv. auct., *Aen.* I, 288.

action. The alternative to this act of covering the head was to wear a leaf-crown.³⁷ A crown was indeed the only head-covering permitted by the rules for the *ritus graecus*, the “Greek rite”. This term did not refer to true Greek sacrificial ritual but to what the Romans understood to be Greek elements in their cults, such as the cult of Saturn, and the ritual at the altar of Hercules.³⁸ Particular dress is supplemented by particular instruments, often elaborately decorated and self-referential in their decoration, for example by depicted ritual scenes. The difference to everyday instruments might be reflected and reinforced in a special terminology in referring to such instruments, as the lexicographers, Verrius Flaccus in particular, amply illustrate. Both types of ritualization, special action and special speech mutually constitute each other and demonstrate the importance ascribed to and the observation invested into religious ritual gestures and objects in Roman culture.

Another marker is music. Musicians lead processions of many kinds. In the *ritus graecus*, hymns were sung by specialists, the *cantores graeci*, Greek singers.³⁹ The most widespread form of music at Roman rituals, however, was “flute”-music played on the double-tibia, an instrument more nearly related to the clarinet or oboe than the flute, since it was played with a reed.⁴⁰ At least in the view of the participants, the sound was meant to guard against, or drown out, other noises (Plin., *H.N.* XXVIII 11). I also subsume language under the heading of acoustic marker. Ritual speech is characterized by elaborate rhythmic language, formulaic, sometimes archaic. Thus, relations were established and habitualized not only to specific places and material objects, but also to acoustic phenomena and ways of speaking, thereby creating webs of associations between situations involving similar objects or sounds.

There were also temporal markers. Many socio-religious practices were marked by their position within local calendars which *vice versa* tried to allocate (or restrict) certain actions to particular dates. Such fixation of festival dates may take written form, but in the case of the regular *sacra publica* prior to the Principate their public announcement seems to have continued to be made orally,

37. For the evidence, see Blech, 1982.

38. Saturn: Serv., *Aen.* III 407; Dion. Hal., VI 1, 4; altar of Hercules: Serv., *Aen.* III 407; Macrobi., *Sat.* III 6, 17. See Scheid, 1995.

39. On hymns see Scheid, 2007; Hickson Hahn, 2007; for the continuum of praying and singing, Patzelt, 2018.

40. Roman ritual music: Fless and Moede, 2007; Naerebout, 2015. For the *aulos/tibia* and the *tibicines* in particular: Cic., *De or.* III 197; Pêché, 2001.

despite the availability of written calendars.⁴¹ Ritualization reaches out even to secondary or subsidiary actions. Apart from that, the timing of rituals seems to have conformed to the general Roman pattern: people began their day early in the morning, and took advantage of daylight as much as possible. Nocturnal rituals were exceptional – their problematic character can be inferred from the hour at which they were celebrated.⁴² Otherwise, it was considered important that complex rituals, festivals, should be celebrated over a specific number of days. There seems to have been a certain, though not very marked, preference for allocating celebrations to the relevant god's *feriae*, the units of time specially allocated to this deity in the calendar.

As ritualization in the forms just presented makes action special, it also renders relationships special. This affects both ends. Special, not-everyday words, instruments, tools, sounds, times, also changes the human actors. Body surface and composure are temporarily different, acoustic isolation, visual focus, separation from or association with specific others are indicators. Garments and crowns, raising hands (and voice), veiled heads, standing on a platform or facing towards a wall (with open or closed gates) made their bodies feel different.⁴³ It is interesting to note that these changes from everyday behaviour that are so clearly discernible on reliefs or other images hardly appear in the text quoted so far beyond Cato's washing of hands. It is specifics of divine names and adequate words and gifts that are formulated and proffered as religious "knowledge";⁴⁴ not individual or established ways of ritualizing comportment and the experiences of the relations thus sought and established.⁴⁵ Yet, even the choice of how to address the divine could result in very different experiences.⁴⁶

41. On the *ferialia* see Rüpke, 1995, pp. 523-533. Oral announcements by the *rex sacrorum*: Varro, *Ling.* VI 13 and 28; for the Principate: Rüpke, 1995, pp. 376-377. On Macrobius, *Sat.* I 14. 8-9.

42. For the rituals at night associated with the Secular Games, performed by Augustus himself, see Schnegg-Köhler, 2002; cf. "*Epulares*" *apud* Paulus, *Excerpt. Festi* p. 72, 13-14 L. Cf. Bravo, 1977.

43. Rieger, 2020.

44. See Rüpke, 2018, pp. 172-177 for the production of such knowledge in late republican Rome. On the concept, Matthiesen, 2005; but see also Hüsken, 2009 on "embodied knowledge".

45. For resulting differences in judgements of contemporaries, Patzelt, 2019 and 2020. See Gordon, 2020, on the concept of "requisite experiences".

46. Belayche, 2020.

3.3. REFLEXIVITY

Such relational socio-religious practices can become self-reflexive, the third perspective proposed above. Why are religious rituals specifically relevant to forge and habitualize specific self-world relations? The quality of the communicative action addressed to and experienced as being taken up by the “special” addressees is again basic. These actions claim (to very different degrees) the effectiveness of the communicative effort initiated by a human agent, while at the same time construing (to very different degrees) the agency and self-will of the addressee(s) and hence the riskiness of the course of action taken by the human principal. Both claims remain in a precarious balance. While actors frequently claim, and by inscriptions document, their effectiveness, later or more general reflections of intellectuals or outright religious specialists like theologians stress the gods’ will, some god’s grace or divine predestination.⁴⁷ One of the leading motivations on the part of these intellectuals is certainly the interest in safeguarding a monopoly of efficient access to the divine or in radically criticizing such claims.⁴⁸ Occasionally, such claims might be politically supported, as we can see in the case of some Augustan antiquarians, Verrius Flaccus for instance, educator of princes and author of the monumental calendar put up at Praeneste, the *Fasti Praenestini*.⁴⁹ Instead, Roman prophets (*vates*) were often criticized or even silenced,⁵⁰ it was difficult for them to evade political power.⁵¹

In the face of the insecurities about the divine pointed out by these discourses, appeal to tradition, mimicking previous successful practices, the employment of specialists or radical innovation and massive medial and material investment typically tried to raise success rates and the outcome of the ritual.⁵² In the perspective of the instigators and agents, the addressees were addressable, did listen, and succoured or had identifiable and removable reasons not to do so or not to do so immediately.⁵³ At Rome, a number of rituals might need repetition or new timing to be successful.⁵⁴

And yet, despite all possible intentional innovation or strategic application, ritual action as communicative interaction is beyond the full control and transparency for the human actors. In his analysis of ritual action, Dietrich Harth has

47. On the contested interpretations, Gordon, 2016.

48. See Kronenberg, 2017; Becker and Rüpke, 2019b.

49. Rüpke, 1995, pp. 114-123.

50. On the figures and evidence, see Bendlin, 2002.

51. Examples in Urciuoli, 2020.

52. Examples in Rüpke, 2018, *passim*.

53. Cf. Belayche, 2011 for a critical view of participants.

54. On the concept of *instauratio*, see Cohee, 1994.

stressed this property as a characteristic shared with all human action.⁵⁵ Given the specific difficulties of religious communication, however, phenomenologically the stress on experiencing and passivity is more intensive here. Religious ritual action is to a higher degree self-analytic, context-sensitive, and reflexive than many other types of action likewise engaged in *poiesis* of “symbolically effective design” and *practice* of successful action.⁵⁶ In other words, socio-religious practices are listening to themselves, thus changing both ends of the relation as well as the relationship itself.

At Rome, a whole range of practices called “divination”, that is, investigating the will of the gods, is relevant here. Frequently treated as a religious field of its own, often characterized by extreme technicality, such techniques frequently are concomitants of other rituals, of religious communication.⁵⁷ They include inquiring about the right time and place, checking the suitability of sacrificial victims, examining the entrails or the shape of the flames on an altar before and during burnt offerings, closely observing the bodily reactions – nodding, bleeding and the like – of statues addressed.

All of this is a form of meta-communication listening to any signs of success or failure of the ritual communication proper.⁵⁸ Every major sacrifice was accompanied by divinatory practices to find out whether the addressee thought the gift was acceptable in that specific situation. The absence of a heart in the victim did not reveal a hidden flaw in the animal chosen. Instead it constituted a sign sent by the addressee at the very moment of sacrifice. Rules about silence or good sounds, “firewalls” around temples, guardian deities at entrances of sacralized spaces, luck-boding names and colours, purity rules and special proveniences or designs of tools and materials, permanently checked and criticized time and again, accrue. Thus the divinatory practices surrounding the ritual communication were another kind of second-order communication, verifying the successful establishment of the first-order communication and stressing that the gods were sovereign with regard to human attempts to contact them.⁵⁹

The non-routine character of this divine-human exchange is neatly dramatized in the so-called *litatio*, the examination of the entrails (*exta*). This can be characterized as

55. Harth, 2006, pp. 18-19, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu.

56. For the latter two properties see Harth, 2006, p. 29.

57. Belayche and Rüpke, 2007.

58. For Roman material see Belayche *et al.*, 2005.

59. Gladigow, 1990, pp. 227-228; see also Borgeaud, 2012.

a ritual game that makes clear that there is nothing automatic or mechanical about the deity's acceptance of the offering, let alone his or her commitment to a return.⁶⁰

The object of this examination is to discover whether the outwardly perfect animal is equally in order inside. Quite generally in antiquity it was believed that the gods' acceptance or rejection of the sacrifice will be manifest in the animal's entrails. There was therefore no a priori assumption that an outwardly normal animal will be equally healthy inside. At the moment the animal is consecrated and killed, when it passes from the human world to the realm of the gods, the deity makes a statement: I accept the animal; I do not accept the animal. This reply is communicated by deformations of the *exta* due to disease or other causes; sometimes – and these were really bad signs – the heart, or the “head” of the liver, might even be clean missing.⁶¹ The sacrificant had to use his judgement here; occasionally, specialist *haruspices*, Etruscan entrail-readers, were consulted,⁶² though the principle remained the same. If the outcome is positive, the *exta* were cooked (boiled or grilled, depending on the animal) separately, and later burned for the gods.⁶³ So the parts of the animal that are closest to divinity are those in which the message is encoded – there was even an ancient etymology that derived the word *exta* from the gods, the “outstanding ones”.⁶⁴

The reading of the *exta* dramatizes the issue of the successful establishment of a relationship. The *litatio*, the announcement that the animal has been accepted by the god, does not have to take place at once. If it fails, there are two possibilities. One is to call a halt to the entire ritual, on the grounds that the moment or occasion is evidently not opportune: the deity does not want a sacrifice at this time. Alternatively, one might continue slaughtering victims until the deity accepted the sacrifice (*usque ad litationem*) or repeat the whole ritual sequence (instauration).⁶⁵ This was, or might be, an expensive business, which could therefore acquire its own expressive value. For example, the sacrificant had the opportunity of conveying how much store he set

60. Although they agree that the gods were not strictly bound by votives, Beard, North and Price, 1998, pp. 1-36 fail to see *litatio* as a ritual dramatization of this truth.

61. Cic., *Div.* I 28; heart and head of liver missing: Cic., *Div.* I 119; Paulus, *Excerpt. Festi* p. 287, 7-8 L., s.v. “*pestifera auspicia*”; Suet., *Iul.* 77.

62. Heurgon, 1953; Hano, 1986; Montero, 1991; Roncalli, 2010.

63. Separately: Liv., XLI 15, 2; cf. Paulus, *Excerpt. Festi* p. 9, 3-4 L., s.v. “*antroare*”. In the case of naval sacrifices, or to marine deities, the entrails were thrown raw, but chopped up (*cruda exta caesa*) into the sea: Liv., XXIX 27, 5; Serv., *Aen.* V 238.

64. Paulus, *Excerpt. Festi* p. 69, 9-10 L., s.v. “*exta*”: *quod ea dis prosecuntur, quae maxime extant eminentque*, “because they are cut out for the gods, who are very conspicuous and prominent” (the alternative spelling of the word *exsto*, “I stand out”, is *exto*).

65. Cohee, 1994.

by the sacrifice, demonstratively, with an audience, or by himself, or in dialogue with participating colleagues, people of his own social level. If a general was determined to go to war, he would just kill another ox, and then another...; but if he were sceptical about how keen the Senate really was to go to war, he was free to say after the first animal: “Well, I’m sorry, I would have fought your war, but the gods are against it, so we can pack up for today”. How often that happened, we do not know.⁶⁶ But it is worth repeating the crucial point, that, in a context where the other world is only apprehensible through signs, *litatio* made communication with gods visibly bidirectional. The individuality of these deities acquires sharper contours through the rejection of the idea that the votive implied an automatically positive response. Above all, they acquired a degree of unpredictability, of freedom, that gave them the right to make surprising choices. The instrumental value of material (dead or animated) objects employed for ritualization could no longer be taken for granted. Thus, the self-world relations implied became an object of reflexion, too.

Within the framework of relations in the making, this amounts to more than funny details. Culturally as much as individually, relationships to fellow humans, to the material world, and to even wider contexts beyond the present moment and location are established, activated, habitualized in those relations that are mediatized by relating to “not unquestionably plausible addressees (or speakers)”, that is to say, in socio-*religious* practices. Evidently, different ritual traditions produce here a very different range of what is to be included in such relationships. To elucidate such a wide spectrum of poles and relationships offers a very different view onto religious rituals and their position in cultural traditions, discourses, and everyday life.

4. HABITUALIZATION

The sources for Roman socio-religious practices do not allow for a micro-sociological approach to chains of ritual actions. Instead, I will briefly review the many levels of processes of institutionalizing such socio-religious practices. In difference to the importance ascribed to Vedic rituals by its practitioners to keep the world going,⁶⁷ at Rome the existence of the world and ongoing life was not dependent on human ritual activities. Nevertheless, in difference to rather anonymous concepts of fate, at Rome the gods were responsible and might be influenced, at least for the

66. See Rüpke, 2019a, p. 154.

67. See Staal, 1983; Heesterman, 1991; cf. for changing constellations, Inden, 1992; Hüsken, 2016.

more contingent (even if important!) events.⁶⁸ This need not result in a cult on a piecemeal basis. My gift commits the god, morally at any rate, to giving me in return something I value.⁶⁹ The commitment is mutual: of course, I will give thanks to the deity who has given me something by sacrificing in my turn again. There is thus a ceaseless cycle of obligation and gratitude, which the usual concentration on individual exchanges expressed by the phrase *do ut des* tends to obscure. Deities received votives, even if they did not fulfil what the votives were promised for, as the ceaseless annual vows of the priesthood of the Arval Brethren show.⁷⁰ There is a chain of actions, a reciprocity of gifts. Typically, ritual actions did not remain a one-off thing. Patterns of repetition were important for the formation of real or imagined worshipping communities, establishing horizontal relationships of different degrees of intensity between leading religious actors, marching participants or members of a standing or seated audience. This is where this survey starts.

The gods who were supposed to sustain this social order had a right to be worshipped. This legitimate claim was met by the *regular* staging of the *sacra publica* – the religious duties that the community as a whole was obliged to fulfil. It was not possible to do less; but, since this pattern of obligation had developed incrementally over the long term, it was usually unnecessary to do more.⁷¹ In certain situations, when a deity showed signs of displeasure by sending earth-quakes, hail-storms or other negative signs, the political leadership, the Senate, might well consider performing additional rituals; but usually the city was confident that it fulfilled the gods' expectations, to avoid the *ira deorum*.⁷² It would have been regarded as pure supererogation for a magistrate, say, to show himself over-zealous and sacrifice to Jupiter every other day instead of twice a month, on the principle, "the more the better". Such behaviour was not generally acceptable, and no magistrate would have gotten extra public funding. Patterns of continuous cult, of lightening, were established only during the imperial period.⁷³

In addition to this top level of "public cult", above all featuring members of the elite, often competing with one another and claiming to represent the community (while priests merely perform specialized tasks), there was a second level of religious institutions, concerned with the regional sub-units of the city. In the

68. Rüpke, 2008.

69. The classic formulation is Pernice, 1885; see also Beard, North and Price, 1998, pp. 1-34.

70. Scheid, 1990.

71. Scheid, 2001.

72. For prodigies, see Gladigow, 1979; Rosenberger, 1998 and 2005; Scardigli, 2008; Rosenberger, 2010.

73. See e.g. Bielfeldt, 2014b on lamps.

case of Rome itself, these were the Seven Hills (the festival of the *Septimontium*), the thirty *curiae* (an old form of political organization that still featured in the route taken by the procession of the *Argei* in May) and the *vici*, neighbourhoods agglomerated into sub-divisions of the city, which were themselves aggregated into the fourteen regions.⁷⁴ This list is by no means complete, since it was added to constantly as the city grew. In addition to such *sacra publica*, as some Romans systematized them, *sacra privata*, the “private cults”, were institutionalized rituals (and hence “gods”) which individuals were responsible for, such as domestic and funerary cults and the cults of the *gentes*, the extended “clans” of those who shared the same *nomen*, especially characteristic of the aristocracy. However, the typology of human agents and their duties constructed by such a terminology does not match the social groups that actually engaged and were formed by such rituals.⁷⁵ The terminology represents an harmonious social ideal, beginning with the household, continuing through the *gentes*, and on up to the public level, particular and general. It had nothing to do with the reality of divergent interests, social barriers, gender roles, physical mobility and individual isolation. A growing number of temples and the services provided by small religious entrepreneurs offered further opportunities for institutionalized ritual practices, supplemented by the ritual framework of (mostly professional) voluntary associations.⁷⁶ “Religion” here is never fixed, but in the making, establishing, habitualizing and criticizing the relationships implied.⁷⁷ Beyond changes in the use of media like inscriptions and their late ancient decrease, socio-religious practices in the form of rituals seem to have been growing in numbers, reflexivity and corporeal and emotional intensity.⁷⁸ The importance of religion is historically variable.

5. CONCLUSION

How did a Roman do sacrifice, do religion? Of course, she or he did it in many different ways, depending on the public status, the group involved, location and date. In that regard, “sacrifice” is a rather difficult term for a comparative enter-

74. *Septimontium*: Varro, *Ling.* VI 24; Festus, p. 458, 1-5 L. and p. 474, 36-p. 476, 5 L. (from Antistius Labeo); *curiae*: Festus, p. 180, 32-p. 182, 4 L.; also Varro, *Ling.* V 83, cf. V 45-54 (*Argei*); *vici*: Suet., *Aug.* 30, 1; cf. Ov., *Fast.* V 145-146.

75. Rüpke, 2007a; Rebillard, 2015, Rebillard and Rüpke, 2015b.

76. Rüpke, 1999; Bendlin, 2011; Gordon, 2016 and 2017.

77. See Albrecht *et al.*, 2018.

78. For the general phenomenon, Rüpke, 2018c.

prise. Socio-religious practices are thus frequently unduly narrowly understood in their malleability and resulting wide range of forms. Often “sacrifice” has been misused in order to formulate some general theories of rituals that depend on the unproven notion that animal sacrifice was at the very heart of ancient religion.⁷⁹ This criticism holds true, even if it proved to be the most stimulating element to think about in terms of ritual already in antiquity. In his commentary on the Roman calendar (*Libri fastorum*), one of the most complex accounts of socio-religious practices from antiquity, Ovid started to reflect on animal sacrifice already in his entry to January the 9th, the *Agonalia*, the ritual killing of an animal par excellence (I 317-456).⁸⁰

“How do you sacrifice?” A friendly-minded Roman might have offered a very simple answer, too. “I did a ritual (*sacra feci*) with ...”, would have been this answer. Marcus Ogulnius Gallus, the consul of 182 BCE, might have pointed to his sacrifice of twenty oxen (Liv., XL 2, 4), Philolaches in the contemporary Plautine comedy *Mostellaria* reflected on a sacrifice of “good silver”, that he missed to perform (v. 241). Another might have answered that he did it by “money”, even if he used corn and fruit, since (as we learn by Paulus’ excerpts of Festus’ lexicon) these things formerly constituted what today is called *pecunia* (“money”, p. 287, 14 L).

All these answers betray the wide variety of relationships to the material world that were habitualized in the triangle of humans, gods, and ritual objects, its spill over into social, human-human, relationships, and in thinking about how to successfully approach the divine addressees. It is this very relationship to the world beyond the immediately graspable world of fellow-humans and objects that is above all experienced and constituted in rituals as a specific form of socio-religious practices. Yet, the range of gestures, of sensorial stimulations and experiences, and of temporal, spatial, and especially social settings, that is, the intensive mediatization of this transcendent relationship, points to further fields of material and social self-world relations of very diverse characters. Livy and Plautus, the ancient authors just quoted, referred to sacrificial material not out of interest for ritual details, but to characterize persons. Yet, material was not only brought into ritual practices, but also taken out of it, as statuettes or flasks, *ampullae*, brought back from pilgrimages for instance, demonstrate.⁸¹ The biography of objects before and after periods of

79. See Cancik-Lindemaier, 2006b.

80. See Gladigow, 1971.

81. Hunter-Crawley, 2012.

ritual intensification⁸² created lasting memories that shaped both ends of many relationships involved in these ritual practices and the character of the relationship itself.⁸³ Material and social relationships that are instrumentalized and produced through their inclusion in or emergence from religious practices, i.e. in communication with not unquestionably plausible addressees, are changing. The ritual practices of such communication as described above were not only intensified by their necessary reflexivity. They were also deeply imbedded in the lived space and time of their agents and potentially reaching out.⁸⁴ This is a hypothesis, however, that needs further testing.

82. For the concept of religious intensification, Davies, 2008. *Biography of objects*: Gosden and Marshall, 1999; applied to ritual objects in Rüpke, 2018.

83. On memories from religious experiences, Cusumano *et al.*, 2013.

84. See e.g. Houben, 2002, p. 468 for “liturgical orders”.

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