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Jörg Rüpke

Reflecting on Dealing with Religious Change

The review panel on *Pantheon* is a unique opportunity to reflect on the choices, the alternatives and the shortcomings (as well as hoped-for strengths) of a book just written and still on my mind due to the work in copy-editing or checking translations.[1] I am grateful for the critical observation as well as appreciation by the four reviewers, Corinne Bonnet, Jan Bremmer, Judith Lieu and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi. There are many important suggestions and remarks that I cannot reply to in detail. I will, rather, try to take up those strands that are of general interest for dealing with history of religion and have been crucial for my own reflection. The selection of strands is, of course, shaped by the text under discussion. *Pantheon* is by no means a conclusion to my own thinking about antiquity and religion. Its very form, narrative, made so many decisions about inclusion and exclusion of topics, about stress and neglect of connections and correlations, necessary that this paper is as much an attempt to present just a few threads of developments as it is an invitation for myself (as, I hope, for others) to follow up on the problems and blanks left by the book. And yet it certainly is a sort of stocktaking, personal and situational, and I shall also refer briefly to the steps preceding or accompanying the writing of *Pantheon*. I will start by discussing the fundamental question of why it is possible and important to speak about religious change, why religions have a history (1). The fundamental methodological concern of *Pantheon* is raised in the subsequent section, arguing about a conceptualisation of religion that focuses on religious agency. This allows us to speak about religious change and invites us to present that discussion in the form of a narrative (2). The decisions entailed by the option for a historical narrative are discussed in the following section (3),

1 *Pantheon: Geschichte der antiken Religionen*, Historische Bibliothek der Gerda-Henkel-Stiftung, München: Beck, 2016. 558 pp.; Engl. *Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion*, trsl. by David M. B. Richardson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018; Ital. *Pantheon*. Biblioteca Einaudi. Torino: Einaudi, 2018, trsl. by Roberto Alciati and Maria dell'Isola. Many thanks go to Katharina Waldner, whose critical questions and suggestions helped to improve my arguments, and, of course, to the four reviewers as well as the editorial board for their agreement to the publication of the review panel.

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that is the object of that narrative, the locus of change, and its driving forces. Here the question of historical agents and the relationship of 'lived religion' to 'civic religion' takes centre stage. Finally, I discuss why 'belief' does not figure in *Pantheon* (4) and why it focuses exclusively on 'knowledge' instead. A brief paragraph on further perspectives (5) tries to give substance to the book's promise for opening up further discussion.

1 History of ancient Mediterranean religion

It still seems not to be self-evident that ancient religions *had* a history. In many instances they were and are still treated as basically timeless cultural facts. In the nineteenth century they were seen as part and parcel of peoples, of ethnicities with a specific language and character. A religion was subject to external influences, and possibly weakening and dissolution, but was basically an enduring characteristic of the people who 'had' this religion. Within this framework it was already a decisive advance to move away from the generic 'ancient' religion to units of description deriving from smaller linguistic groups, resulting in those 'Greek', 'Roman' or 'Etruscan' religions (and less prominently, e. g., Umbrians) that still dominate our accounts. Only occasionally do analyses further differentiate regions (Sabine territories, North Ionians, Palestine, Decapolis) or even cities and their territories (Athens, Sparta, Alexandria, Pompeii). In this imagined world of ethnic religions, change is bound up with military fate – expansion, recess, domination, submission, and imperial success at the extreme – and cultural autonomy. The one's superiority is the other's decline.

To remove later accretions and distortions, historical research was necessary and here historicism offered all of its tools of 'source criticism'. The aim, however, was to go back to the 'original' religion, untouched by later developments and continuing to express a people's proper character. Following ancient observations, Hellenic culture was seen as invading nearly all the other cultures it touched upon. For Rome, Roman religion before Hellenisation (and later 'oriental' and 'Christian' influences) thus offered itself as the aim of historical research.[2]

However, a historicist interest in details was not without alternatives.[3] Evolutionary perspectives on religion took their departure from Giambattista Vico and flourished by the end of the nineteenth century. Magic, reli-

2 Cf. the rise of Judaism as a historical category, Wyrwa 2003.
3 Kippenberg 1994.

gion and reason or animism, polytheism and monotheism hardly offered fine-grained historical sequences but they did allow the search for large-scale developments and 'survivals'. With regard to religion, the evident existence and self-understanding of universalising bodies of beliefs led to the notion of 'world religions' that were inherently superior to 'ethnic religions', pushing the latter back into the strongholds of traditionalism and the backyards of geographical isolation. Here, another type of competition would account for religious change.

How, then, is one to write a history of ancient religion? National and confessional definitions of the objects went together with the establishment of disciplines and the pragmatic shaping of fields of research, covered rather than challenged by the continuous use of the collectives 'Classics' or 'Classical Philology', 'Classical Archaeology' and 'Ancient History', conceptions supported by the high esteem for, and the role given to the study and quotation of, 'the ancients'. For Rome, Georg Wissowa's *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (first ed. 1902, second ed. 1912) was above all a systematic account. This account was modelled on Varro's *Antiquitates rerum divinarum,*[4] without noting the historical overview of changes in Roman religious practices and Roman gods given in Varro's first book.[5] Instead, Wissowa's account was informed by his own historical interpretation of the Roman calendar.[6] Identifying a list of 'Numan festivals' seemed to offer the possibility of reconstructing an early historical stage that allowed Wissowa to differentiate what was truly Roman from other influences. Despite the fact that the treatment of individual 'gods' was the backbone of the manual (91–317 in the first edition), the author time and again focuses on rituals and places of cult rather than theologies. The massive third part on ritual (318–490) and its reconstruction of Roman 'Sacralrecht' (a term first used by Mommsen's pupil Pernice)[7] underlined this double turn against a protestant, or more precisely Schleiermacherian concept of 'belief' as fundamental for religion[8] and against evolutionary thinking. Roman religion had to be treated as a religion *sui generis*, to be described in terms of its own self-description,[9] what Roman authors described as the *religio* (and not, for instance, *superstitio*) of Roman citizens,[10] that is Rome's 'civic religion'. As the development of the latter

4 Rüpke 2003.
5 See Rüpke 2014b.
6 Wissowa 1902, 2 – see the criticism in Rüpke 2011, 21–22.
7 Pernice 1885.
8 See Scheid 1987.
9 Fully restated by Scheid 2016, 48.
10 Thus Scheid 2001, 174.

concept at the end of the twentieth century demonstrated, this approach demands detailed historical contextualisation and does not exclude historicisation. And yet, as it is normally just a reflection of political change, it is not particularly interesting to map 'civic religion' in its own right.

Precisely by accepting the background of evolutionary thinking on religion, Kurt Latte began his conceptualisation of *Römische Religionsgeschichte* with his contribution to Alfred Bertholet's 'Religionsgeschichtliches Leseheft' in the late 1920s, contemporary with the work of, for example, Cyril Bailey. In the final version, the Dutch evolutionist Hendrik Wagenvoort is praised.[11] Latte's own model builds on the 'religion of the farmer' taken up by the 'religion of the community' but, by and large, his table of contents for more than 350 pages corresponds to that for Wissowa's first 90 pages: Italian and Greek influences, then Roman systematisation and Hellenistic transformation, and finally monarchy and new cults are the steps and ingredients. Evolutionary thinking was not only applied to Rome. Martin Per Nilsson's two massive volumes of *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, written in the 1930s and the early 1940s, spend around 150 introductory pages on comparative mythology and ethnological approaches, while another 200 pages, not much less than the space devoted to the gods, are given to the 'fundamentals of Greek religion', concepts like 'power', 'the sacred', sorcery and animism, gifts and masks.[12] Employing comparisons frequently leads historians to evolutionistic reconstruction of survivals, in a clear contrast to what Wissowa did for Roman religious practices. Historical change is traced on this basis through the epochs, from the Minoan period, through Hellenism with its 'religion serving the kings' and 'personal religion and religious worldview', to the Roman period with its foci on 'belief' and 'syncretism'. Amounting to nearly 400 pages, this is perhaps still the most detailed account of the history of the imperial period. Reconstructing many, also conflicting, lines of development, Nilsson's account ends by identifying a process of intellectualisation and rationalisation that went beyond what could be integrated into the people's religious practices and beliefs and a parallel process of Christianisation, the intrusion of which into the individual sphere was mitigated only by the tenacity and traditionalism of the rural population.

Just a few years later, Jean Bayet wrote a 'histoire politique et psychologique de la religion romaine'.[13] Here the search for a particular Roman character is continued. This character is identified in a peculiar mix of conservatism, de-mythologisation, pragmatism and a focus on politics, and, finally,

11 Bailey 1932; see Latte 1960, 13 on Wagenvoort 1947.
12 Nilsson 1988a, Nilsson 1988b.
13 Bayet 1957.

ritualism.[14] Factors influencing historical change are inter-cultural contact (not least based on Roman expansion), political crises, and the changes in mentality stimulated by such crises. In both the republican and the imperial periods, change came in the form of emotional reactions against ritualism, irrationalism against rationality, and individualisation against the political use of religion. This reflection on factors influencing major changes clearly differs from the way in which historical change is narrated in the histories by Wissowa and Latte. There, the subjects of a basically linear development are quasi-natural processes of change, either *inseparably* connected with political developments, such as expansion, or seen as inherent developments, such as the decomposition of an initial unified idea or permeation. This is not bad history but a narrative decision. Wissowa does not shrink from adding unrelated further observations, for instance on the growing degree of involvement of people in public ritual (thus obscuring the dividing line between public and private) or on the incremental character of Hellenisation. As for the latter, new Greek gods were prepared for by a textual phenomenon, namely a growing number of literary metaphors.[15]

After the publication of Bayet's work, a new attempt at a full-scale history was not attempted until the arrival of the first volume of *Religions of Rome,* by Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price.[16] Meanwhile, the historiography of Greek religion had not only taken a sharper look at regional differences[17] but had also theoretically elaborated the concept of 'polis religion', not least in taking up functionalist theories on religion.[18] This notion was built on the observations that what we see as characteristic of Greek religion – Homeric gods, stylobate temples, and many rituals and festivals – co-originated with the classical *polis* and has a clear function in the city-and-country-unit thus called. It was François de Polignac who, on the basis of archaeological material, pointed to the geographical dimension of the role of religion in Greek urbanisation.[19] Monographs on, for instance, *Athenian Religion* were a consequence.[20] Accordingly, it was not 'Roman religion' but 'Religions of Rome' that was selected as a title by the team of authors, reflect-

14 Bayet 1957, 42–61, drawing on evolutionary as well as comparatist theories but reluctant towards Dumézil's supposedly Indo-European schemata, fully elaborated in 1966: Dumézil 1970.
15 Wissowa 1912, 58–59 and 65.
16 Beard, North and Price 1998.
17 E. g., Graf 1985.
18 Sourvinou-Inwood 1990. On the early development of functionalist perspectives, see Krech 2000.
19 de Polignac 1984.
20 Parker 1996.

ing both a sensibility to the spatial conditions of religious change as well as an eye for what rested outside of public control and financing – even if the term 'Roman religion' is used time and again throughout the book and prominently in many headlines. And, indeed, it becomes necessary once the analysis moves beyond the limits of the city and into the empire to talk about what is being taken along, diffused and taken over in distant places.

Against the notion of religious conservatism, the book explores religious change, examining the question of how rituals and institutions developed under the impact of political and cultural forces while also identifying change in new interpretations of seemingly stable practices.[21] After a detailed inquiry into religious changes in the context of late republican political and social developments and into those religious phenomena judged deviant by the political elite, the book maps above all the (selective) diffusion of religion into the empire and the use of religion by the empire. The impact of the empire is also seen in the contrasting trend of the continuous enlarging of the range of 'elective cults' available at Rome. A chapter on Christian emperors and the dramatic change of political, legal, and social conditions involved in the transition to Christianity concludes the volume. And yet, ritual practices that are rooted in Wissowa's Numan period (if not earlier), were continued by people probably classifying themselves on occasion as 'Christians'.[22] There is a substance of 'Romanness' and change is, thus, rather situational. Being very conscious of the problematic character of the sources, the narration frequently employs the passive voice, agents and their motives are only very occasionally discussed.[23]

In my short introduction to the *Religion of the Romans* I have already criticised the reduction of the historical narrative of the ancient history of religion to a history of Orientalisation, Hellenisation and Christianisation.[24] I have invoked instead various alternative models, preferring a model based on local religion and a changing local (or trans-local) elite's use of religion,[25] that is, basically one based within a functional framework of a competitive elite. This use of religion was, however, not simply a given. 'Politicisation', the appropriation of religious practices for gaining in power, was thus a process that characterised the middle and late republic and massively changed with the establishment of monarchical rule. 'Urbanisation' and cultural contacts in a vastly enlarged political space were other processes identified in

21 Beard, North and Price 1998, xi.
22 Beard, North and Price 1998, 387–388.
23 E. g., Beard, North and Price 1998, 95 on the senate's dealing with the Bacchanalia.
24 Rüpke 2001/Rüpke 2007c, 236–238.
25 Rüpke 2007c, 254–257.

my introduction but were simply added to a presentation of models that did not take the form of a narrative like that offered in *Pantheon*.

A short time later, the chapters on different epochs in the *Companion to Roman Religion* made me aware of the scale on which change had taken place.[26] At a closer look, even the implicit and explicit rules governing, or created in, Roman ritual were in historical flux. The literary and legal sources that form the core of our 'evidence' were the contingent results of social and cultural change, as I tried to show in a subsequent monograph.[27] As Beard, North and Price had rightly stressed, a history of Roman religion could only be written in the context of the empire dominated by Rome, as the history of local religion was inextricably entangled with the history of Mediterranean religion.[28] But how to come to grips with all these changes? The basic problem is that ancient narratives hardly existed. Roman historiography offered hundreds of pieces of information about religious events but it did not integrate these into the history of something – 'religion' – that was only developed into a coherent field of practices by the very end of the republic.[29] Does the lack of narratives on the ground necessitate giving up any narration from our modern perspective?[30]

2 Writing about religious change

Before I address the question of narrative, the question of *religious* change needs to be dealt with. Central to the enterprise of writing *Pantheon*, and the most crucial methodological decision I made in the process, was to find a concept of religion that allows the selection and grouping of phenomena in a manner that is both meaningful to the author and his reader and that would correspond to ancient agents and the meanings attributed by them to actions and objects. Why 'religion'? Because it is a term that helps to show certain cultural products and their social contexts in a perspective that is not offered by 'politics or 'economy' or just 'life'. This is not to claim that religion is a cultural (or even natural) universal. Yet it allowed for comparisons between here and there, and then and now, which I would not otherwise have been able to make. There are other terms available, which might be even more

26 de Cazanove 2007; Galinsky 2007; Leppin 2007; Orlin 2007; Salzman 2007; Smith 2007; van Andringa 2007.

27 Rüpke 2012b.

28 Rüpke 2014a.

29 See Rüpke 2012b, 172–204; see also Barton and Boyarin 2016.

30 Cf. Nongbri 2013.

useful, and humanities in European languages need to engage more intensively with concepts from other cultures, not least to better understand developments in cultures that did use the concept of 'religion'. But for the time being, I do not see any comparatively well reflected concept competing with 'religion', that is, a concept that might be reshaped in hundreds of different directions to serve its situational purpose.[31] Of course, in employing such a concept we also need to pay very close attention to the concepts held by those whose 'religion' we analyse. Differences between our and their concepts are of great interest and can lead to many new observations.[32]

Mediterranean antiquity itself yields no concept that could serve us as a meaningful guide. The very word *religio* was not elaborated into a coherent concept before the late republic and even then hardly corresponds to any notion in use today.[33] 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 the discovery of a large variety of cultural practices *as* religion. Culturist definitions of religion define the other end of the equation, taking religion as shared meaning, as systems of beliefs, signs, and practices that have been established in certain cultural contexts and provide meaning and orientation in the face of change. On this understanding, religion is a powerful instrument to inform the agents' meaning-making and it corresponds very much to the everyday notion of the traditionalism and the *longue durée* of religion. Change, however, comes either slowly or in a rather abrupt and revolutionarily manner, as can be seen across the (usually implicit) concepts of religion used in our field.

With a view to these problems, right at the beginning of *Pantheon* I proposed a concept of religion that is based on communication with superior agents beyond the living humans otherwise seen as influential, or just relevant, agents in the situation. This approach has a substantialist basis, as it starts from classifications that are historically observable ('gods', 'demons', 'ancestors'), but it is focused onto agents and their acting in social situations, thus avoiding presuppositions of 'religiosity', 'piety', 'belief' or the like. Construing religion through this lens stresses innovation and appropriation, referring shared meanings and institutions to the background of individual action. Of course, it is knowledge about 'gods' or ways to 'honour' ancestors that enables individuals to classify experiences as 'religious'[34] or

31 For antiquity: Bendlin 2001.
32 See again Barton and Boyarin 2016.
33 Rüpke 2010; in contrast Barton and Boyarin 2016.
34 Taves 2010, Taves 2016.

present themselves as 'pious' to an audience.[35] But it is the acts of appropriating and reshaping such knowledge that are foregrounded instead of the corpus of narratives about a certain god or of ritual rules.[36] Of course, such cultural products come into view as religion, but they are not the essence: they are medial forms, systematisations or elaborations that might be part of the repertoire of a period's agents or not – maybe present in material forms that allow for re-appropriation even across the discontinuation of practices. 'Lived ancient religion' was the tool to further develop this, an approach taken over from contemporary Religious Studies,[37] but developed beyond the study of the 'everyday' into a bundle of methods for the study of textual, iconographic or material, even architectural sources,[38] in order to reconstruct religion as 'religion in the making'.

Such explicit theorising comes, however, at a price. If 'gods', 'temple', 'altar', 'piety', 'priest' are not the real stuff but are, rather, historical notions used for or developed together with phenomena within a wider framework, this difference needs to be recalled from time to time. This makes for clumsy terms where speedy narrative might be preferred, but it also allows for differentiation and historicisation where differences have been buried underneath the easy use of contingent ancient terms as the concepts of a metalanguage. Using 'not unquestionably plausible addressees' rather than 'gods' as a broad generic term allows us to better capture the seamless transition from dead humans to divine figures from early Iron Age burial practices, and through ruler cult to late ancient Christological titles as addresses of religious communication – one of the surprising and more consequential observations advanced in *Pantheon*. The late rise of the concept of 'votive' is another example. Such observations are only possible if the difference between our analytic concepts and the ancient phenomena and conceptualisations is made explicit.[39]

3 Narrative

'Religion' is, thus, a conscious choice. So is 'narrative'. There are alternatives. It is the analytical study and presentation of case studies or the systematic elucidation of models or concepts that might seem most fitting to the appli-

35 See Patzelt 2018.
36 See the approaches of Burkert 2011 resp. Scheid 2003.
37 Orsi 1997; McGuire 2008.
38 Raja and Rüpke 2015b, Raja and Rüpke 2015a.
39 Here, I fully follow Barton and Boyarin 2016.

cation of such a new and provocative methodology as 'lived ancient religion' claims to offer. But even if these alternatives might undermine larger narratives and reduce them in their plausibility, they do not replace them.

Possibly for anthropological reasons, or perhaps for cognitive reasons, narratives are powerful and operate as frameworks for many, many details. Neither Livy's bracketing of earlier, untrustworthy narratives of the early history of Rome, nor Niebuhr's bracketing of Livy's narrative,[40] have replaced '753'. The Romulean foundation and Numan systematisation still haunt the narration of early religion in Rome. Centuries of Church history have established the narration of Rome's violent rejection of Christianity and the latter's final victory, encapsulating the victory of universal religions *(Weltreligionen)* over ethnic religions *(Volks-* or *Stammesreligionen).* This view was successfully modified above all by Cumont's intermediary notion of 'oriental religions'.[41] For the republican period, narratives of the decline of the classical Greek polis during the Hellenistic period, and those by late republican authors on moral degeneration and crisis, add details. Evidently, the 'histories' written in antiquity are more powerful than the classification of them as 'sources', which we are critically evaluating, seems to suggest. Such old narratives account for a lot of later narrative frames, some of which extend all the way into the present, in the discipline of History of Religion as much as in general History.[42]

Narrative is a very ancient and very widespread way of producing 'history', of treating past events as a past that is, fundamentally, chronologically ordered. The study of narrative historiography has shown how much fictionalisation is involved in such narratives.[43] It produces 'sense' as we make 'sense' of our own lives and dealings by narrating them to ourselves or others. For History of Religion (and again: the academic discipline of History in general) narrative does not offer any 'higher truth', but it does offer understanding in a competitive mode, claiming a better understanding, making better sense of the data and stories available, and thus questioning those stories and earlier histories – without forgetting that it is itself to be questioned by subsequent narratives.[44] Thus, for me too, narrative was the form of choice in order to not only question existing narratives, but to demonstrate that different, alternative, and hopefully more convincing narratives exist. The goal was not to uncover some hidden 'truth' or inherent 'meaning',

40 Niebuhr and Isler 1846.
41 Bonnet, Rüpke and Scarpi 2006; Cumont and Bonnet 2006; Bonnet and Rüpke 2009.
42 Otto, Rau and Rüpke 2015.
43 Ricoeur 1984–85; White 1987; White and Doran 2010.
44 See Ankersmit 2001, also Ankersmit 2005.

but to bring new perspectives, new data and, above all, new agents into the histories of ancient religion. It was also a challenge for myself to sum up a lot of earlier research and to test the viability of the perspective of religious agency and lived religion.

Narrative offers powerful tools. Where to start and when to end gives meaning to much of what happens between the chosen points. To not start at Rome, to start 'before temples' (a title I toyed with for the first narrative chapter) is an implicit, but no less important, statement about the inadequacy of the concept of 'Roman religion' and the inadequacy of our usual notion about what is characteristic of 'ancient religion'. Ending on the eve of the accession of Julian replaces a teleological narrative with an open story. Thus I did not have to deal with him as a Julian 'Apostata', as in those narratives that tell of an earlier, Constantinian, victory of Christianity and the end of all alternatives on Julian's death. This was, I have to admit, a narrative solution long sought after but found only at a very late stage when the lack of space imposed an earlier end to the narrative than I had originally anticipated.

Narrative used in this way does not imply moving forward in a uni-linear manner. There is space for different voices, for different strands, for dead ends and new beginnings. At the same time, the number of threads that can be handled is limited, the higher the complexity, the smaller the memorability and impact is. This certainly makes for another shortcoming of *Pantheon*. In narrating change, I tried to focus on those developments that I consider the most important for a certain period. At the same time I felt and feel it necessary to follow such processes of transformation for at least substantial stretches of time once they were under way. Elaborate tombs and images (media), fixing and monumentalising places for religious practices, writing religion, medially representing religious action, professionalisation, building religious communities, and drawing boundaries between them were processes that (of course) can be identified earlier and later but nevertheless appear more prominently in certain periods than in others. Even so, I still ended up with overlapping periods and I opted to focus the narrative on the processes rather than fix on a strict chronological sequence. Thus, at times, later stretches of the narrative have an earlier starting point in time than the one reached at the end of the narrative concerning the previous process. Some other topics could not be assigned to a certain period so easily. New religious practices could appear at any time, appropriation of established forms of belief and institutions in religious communication by agents of diverse social locations (the upper echelons and the political elite in particular) and lived religion are perspectives that are important at any period.

Here, focusing on a certain, even if a broader, period makes the sequence awkward. As degree of prominence is also a matter of surviving sources, shifting my focus proved much easier for the earlier periods than for the imperial age. The indication of the overlapping timeline in the chapter headings tries to at least give a degree of transparency to the procedure selected.

4 History

The historical narrative form entails making decisions about the object of that narrative, the locus of change, and its driving forces. I will briefly deal with these three elements.

4.1 Object

This author comes from a tradition shaped by thinking and writing in terms of 'Greek religion' and 'Roman religion', as indicated above – two lines of scholarship that rarely quote each other and, perhaps, rarely read each other either. This approach has not been shaken by reflecting on the connectivity established by the Mediterranean.[45] The reason is not the lack of coherence and specific differences in comparison to adjacent areas.[46] It is, rather, that there are established concepts of closed and coherent cultures built on language and territory, which require internal differentiation rather than more encompassing perspectives. The tenacity of academic disciplines stabilises this segmentation. Even for the period of the *Imperium Romanum*, research projects and networks like 'Roman Provincial and Imperial Religion', 'Impact of Empire' or 'Imperialism and Identities at the Edges of the Roman World' (to name but a few) had to push for wider approaches. The establishment of this very journal, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, is part of an attempt to overcome barriers, which are even higher with regard to religion, given the sensitivity of the subject once it moves into the fields of Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, as this journal does.[47]

The classical solution was to move along with the geographic expansion of the political agent in question. That is, in the case of Rome, to start from the seven hills in the early Iron Age (down to Augustus in many cases) and to end at the *limites* for the fourth century CE (starting with Augustus).[48] For

45 Forcefully revived after Ferdinand Braudel by Horden and Purcell 2000.
46 Woolf 2003; cf. Rüpke 2009.
47 Feldmeier et al. 2015.
48 See the discussion in Rüpke 2007a.

Pantheon, issues of diffusion and theoretical ambition had to be balanced by reader expectations and the competence of the author. The solution was to start from the western and north-eastern Mediterranean and then to slowly narrow the focus onto Italy and central Italy. Thus, a continuous focus on the city of Rome is not reached before the fifth chapter, a period when the prominence of Rome in our sources is due to the mass of contemporary documentation rather than to the prominence of the early city in much later narratives. And this focus is enriched by page-long side-glances at, for instance, Etruscan intellectuals, warfare in the provinces, and the representation of urban rituals in coins circulating afar. After the period of Augustus (classical style, see above), developments within the established cultural space of the Mediterranean are taken into account, without denying a certain priority to Roman examples and with an inquiry into the specific role of the capital within that space. The end of the book reminds all of us of how small the Mediterranean world was from a global perspective.

The negotiating of the ambitions, possibilities, expectations and narrative traditions to be used and questioned is reflected in the titles. With *Pantheon* as a bold and rather full-bodied title in the German, English and Italian versions (on this title, see below), the subtitles fall to either side of the tightrope. 'History of ancient religions' (German) stresses the expansive side of the treatment, 'A new history of Roman religion' (English) points to the questioning of the concept of 'Roman religion' but first of all stresses the geographical centre.

4.2 Locus of change

Pantheon is neither about the individual versus society nor polis-religion versus the individual. Religious agency as developed from the first chapter onwards is not about the whimsical decisions of lonely individual actors. Rather, it is concerned with the insight that traditional action is kept alive by individuals repeating it, that even written instructions are powerless if not enacted by individuals, and that basically every repetition, re-enactment, or even copying, is an act of appropriation that modifies its models. This might be strategic on the highest political level, subversive on the level of every-day action,[49] or just a result of lack of care or the impossibility of precise repetition. Individuals act within often dense structures that do not leave a lot of space for alternatives. Emirbayer, on whom I draw for my concept of agency, has even been criticised for leaving too small a place for the individual in

49 de Certeau 1984.

individual agency.[50] The agents that are featured in the book are agents deeply socialised and raised in societies that do not entertain any ideal of individualism but, rather, value conformity and obligations to families and friends. The individuality that we find occasionally implies moral (or even legal) responsibility.[51] It entertains the wish to serve as an example, just doing the same better than the others.[52] It might also characterise somebody, who is simply left on his own, is at a loss, facing the unknown and unexpected.[53] It is these (in a very basic sense) individual agents who are the foremost factors in shaping changes of mentality, state formation, and the forming of traditions. And it is by bringing their actions into focus that innovation and change can be narrated, by not making processes, rules, traditions, insights or gods the grammatical and logical subject of changes. From such a perspective, religious architecture does not develop, but is commissioned and built by people. Similarly, gods do not migrate but are transported by word of mouth or in the form of statues by human carriers, sometimes of humble background and sometimes even female.

Likewise, it is not the city, the *polis,* that is acting, as the grammar of sentences used in many narratives suggests. Actions are carried out by people, emperors, consuls, senators, majorities, rich aristocrats. These might be grouped together in councils, priestly colleges or voluntary associations. Even the public is not an objective fact but an ideological and legal construct, used by people in specific roles and for specific purposes, in no way enforced like public property today but talked of very much in the same way as we speak of the public interest today.[54] The sociological reality of the 'common weal' includes the dramatic differences in wealth and power between members of the elites and simple people, as much as the former's attempts to create a shared (even if sharply hierarchical) 'political' identity as 'citizens'.[55] Taken as a background of religion in ancient cities, I am glad to register nearly parallel concepts and wording in Robert Parker's account of 'public religion' and my own,[56] which I thought is unnecessary to repeat. The whole

50 Emirbayer and Mische 1998.

51 And even going to court is a family affair in a certain sense, see David 1992, David 2009; Degelmann 2018.

52 David 1998.

53 In general Rüpke 2013b, Rüpke 2013a.

54 See Ando 2006; Ando and Rüpke 2015; also Terrenato 2007; Terrenato and Haggis 2011; Terrenato 2013.

55 See, e. g., Jehne 2006, Jehne 2010, Jehne 2013; Jehne and Lundgreen 2013.

56 Compare Parker 2011, 246–247 with Rüpke 2007c, 12–28.

issue is spelt out at length in a parallel book built on the Townsend lectures I was invited to give at Cornell University in 2013.[57]

4.3 Driving forces

I admit that the combination of the focus on individuals and the use of narrative (which is time and again interrupted by passages reflecting on sources, methods and concepts) seems to present the agents not only as meaning-making agents, but as 'rational choice actors', calculating their every move.[58] This limitation is not mitigated by the occasional use of the adjective 'strategic'. Evidently, a polemic against accounts focusing on the acts of collective agents and abstracts has occasionally led to a perhaps unnecessary emphasis. But rational calculation is only rarely a model I advance. Competition is, instead, one of the driving forces that I positively admit as underlying the description of even the earliest actors. Distinction is another factor. And the wish and imagination of living in health and security, a 'good life' on the level of social bonds, material culture and technology available, is a further driving force, as my starting narrative of Rhea underlines. Religion – or experience deemed religious – is not treated as a widespread driving force. Instead, it is treated as just one bundle of cultural tools that was available and henceforth used and reshaped – but a bundle that was grossly enlarged and ever more present as an available toolkit over the period under consideration. Religious experience and aspiration could certainly become a driving force of its own.

The admission of ambiguities must be extended to two further issues. By looking into the period 'before temples', the narrative runs the risk of presenting a blank slate, a *tabula rasa* as the basic condition of the late Bronze Age population of Italy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Again, it was the goal of the geographically broad, Mediterranean, introduction to make clear that the larger space knew monumentalised temples, images of gods, and elaborate rituals. But I also supposed that in the narrower space of middle Italy, such knowledge or experiences were not present, more likely by earlier discontinuities than by being untouched in that respect. Thus, cultural differences, bridged by contacts and, in particular, long-distance contacts, were another driving force for Italian development and, later, for those in the north-west, for instance.

57 Rüpke 2016.
58 For a critique of the use of this model in History of Religion, see Rüpke 2007b.

In general, and in opposition to Atlantic winds, cultural products drifted from the East to the West (that is from east of the line from the Adriatic to Lybia, not from the 'Orient') on a larger scale than *vice versa*. From an Italian point of view, exchange was enabled by existing networks of Greek or Syro-Phoenician merchants (even to the West of Italy). On a smaller scale it was perhaps also enabled by Jewish networks linked, above all, to Alexandria. These exchanges were ceaselessly intensified by direct military, economic or administrative links from the second century BCE onwards. Instead of repeating the myth of 'Oriental religions', I conceptualise exchange as highly selective (and modifying) 'appropriation' (whether from a position of power, and corresponding choices this position allows, or from an inferior position, with its corresponding constraints), but also as a direct import via immigrants, slaves or merchants – settling down permanently or temporarily or being forced to do so.

The veneration of Christ, important as it was in the long run, was not an oppressive force from the Orient but a phenomenon that developed within such networks, at Rome and in Italy as much as at Jerusalem and in Palestine. And again, such networks could differ widely in terms of power and opportunities if, for instance, an emperor like Constantine was involved, as is made clear by the highly divergent narratives of formative Christianity in the second century and of institutionalised Christianity in the fourth century. As far as the range of phenomena and the number of people involved is concerned, disproportional space is already allotted to this particular religious option. Framing the developments of Judaism and Judaeo-Christianity in a 'history of ancient religions' means also resizing it, seeing it in proportion to other developments and not as the one major force, which has a (less important) *Umwelt*.

5 Belief and knowledge

The two most widespread models for the academic writing of history of religion are histories of institutions (like *Kirchengeschichte*) and of belief systems (like *Dogmengeschichte*), both developed in the context of Christianity. However, both take their roots in philosophical discourse, even if histories of schools (and splitting of schools) and heads of schools are the more prevalent and encompassing genre.[59] For a history of religion covering long periods without larger religious institutions or anything like an elaborate

59 See Cancik 2011.

and institutionally supported theology, these approaches do not work. Religious practices and non-elaborated beliefs are usually treated as a-historic and related to the marginal field of popular belief: the treatment of 'votives' in the history of Europe (and museums) forcefully attests to these claims. In the research leading to *Pantheon*, it was not in the least challenging to collect data and data-series that allowed statements about continuity or change.

This does not amount to a neglect of questions about the intellectual contents and framework of religious action and experience. Belief is represented by only two instances of *Glaubensbekenntnis* ('crede') in the index of the German version because I opted instead for the more neutral 'knowledge', which has nineteen sub-entries with dozens of passages. Difficulties abound, however. For many periods and places, even the most basic assumptions are not attested and when they are attested, the correlation with specific practices is thin. Neither today nor for antiquity do burial practices, to take one example, say much about the ontological assumptions about the status of the deceased. This does not exclude the existence of widespread and shared knowledge about the very special addressees, their willingness to intervene, and the necessary combination of divine help and physical or chemical efforts (roots, drugs, cakes or detergents) in cleansing and healing, in winning over objects of sexual desire, or in defeating superior adversaries in court. But much of this knowledge is local,[60] is monopolised by practitioners, and is elaborated by 'primitive intellectuals'.[61] The reach of literary discourse and its elaborated knowledge of health, death, divine benevolence, or distance might not be much broader; its availability to modern researchers in the form of printed copies, as well as in the congeniality due to its discursive form, grossly distorts this fact. *Pantheon* could not adequately represent the complexity of this discourse (as sketched at least by Martin Nilsson) and instead points only to its autonomy. It was the translation into widespread practice, visible early in the case of Astrology, and later also in the cases of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, that was given pride of place.

I am aware that a title like *Pantheon* must raise expectations with regard to the treatment of and terminological reflection on 'polytheism'. Let me just briefly say that I found polytheism to be, above all, a practice, a competence, widely shared throughout history and across agents loyal to very different religious traditions and philosophical convictions. Reflection on such practices, and the attempt to supplement or even overcome them by trans-locally valid, even universally applicable knowledge (that is, what the ancients con-

60 For the concept, Whitmarsh 2010.

61 See Gordon 1995, Gordon 2007, Gordon 2010, Gordon 2011, Gordon 2013b, Gordon 2013a.

ceived of as 'philosophy') usually led to monotheistic elaborations,[62] thus demonstrating the loose coupling of practice and knowledge. This problem, and particularly if viewed across large geographical areas of practices and discourses, demands an attention that *Pantheon* was not able to pay.[63]

6 Perspectives

A multiplicity of groupings and identities, shared practices and forceful distinctions, was made visible by the two perspectives of the 'lived ancient religion', on the one hand, in its permanent, but normally slowly changing, forms and the empire, on the other hand, as the largest political and cultural framework accessible and visible in details of everyday life. In its introduction, *Pantheon* demands specific attention be paid to the role of the city between these poles, not of the *civitas* or *polis* as political frameworks but of the actual built environment and the density of daily encounters. This was a rather late insight in the course of my research and writing and the narrative does not live up to the task. Beyond the many fair critical remarks of the reviewers I have to add this to the list of shortcomings. If *Pantheon* is stocktaking, it is also stocktaking about what needs to be tackled in the future.

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62 This is the famous 'pagan monotheism', Athanassiadi and Frede 1999; Mitchell and Van Nuffelen 2010; North 2010; Rüpke 2012a.

63 For a starting point see Bremmer 2011; Van Nuffelen 2011; Versnel 2011.

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