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Ancient Lived Religion and the History of Religion in the Roman Empire¹

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a program of research on ancient religion that draws on the concept of ‘lived religion’. For antiquity, we use the term to denote an approach which focuses on the individual appropriation of traditions and embodiment, religious experiences and communication on religion in different social spaces and the interaction of different levels facilitated by religious specialists. Combining the starting point of individual religious agency with research on religion and empire, that is the largest aggregate of the period, such an approach offers a basis for a review of the history of religion in the Roman imperial period. The article offers a series of hypotheses, which might guide further research.

1 Introduction

The title of this article is obviously referring to a research paradigm, which I have not invented, but which I am trying to make fruitful for the study of the ancient history of religion in the Mediterranean, starting from the individual and ‘lived’ religion instead of cities or ethnic groups, from cults or religions. ‘Lived religion’ suggests a set of experiences, of practices addressed to, and conceptions of the divine, which are appropriated, expressed, and shared by individuals in diverse social spaces.²

Such an approach has consequences for our conceptualization of religious traditions or ‘religions’. Lived ‘religions’ – and I will be very careful in using the plural – are much more chaotic, much more diverse, and much less defined

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² See an earlier version of this in Jörg Rüpke, ‘Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning “Cults” and “Polis Religion”’, *Mythos* ns 5 (2011), 191-204, which I try to develop further in the first part of this article.

by clear-cut boundaries as we usually assume in speaking of ‘religions’. This is not a manifesto of some post-modern ‘turn’. I am very much interested in the realities of survival, interaction, of daily life and power behind the sources available to us.³ The shift of focus towards individuals and shared practices leads to new insights about boundaries and identities as processes and practices rather than result, focuses on ‘religion in the making’ rather than container concepts of religions, which presuppose shared beliefs and uniform behaviour by all those within the container. This might fruitfully be connected to discussions about the parting of the ways or to the growth of institutions and confessional identities.⁴ Thus, in the second part I will try to formulate some hypotheses about the history of religion in the imperial period down to Late Antiquity. If I present hypotheses derived from such an approach to religion in the making on an aggregate level, I need to justify this on the methodologically more important basic level. This will be done in the first part.

2 Lived Ancient Religion

Ancient Mediterranean religion is traditionally viewed through the lens of public religion, that is consisting of the religions of political units (usually city-states) that are part and parcel of civic identity. Such analyses of ancient polytheistic

³ See briefly Christoph Riedweg (ed.), *Nach der Postmoderne: Aktuelle Debatten zu Kunst, Philosophie und Gesellschaft*, Schwabe reflexe 34 (Basel, 2014) on the discussion of postmodernity and see the methodological reflections in Jörg Rüpke, *Aberglauben oder Individualität? Religiöse Abweichung im römischen Reich* (Tübingen, 2011).

⁴ See Paula Frederiksen, ‘What “Parting of the Ways”? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City’, in Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam Becker (eds), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism / Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 95 (Tübingen, 2003), 35-63; Martin Goodman, ‘Modeling the “Parting of the Ways”’, in *ibid.* 119-29; Annette Yoshiko Reed, ‘“Jewish Christianity” after the “Parting of the Ways”: Approaches to Historiography and Self-Definition in the Pseudo-Clementines’, in *ibid.* 189-231; Jörg Frey, ‘Temple and Identity in Early Christianity and in the Johannine Community: Reflections on the “Parting of the Ways”’, in Daniel R. Schwartz and Zeev Weiss (eds), *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 78 (Leiden, 2012), 447-507; Peter Brown, ‘Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways’, in *id.* (ed.), *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), 166-95; Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin, *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 119 (Tübingen, 2008); Karen L. King, ‘Social and Theological Effects of Heresiological Discourse’, in *ibid.* 28-49; Hannah Cotton, *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge, 2009); Brent Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, 1. publ. ed. (Cambridge a.o., 2011); Andrew Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised: A Study in Early Christian History and Difference*, Divinations: Reading Late Ancient Religion (Philadelphia, 2012).

religions, whether they refer to ‘embedded’ religion⁵ or ‘polis religion’⁶, work on the assumption that all members of ancient societies were in principle equally religious. From this point of view, religion (and this also applies to Judaism) is a taken-for-granted part of every biography: rites de passage structure the life of each individual, while ritual acts within the domestic cult, family cult or burial and death rites facilitate change of status. This basic assumption of a *homo religiosus* is bound up with the political interpretation of ancient religion: since religion is an unquestioned given, religion is thought to be particularly well-suited to cultivate ‘collective identities’ and to act as instrument for the justification of power. Here the religious actions of individuals take place solely in those niches and predefined spaces permitted by the civic religion, which is in turn created and financed by the dominant social groups.⁷ This imagination of religion has been theorised by Émile Durkheim and re-envisioned as civic religion of America in the 1960s.⁸

Polis religion is understood as the defining framework of all local religious practice. Thus it is regarded as being supplemented by, even more being in competition with, and finally overcome by ‘cults’. Being elective in nature, these cults offered options for more intensive social interaction and in particular soteriological perspectives, starting with Orphism in classical Greece.⁹ For nearly a century, interest has been focused on the so-called ‘oriental’ cults or religions such as those of Isis, Mithras or the Syrian deities, all supposedly close to Christianity in some traits. Recently, however, this category has been dissolved, not because of some new correctness in using ‘oriental’, but because the category remains empty as a classification. It provides not a stable criterion either with regards content (mysteries) or geography.¹⁰ Franz Cumont’s narrative – more

⁵ Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome. 1: A History. 2: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁶ Christiane Sourvin-Inwood, ‘What is Polis Religion?’, in Oswyn Murray and Simon Price (eds), *The Greek City: From Homer to Alexander* (Oxford, 1990), 295-322.

⁷ See for instance John Scheid, *Les dieux, l’État et l’individu: Réflexions sur la religion civique à Rome* (Paris, 2013).

⁸ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*. Trans. from the French by Joseph Ward (Glencoe, Ill, 1915, repr. 1947); Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York, 1975); Gail Gehrig, *American Civil Religion: An Assessment*. Society for the Scientific Study of Religion: Monogr. ser. 3 (Storrs, Con., 1979); Rolf Schieder, *Civil Religion: Die religiöse Dimension der politischen Kultur* (Gütersloh, 1987, reprint, Diss. München 1986); Martin Fuchs, ‘A religion for civil society? Ambedkar’s Buddhism, the Dalit issue and the imagination of emergent possibilities’, in Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar and Martin Christof (eds), *Charisma and Canon: Essays on the Religious History of the Indian Subcontinent* (New Delhi, 2001), 250-73; Melissa M. Wilcox (ed.), *Religion in Today’s World: Global Issues, Sociological Perspectives*, Contemporary sociological perspectives series (New York, 2013).

⁹ Walter Burkert, ‘Ancient mystery cults’ (Cambridge/Mass, 1987).

¹⁰ Corinne Bonnet, Jörg Rüpke and Paolo Scarpi (eds), *Religions orientales – culti misterici: Neue Perspektiven – nouvelle perspectives – prospettive nuove*. Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche

and more understood in its details and context¹¹ – claimed that among such cults Christianity alone offered a fundamental alternative to polis religion, as it most clearly and even more than Judaism marked a rupture with the truly ancient, the polis religions, due to its emphasis on individual promises of salvation and faith rather than ritual practices. This narrative is losing its ground, too. As in the case of oriental cults, so with regard to Christianity a principle revision has been its recent reinterpretation as ‘ancient religion’.¹²

The paradigms of ‘cults’ and ‘polis religion’ (never matched by the ancient concept of the situational concept *religiones*) leave a major gap. Religious phenomena of the ancient Mediterranean societies have been analysed far beyond what has been described so far. Ten thousands of votives in sanctuaries have been collected, documented, and studied. They are pointing to religious practices that cope well with individual crises, witnessing the establishment of short-lived local traditions by just copying the object most recently put up as well as witnessing highly individual combination of gods and circumstances.¹³ Religious practices,

Beiträge 16 (Stuttgart, 2006); Corinne Bonnet and Jörg 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).

¹¹ E.g. Corinne Bonnet, ‘Contributi belgi allo studio dell’Antichità e della storia delle religioni a Roma’, *Bulletin de l’institut historique belge de Rome* 73 (2003), 203-16; *ead.*, ‘La dimension du voyage dans la vie et dans l’œuvre de Franz Cumont’, in Veronique Krings and Isabelle Tassignon (eds), *Archéologie dans L’empire ottoman autour de 1900: entre politique, économie et science* (Brussels and Rome, 2004), 55-74; Franz Valery Marie Cumont and Corinne Bonnet, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, repr. (in parts) (Paris, 1929), Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 4. ed., Bibliotheca Cumontiana: Scripta maiora 1 (Torino, 2006); Corinne Bonnet, *S’écrire et écrire sur l’antiquité. L’apport des correspondances à l’histoire des travaux scientifiques* (Grenoble, 2008); Philippe Borgeaud, ‘Les mystères’, in Laurent Bricault and Corinne Bonnet (eds), *Pantheé: Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 177 (Leiden, 2013), 145-67.

¹² Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990); see now Richard Gordon, ‘Coming to Terms with the “Oriental Religions of the Roman Empire”’, *Numen* 61 (2014), 657-72.

¹³ Mary Beard, ‘Writing and religion: Ancient literacy and the function of the written word in Roman religion’, in *ead.* (ed.), *Literacy in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor, Mi., 1991), 35-58; Jelle Bouma, *Religio votiva: The Archaeology of Latial Votive Religion: 5th-3rd c. BC.*, 3 vols. (Groningen, 1996); Annamaria Comella (ed.), *I rilievi votivi greci di periodo arcaico e classico: Diffusione, ideologia, committenza*, Bibliotheca Archaeologica 11 (Bari, 2002); Mareile Haase, ‘Votivbilder als Werbemedien? Votivterrakotten aus Gravisca als Zeichenträger in Prozessen symbolischer Interaktion’, in U. Veit, T.L. Kienlin and Ch. Kümmel (eds), *Spuren und Botschaften: Interpretationen materieller Kultur* (Münster, 2003), 369-83; Günther Schörner, *Votive im römischen Griechenland: Untersuchungen zur späthellenistischen und kaiserzeitlichen Kunst- und Religionsgeschichte*, Altertumswissenschaftliches Kolloquium 7 (Stuttgart, 2003); Annamaria Comella and Sebastiana Mele (eds), *Depositi Votivi e Culti dell’Italia Antica dall’Età Arcaica a Quella Tardo-Repubblicana – Atti del Convegno di Studi Perugia, 1-4 giugno 2000*, Bibliotheca archaeologica 16 (Bari, 2005); Christian Frevel and Henner von Hesberg, *Kult und Kommunikation. Medien in Heiligtümern der Antike*, Schriften des Lehr- und Forschungszentrums für die

ranging from amulets and curse tablets to elaborate rituals and discursive methods manipulated by ancient specialists,¹⁴ have been analysed as a powerful religious resource, which is drawing on the whole range of gods of the polis religion as often as not. Divination forms another field of ‘instrumental religion’, provided not only by and for state officials (and hence described as part of public religion), but also by a broad range of male and female practitioners, small religious entrepreneurs. Technical studies have failed to take into account the importance of such practices in ancient religion as stressed by ancient philosophy (Stoicism, Cicero) and the Judaeo-Christian concept of revelation.¹⁵ Finally, funerary rites and the cult of the dead – seen as fundamental trait in many extra-European religious practices – are a further area that abounds with evidence, yet occupies a marginal position (if any) in the polis religion paradigm despite the fact that practices of communication frequently paralleled communication with gods.¹⁶ To

Antiken Kulturen des Mittelmeerraumes – Centre for Mediterranean Cultures 4 (Wiesbaden, 2007); Karel van der Toorn, ‘Votive Texts and Letter-Prayers Writing as Devotional Practice’, in R.J. van der Spek (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Near Eastern World View and Society* (Bethesda, Maryland, 2008), 39-46; Daniele Federico Maras, *Il dono votivo: gli dei e il sacro nelle iscrizioni etrusche di culto*, Biblioteca di ‘Studi etruschi’ (Florence, 2009); briefly Jörg Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, trans. by Richard Gordon (Cambridge, 2007), 154-66.

¹⁴ Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York, 1991); Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge, 2008); Richard Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón (eds), *Magical Practice in the Latin West: Papers from the International Conference Held at the University of Zaragoza 30 Sept.-1 Oct. 2005*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World (Leiden, 2010); Richard Gordon, ‘Archaeologies of Magical Gems’, in Chris Entwistle and Noel Adams (eds), *Gems of Heaven: Recent Research on Engraved Gemstones in Late Antiquity c. AD 200-600*, British Museum Research Publications 177 (Oxford, 2011), 39-49; Andrew T. Wilburn, *Materia Magica: The Archaeology of Magic in Roman Egypt, Cyprus, and Spain* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2012); *id.*, ‘Cosmology, Astrology, and Magic: Discourse, Schemes, Power, and Literacy’, in Laurent Bricault and Corinne Bonnet (eds), *Pantheé: Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 177 (Leiden, 2013), 85-111; *id.*, ‘The Religious Anthropology of Late-Antique “High” Magical Practice’, in Jörg Rüpke (ed.), *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2013), 163-86; Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg, *Defining Magic: A Reader*, Critical categories in the study of religion (Sheffield, 2013).

¹⁵ Nicole Belayche *et al.*, ‘Divination romaine’, *ThesCRA* 3 (2005), 79-104; Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 155 (Leiden, 2005); Jörg Rüpke, ‘Divination et décisions politiques dans la République romaine’, *Cahiers Glotz* 16 (2005), 217-33; Nicole Belayche and Jörg Rüpke, ‘Divination et révélation dans les mondes grec et romain. Présentation’, *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 224 (2007), 139-47; Jörg Rüpke, ‘Divination et décisions politique dans la République romaine’, *Cahiers du Centre Gustave-Glotz* 16 (2007), 217-33; Kim Beerden, *Worlds Full of Signs: Ancient Greek Divination in Context*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 176 (Leiden, 2013); Veit Rosenberger (ed.), *Divination in the Ancient World: Religious Options and the Individual*, Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 46 (Stuttgart, 2013); Jörg Rüpke, ‘New Perspectives on Ancient Divination’, in *ibid.* 9-19; Federico Santangelo, *Divination, Prediction and the End of the Republic* (Cambridge, 2013).

¹⁶ Kathryn J. McDonnell, ‘Funerary Cult and Architecture’, in Roger B. Ulrich and Caroline K. Quenemoen (eds), *A Companion to Roman Architecture*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient

sum up, vast areas of evidence and excellent research done on these phenomena have not managed to open up a new, broader framework within the study of ancient religion.

In order to question the cults-and-polis religion-perspective, it is not sufficient to merely point to these fields. The challenge is to integrate all these fields into a new theoretical framework. To provide such a framework and adequate methodological tools is the task tackled by 'Lived Ancient Religion'.

The concept of 'lived religion' had been developed in a book published in 2008 in order to describe and analyse contemporary religion by the anthropologist Meredith McGuire,¹⁷ even if the term has been coined earlier, in particular in the context of practical theology.¹⁸ It is my attempt to employ this concept within the field of ancient religion. In its application to contemporary social analysis, the concept of lived religion does not address thriving religious communities or the latest theological fashions. Instead, without falling into the fallacy of methodological individualism, clearly untenable given the inter-subjective and relational character of the ancient as well as modern individual, it is focusing on the individual's 'use' of religion. But there is more to it. 'Lived religion' does not ask how individuals replicate a set of religious practices and beliefs preconfigured by an institutionalized official religion within their biography –

World (Chichester, West Sussex, 2014), 264-80; Maureen Carroll, 'Ethnicity and Gender in Roman Funerary Commemoration: Case Studies from the Empire's Frontiers', in Sarah Tarlow and Liv Nilsson Stutz (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Death and Burial* (Oxford, 2013), 559-79; Karina Croucher, *Death and dying in the neolithic Near East* (Oxford, 2012); Valerie M. Hope and Janet Huskinson (eds), *Memory and Mourning: Studies on Roman Death* (Oxford, 2011); Maureen Carroll (ed.), *Living through the dead: burial and commemoration in the classical world*, Studies in funerary archaeology 5 (Oxford, 2011); Jörg Rüpke and John Scheid (eds), *Bestattungsrituale und Totenkult in der römischen Kaiserzeit/Rites funéraires et culte des morts aux temps impériaux*, Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 27 (Stuttgart, 2010); Stefanie Martin-Kilcher, 'Römische Gräber – Spiegel der Bestattungs- und Grab-sitten', in John Scheid (ed.), *Pour une archéologie du rite: nouvelles perspectives de l'archéologie funéraire*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 407 (Rome, 2008), 9-27; John Scheid (ed.), *Pour une archéologie du rite: nouvelles perspectives de l'archéologie funéraire*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 407 (Rome, 2008); Nicola Laneri, *Performing Death – Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Chicago, Illinois, 2007); Éric Rebillard, *Religion et sépulture: l'église, les vivants et les morts dans l'antiquité tardive*, Civilisations et sociétés 115 (Paris, 2003); Jörg Rüpke, *Religion: Antiquity and its Legacy* (London/New York, 2014), 118-36.

¹⁷ Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion* (Oxford, 2008). The following passage is taken from Rüpke, *Religion: Antiquity and its Legacy* (2014), 118-20 and extended.

¹⁸ For the reception in Religious Studies see e.g. Hildegard Piegeler, Inken Prohl and Stefan Rademacher (eds), *Gelebte Religionen: Untersuchungen zur sozialen Gestaltungskraft religiöser Vorstellungen und Praktiken in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Festschrift für Hartmut Zinser zum 60. Geburtstag* (Würzburg, 2004); Hans-Günter Heimbrock, 'Reconstruction Lived Religion', in H.-G. Heimbrock and C.P. Scholtz (eds), *Religion: Immediate Experience and the Mediacy of Research – Interdisciplinary Studies in the Objectives, Concepts and Methodology of Empirical Research in Religion* (Göttingen, 2007), 133-57.

or, conversely, opt out of adhering to a tradition. Instead, 'lived religion' focuses on the actual everyday experience, on practices, expressions, and interactions that could be related to 'religion'. Such 'religion' is understood as a spectrum of experiences, actions, and beliefs and communications hinging on human communication with super-human or even transcendent agent(s), for the ancient Mediterranean usually conceptualized as 'gods'. Ritualization and elaborate forms of representation are called upon for the success of communication with these addressees, a communication, which at the same time implies the forging or – at times – rejection of human alliances.¹⁹

This is not to deny the existence and importance of culturally stabilized forms of rituals and concepts. These are of importance. It is necessary to keep in mind that individual practices are not entirely subjective. There are religious norms, there are exemplary official practices, there are control mechanisms. But we also have to take into account, that our evidence is biased. It is precisely such institutions and norms that tend to dominate the surviving evidence from antiquity. We see the norm, but this is not a description, but a communicative strategy on the part of some other agent. If we observe religion in the making institutions or beliefs are not simply culturally given, but are themselves aggregates of individual practices – as well as the latter's constraints. Of course that gives particular importance to religious specialists and providers of religious services.

To deal with this situation, the term 'appropriation', as developed by Michel de Certeau, proved very helpful.²⁰ The specific forms of religion-as-lived are barely comprehensible in the absence of specific modes of individual appropriation of motives and models offered by traditions, up to the point of radical asceticism, martyrdom or outright atheism. For the concrete forms and above all for the survival as today available 'evidence', cultural techniques such as the reading and writing, the interpretation of mythical or philosophical texts, rituals, pilgrimages and prayer, and the various media of representation of deities in and out of sanctuaries are decisive.²¹ The notion of agency implicit

¹⁹ Jörg Rüpke, 'Representation or presence? Picturing the divine in ancient Rome', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 12 (2010), 183-96.

²⁰ Michel De Certeau, *Arts de faire*, Nouvelle ed. par Luce Giard (Paris, 2007).

²¹ See e.g. Valentino Gasparini, 'Staging Religion: Cultic Performances in (and Around) the Temple of Isis in Pompeii', in Nicola Cusamano *et al.* (eds), *Memory and Religious Experience in the Graeco-Roman World*, Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 45 (Stuttgart, 2013), 185-212; Jörg Rüpke, 'On Religious Experiences that should not Happen in Sanctuaries', in *ibid.* 137-44; Marlis Arnholt, 'Group Settings and Religious Experiences', in *ibid.* 145-65; Birgit Meyer, 'Media and the senses in the making of religious experience: an introduction', *Material Religion* 4 (2008), 124-35. On the concept of religious experience in general see Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, NJ, 2009); Jeremy Carrette, *Religion and Critical Psychology: Religious Experience in the Knowledge Economy* (London, 2007); Andrea Bieler, 'Embodied Knowing – Understanding Religious Experience in Ritual', in Hans-Günter Heimbrock and Christopher P. Scholtz (eds),

in the notion of ‘appropriation’ – far more so than with ‘reception’ – is important. Agency is not about the lonely individual, but about the interaction of individuals with structures, structures, which again are the result of individual action. Sociologically speaking, I would opt for a relational approach. In view of the normative tagging of teachings, traditions, narratives *etc.* in the field of religion, and that is to say, in view of the normative claims raised by some of the agents, the question of how ideas are taken up and are modified by others or in other words: the specification of processes of appropriation is of particular importance. Talking of lived religion offers a frame for a description of the formative influence of professional providers, of law and other legal norms, of philosophical thinking and intellectual reflections in literary or reconstructed oral form, of social networks and socialization, of lavish performances in public spaces (or performances run by associations) with recourse to individual conduct in rituals and religious context. This valuation and methodological primacy of the individual is more than a radicalization of approaches to differentiate the practices of ever more smaller defined groups and communities. Certainly, however, institutions are not regarded as ontologically antecedent. Individuals’ agency and structure constitute each other.²²

Let me give an example, which is relevant for the question of religious pluralism, even if untypical for the small-scale variations which might be seen in cemeteries or series of dedications.²³ Hippolytus, a venerator of Christ and (prob-

Religion: Immediate Experience and the Mediacy of Research (2007), 39-59; Matthias Jung, ‘Making life explicit – The Symbolic Pregnancy of Religious Experience’, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 2 (2006), 16-23; Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious experience* (Berkeley, Calif., 1985); and Dietmar Mieth and Britta Müller-Schauenburg (eds), *Mystik, Recht und Freiheit: Religiöse Erfahrung und kirchliche Institutionen im Spätmittelalter* (Stuttgart, 2012); Friedo Ricken (ed.), *Religiöse Erfahrung: Ein interdisziplinärer Klärungsversuch*, Münchener philosophische Studien N.F. 23 (Stuttgart, 2004); Matthias Jung, *Erfahrung und Religion: Grundzüge einer hermeneutisch-pragmatischen Religionsphilosophie* (Freiburg i. Br., 1999) for the German concept of ‘Erfahrung’.

²² Margaret S. Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, Orig. 1988 edn. (Cambridge, 1996); Colin Campbell, ‘Distinguishing the Power of Agency from Agentic Power: A Note on Weber and the “Black Box” of Personal Agency’, *Sociological Theory* 27 (2009), 407-18; François Dépelteau, ‘Relational Thinking: A Critique of Co-Deterministic Theories of Structure and Agency’, *Sociological Theory* 26 (2008), 51-73; Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, ‘What Is Agency?’, *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1998), 962-1023; Adam Moore, ‘The Eventfulness of Social Reproduction’, *Sociological Theory* 29 (2011), 294-314; Jörg Rüpke, ‘Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflecting on History and Theory of Religion’, *Religion* 45.3 (2015), 344-66; Daniel Silver, ‘The Moodiness of Action’, *Sociological Theory* 29 (2011), 199-222; Yong Wang, ‘Agency: The Internal Split of Structure’, *Sociological Forum* 23 (2008), 481-502.

²³ The following is based on and criticizing *e.g.* Katharina Bracht, *Hippolyts Schrift In Danielelem*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 85 (Tübingen, 2014); Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension Before the Emergence of a Monarch Bishop*, *Vigiliae Christianae Supplements* 31 (Leiden, 1995); Michael Heintz, ‘Martyrdom from exegesis in Hippolytus: an early church Presbyteré commentary on Daniel’, *Religious Studies Review* 37 (2011), 139-40.

ably) a recent Roman citizen at Rome in the first quarter of the third century AD, acquired religious authority by writing a text addressed to his contemporaries. It is known as a ‘bible commentary’, basically a re-narration, historical reconstruction and ultimately speculative interpretation of the story of Susanna in her bath and Daniel rescuing her from the heinous accusations of two elders, and, in the later books of Daniel’s prophecies. The text shows us an author who claims authority above all by exact historical reconstruction, he is a learned man. The story must have had some currency in the period. He is appropriating it to gain authority and indulges in it to entertain his audience and thus keeps their attention, and he reinterprets the story into a warning: There are people among you, among us in our worshipping, who might forge some accusation to the magistrates. Martyrdom is not an instant threat – we do not have evidence for Roman martyrs for that quarter of the century –, but the imagination of life threatening danger is used as a tool to reflect about boundaries. This is not the comforting sermon of a bishop addressing a flock feeling threatened by annihilation in every single individual as it is read in nearly all scholarship. Rather it is a personal appropriation, which will have been received very differently by his listeners and readers; given the length of the later books, these must have been much more interested in speculations about the future than about the martyr element. Read in this light, the text is attesting an internal plurality of Jewish groups at Rome rather than an institutional and full-scale separation and plurality of what might be called ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’.

My example is giving not only an idea of what I mean by ‘lived religion’, but also relates to the permanent necessity to critically review previous scholarship in the light of alternative approaches. Perhaps, Hippolytus is a good example for the inter-subjective dimension of religious communication, which might be accessed through the records of the individuals by enquiring into their communication, their juxtaposition, their sharing of experiences and meaning, their specific usage and selection of culturally available concepts and vocabulary, as sociologist of religion Nancy T. Ammerman has put it.²⁴ What I would like to stress is that meanings constructed in situations rather than coherent individual worldviews should be identified. Logical coherence is secondary to the effectiveness of religious practices for the purposes desired and called ‘practical coherence’ by McGuire.

The ‘lived religion’ approach induces methodological modifications in the process of selecting and interpreting the evidence, to only two of which I will just very briefly refer. Firstly, the focus is on experience rather than symbols. The concept of experience has not yet been brought to bear on ancient religion to a large extent outside Judaism and Christianity.²⁵ The very subjective nature of ‘experience’ (pathos, unlike the ancient notion of *experientia*, that is, learning

²⁴ Nancy Tatom Ammerman (ed.), *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford, 2007).

²⁵ One of the few exceptions is William V. Harris, *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009).

by practising) seems to be in conflict with the dearth of ancient sources. ‘Experience’ stresses the role of the viewer and user of images, of more or less sacralised space in open and domestic contexts.²⁶ For material culture, the term ‘archaeology of religious experience’ addresses this perspective and stresses individual experience both indoors and in the use of public religious infrastructure as Rubina Raja and I hope to demonstrate in a ‘Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World’.²⁷

A second focus is on culture in interaction rather than on habitus, organisation or culture as text. Everyday religion is not to be grasped in terms of individual isolation, but is characterised by diverse social contexts that are appropriated, reproduced and informed by the agent on relevant occasions. The concept of ‘culture in interaction’²⁸ can enrich the lived religion approach. The concept has been developed in the ethnographic analysis of contemporary societies as a complement to the sociology of emotion. Focusing on situational communication in groups, the concept aims to identify specific ‘group styles’, which modify the use of linguistic as well as behavioural register within cultural contexts.

People *are* not a group and behave accordingly. Instead, by trying to embody imagined norms they form a group in a specific public, according to the situational necessities of forming alliances, displaying differences, pretending membership.²⁹ For the most thoroughly defined and stabilised social contexts

²⁶ Jörg Rüpke, ‘Heiliger und öffentlicher Raum: Römische Perspektiven auf private Religion’, in Babett Edelmann-Singer and Heinrich Koenen (eds), *Salutationes – Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte und ihrer Diskussion: Festschrift für Peter Herz zum 65. Geburtstag*, Region im Umbruch 9 (Berlin, 2013), 159-68.

²⁷ Rubina Raja and Jörg Rüpke (eds), *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World* (Boston, 2015).

²⁸ Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman, ‘Culture in Interaction’, *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (2003), 735-94; Paul Lichterman, ‘How religion circulates in America’s local public square’, in *id.* and C.B. Potts (eds), *The Civic Life of American Religion* (Stanford, 2009), 100-22.

²⁹ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, 2004); Ed Cairns *et al.*, ‘The role of in-group identification, religious group membership and intergroup conflict in moderating in-group and out-group affect’, *British Journal of Social Psychology* 45 (2006), 701-16; M. Feinberg, R. Willer and M. Schultz, ‘Gossip and ostracism promote cooperation in groups’, *Psychological Science* 25 (2014), 656-64; Philip A. Harland, ‘Familial Dimension of Group Identity: “Brothers” in Associations of the Greek East’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005), 491-513; A. Moore, ‘The Eventfulness of Social Reproduction’ (2011); S.L. Neberg *et al.*, ‘Religion and intergroup conflict: findings from the Global Group Relations Project’, *Psychological Science* 25 (2014), 198-206; Elitot R. Smith and Diane M. Mackie, ‘Intergroup Emotions’, in Michael Lewis, Jeanette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa Feldmann Barrett (eds), *Handbook of Emotions* (New York, 2008), 428-39; Henri Tajfel, ‘Social identity and intergroup behaviour’, *Social Science Information* 13/2 (1974), 65-93; Linda R. Tropp and Ludwin E. Molina, ‘Intergroup Processes: From Prejudice to Positive Relations Between Groups’, in Kay Deaux and Mark Snyder, *Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology* (New York and Oxford, 2012), 545-72; John C. Turner, ‘Social comparison and social identity: Some prospects for intergroup behaviour’, *European Journal of Social Psychology* 5 (1975), 5-34; Éric Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200-450 CE* (Ithaca, 2012).

of ritual interaction – namely the nuclear and wider family (including slaves), clans,³⁰ neighbourhoods, professional bodies,³¹ and voluntary associations (usually meeting three or four times a year),³² intellectual networks supported by letters and the exchange of manuscripts³³ – the concept helps theorise situational differences in reproducing cultural religious representations as well as in evoking less widely shared knowledge and practices.

Ancient ethnographic evidence and provisions and exceptions made by public norms (laws) could form important evidence as can archaeological remains that attest to micro-topographically different practices without corresponding attestations of variances in explicit norms. As a consequence, ‘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 might include the notions of sacred and profane, pure and impure, public and private, but also gendered conceptions of deities. Institutionalizations such as professionalised priesthoods and the reformulation of religion as knowledge that is kept and elaborated by such professionals would constitute further features of crucial importance for sketching a history of such institutions as well as what has been conceptualised as many

³⁰ Christopher John Smith, *The Roman Clan. The gens from Ancient Ideology to Modern Anthropology*, The W.B. Stanford memorial lectures (Cambridge, 2006).

³¹ Jörg Rüpke, ‘Apokalyptische Salzberge: Zum sozialen Ort und zur literarischen Strategie des “Hirten des Hermas”’, *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 1 (1999), 148-60.

³² Wendy Cotter, ‘The Collegia and Roman Law: State restrictions on voluntary associations, 64 BCE-200 CE’, in John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (eds), *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (London, 1996), 74-89; Jean-Marc Flambard, ‘Collegia Compitalicia: phénomène associatif, cadres territoriaux et cadres civiques dans le monde romain à l’époque républicaine’, *Ktema* 6 (1981), 143-66; John S. Kloppenborg, ‘Collegia and thiasoi: Issues in function, taxonomy and membership’, in *id.* and S.G. Wilson (eds), *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (1996), 16-30; Jörg Rüpke, ‘Collegia sacerdotum – religiöse Vereine in der Oberschicht’, in Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser and Alfred Schäfer (eds), *Religiöse Vereine in der römischen Antike: Untersuchungen zu Organisation, Ritual und Raumordnung* (Tübingen, 2002), 41-67; Andreas Bendlin, ‘“Eine Zusammenkunft um der religio willen ist erlaubt ...”? Zu den politischen und rechtlichen Konstruktionen von (religiöser) Vergemeinschaftung in der römischen Kaiserzeit’, in Hans Georg Kippenberg and Gunnar Folke Schuppert (eds), *Die verrechtlichte Religion: Der Öffentlichkeitsstatus von Religionsgemeinschaften* (Tübingen, 2005), 65-107; Andreas Bendlin, ‘Associations, Funerals, Sociality, and Roman Law: The collegium of Diana and Antinous in Lanuvium (CIL 14.2112) Reconsidered’, in Markus Öhler (ed.), *Aposteldekret und antikes Verineswesen: Gemeinschaft und ihre Ordnung* (Tübingen, 2011), 207-96.

³³ Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford, 2000); Sigrid Mratschek, ‘Zirkulierende Bibliotheken: Medien der Wissensvermittlung und christliche Netzwerke bei Paulinus von Nola’, in Janine Desmulliez (ed.), *L’étude des correspondances dans le monde romain de l’Antiquité classique*, Collection UL3. Travaux et recherche (Lille, 2010), 325-50; Markus Vinzent, ‘Give and Take amongst Second Century Authors: The Ascension of Isaiah, the Epistle of the Apostles and Marcion of Sinope’, *Studia Patristica* 50 (2011), 105-29; Kendra Eshleman, *The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians*, Greek culture in the Roman world (Cambridge, 2012).

different polis religions. This is religion in the making, always pretending to be religion as made forever. We should not underrate the importance of religious entrepreneurs and their ability to make historians, to make us look at things through their eyes.

3 Changes in the Imperial period: A model

If religion in the making, if lived religion is a process, it is a historical process. I now have to address real change instead of methodological imaginations. Without any doubt the imperial period, the first to fifth centuries – following the conventions of Ancient Historians I would speak of Late Antiquity only from the end of the third century onwards – witnessed major changes in and regarding religion, detectable in the amount of legislation on religion, the presence of religion in courts, and the knowledge about individual religious preferences available in the sources and important for their careers. Religion became more important in lives.³⁴ That must have changed the shape of lived religion. The big question is: What did actually change? What is the process, what are the processes behind the visible symptoms?

I am not yet ready to supply an answer – and an individual will hardly be able to do so on her or his own –, but pulling together research of the last decade in many fields within the framework of Lived Ancient Religion can at least develop a model to describe and further research into religious change of the period.³⁵

I have to start by acknowledging that hardly anything visible in our period was absolutely new. Social constellations, ritual forms, figures of thought – that all can be detected already in the Hellenistic period. And yet, its intensification, the diffusion, the combination, and finally the processes of institutionalization and fixation were more than a change in quantity. Religious change was an incremental process.

From the point of view of lived religion, already pre-imperial Mediterranean religion was characterized by first of all a widespread personal, instrumental religion, dealing with situations of individual uncertainty and risk, be it in sowing

³⁴ Jörg Rüpke, *From Jupiter to Christ: On the History of Religion in the Roman Imperial Period*, trans. David M. B. Richardson (Oxford, 2014).

³⁵ I am particularly grateful here to many scholars of the collaborative research programmes of ‘Roman Imperial and Provincial Religion’, ‘Religious Individualization in Historical Perspective’ – both financed by the German Science Foundation, but including many other European and extra-European scholars –, among whom today I like to acknowledge my debt to scholars also working in the field of Patristics like Markus Vinzent, Eric Rebillard, Susanna Elm, Blossom Stefaniw, Jan Bremmer, Tessa Rajak or Johan Leemans. It is my pleasure that out of such collaborations the launch of a new journal dedicated to ‘Religion in the Roman Empire’ and the lived religion approach has been generated, in order to bring together the research of different disciplines.

or travelling, in childbirth and illnesses, in crises and (particularly in Greece) in lawsuits.³⁶ These situations are dealt with by introducing ‘gods’ or rather (and that is, what made religious communication risky even in antiquity)³⁷ specific gods as supposed agents in prayers, vows, curses, or in material form as amulets. It is within the always precarious horizon of plausibility thus established that religion was also used to communicate about and to shape power, within elites as well as between ruling groups and their subjects. The resulting religious practices were important and created and permanently re-created their own sets of religious symbols. It was a very explicit form of religion, but only one sector. The paradox of the resulting situations were especially visible at Rome, where an extensive use of religion in the legitimation of political and military procedures was combined with a clear acknowledgment of the priority of individual religious experiences.³⁸

We can map change against this background. Religion became more important in many areas of life. It became more complex, in terms of elaborate religious practices and infrastructure, as the formation of religious networks and groups, by the integration of ethnographic systematization and philosophical reflection. Among the collective identities of the inhabitants of the Empire, religion became more important, that is, many persons regarded themselves more frequently as members of a religious group. Please, note the methodological *caveat*. This does neither imply the social existence of that group nor any consequences of such a feeling of belonging in actual behaviour. There is an economic aspect to the development, too. Religious agents and specialists, whether they supply horoscopes, serve particular deities or run monasteries – were ever more successful to win resources to enlarge their business. Welfare, care of the poor is among this spectre. Institutions grew and copied each other.³⁹

As a consequence, ‘religion’, so far our modern concept, which is grouping together distinct practices and objects in order to create something comparable to modern ‘religion’ in the field of the past – as a consequence ‘religion’ coalesced

³⁶ Richard Gordon, ‘[Rev.] Martin, Dale B.: *Inventing Superstition ... 2004*’, *Gnomon* 78 (2006), 521-26; Richard Gordon, “‘Will my Child Have a Big Nose?’: Uncertainty, authority and narrative in katarthic astrology”, in Veit Rosenberger (ed.), *Divination in the Ancient World: Religious Options and the Individual*, Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 46 (Stuttgart, 2013), 93-137; Fritz Graf, ‘Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual’, in Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York, 1991), 188-213.

³⁷ See in general on the precarious nature of religious agency J. Rüpke, ‘Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflecting on History and Theory of Religion’, *Religion* 45 (2015), 344-66.

³⁸ Jörg Rüpke, *Aberglauben oder Individualität? Religiöse Abweichung im römischen Reich* (Tübingen, 2011).

³⁹ For priesthoods see Jörg Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum. A prosopography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome, 300 BC to AD 499*, trans. David M.B. Richardson (Oxford, 2008).

as a social field of its own, together with specific types of religious power and authority.⁴⁰ Consequences are visible around the Mediterranean. Agents in other social fields, too, were interested to relate themselves to religious power and to accumulate religious resources. From the tetrarchs onwards, religion is a central factor of the legitimization of rulership.⁴¹ In the centuries to come, bishops became patrons of cities, rabbis organised the Aramaic diaspora, and Islamic conquerors combined military expansion and religious message.

Where were the causes? Let me suggest some factors for closer inspection.

The most important factor, I suppose, is the formation of the Empire itself.⁴² An ancient empire was not a very large territorial state, but the systematic cooption of local and regional elites to make them collaborate in the rough coordination of administration, the formation of a common market (notwithstanding local taxes), and the centralisation of disposal of military resources. Winning prestige and access to central resources and values, these elites nevertheless lost in local monopoly of power. Provincial governors and emperors offered courts of appeal, which were present on coins, in statues, on buildings and occasional benefactions. It is the intermediate level, which experienced the most serious change.

How was religion involved? I take religion to be defined by its relating to symbols that are beyond direct individual and social control, but involved with the same instances. Thus, agents employing religion have to react to the more complex layers of social and political identities produced by the empire. These reactions are, however, contingent. I see three possible types. a) Religious practice might be concentrated on the more elementary social formations of families and neighbourhoods. This might have been the case in the early Chinese Empire as Greg Woolf has recently suggested.⁴³ b) Religious agents might

⁴⁰ See Jörg Rüpke, 'Religious Pluralism', in Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies* (Oxford, 2010), 748-66.

⁴¹ Jörg Rüpke, 'Patterns of Religious Changes in the Roman Empire', in Ian Henderson and Gerbern Oegema (eds), *The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity*, Studien zu den Jüdischen Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit 2 (Gütersloh, 2006), 13-33.

⁴² See briefly Clifford Ando, *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 44 (Berkeley, 2008); *id.*, 'Subjects, Gods, and Empire, or Monarchism as a Theological Problem', in Jörg Rüpke (ed.), *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2013), 85-111; *id.*, 'Cities, Gods, Empire', in Ted Kaizer *et al.* (eds), *Cities and Gods: Religious Space in Transition*, Babesch Supplement 22 (Leuven, 2013), 51-7; Greg Woolf, 'Found in Translation: The Religion of the Roman Diaspora', in Olivier Hekster, Sebastian Schmidt-Hofner and Christian Witschel (eds), *Ritual Dynamics and Religious Change in the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Eighth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Heidelberg, July 5-7, 2007)*, Impact of Empire 9 (Leiden, 2009), 239-52; Greg Woolf, *Rome: An Empire's Story* (Oxford, 2012); J. Rüpke, *From Jupiter to Christ* (2014), 1-21.

⁴³ In a paper given at Oxford in March 2013. See Hubert Seiwert, 'Orthodoxie, Orthopraxis und Zivilreligion im vornezeitlichen China', in Holger Preißler and Hubert Seiwert (eds), *Gnosisforschung und Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Kurt Rudolph zu 65. Geburtstag* (Marburg,

also concentrate on the imperial level and strive for monopoly and the quality of 'imperial religion'.⁴⁴ The early Islamic and the Byzantine Empire might fall into this category.⁴⁵ c) Thirdly, religious practices could be concentrated on the intermediary level and build up their own structures and networks. This seems to have been the dominant model of the Roman Empire. Despite all not only Christian rhetoric of an own *ethnic* identity,⁴⁶ the political dominance of the Empire is hardly openly challenged. Institutional religious competition with imperial politics was suppressed in the case of Bar Kochba or geographically marginalized in the case of monasticism or – on a larger territorial scale – of Jewish or Zoroastrian states.

Why religion? In the Roman tradition, religion had been one of the central contents of public and monumentalized public communication, important in demonstrating social status as in the legitimation of political power. It has also been an important medium of individualization, offering experiences and schemata for self-reflection as well as media for individual expression of such experiences. The exoticism of a deity from Egypt like Isis, the thorough guidance offered in the therapeutic cult of Asclepius, the detached grandeur of traditional cults, the emotional intensification of daily cult as witnessed (or imagined) by Seneca on the Capitoline hill, Stoic self-introspection in the face of a nameless divine, the extraordinary power of named deities evoked in curses in the face of social injustice and discrimination or, finally, pilgrimages to places and gods

1994), 529-41; Michael Loewe, *Divination, mythology and monarchy in Han China*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 48 (Cambridge, 1994); Tu Wei-Ming, 'The Structure and Function of the Confucian Intellectual in Ancient China', in S.N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany, 1986), 360-73; Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, *China: Vielvölkerreich und Einheitsstaat* (München, 1997); Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard Shek (eds), *Heterodoxy in late imperial China* (Honolulu, 2004).

⁴⁴ See Jörg Rüpke, 'Roman Religion and the Religion of Empire: Some Reflections on Method', in John A. North and Simon R.F. Price (eds), *The Religious History of the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Oxford, 2011), 9-36 for the concept.

⁴⁵ See Garth Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton, NJ, 2013); *id.*, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1993); Walter Pohl, *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: the West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100* (Farnham, 2012); Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire. Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408-450)*, Sather classical lectures 64 (Berkeley, Calif., 2006).

⁴⁶ Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford, 2004); Elizabeth Depalma Digeser, 'Christian or Hellene?: The Great Persecution and the Problem of Identity', in Robert M. Frakes and *ead.* (eds), *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Toronto, 2006), 36-57; Jeremy M. Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia, 2008); Judith Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era*, Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies (London, 2009); Pantelis M. Nigdelis, 'Voluntary Associations in Roman Thessalonike: In Search of Identity and Support in a Cosmopolitan Society', in Laura Salah Nasrallah, Charalampos N. Bakirtzis and Steven J. Friesen (eds), *From Roman to Early Christian Thessalonike: Studies in Religion and Archaeology* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), 1-47; E. Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity* (2012).

praised by others – all these situational opportunities could also be used as structural alternatives. It is here, in the permanent redefinition of one's body and of its ever more precarious place in the social and topographical network that I see the place of asceticism.⁴⁷

But how could certain bundles of religious practices for some people become structural rather than merely situational alternatives to the delegitimized or at least now questionable local power relationships? For the Greco-Roman world, the specific form of an urban public that aimed at communication, but did no longer exclusively rely on face-to-face communication, was crucial. It resulted in an epigraphic culture, known as epigraphic habit, with production of inscriptions rising enormously up to the Severan Age.⁴⁸ Ascribed rather than actually lived 'relational'⁴⁹ collectivities and networks and correspondingly literary texts must have been judged important. This must have been genetically a specifically urban phenomenon, but was not restricted to urban spaces.

People became more mobile. Immigrants produced religious pluralism, more and more felt by all. Long-distance transport of religion, however, demanded recognisability of signs used and experienced earlier. Iconographic schemes, pattern books, and circulating texts produced such recognisability in piecemeal fashion and fragmentary mode, thus only occasionally achieving images of unity and standardization, which are too easily pre-supposed by employing the term 'cults' and its association of ready-made units of religious practices and beliefs, just short of fixed and exclusive membership.⁵⁰ In the lived religion perspective, religious practices and even beliefs remain primarily local, even if they claim – and have to claim within an Empire – to refer to something trans-local, to something uniform, to foreign centres.⁵¹ Thus, 'Rome', 'Athens', and 'Jerusalem' became even more important as imaginary rather than real places.

⁴⁷ See Susanna Elm, *Virgin of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1994); Richard Damian Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 2009); Dale B. Martin and Patricia Cox Miller (eds), *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography* (Durham, 2005).

⁴⁸ Ramsay Macmullen, 'The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire', *AJPh* 103 (1982), 233-46.

⁴⁹ See Carsten Hermann-Pillath, 'Social Capital, Chinese Style: Individualism, Relational Collectivism and the Cultural Embeddedness of the Institutions-Performance-Link', *China Economic Journal* 2 (2009), 325-50.

⁵⁰ See Daniel Boyarin, 'The Christian Invention of Judaism: The Theodosian Empire and the Rabbinic Refusal of Religion', *Representations* 85 (2004), 21-57, also in Hent De Vries (ed.), *Religion: Beyond a concept* (New York, NY, 2008), 150-77; *id.*, *Border lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Divinations (Philadelphia, Pa., 2004); Markus Vinzent, *Marcion and the Dating of the Synoptic Gospels*, *Studia Patristica Suppl.* 2 (Leuven, 2014).

⁵¹ See the observations of Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, 'Landscape, transformation, and divine epiphany', in Simon Swain, Stephen Harrison and Jaś Elsner (eds), *Severan Culture* (Cambridge, 2007), 250-89; Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and the Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion. Greek Culture in the Roman World* (Cambridge and New York, 2011); and also Edmund V. Thomas, 'The Severan Period', in Roger B. Ulrich and Caroline

Let me try to summarize this first attempt at identifying important factors in the processes of religious change during the Imperial period seen as religion in the making. Within the new multi-layered structure of political identities, religion became an important instrument in the formation of collective identities and of networks on a local level. The more religious signs and practices were able to offer a comprehensive access to the world, provided by local political institutions and identities before, the more successful they were in the short run. The more they were able to integrate reflectivity and formation of groups, the longer they survived. Competition between such movements rendered the competitors more similar. This was not so much a conscious strategy, but a result of individual appropriation and the permanent recreation and reshaping of practices, objects, and beliefs. Mysteries of the emperor, theological oracles, one's own architecture, imagined or real centres as referred to before, were part of a shared and ever newly recombined array of religious practices and beliefs, regardless whether this happened at Rome, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Doliche, Abonuteichos or Claros. These instances of lived religion were characterized in many of their varieties by common meals, games, elaborated narratives and fitting amulets, tombs of heroes and martyrs including dedications and sacralised souvenirs. Many religious specialists and entrepreneurs enjoyed this and lived on it and tried to carve out their niches by distinctions. Naturally, there were also losers. The old elites who had bound political power to the demonstration of agrarian wealth in public sacrifices⁵² lost the attractiveness of such rituals of the local political unit. Not everything is simply bolstering the image sketched so far. There is contradicting evidence regarding the loss or stress of religion in the same people's villas.⁵³ On the whole, however, we see the merging, the concretizing of different fields. The mere ritual specialist had to justify her or his activities to the philosopher of religion. Without an elaborate interpretation the sequence of ritual gestures appeared to be empty in the eyes of some contemporaries. Convictions had to be supported by deeds. Philosophy could serve as a model for the latter, as it had been a way of life rather than a system of thought long before. Here, outright 'conversion' was possible.⁵⁴

K. Quenemoen (eds), *A Companion to Roman Architecture*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Chichester, West Sussex, 2014), 82-105; Clare Rowan, *Under Divine Auspices: Divine Ideology and the Visualisation of Imperial Power in the Severan Period* (Cambridge, 2012).

⁵² Daniel C. Ullucci, *The Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice* (Oxford, 2012).

⁵³ Kimberley Bowes, 'Personal devotions and private chapels', in Virginia Burrus (ed.), *Late Ancient Christianity. A People's History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, 2005), 188-210; Kimberly Diane Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008); for Roman Karanis see Lara Weiss, *Religious Practice at Deir el-Medina*, Egyptologische Uitgaven 29 (Leuven, 2015).

⁵⁴ Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Konversion zur Philosophie in der Spätantike. Kaiser Julian und Synesios von Kyrene*, Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 23 (Stuttgart, 2008).

4 Historical developments

The reductionist model sketched so far will hardly satisfy. It hardly fits the claim of a lived ancient religion approach to allow for diversity and contingency. Given the vastness of the task, I must, however, stick to a kaleidoscopic presentation of historical hypotheses rather than detailed arguments, partly relying on research done, partly advancing hypotheses to be tested in further research.

1) If my general model has explanatory power, it might explain the success of some religious signs (*vulgo* gods) stemming from the former Hellenistic empires like Jahwe, Isis, and some Syriac deities. Rather than offering particularly attractive beliefs – it has to be pointed out that for example resurrection of the dead seemed ridiculous for many – or institutional properties – community was offered in many other contexts, too – these traditions would have had a lead in imperial experience and development, that is, ‘religionification’, of several centuries, depending on their Babylonian, Iranian or Seleucid pre-history.

2) Greek philosophy had developed in self-differentiation from myth and popular belief about gods and the world. At the same time, its practitioners remained in relationship to this type of thinking and talking, either in the attempt at criticism and competitive explanation or in the attempt to give meaning to widespread religious practices. Plato, Stoicism, Middle and Neo-Platonism offered schemes to philosophically justify belief in and practices towards gods. Cicero and Seneca, Philo and Justin, Origen, Jamblichus and Julian appropriated this terminology. Minucius Felix claimed the Christians to be the better philosophers in his early third century apology. All this helped to merge reflection and practice, that is, theology and ritual performances in the nascent religious groups. Mythical narrative was not driven out by that and was soon enlarged by a wealth of biblical, Christ- and martyrs-centred narrations. Practical coherence, meaning in situations (and locations like in catacombs) carried the day. Hence:

3) Religious agents, less and less confined to families, political space and public sanctuary, appropriated textual strategies. They wrote interpretations of rituals, copied ancient texts, commented upon them, re-narrated them and invented new versions and genres. The multi-lingual Roman Empire embraced like the Hellenistic ones a culture of translations, attractive Greek texts are quickly rendered into Latin, into Aramaic and Arabic; ecclesiastical Syriac, Coptic and Slavonic will be invented at the margins of this culture. It cannot be denied, however, that this situation opened a counter strategy of self-isolation via a ‘sacred language’, followed by the Rabbis in their bizarre minority situation (not made explicit in the texts) as well as by the redactors of the Qurān. Individual initiative easily transcended or established ‘ethnic’ barriers.

4) Nevertheless, from the late first to the early third century, the whole space owns an intellectual centre, the mega-city of Rome. Every school, every network wishes to be present here, to take part in the unbelievably (or rather: typically urban) quick diffusion of ideas beyond cultural boundaries, known from Alexandria in

the third century BC and in the third and fourth centuries AD. Some, perhaps many texts that were later taken up in the canon of the 'New Testament' were produced here, gospels, acts, letters, tracts like the one 'To the Hebrews'. One might meet Greek priests like Plutarch and Appian, philosophers like Epictetus, Cornutus and Marcus Aurelius, founders of communities like Marcion, Justin and Valentinus, priests of Isis from Alexandria and learned men from Palestine like Matthatias. Lobbyists of Jews and Syrian Baal were present, the emperor poured in money and tried to gain profile by discriminating support of specific cults. Urban, if not metropolitan religion was a spatial, not a confessional phenomenon.

5) The dissolution of confinements for religion – a concept also inspired by Jonathan Zittel Smith's idea of a change from locally bound and rule-legitimizing 'locative religion' to individual and rule-critical 'utopian religion' – could also be a result of force. The brutal oppression of religiously inspired rebellions in former Hellenistic Empires, be it Egypt, Judea or Palmyra, but perhaps also applying to Baal's Emesa and Mithras' Doliche, forced the respective locative cults into religionification and universalization. As shown by Aurelian's policy, it was only Elagabal, who failed at Rome, not the other agents of a Sun-god. Similarly, Constantine's elevation of his network of episcopal friends into counsellors for far distant problems pushed institutionalization of Churches far beyond any internal drive and necessity. In the long run, such religions (and here I think it is legitimate to use the plural of religion) went easily back into a locative mood, even if on the scale of an Empire. Due to their strategic nature, religious boundaries were as easily dissolved as erected.

6) The self-organisation of Christian churches by means of legislation and ecclesiastical law (usually negatively formulated: *anathema sit*) demonstrated how much institutionalization had to be mapped on political models and was above all boundary work. Taking up the forms offered by empire, this process demonstrated the advanced stage of a paradoxical process characteristic for lived religion in late antiquity. The support lent to processes of individualization by the formation of groups and institutionalization offered a social and intellectual environment to what otherwise might be seen as mere individual religious deviance. However, in a logically second step, these groups, eager to gain profile and differentiate themselves from others, did not only apologetically defend themselves against others or polemically attack the other, but also tried to enforce standards, ethics, way of living among its members and to expulse internally deviant ones.

7) If local ritual practices tended to be polytheistic, rational philosophical discourse of a Greek type tended to be monotheistic. This was not a pagan monotheism of a semi-Christian Late Antiquity,⁵⁵ but genetic material of Greek

⁵⁵ Aweew Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (eds), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1999); T.D. Barnes, 'Monotheists all?', *Phoenix* 55 (2001), 142-62; Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen (eds), *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2010).

philosophy. Nevertheless, the dominant religion of the fifth century is not a monotheistic, but a trinitarian one, that includes two closely related, but clearly differentiated divine figures, 'God' and 'Jesus Christ'. The price to be paid was high. Monophysites, who did not join in a differentiation of mankind and deity within Christ, and this is to say a large and under-researched, and today one has to say: dying, Christian tradition became as marginalized as the Jews – and both later offered the theological blueprints for the radically monotheistic Islam. The gain was as high: Dyophysitism offered a theology, which could allow for the divinization of Christ as for the consecration of the Roman emperors. The latter remained a pervasive element of any religious experience in the empire.

5 Conclusion

Lived ancient religion invites to start from individual practices and appropriations and to do away with the essentializing presuppositions of the concepts of polis religion, cults, and religions in a plural. Even the concept of 'pluralism', helpful as it is for the description of religious transformations, has to be seen in a relational perspective, not losing sight of the individual agents of change instead of reifying 'religions'. But the approach does not stop here. It invites to reconsider processes of formations far beyond individual actors and to analyse the rise of ancient lived religions as religion in the making. The one pole is as fascinating as the other.