A Methodology for the Historiography of Ancient Religion*

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Abstract

Starting from a discussion about the usefulness of a historical approach to ancient religion, I propose basing the historiography of ancient religion on a set of three concepts, replacing three others that have been widely used. First, I contend that we need to shift our focus from questions of iden-

Résumé

Partant d'une discussion sur l'utilité d'une approche historique de la religion ancienne, l'article propose de fonder une étude historique de la religion ancienne sur un ensemble de trois concepts, qui en remplacent trois autres qui ont été abondamment utilisés. Tout d'abord, il propose de déplacer l'accent

tity to questions of agency, not least in the face of earlier traditions of historiography of regions outside the imperial capitals. The application of an agentic perspective entails a further unavoidable consequence. The concept of "religions" must be replaced by that of "lived religion", even for the past, once again shifting the focus to the local and the entire range of social agents and their cultural production. This agentic and material focus is further supplemented by a spatial one. Thus, I propose moving away from the widespread focus on civic religion in cities to embrace the perspective of urban religion. Lastly, I briefly touch upon the problem of the selection of forms of contemporary historiography of religion.

des questions d'identité vers les questions d'agentivité, notamment face aux traditions précédentes de l'historiographie des régions situées en dehors des capitales impériales. Dans cette perspective d'agentivité, une conséquence s'impose. Le concept de « religions » doit être remplacé par celui de « religion vécue », même pour le passé, en mettant à nouveau l'accent sur le local et sur l'ensemble des agents sociaux et leur production culturelle. L'accent mis sur l'agentivité et le matériel est enfin complété par un facteur spatial. L'article propose de remplacer l'accent largement répandu sur la religion civique des villes par une perspective axée sur la « religion urbaine ». Enfin, il aborde brièvement le problème de la sélection des formes d'historiographie actuelles de la religion.

It is not self-evident to write about religion in the form of historiography – if we agree not to widen this term to every treatment of the past of humanity and human societies in all their entanglement with non-human factors, from physical topography to domestica-ble animals and germs. Does religion have a history? Or more precisely, is historical change meaningful for any religion? Such a question does not seem to be superfluous in the face of theologians' statements of the unchangeability of divine revelation or some historians' state-ment about the supposed unchangeability of the rule-based systems which are identified by them as "ancient religions"[1]. To historicize ancient religious practices, ideas, institutions at all is an issue before one can turn to the question of how to historicise them.

As a consequence, historicisation as such is the initial claim I wish to argue here (sec-tion 1). It is on this basis that I propose doing this by a strategy of replacing three concepts. I will first claim to approach religious data by shifting the focus from "identity" to "agency", not least to overcome the focus on issues of Romanisation (chap. 2). In such an agentic perspec-tive a further consequence is unavoidable. The concept of "religions" needs to be replaced by "lived religion", even for the past (chap. 3). With a view onto the topic of a historiography of North African religion, the question of space needs to be tackled. Yet, within the tension between globalisation and localisation it is no primarily the question of province and empire that needs to be reflected. Instead, I propose to replace the widespread focus on cities' civic religion by the perspective of urban religion (chap. 4).

Finally, in a conclusion, I will also briefly touch upon the forms of historiography of religion and will advocate "narrative" against "lists" as an adequate manner of presenting results of historical research in material and textual evidence (chap. 5).

1. Historicizing Ancient Religion

Even before I have to briefly touch upon the applicability of the concept of "religion", a quick look into ancient practices of historicizing religion should be in order. Of course, it is – from

1. See below, n. 28.

the period of historicism onwards (and even before) – *our* decision to look back on the past as a period of internal change and not just something different as such from our situation or simply the same. This is a decision regularly taken by academic historians as part of the historicist "turn" (if I may anachronistically employ this concept for the mid-19th cent.), but already known in earlier epochs and cultures globally. For ancient Rome and in particular the Latin West (to again prepare a focus on North Africa) some pertinent observations have been made[2]. By the end of the Republic, as I have shown, incipient processes of rationalization can be observed[3], employing the instruments of Greek linguistics, philology, and philosophy to systematize second-order thinking about religion in Cicero's philosophical treatises or in Varro's *Antiquitates rerum diuinarum* placed aside his *Antiquitates rerum humanarum* or shortly Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. The clustering is significant for the strength of the development as for its utterly provincial character. After all, Rome was just one of the many intellectual centres of the Ancient Mediterranean, including places like Athens, Pergamon, Alexandria. It needs no further stressing that such a communication was restricted to a small intellectual elite engaging in this third-order reflection about religion.

The historicisation of religious data was an important, even if not the decisive element of this creation of a concept of "religion" in the late Roman Republic. From the late 3rd cent. BCE onwards, Romans had developed a general historiography of the rise of their city on the lines of 5th cent. Greek historiography, actually starting by writing Greek and leading to the definitive account of Roman history by the late 1st cent. BCE, that is, to the Augustan work of Livy, a text full of religious data, prodigies, temples, accessions to priesthoods, large rituals performed by magistrates. But it was not the conceptualisation and historicisation of religion, which was at the centre of his interest. It was just religious actions as a factor in secular history and an argument in secular historiography, which formed his objects. It is for Varro's *Antiquitates rerum diuinarum* that an implicit conceptualisation and fully-fledged historicisation of religious data can be shown, a historicisation that served strategic purposes in a particular historical situation[4]. For Varro religion is chronologically and logically secondary to the foundation of Roman society. Religious institutions are subsequent to historic data, even if contingency does not rob them of their obligatory character for all those who were posterior to the founders' decisions (fr. 12 Cardauns). Political and art history mark major steps in the history of religion. The introduction of divine images is such a step, chronologically related to the building of the large Capitoline temples. To an extent unknown to us, Varro noticed the foundation of temples down to his own time. The introduction of cults needs not take the form of the erection of temples. For instance, Varro was interested in the

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2. J. Rüpke, *Religion in Republican Rome: Rationalization and Ritual Change*, Philadelphia, 2012. For North Africa see V. Gasparini, "Tracing Religious Change in Roman Africa", in R. Raja and J. Rüpke (eds.), *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World*, Malden, 2015, 478-488.

3. J. Rüpke, *Religion in Republican Rome..., op. cit.*, n. 2, for the larger framework of the following.

4. J. Rüpke, "Historicizing Religion: Varro's *Antiquitates* and History of Religion in the Late Roman Republic", *History of Religions*, 53.3, 2014, 246-268, DOI: 10.1086/674241, which I follow in this section.

exact dating of the introduction of festivals. He is also interested in agency, dating by reigns or consulships is performed in the disguise of statements about actions of the office holders.

In an analysis of these data it could be shown that Varro's take on religious change was developed within a universalistic framework. An astonishing number of fragments does not necessarily imply an urban Roman context. Frequently Varro used the plural *civitates* or *urbes*[5]. It should not be forgotten that Roman citizenship was extended to most of Italy by the time of Varro's writing. He did not only acknowledge the introduction of Italian deities to Rome by the early kings, but deals with a wealth of central Italian local deities. He reflected differences to Jews (fr. 16), Chaldaeans (fr. 17), to Greek peoples like Spartans (fr. 32) or the Eleusinians (fr. 271) or the Greek in general (fr. 200). Within a universalistic framework, religious traditions of different peoples offer a heritage that might be shared, too. The same god could be venerated under different names. Even a negative trait like images of the divine is shared by many polities (fr. 18). Roman precepts for ritual action as well as Greek precepts for ritual abstinence were both resources for the solution of human problems (fr. 49-50). Within the context of an incipient empire, there was a strong current in Roman historiography which aimed at creating a history common to the Roman families from all over Italy and different layers of society. Varro, as has been summarized, wrote historical accounts of religion within a universalistic framework. His intended readers were Roman and his focus was Roman, but his interest was in religion as a universal phenomenon, enabling Italian and imperial communication rather than strengthening mutually exclusive ethnic or urban identities.

As stressed in the beginning of this section, *we* do need neither ancient concepts nor ancient historiography of religion as antecedents in order to legitimise a historiographical approach to ancient religion. Yet, it underlines that already the ancient religious agents were aware of religious change and were able to insert this into larger historical frameworks within and beyond smaller and larger political units, acknowledging diverging local developments, specific changes in specific places.

2. "Agency" Instead of "Identity"

Any historiography of religious change is based on the choice of a concept of religion that allows to select and group phenomena in a manner that is both useful for the analytical perspective in related scholarship and is in a describable way related or even close to the view of the historical actors and the meanings attributed by them to actions and objects. Why shall we still use "religion" in the face of all the criticism that has been raised with a view to the complex history of this term, the many post-ancient association and the lack of a comparable concept (despite the existence of the term *religio* in Latin) in Antiquity?[6]

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5. E.g. frr. 5, 9, 18, 20, 68, 69.

6. On *religio* see J. Rüpke, "Religio and Religiones in Roman Thinking", *Études Classiques*, 75, 2007, 67-78; G. Casadio, "Religio versus Religion", in J. Dijkstra, J. Kroesen and Y. Kuiper (eds.), *Maths, Martyrs, and Modernity*, Numen Book Series, Studies in the History of Religions 127, Leiden, 2010, 301-326. The criti-

Because it is a term that helps to see certain cultural products and their social context in a perspective that is not offered by "politics" or "economy" or just "life", themselves perspectives that would to different degrees include phenomena here addressed as "religious". This is not to claim that it is a cultural (or even natural) universal. Yet it allows for comparisons of here and there, of then and now, which I would not undertake otherwise. I do not see any comparatively well reflected concept competing with the concept of "religion", that is, a concept that might be reshaped in hundreds of different directions to serve its situational purpose. That does not exclude, but forcefully include the task to pay very close attention to the concepts held by those whose "religion" we analyse.

For Mediterranean antiquity, there is no ancient concept, neither from today's South Europe, West Asia or North Africa, that could serve as a meaningful guide. The very word *religio* was elaborated into a coherent concept not before the Late Republic and even then hardly corresponding to any notion in use today[7]. For an analysis of historical change, functionalist notions already fix an important variable, namely the uses and purposes of religion; for that price they allow discovering a large variety of cultural practices *as* religion. Culturist definitions of religion fix the other end as they take religion as shared meaning, as systems of beliefs, signs, and practices that have been established in certain cultural context and provide meaning and orientation across change. Such religion is a powerful for informing the agents' meaning-making. It corresponds very much to the everyday notion of the traditionalism and the *longue durée* of religion. Yet, it tends to give priority to systematic (if not dogmatic) accounts and the top-down view of writers, who use the very production of normative accounts to produce their own religious authority[8]. A wide range of religious practices is typically classified as deviant or marginal as a consequence of such an approach; pride of place is given to just one social locus of religious authority, namely the political (and at times intellectual) elite.

Therefore, I propose to employ an analytical model of religion that enables us to describe changes in the social locus, but also individual importance of religion, and to better in-

cism against a use for the ancient period (e.g. B. Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*, New Haven, 2013) is derived from postcolonial criticism against the application to non-European cultures in general (e.g. R. King, *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"*, London, 1999; J. I. Isomae, "The Conceptual Formation of the Category 'Religion' in Modern Japan: Religion, State, Shintō*", *Journal of Religion in Japan*, 1.3, 2012, 226-245, DOI: 10.1163/22118349-12341236). For a defense see J. Rüpke, "Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflecting on History and Theory of Religion", *Religion,* 45.3, 2015, 344-366, DOI: 10.1080/0048721X.2015.1024040.

7. J. Rüpke, "Religious Pluralism", in A. Barchiesi and W. Scheidel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, Oxford, 2010, 748-766; in contrast C.A. Barton and D. Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities*, New York, 2016.

8. E.-M. Becker and J. Rüpke, "Autor, Autorschaft und Autorrolle in religiösen literarischen Texten: Zur Betrachtung antiker Autorkonzeptionen", in E.-M. Becker and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Autoren in religiösen literarischen Texten der spräthellenistischen und der frühkaiserzeitlichen Welt: Zwölf Fallstudien*, Culture, Religion, and Politics in the Greco-Roman World 3, Tübingen, 2019, 1-17, DOI: 10.1628/978-3-16-156138-2.

terpret the enormous wealth of religious media and material religion in the historical record beyond textual evidence. This is more adequate for the history of ancient religion outside of the main centres of literary production and the "sources" thus left to us: from Rome, Athens, Alexandria above all. There are further consequences. The formation of institutions, which are established, continued and modified in perpetual and habitual transactions, is not presupposed but can be understood as a consequence of the basic model of religious action. My elaboration of such a model[9] presupposes to conceptualize religion from the methodological perspective of the intersubjective and communicative constitution of the individual – that is, from its individuation in relation to and interaction with the social and material context –, thus avoiding the fallacy (or more neutral: the extreme position in balancing structure and agency against one another) of methodological individualism[10]. In terms of methodological choices, this implies opting for an analysis of the ways in which individual agency and an individual self are created, that is being based on two notions that most clearly express the sociological and hermeneutical bias towards the individual agent.

I suggest defining "religion" as the temporary and situational enlargement of the environment – judged as relevant by one or several of the actors – beyond the unquestionably plausible social environment inhabited by co-existing humans who are in communication (and hence observable). Plausibility, the possibility of gaining assent by others, is relative and is in itself a communicative, or more specifically, a rhetorical concept. "Implausibility" in the way it is used here refers to the risk envisaged or encountered by actors that their ascriptions of agency do not meet universal approval in the immediate situation or thereafter.

If religion is defined as the attribution of agency to something beyond the unquestionably plausible, this enlargement of the relevant situation does not imply a structured "Beyond" or an organised "pantheon", neither "afterlife", nor "netherworld". Communication could introduce big or small gods and might do so frequently and very early on, or reluctantly and rather late, as it runs its course. Forms and intensity of religion may also vary widely. The initiatives of human agents and the range of options suggested by previous communication (and habitual tradition) might diverge. Ascription of agency to deities or ancestors might be contested or enforced.

Communication with or concerning such "divine" agents might reinforce or reduce human agency, create or modify social relationships, and change power relationships. "Religious agency" is, thus, actually a constellation of two forms of agency: first, the agency attributed to such non-human or supra-human agents, and, secondly, the agency of the human instigators of such communication. I am well aware that there is a great deal of phenomenologically comparable ritual action that does not assume the inclusion of such non-human

9. The following is based on Rüpke, "Religious agency …", *op. cit.*, n. 6.

10. See M. Fuchs, "Processes of Religious Individualization: Stocktaking and Issues for the Future", *Religion*, 45.3, 2015, 330-343, DOI:10.1080/0048721X.2015.1024040; M. Fuchs, A. Linkenbach, M. Mulsow, B.-C. Otto, R.B. Parson and J. Rüpke, "General introduction", in M. Fuchs *et alii* (eds.), *Religious Individualisations: Historical Dimensions and Comparative Perspectives*, Berlin, 2019, 1-31.

agents. However, I deliberately restrict my definition of religion to the consequences of the invention of this specific type of agency, which I will call "divine agency" (first type) in order to differentiate it from human "religious agency" (second type). In the eyes of contemporaries, the latter type of agency would be understood as deriving from the former, which is to say that the god grants agency to his or her human venerators (whether male or female, spontaneous or habitual, and whether conceptualised as "mediators", "saints", or just "pious" and exemplary). Agency could also be attributed and arrogated by further participants or the peers, family, followers, or contacts of the primary group. It might also be used in a reversed manner, by negating the power, legitimacy, honesty, or piety of those excluded from the temporary or lasting relationship established in the initial or repeated act of communication: those not present, not listening, heathens or unbelievers, or simply "the others", are all powerless or will ultimately be rendered powerless.

Evidently, such agency (or patiency in some cases, where every power to act is seen to lie with the divine) could find expression and temporal extension in processes of sacralization and in the spaces, times, or objects thus sacralised, that is to say, in activities and objects that are most likely to survive in the archaeological (and sometimes textual) record and thus might form the basis for historical research. For the contemporaries, the reference to or direct use of such previously sacralised contexts and previously sacralised objects could support their agency. Praying in a sanctuary[11], sacrificing on a holiday, preaching in a priestly garment, all could serve to enhance religious agency so long as the position of power held by the actor allows her or him to enlist such resources. The use of such resources is a process of negotiating and appropriating such institutional resources within the overlapping networks of urban space. This is the case whether such actions are the outcome simply of previous, comparable actions of prestigious individuals or the outcome (and further development) of a powerful organization, such as a priesthood running a temple, or a ruler who had dedicated a place, building, altar, etc. before and might use it again. The performance and novelty of religious agency interfere with institutionalised sacrality in many different ways, some of which may potentially conflict with one another. A new actor might be regarded as an impostor or heretic, as illegitimate or simply unworthy. All this depends on the audience present at the time or on later indirect observers, and on the relationships holding between the observers and the human religious actor. These relationships might range from hostility or disinterested neutrality, contemporaries who could possibly be mobilised in support, to people with obligations to existing institutional powers or who might simply be the family or followers of

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11. On prayers see M. Patzelt, *Über das Beten der Römer: Gebete im spätrepublikanischen und frühkaiserzeitlichen Rom als Ausdruck gelebter Religion*, RGVV 73, Berlin, 2018. On sanctuaries see J. Rüpke, "Was ist ein Heiligtum? Pluralität als Gegenstand der Religionswissenschaft", in A. Adogame, M. Echtler and O. Freiberger (eds.), *Alternative Voices: A Plurality Approach for Religious Studies. Essays in Honor of Ulrich Berner*, Critical Studies in Religion/Religionswissenschaft 4, Göttingen, 2013, 211-225, and J. Rüpke, *Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion*, Princeton, 2018.

the initiator. As audiences widen and the public position of the actor grows, so both potential and risk increase.

To conceptualize religion as communication (as done so far) necessarily requires the identification and analyses of human religious agents. These are fundamentally human individuals within a dense web of social interactions; but this need not force historical approaches to narrow the perspective down to questions of individual and collective "identities". The complex and, sometimes, only imagined relationships between processes of groupings, classification by self and others, and the very slow development of processes of groupings based on shared religious activities and ideas, in short: the at best incipient formation of "religions" in Late Antiquity, have been thematised for more than two decades for different periods[12]. For the purpose of my argument here, prioritizing agency over identity, I restrict myself to a brief review of – as I propose – three very different meanings of "religious identity", which also have very different consequences for social interaction.

First, "religious identity" might mean a form of personal identity achieved through self-reflection in dialogue with the "divine" or some divine addressee. I take this to be a synonym for the "religious self"[13].

Secondly, "religious identity" might mean a person's "collective identity", that is an individual's occasional, repeated, or even frequent entertaining or acceptance of the idea of being part of a religious collective. It does not matter whether this collective is an imagined community or a group that might be encountered directly and might be able to confirm the idea that the individual belongs to it. What is important and consequential for one's way of life, attitudes, and even knowledge is one's own perception of membership. Typically, such collective identities become salient in specific situations only. Multiple religious identities are possible here. The ideas of belonging to several different religious collectives, might be compartmentalised and kept separate from one another, without any one identity "knowing" the others or reflecting on possible connections, interferences, or problems. It is also possible that such multiple identities might be entertained consciously, with the individual reflecting upon them together and considering the ways in which each collective

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12. For Mediterranean Antiquity see E. Rebillard, "Material Culture and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity", in R. Raja and J. Rüpke (eds.), *A Companion…*, *op. cit.*, n. 2, 427-436; É. Rebillard and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity*, CUA Studies in Early Christianity, Washington, DC, 2015; E. Rebillard, "Expressing Christianness in Carthage in the Second and Third Centuries", *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 3.1, 2017, 119-134.

13. For the notion of religious selves in Antiquity in a historical perspective see J. Rüpke and G. Woolf (eds.), *Religious Dimensions of the Self in the Second Century CE,* Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 76, Tübingen, 2013 for the imperial period; M. R. Niehoff and J. Levinson (eds.), *Self, Self-Fashioning and Individuality in Late Antiquity,* Culture, Religion, and Politics in the Greco-Roman World 4, Leiden, 2019, for the late ancient periods; more general A. Klostergaard Petersen, "Suifaction: Typological Reflections on the Evolution of the Self", in M. Fuchs *et alii* (eds.), *Religious Individualisations…*, *op. cit.*, n. 10, 185-214.

identity conforms to or conflicts with rules about inclusiveness or exclusiveness known or supposed to be present in the other identities.

Finally, "religious identity" might mean the ascription by others of somebody's belonging to a religious collective, from inside or outside of that collective. Such acts of ascription typically add stereotypes or explicit norms about conforming behaviour. What is being applied in such a case in historical thinking is a container model, by means of which we easily drift into the deadlock of the discussion about "Romanisation". That is, why I advocate the focus on agency.

3. "Lived Ancient Religion" Instead of "Religions"

It seems natural to speak about "religions" in the present world, thinking of "Islam", "Christianity", "Hinduism", and associating Mullahs and fatwas, bishops and Churches, temples and the Hinduist nationalism advanced by the BJP. Yet, evidently, these are conflations of concepts of shared beliefs, powerful institutions and pervading identities. On closer looks, boundaries and fault lines are far from identical. The number of Churches is myriad, religious conflicts between different groups of Muslims might also be bloody, the organisational and doctrinal unity of people referred to as Hindus is vague – to say the least. Vast areas of practices performed by all these people are put aside by the use of concepts of popular religion, folklore or culture, practices which are often shared between and crossing the divisions of "religions". Nevertheless, the term is used to designate practices addressed to the divine under the same name, the same "god". More cautious analysts prefer "cults" to "religions" in order to allow for their combination rather than exclusivity, but at the same time suggesting advanced stages of groupings that are typical for the modern sociological use of "cults".

If religion is conceptualized from the methodological point of view of the individual and its social context, it is however not "systems" of belief or practices as elaborated by internal or external observers which will be the object of such a research strategy. Such systems could be appropriated by individual agents only partially and imperfectly[14]. Instead, it is lived (ancient) religion in its individual variants, its situations, and social constellations, which will come under scrutiny[15]. Only rarely such interactions grow together into networks, organisations, or written texts, which might develop an existence of their own and then resemble what we used to regard as "religions"[16].

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14. For the concept of appropriation, see M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, 1984.

15. J. Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning 'Cults' and 'Polis Religion'", *Mythos*, ns. 5, 2011, 191-204.

16. Thus J. Rüpke, "Ritual Objects and Religious Communication in Lived Ancient Religion: Multiplying Religion", in M. Fuchs et alii (eds.), *Religious Individualisation …*, *op. cit.*, n. 10, 1201-1222, here 1202.

To employ the concept of "lived religion" for the analysis of ancient religion has been proposed only recently, but tested in numerous studies since[17]. Against the background of the discussions about lived religion in contemporary societies pointed out in the preceding paragraph, the main thrust is not to just include everyday or folk religion or what might have been excluded as "superstition"[18]. Instead, it suggests to take a fresh look also at phenomena in many studies conceptualised as "religions" and "panthea" of individual cities, i.e., "civic religions". This is not to deny crucial quantitative differences in agency. Members of the elites of circum-Mediterranean ancient cities certainly used the possibilities offered by religious communication for various purposes. For political actors, reference to divine agents was ideally suited to create a communicative space beyond the families and clans. Thus, they could emphasize shared interests and yet could also use religious activity as a field in which to compete and obtain distinction. This flexibility helped ritual activity and religious architecture to achieve a high degree of dynamism: ever new possibilities of religious communication were invented, or existing traditions appropriated and altered in order to deal with the problems thrown up by the increasing geographic extent of ancient empires, urban growth or increasing social differentiation and competition. "Civic religion", too – religious practices organised by the political elite for themselves and the wider populace and employed to bolster a city-focused political identity in processes of slow and ongoing state formation, to put it in a nutshell – needs to be reconceptualised as part of "lived religion" rather than as the over-arching framework allowing on its margins for inconsequential acts of popular religion and its irrelevant variations and innovations as well as allowing for a politically similar unimportant sector of elective cults[19].

With regard to the latter, the concept of lived ancient religion stresses the similarity of practices and techniques of creating meaning and knowledge across the whole range of addressees of religious communication and the high degree of local innovation rather than focussing on the similarity or identity of the religious signs, foremost divine names, employed[20]. This builds not least on a critique of the concept of "oriental cults" (or "religions"), which had pointed out that the problem of this line of research did not lie with a problematic notion of

17. For a recent review of the field see V. Gasparini, M. Patzelt, R. Raja, A.-K. Rieger, J. Rüpke and E.R. Urciuoli (eds.), *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics*, Berlin, 2020.

18. See e.g. J. Rüpke, "Living Urban Religion: Blind Spots in Boundary Work", *Historia Religionum*, 10, 2018, 53-64, DOI: 10.19272/201804901005; cf. M.L. Satlow, "Defining Judaism: Accounting for 'Religions' in the Study of Religion", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 74.4, 2006, 837-860, DOI: 10.1093/jaarel/lfl003.

19. J. Rüpke, *Pantheon…, op. cit.*, n. 11, 109-157.

20. J. Rüpke, "Theorising Religion for the Individual", in V. Gasparini and R. Veymiers (eds.), *Individuals and Materials in the Greco-Roman Cults of Isis: Agents, Images, and Practices*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 187.1-2, Leiden, 2018, 61-73.

"oriental", but with inadequate classifications of practices and signs preceding any labelling[21]. Primary are not competing "religions" or "cults", but symbols assuming ever new configurations within a broad cultural space. It was professionals, who made enormous efforts to establish and secure group boundaries. "Religions" as seen "from below" are the attempt – often by just a few – to at least occasionally create order and boundaries rather than a normative system only imperfectly reproduced by the citizens. Such boundaries would include the notions of sacred and profane, pure and impure, public and private, but also gendered conceptions of deities, as concepts among other concepts. Institutionalisations such as professionalised priesthoods and the reformulation of religion as knowledge that is kept and elaborated by such professionals could constitute further features of crucial importance for sketching a history of such institutions. We should not underrate the importance of religious entrepreneurs and their ability to make historians, to make us look at things through their eyes.

The focus on "lived religion" shows that "funerary ritual" and "domestic religion", the social and ritual practices of voluntary associations ("cults" and "religions") and the political use of religion by administrators and political elites are neither independent strands of religious practice nor replications of or counter-models to "civic religion" (which is better conceptualized as a single field of action with many loci of religious authority in permanent fluctuation)[22].

Methodologically, acknowledging individual appropriation and the production of meaning in situations excludes to just employ culturalist interpretations. The latter are drawing on meaning that is only derivative, because it is established in other parts of a dense and coherent web of meaning. Individual evidence can no longer be regarded as part of a culture that can be read as a text in the Geertzian sense[23]. Very prominently, those accounts of ancient religion that have figured in establishing ancient religions as ordered systems of gods ("panthea") or systems of rituals must be questioned as to their own interest and historical position in systematising religious practices or signs and elaborating religious norms[24]. Implicit or explicit in these enterprises is the claim that religious knowledge is important and part of religious agency in dealing with divine addressees. At the same time, their very preservation and transmission from a scriptographic culture by repeated copying and quoting (and maybe interesting processes of

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21. C. Bonnet, J. Rüpke and P. Scarpi (eds.), *Religions orientales - culti misterici: Neue Perspektiven - nouvelle perspectives - prospettive nuove,* Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 16, Stuttgart, 2006; C. Bonnet and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Les religions orientales dans les mondes grec et romain = Die orientalischen Religionen in der griechischen und römischen Welt*, Trivium: Revue franco-allemande de sciences humaines et sociales/ Deutsch-französische Zeitschrift für Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften 4, Paris, 2009.

22. J. Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion …", *op. cit*., n. 15.

23. Cf. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, New York, 1973; C. Geertz, "'From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding", in R.A. Shweder and R.A. LeVine (eds.), *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, Cambridge, 1984, 123-136.

24. As, for example, the pre-Roman "Lybian religion". See in this volume M. McCarty, 127-148.

modification)[25] warns us to take into account how discourses about norms and interpretations could modify individual appropriation of ritual practices or religiously relevant narratives[26]. Thus, the "Lived Ancient Religion" approach has developed tools for analysing the religious practices of political elites, writers, practitioners and the general populace in its diversity[27]. Focusing on practices and religious action as communication, this approach has questioned the simplistic dichotomy between public and private[28], and has developed concepts for exploring religious agency, the instantiation of religion in practices and media, the effects of such instantiated religion upon action and experience, the (re-)narration of religion, and finally the roles of narrated religion. Religion, again, needs to be seen as "religion in the making"[29].

4. "Urban" Instead of "Civic Religion"

The historiography of ancient religion has been space-sensitive since long. The paradigm of ethnic religion ("Greek" or "Roman religion"[30], but also Laconian or Sabine "cults"[31]) was plausible within the framework of Romantic notions of peoples, but less and less plausible within frameworks that stress entanglement and hybridity and see ethnogenesis as secondary phenomena. It was soon supplemented by the notion of "state religion", informed by 19th century concepts of the nation state but typically identified with city-based political units,

25. E.g. K. Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity*, Oxford, 2012.

26. E.g. J. Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi: Religion and Storytelling in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge Classical Studies, Cambridge, 2016.

27. R. Raja and J. Rüpke, "Appropriating Religion: Methodological Issues in Testing the 'Lived Ancient Religion' Approach", *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 1.1, 2015, 11-19, DOI: 10.1628/219944615X14234960199632; R. Raja and J. Rüpke, "Archaeology of Religion, Material Religion, and the Ancient World", in R. Raja and J. Rüpke (eds.), *A Companion…*, *op. cit.*, n. 2, 1-25.

28. See C. Ando and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Public and Private in Ancient Mediterranean Law and Religion,* Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 65, Berlin, 2015.

29. J. Albrecht, C. Degelmann, V. Gasparini, R. Gordon, G. Petridou, R. Raja, J. Rüpke, B. Sippel, E.R. Urciuoli and L. Weiss, "Religion in the Making: The Lived Ancient Religion Approach", *Religion*, 48.4, 2018, 568-593, DOI: 10.1080/0048721X.2018.1450305.

30. A. Bendlin, "Religion I. Einleitung", *Der Neue Pauly*, 10.4, 2001, 888-891; J. Rüpke, "Roman Religion - Religions of Rome", in J. Rüpke (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Religion*, Malden, 2007, 1-9.

31. E.g. L.R. Taylor, *Local Cults in Etruria*, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome 2, Rome, 1923; R.F. Willetts, *Cretan Cults and Festivals*, London, 1962; T.B. Mitford, "The Cults of Roman Cyprus", *ANRW*, II.18.3, 1990, 2176-2211; F. Graf, *Nordionische Kulte: Religionsgeschichte und epigraphische Untersuchungen zu den Kulten von Chios, Reythrai, Klazomenai und Phokaia*, Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana 21, Roma, 1985; O. Pilz, *Kulte und Heiligtümer in Elis und Triphylien: Untersuchungen zur Sakraltopographie der westlichen Peloponnes,* Berlin 2020. Cf. P. Herz, "Einheimische Kulte und ethnische Strukturen: Methodische Überlegungen am Beispiel der Provinzen Germania Inferior, Germania Superior und Belgica", in H.E. Herzig and R. Frei-Stolba (eds.), *Labor omnibus unus: Gerold Walser zum 70. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart, 1989, 206-218.

characteristic for the ancient Mediterranean[32]. In the face of a substantial and proliferating urbanization, individual cities came into focus, not just Rome, but also Ostia, not just Athens, but also Sparta[33]. The Greek ideology of the *polis*, which programmatically obfuscated any divide between city (*asty*) and countryside, helped to took the (urban) part for the (geographical) whole, regarding even far away sanctuaries from the point of view of the centre[34]. This was the case above all in the complex model of centres and periphery (*chora*) proposed by François de Polignac for Greek politically independent cities (*poleis*)[35].

It was, however, not the countryside that was foregrounded in the so-called "spatial turn". Here, the lack of those particularly urban media – monumentalised sites and architecture, writing in the form of inscriptions or literary texts – still relegates religious changes to the background of research beyond some tribal religious centres[36]. Instead, the topic of empire – already the frame of the second volume of Martin P. Nilsson's monumental history of Greek religion[37] – and the dialectical notions of globalization and localization inquired into the interplay of central and peripheral or rather polyfocal developments[38]. This led to a series of research focusing on regions or provinces, all demonstrating the variety of religious agents and the limited role of political factors, of "polis religion" or – an even more limited concept – "civic religion"[39]. The focus on "lived religion" as just presented was one reaction to

32. E.g. L.R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, Oxford, 1896.

33. L.R. Taylor, *The Cults of Ostia*, Bryn Mawr Monographs, Monograph Series 11, Bryn Mawr, 1912; A.E. Gordon, *The Cults of Aricia*, Berkeley, 1934; M. Pettersson, *Cults of Apollo at Sparta: The Hyakinthia, the Gymnopaidiai and the Karneia*, Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Athen 8°, 12, Stockholm, 1992.

34. C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "What is Polis Religion?", in O. Murray and S. Price (eds.), *The Greek City: From Homer to Alexander*, Oxford, 1990, 295-322. Cf. J. Kindt, "Polis Religion – A Critical Appreciation", *Kernos*, 22, 2009, 9-34, DOI: 10.4000/kernos.1765; J.N. Bremmer, "*Manteis*, Magic, Mysteries and Mythography: Messy Margins of *Polis* Religion?", *Kernos*, 23, 2010, 13-35; J. Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion…", *op. cit.*, n. 15.

35. F. de Polignac, *La naissance de la cité grecque: cultes, espace et société VIIIe-VIIe: siècles avant J.-C.*, Textes à l'appui: Histoire classique, Paris, 1984 (Engl. F. de Polignac, *Cults, Territory, and the Origins of the Greek City-State*, Chicago, 1995).

36. Cf. C. Auffarth (ed.), *Religion auf dem Lande. Entstehung und Veränderung von Sakrallandschaften unter römischer Herrschaft*, Stuttgart, 2009.

37. M. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, 2 vols., Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 5.2.1-2, München, 1988 (repr.).

38. H. Cancik and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion*, Tübingen, 1997; H. Cancik and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion: Globalisierungs- und Regionalisierungsprozesse in der antiken Religionsgeschichte*, Erfurt, 2003; H. Cancik and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Die Religion des Imperium Romanum. Koine und Konfrontationen*, Tübingen, 2009; J. Rüpke, "Reichsreligion? Überlegungen zur Religionsgeschichte des antiken Mittelmeerraums in römischer Zeit", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 292, 2011, 297-322; J. Rüpke, *Tra Giove e Cristo: Trasformazioni religiose nell'impero romano*, Scienze e Storia delle Religioni, Brescia, 2013 (Engl. *From Jupiter to Christ: On the History of Religion in the Roman Imperial Period*, Oxford, 2014).

39. G. Woolf, "Polis-Religion and its Alternatives in the Roman Provinces", in H. Cancik and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Römische Reichsreligion…*, *op. cit.*, n. 38, 71-84; N. Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina: The Pagan Cults*

this, focusing on agency and materiality rather than space. Acknowledging the overarching role of urban centres and urban networks even in the face of around ninety per cent of the population living in the countryside, I propose to add the perspective offered by "urban religion" as a second and space-sensitive reaction.

From the point of view of an European historian the relationship of religion and the city has been thematized in two very different lines of research. Religion has been viewed as an important factor in stabilizing cities and rendering them governable. It was regarded as a decisive factor in forming the concept of citizenship as well as in justifying the expulsion of large groups. Without doubt, it has contributed to the monumentalization of centres and the "branding" of cities already in Mediterranean Antiquity. In fact, research on the relationship of religion and urbanization in a historical perspective was opened by a classicist, Numa Fustel de Coulanges and his *La cité antique*[40], an important teacher of Émile Durkheim. In Urban Studies, Fustel is acknowledged as a pioneer[41]. For the study of religious change,

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in Roman Palestine (Second to Fourth Century), Religion der römischen Provinzen 1, Tübingen, 2001; W. Spickermann, *Germania Superior*, Religionsgeschichte des römischen Germanien 1, Tübingen, 2003; H. Kunz, *Sicilia: Religionsgeschichte des römischen Siziliens*, Religion der römischen Provinzen 4, Tübingen, 2006; W. Spickermann, *Germania Inferior*, Religionsgeschichte des römischen Germanien 2, Tübingen, 2008; O. Hekster, S. Schmidt-Hofner and C. Witschel (eds.), *Ritual Dynamics and Religious Change in the Roman Empire,* Impact of Empire 9, Leiden 2009; L. Scheuermann, *Religion an der Grenze: Provinzialrömische Götterverehrung am Neckar- und äußeren obergermanischen Limes*, Osnabrücker Forschungen zu Altertum und Antike-Rezeption 17, Rahden, 2013; see also J. Assmann, F. Graf, T. Hölscher, L. Koenen, J. Rüpke and J. Scheid (eds.), *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte 10: I. Religion und Raum. II. Ritual in Domestic and Civic Spheres*, Berlin, 2008; C. Ando, "Imperial Identities", in T. Whitmarsh (ed.), *Local Knowledge and Microidentities in the Imperial Greek World. Greek Culture in the Roman World*, Cambridge, 2010, 17-45; C. Tsochos, *Die Religion in der römischen Provinz Makedonien*, Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 40, Stuttgart, 2012; P. Funke, "Überregionale Heiligtümer – Orte der Begegnung mit dem Fremden", in S. Rollinger (ed.), *Kulturkontakte in antiken Welten: Vom Denkmodell zum Fallbeispiel*, Leuven, 2014, 53-65; V. Gasparini, "Les cultes isiaques et les pouvoirs locaux en Italie", in L. Bricault and M.J. Versluys (eds.), *Power, Politics and the Cults of Isis: Proceedings of the Vth International Conference of Isis Studies, Boulogne-sur-Mer, October 13-15, 2011*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 180, Leiden, 2014, 260-299; G. Woolf, "Religious Innovation in the Ancient Mediterranean", *Oxford Encyclopedia of Religion*, Oxford, 2015, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.5; T. Kaizer, "Empire, Community, and Culture on the Middle Euphrates. Durenes, Palmyrenes, Villagers, and Soldiers", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 60.1, 2017, 63-95; A. Lawrence, *Religion in Vindonissa*, Veröffentlichungen der Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa 24, Brugg, 2018. For "civic religion", see J. Scheid, *Les dieux, l'État* et l'*individu: Réflexions sur la religion civique à Rome*, Paris, 2013.

40. N.D. Fustel de Coulanges, *La cité antique, étude sur le culte, le droit, les institutions de la Grèce et de Rome*, Paris and Strasbourg, 1864.

41. See N. Yoffee and N. Terrenato, "Introduction: A History of the Study of Early Cities", in N. Yoffee (ed.), *The Cambridge World History, 3. Early Cities in Comparative Perspective, 4000 BCE-1200 CE*, Cambridge, 2015, 1-24, here 7.

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too, his complex approach has much to offer[42], even if his name is surprisingly absent even in the many studies of ancient religion, in which some of his ideas are so present. The basic question Fustel de Coulanges tried to answer was how a city could function without a power structure kept in place by force. The broad presence of religious practices seemed to point to a prominent role in societies' dealing with that problem. Yet, it was also a historical date that needs to be explained. Here Fustel de Coulanges developed a narrative that made both facts plausible at the same time.

In his analysis, Greco-Roman religion in its earliest, original form was exclusively domestic, with a double focus on the hearth in the house and the family tomb close by. The cult was not public but, rather, performed in the *foyer* (literally "the place of the fire") of the house. There were no rules governing the practice of religion and every family could do what it liked, it was even constituted by these practices. Yet, families were not just small nuclear units. In the form of the *gens*, the clan, they might comprise many thousands of people. The size of such "societies" grew in parallel with the expansion of the reach of religious concepts, in the sense of the degree to which these concepts can include more people and settlements within their conceptual horizon. Thus, it was religion – that is, cult on a higher level – that enables new types of societies, phratries, and *curiae.* Again, a shared meal was prepared at an altar. The mechanisms that allowed religion to transcend the limits of the family were twofold, in fact there were two different religions[43]. The first was built on the experience of one's own life and self, and located the divine forces in one's own soul and in the ancestors, the heroes, and the *lares.* The other was related to the wider world, to the external physical forces that enabled life. This second religion thus located the divine forces in external objects but imbued them with the same kind of personality and will found in the divinities that were located in human agents. It was still domestic religion, but in the long run, the gods of the second religion had enough in common so that they could become generalised in a way that the ancestors could not. The formation of such shareable religious concepts preceded the creation of larger social units, not least because this second type of deity also implied another type of morality, as such gods were referred to or associated with phenomena of the shared social and natural world, thus favouring hospitality even to strangers and asking for concord even if occasionally they were party to one side of a conflict. Society could enlarge in parallel with the rise of these gods and their associated morality. The domestic *foyer* was thus transformed into an extra-domestic small *naos* or *cella*, and finally into a full-size temple. These mechanisms shaped the very form of the city. And yet, the fundamental units did not merge with one another but, rather did associate on a higher level: families grow into *curiae*, *curiae* into "tribes", and tribes into a city, while remaining individual and independent units that were held together by their own form of

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42. J. Rüpke, "Religion als Urbanität: Ein anderer Blick auf Stadtreligion", *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft*, 27.1, 2019, 174-195, with more details to the following "narrative".

43. N.D. Fustel de Coulanges, *La cité antique...*, *op. cit*., n. 40, 136.

cult. "The city is not an assembly of individuals, but a confederation of several groups"[44]. A shared belief, the strongest bond imaginable, kept it together. Freedom of religion was not granted at the level of the domestic, the phratries/*curiae*, or the city as described so far. This sort of liberty was conceptually related only to religion at an even higher level: the belief in universal gods and a universal god, a possibility grounded in the expansion of the "second religion" and one that ultimately brought about the end of the ancient Greco-Roman city. This ending of the ancient city is helped along on the political side by the growing number of people who fall outside the ultra-dense structure of the ancient city and the ancient state (which is unable to expand beyond the city, since it can develop only *within* the spatial and organisational context of the city), and who fight (without knowing it) for a wider and more universal structure than the city can offer. This beginning of the end of the ancient city is dated to the 7th cent. BCE by Fustel de Coulanges, that is, to the time immediately following the first steps in Greco-Roman urbanisation. In the end, however, it was the transformation of Rome into an empire (again led by a change in thinking), that led to the demise of the "municipal regime". The growing distance between practices addressed to the dead and concepts of the divine and divine intelligence, that is the growing distance between habitualised cultic practices that lacked an adequate explanatory framework and the new philosophical discourse that opened up new existential perspectives, served to undermine the principles of polis religion[45].

Thus, at the heart of Fustel's theory were the religious creativity of individuals, the centrality of religious practices and beliefs as socially inclusive and exclusivist strategies, the continuation of practices and related conceptions across different levels of social aggregation, the co-presence of the institutions and actions of these levels within the city, and, finally, the heterogeneity of the imaginaries entertained by co-present inhabitants. It is the complexity of this approach that ties in with more recent developments in urban research. The study of ancient, that is, South and West European, West Asian and North African, processes of urbanisation has foregrounded cities as focal points of movements and relations ("flows")[46] and as particular social and spatial arrangements[47]. These were crucial to religious practices and driving forces of religious change. And *vice versa*, such practices and religious ideas shaped the contemporary concepts of urbanity, of what it meant to live in a city rather than in some other place, concepts that need to be seen as the decisive indicator of whether to address a

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44. *Ibid.*, 145.

45. *Ibid.*, 418.

46. See J. Robinson, A.J. Scott and P.J. Taylor (eds.), *Working, Housing, Urbanizing: The International Year of Global Understanding - IYGU,* SpringerBriefs in Global Understanding, Berlin, 2016, 5.

47. R. Osborne, "Urban Sprawl: What is Urbanization and Why does it Matter?", in R. Osborne and B. Cunliffe (eds.), *Mediterranean Urbanization 800-600 BC*, Proceedings of the British Academy, Oxford, 2005, 1-16; R. Osborne and A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Cities of the Ancient mediterranean", in P. Clark (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History*, New York, 2013, 49-65; A. Zuiderhoek, *The Ancient City*, Cambridge, 2017.

settlement as urban or not[48]. In many ancient narratives, religion was seen as a decisive tool in the actual foundation of cities. From the point of view of a broader range of agents another quality of religious practices, related to strategies of appropriating, sometimes marking or even sacralising space, was even more important. In the diversity and density of urban settlements, religious communication and its association with space and people supported making "places" out of underdefined space[49]. At ancient Rome, the separation of settlement space and tombs, enforced from early on, drove the ancestors and all the place-claiming strategies frequently related with funerary practices and ancestor cult out of the space between the walls.

Like "lived religion", "urban religion" is not an identifiable subset of "religion" (or the "urban"), namely, religion in the city as opposed to the countryside, but a perspective on religious practices, ideas, agents and institutions in their interaction and reciprocal formation with practices, ideas, materialities, agents and institutions of urbanity[50]. Again, it is a focus on religion in the making, a focus on divergent and even contradictory two-sided processes across different historical periods and geographical spaces, in which religion shapes urban space and urbanity shapes religion, an entanglement of religious change and urbanisation, in which the religious is an (active) agent, preparing and pushing forward processes of urbanisation (as defined by urbanity), as well as a (passive) patient, reacting and adapting to urban conditions and thus becoming part and parcel of urbanity.

As a tool of historical research, "urban religion" does not forward the claim that religious practices were the prime factor in all or most urbanisation processes. Religion was, however, an important factor from early on. As such, it was a factor in enabling, if not out-

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48. See S. Rau and J. Rüpke, "Religion und Urbanität: Wechselseitige Formierungen", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 310, 2020, 654-680.

49. For the differentiation see Y.-F. Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis, Minn., 1977; see also H. Berking, "Contested Places and the Politics of Space", in H. Berking *et alii* (eds.), *Negotiating Urban Conflicts: Interaction, Space and Control*, Bielefeld, 2006, 29-39. For Rome, see C.R. Galvao-Sobrinho, "Claiming Places: Sacred Dedications and Public Space in Rome in the Principate", in J. Bodel and M. Kajava (eds.), *Dediche sacre nel mondo greco-romano: Religious Dedications in the Greco-Roman World*, Acta Instituti Romani Finlandia 35, Rome, 2008, 127-159; H.O. Maier, "From Material Place to Imagined Space: Emergent Christian Community as Thirdspace in the Shepherd of Hermas", in M.R.C. Grundeken and J. Verheyden (eds.), *Early Christian Communities between Ideal and Reality*, Tübingen, 2015, 143-160; J. Rüpke, "Crafting Complex Place: Religion, Antiquarianism, and Urban Development in Late Republican Rome", *Historia Religionum*, 9, 2017, 109-117.

50. Cf. S. Lanz, "Assembling Global Prayers in the City: An Attempt to Repopulate Urban Theory with Religion", in J. Becker *et alii* (eds.), *Global Prayers: Contemporary Manifestations of the Religious in the City*, MetroZones 13, Zürich, 2014, 16-47, here 25, and his definition of urban religion as "a specific element of urbanisation and urban everyday life (…) intertwined with (…) urban lifestyles and imaginaries, infrastructure and materialities, cultures, politics and economies, forms of living and working, community formation, festivals and celebrations" and "a continual process in which the urban and the religious reciprocally interact, mutually interlace, producing, transforming and defining each other".

rightly co-creating diversity and heterarchy in urban settlements[51]. Living in the city *and* as an urbanite includes the possibility to remain different from many other inhabitants of the same city and to create unity with selected others. In the history of urban settlements such religious practices might shape the urban topography, architecture and even the atmosphere and the "branding" of such a settlement in terms of memories and "heritage"[52]. Religious practices and ideas catered for urban aspiration and place-making as much as for ruling and administration. People employed them as a cultural technique with very particular spatial properties, permanently referencing a spatial Beyond (of divine powers and imagined places) within an urban settlement and its urban networks. As an object of historiography, it is of primary importance to understand the interaction of different spaces – city and non-city, province and empire, empire and the world or cosmos – in and for localities and agents.

5. Conclusion

How can agency, the practices and materialities of "lived religion", the complexities of overlapping spaces, and their changes be captured? How can a historiography be construed that needs to weave together individual sense or "meaning" and the aggregate social effects, present experience and long-term change, momentaneous change in every act of appropriation and the *longue durée* of texts, architecture or power constellations, all of which have been invoked as important for a history of religion before? Quotations from strategic *alter-* and *ego*-documents with images and lists? No doubt, *corpora* and prosopographies, maps and physical data are fundamental. It is the seeming autopsy of images and the reductionism of models that convince best, as already ancient rhetoric has taught. Yet, they all tend to simply imply or actively hide their methodological options, which I suggested to reflect and bring into the open here. Therefore, it is not some theory taken from sociology or philosophy that is advocated in the end. Rather, I suggest to not shun from narrative as a strategy of meaning-making for intended audiences. History is about change, and past change is most actively sought as a tool for the future. It is here that the empirical, normative and narrative evidence of narrations work together[53]. In other words, narratives first

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51. For the concept of a diversity of conflicting or at least changing systems of ranking power or prestige see A.E. Rautman, "Hierarchy and Heterarchy in the American Southwest: A Comment on Mcguire and Saitta", *American Antiquity*, 63.2, 1998, 325-333, here 327 with the definition of Crumley: "heterarchies are systems in which the component elements have (1) 'the potential of being unranked (...)' and/or (2) ... of being 'ranked in a number of ways, depending on systemic requirements'".

52. E.g. C. Sulzbach, "From Urban nightmares to Dream Cities: Revealing the Apocalyptic Cityscape", in C.M. Maier and G.T. Princeloo (eds.), *Constructions of Space V: Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterrranean World*, LHBOTS 576, New York, 2013, 226-243.

53. Cf. J. Rüsen and I. Rüsen (eds.), *Historisches Lernen. Grundlage und Paradigmen,* Forum historisches Lernen, Schwalbach/Ts., 2008; J. Rüsen and I. Rüsen, *Historik. Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Köln, 2013.

of all – if not otherwise explicitly stated – suggest that they present facts, unquestionable facts that need not be argued for, as they are simply part of the flow of the narrative. They also establish norms. The way people act have consequences, maybe even explicitly evaluated by other characters or the narrative voice. Thus, what is good or bad becomes evident. And finally, the very flow of the narrative, its framing and sequencing of highly selective data plausibilise and hide this very selectivity. For religion in the making that seems most adequate. As it did for the ancients, with whom I started.