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RELIGIOUS AGENCY, SACRALISATION AND TRADITION IN THE ANCIENT CITY

Abstract: Starting from a discussion against the notions of a unified 'public religion' my focus during the past decade has been on 'religious individualization' and the fluidity of religion captured by the concepts of 'lived ancient religion' and 'religion in the making'. These concepts focus on the *inherent* dynamic qualities of those cultural products that I identify as religion in the course of historical analyses. And yet, the undeniable presence of traditions and even *canones* can be conceptualized beyond a world of individually fragmented religious practices and beliefs and incipient, ever-changing and also dissolving institutions that would be clustered together only in the form of narrative shorthand terms by historians. The paper offers a theoretical reflection on a concept of religion useful for the question of tradition and canonization, building on earlier proposals and developing those further by developing the notion of sacralisation. This will be framed by an historical assumption, namely that the processes of interest here are pushed in urban contexts. Here, my focus will be on the ancient Mediterranean.

Keywords: religious agency, sacralisation, urban religion, tradition, canon.

1. Introduction

Starting from the discussion against the notions of unified 'public religion' as entertained by ancient historians, one research focus during the past decade has been very much on 'religious individualization' and the fluidity of religion. This is captured by the sociological concept of 'lived religion' and its application to the study of ancient religion. To speak of 'lived ancient religion' is in accord with contemporary 'lived religion' by referring to individual religious practices beyond established traditions and institutionalized forms of religion.[1] However, 'lived ancient religion' does not stop at ancient 'popular religion', but includes the very making also of 'public religion', understood

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[1] Such as proffered by Ammerman 1997; Hall 1997; Orsi 1997; McGuire 2008. – I am grateful to Elisabeth Begemann, Erfurt, for comments and the revision of the English text.

as strategies of members of the elite and their dramatically superior resources.[2] These resources typically dominate the archaeological and frequently also the textual records from these distant periods and obliterate our view on the dynamic character and situational meaning making even of these practices.

I have tried to capture this perspective onto religion by the phrase 'religion in the making'. Rather by chance than by intention this is at the same time the title of an early work of Alfred North Whitehead, consisting of four lectures published in 1926. It did not come to my mind when I started to use the phrase, as I had read the book years ago in a German translation, entitled 'Wie entsteht Religion?'.[3] Whitehead's title phrase is never repeated throughout the book, but helps to define my wording *ex negativo*, if read in the light of Whitehead's formulation at the very beginning of the preface: 'The aim of the lectures was to give a concise analysis of the various factors in human nature which go to form a religion, to exhibit the inevitable transformation of religion with the transformation of knowledge, and more especially to direct attention to the foundation of religion on our apprehension of those permanent elements by reason of which there is a stable order in the world, permanent elements apart from which there could be no changing world.' Whitehead's account is of a universal history of religion, its necessary change in the course of development of a rational world view and its permanent individual reproduction on the basis of aesthetic experiences that bring together the material and the noetic world. In historical terms, the religion of the Roman Empire is seen as the most advanced rational form of a 'communal religion' before the universal character of a rational religious world view necessarily distances the individual from every concrete social formation, helping her or him to arrange oneself in one's solitariness, bringing a sort of transcendence into one's limited and mortal immanence.[4] If it is philosophical critique that questions the stability of religion and dogmas in Whitehead, my 'making', instead, focuses on the *inherent* dynamic quality of those cultural products that I identify as religion in the course of historical analyses.

All the more, the question remains of how the undeniable presence of 'traditions' and even 'canons' can be conceptualized beyond a world of individually fragmented religious practices and beliefs and ever-changing and also dissolving institutions that would be clustered together only in the form of narrative shorthand terms by historians. What I am going to offer in this paper is thus above all a theoretical reflection on a concept of religion that is able to capture both the fluidity of 'religion in the making' visible when focusing on religious agency and the notion of persistence, of trans-individual continuity, emphasized by the use of 'tradition'. For this I am building on earlier proposals and developing these further. Necessarily, this is a historical enterprise, as both notions are used to account for historical and historically shifting phenomena. Focusing on circum-Mediterranean history, I assume that the most relevant historical factor is spatial rather than chronological. Thus, the second half of my article will be framed by an historical assumption, namely that the processes that are of interest here are pushed in urban contexts. Whether 'pushing' is a

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[2] Rüpke 2016b; Albrecht *et al.* 2018.
[3] Whitehead 1926, 1990.
[4] Indeed, subchapter 6 'The Ascendance of Man' of his first lecture dates the decisive shift to the first millennium BCE, thus approaching the notion of an 'axial age' *ante litteram* (1990, 31-33).

synonym for merely 'furthered' or 'accelerated' or amounts to 'originated in' needs to be discussed in the end on the basis of specific historical evidence.

2. Religious agency and sacralisation

For the study of the ancient Mediterranean world I have suggested to theorize religion as communication with special agents (sometimes including objects) – frequently conceptualized as god or gods, but in the period under consideration also ancestors or demons. These agents are accorded agency in a not unquestionably plausible way. Plausibility is as much a result of the rhetorical efforts of the speaker as of the situational circumstances and cultural notions shared by actors and observers. Communication with or concerning such 'divine' agents might reinforce or reduce human agency, create or modify social relationships and change power relationships.[5] Religious agency, hence, is a) the agency attributed to such non-human or in this regard supra-human agents, and b) the agency of human instigators (and their human audiences) of such communication. I am quite aware that there is a lot of phenomenologically comparable ritual action that does not assume the inclusion of such non-human agents. However, I deliberately restrict my definition to studying the consequences of the invention of that type of agency, which I will call 'divine agency' (religious agency type A) in order to differentiate it from human religious agency (type B). In the eyes of the contemporaries the latter type of agency derives from the former and it might consequently be attributed to the one (respectively those) who took a primary role in the communication (whether conceptualized as 'mediators', 'saints' or just 'pious' and exemplary). It could also be attributed and arrogated by further participants or the peers, family, followers or contacts of the primary group. It might also be used in a reversed manner, by negating the power, legitimacy, honesty or piety of those excluded from the temporary or lasting relationship established in the initial or repeated act of communication.

It is the enlargement of the dyadic to a triadic model of communication that takes an audience into account, which leads back to the problem of plausibility, briefly raised at the beginning. Plausibility is a rhetorical category, tying the success of communication to an approving audience, as I have pointed out in my earlier piece.[6] However, I suggest turning to semiotics for a more detailed description of what is going on. So far, I have deliberately avoided talking about media of communication and the use of signs, not least in order to start from a simple model, where the addresser's own body and speech constitute the most basic form of what needs to be conceived of as symbolic communication. Again, I am aware that historically, ritual behaviour might well precede language.[7]

I will put off further details regarding signs for the moment, but of course admit that my initial dyad already has a triadic structure, including – to use Charles S. Peirce's terms – the sign proper *(representamen),* the interpretant and the object represented.[8] The interpretant

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[5] Rüpke 2015.
[6] Rüpke 2015.
[7] See Bellah 2011: 132-3.
[8] See Peirce 1986; Peirce 1991. I am grateful to Anders Klostergaard Petersen to referring me to Peirce on multiple occasions.

is not simply the religious agent speaking, but her or his conception of the sign. This conception includes, in Peirce's pragmatic turn, all the possible practical effects of the sign, and thus ties in with the concept of this person's religious agency. The semiotic perspective and semiosis, that is, the creation of a chain of meaningful signs, do not stop here. The process of interpretation continues, as the interpretation is an interpretation for an audience now itself engaging in interpretation of the semiotic complex put before its eyes and ears.

The attribution of meaning as well as the imagining of effects do not come from nothing, but are drawing on previous experiences, shared meanings and imaginings, and shared strategies of interpretation.[9] Even if limitless in principle, the probable range of interpretations is thus restricted, without excluding creativity.[10] There is no zero point in an encounter between a user and a sign. Any articulation of this encounter – or more precisely of the experience, in which such a sign is involved – is already participating in language and shared meaning thus conveyed.[11] This is not to advocate a culturalist approach. Linguistic research has demonstrated the quickly changing character as well as the interpersonal and inter-group differences of language.[12] The varieties of often implicit meaning or meaning communicated in the form of narratives or images go far beyond the clear-cut dichotomies favoured in structuralist interpretations or the systematization attempted by indigenous or academic 'intellectuals'.

Evidently, I conflate the perspectives of articulation – focusing on the initiator – and interpretation – focusing on the audience – with the specific character of religious communication in mind. Religious communication is communication with divine agents that are not undeniably relevant. As it is the very communication that brings the divine agents into situational relevance and thus situational existence, the pragmatic efficiency and the plausibility of such communication is stressed for the agent as well as for the audience by the intensive use of media. In fact, the very act of communication and the massiveness of the media involved produce and further strengthen the existence of the otherwise invisible addressees.[13] The media-intensity of religious communication is not the least reason for its presence in archaeological records from different regions and periods.

It is at this point of my argument that I would like to introduce the notion of sacralization and the sacred. I propose to use 'sacralizing' as referring to actions and processes that include elements of the situation – objects, space, time – into the act of religious communication and ascribe meaning to them. Sunrise or the day of the full moon are thus marked as specifically conducive, a hot spring or the top of a hill or a tomb are elements places of more successful communication; a torch, an animal killed, a valuable dress or a block of stone might support the formulation and conveying of one's message. Thus, the instigators make their communicational intention more relevant to the addressees and their communication as a whole more relevant to any audience. They are heard by the gods and seen by their fellow humans.[14]

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[9] For the latter see Fish 1995.
[10] Joas 1996.
[11] See Jung 2005.
[12] Keller 1994; Bowern *et al.* 2015: 225-553; Brinton 2017; Filppula *et al.* 2017.
[13] See Rüpke 2007a.
[14] Sacralization is here developed on the model of Catherine Bell's 'ritualization' (Bell 1992).

The notion developed so far allows us to speak of 'temporary sacralization'. A place is used for religious communication and subjected to specific interpretations, maybe even rules of behaviour for the duration of the communication (which would usually take the form of a ritual, but I try to avoid the introduction of a further concept right now). This might be a marketplace for a prayer or a street for a procession. Usually, such a temporary sacralization would not leave any traces, unless a bronze plaque commemorates the visit of particularly important religious actors, a guru, saint, pope or the like. Nor would such a place strengthen the character of an action as 'religious' in a future instance, unless great efforts are made to re-activate the former ascription of a special character by way of remembrance or full re-enactment. Sacralization need, however, not encompass the whole site. It could focus on single, even small objects that happen to be available or are consciously introduced into or produced within the situation. 'Gifts' or 'tokens' referring to the communicants involved or the message to be transferred are widespread.[15] A particular dress or objects attached to the body – festive garments, crowns, ornaments, again also of temporary character like colours – are in use.

It is now easier to imagine the processes of interpretation in their temporal extension. Objects (places, times), sacralized to different degrees, would already create presuppositions for the processes of interpretation connected with the communicative action proper. Re-use or the addition of new objects into the process of framing could strengthen and would intensify the religious character. Sacralization is a matter of quantity and scale.[16] Perhaps only under certain conditions and in specific cultural contexts could such processes produce debates about a dichotomic character as 'sacred' as opposed to 'profane' (literally: 'in front of the sanctuary').[17] As is well known, these debates, reformulated as religion and its opposite, society, have been important in Europe and beyond up to the present day.[18]

The argument started from the notion of agency and has to come back to it. By invoking in specific situations agents or authorities held to be divine, human agents acquire extended possibilities for imagining and acting. In this way, religious agency, specifically the attribution of agency to 'divine agents' or the like, allows the human agent to develop ideas that transcend the situation in question. This may lead to creative strategies adequate to the situation, whether we are talking about principals in ritual performance or of individuals working through possession attributed to a divine being. Performing ritual action or claiming religious knowledge creates powerful allies, spaces, and audiences and, in the long run, even networks. But the converse is also possible. The same mechanism can also trigger an abjuration of personal agency, resulting in impotence and passivity, with agency being reserved for the divine agents. Quietism, or even voluntary death illustrate this.

Evidently, such agency or patiency could find expression and duration in processes of sacralisation and space, time or objects thus sacralized. *Vice versa*, such agency could be supported by means of employing or situating itself in sacralised context. Praying in a

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[15] See e.g. van Straten 1981; Linders *et al.* 1987; also Auffarth 1995; Rüpke 2018a.

[16] Thus, concepts like 'sacral topography' or 'sacred landscape' (e.g. Cancik 1985; MacCormack 1990; Caseau 1999; Ando 2001; Steinsapir 2005; Ceccarelli 2008; Hahn 2008) need also to be discussed with regard to the degree of sacralization – as much as to visibility, readability and intentionality.

[17] On *profanus* see Rüpke 2006; for Greek concepts see Casevitz 2010.

[18] See e.g. Burchardt *et al.* 2013.

temple, sacrificing on a holiday, preaching in a priestly garment would enhance religious agency, if only the power position of the actor allows her or him to enlist such resources.[19] It is a process of negotiating and appropriating such institutional resources: whether they are the outcome simply of previous, comparable actions of prestigious individuals or the outcome and shape of a powerful organization, such as a priesthood running a temple, or a magistrate or ruler who had dedicated places, buildings, altars etc. before and might use it again. Performance and novelty of religious agency interfere with institutionalized sacrality in many different and even potentially opposing ways. The new actor might also be regarded as an impostor, heretic, illegitimate or simply unworthy. All this depends on the audience present or indirect, later observers and their relationship to the human religious actor, whether they are neutral, perhaps mobilizable contemporaries, people obligated to existing institutional powers or just family and followers of the initiator. Growing degrees of publicity enlarge risks and potentials.

To briefly conclude my terminological proposal, it is obvious that such a concept of sacralization and resulting degrees of sacredness are very different from notions of 'the sacred' as used in sociological or theological reflections from Rudolf Otto through Mircea Eliade to Hans Joas.[20] It is inspired foremost by the Latin concept of *sacer*, describing property of the gods, but also by the Hebrew concept of *qadosh*, describing God and his radiance into the world with decreasing degrees of intensity. Stressing the transformation in the former case, *sacer*, my concept of sacralization inverts the agency of the latter concept, *qadosh*.

3. Selectivity and canonicity as intensification of sacralization

The notion of sacralisation so far developed allows for different degrees or intensity of sacrality. This might be further specified by introducing the term canonicity[21] as it is being used in the historiography of religion. Here, a canon is produced by the selectivity and intensity of sacralization.[22] Power is translated into decisions about the restriction of high degrees of sacredness. Within the framework of sacralization this can be easily illustrated by a few examples from ancient Rome:

* Only certain dates, by decision of the Roman senate, are qualified as *nefas (piaculo), NP.* Thus, a number of political and juridical activities are forbidden or made precarious, but other religious qualifications of days are denied these consequences.[23]

* Only certain places are accorded the quality of being *sacer*. On the one hand, this depends on the decision and participation of officials, on the other, it is in terms of public property and in terms of geography Roman soil only that could be accorded such a quality, which excluded further economic transactions and private occupation – at least in principle.[24]

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[19] For a detailed discussion see e.g. Patzelt 2018 (for praying) or Rüpke 2013 and Rüpke 2018b (for sanctuaries).
[20] Otto 1917, 2014 (dazu Deuser 2014); Eliade 1961; Urban 2003; Joas 2017.
[21] I am grateful to the Leiden research group on canonical cultures and the opportunity to discuss part of this argument with them, in particular with Peter Bisschop, Ab de Jong and Elizabeth Cecil.
[22] For concept of 'canon' see e.g. Assmann *et al.* 1987; Hahn 1987; Cancik 1997; Becker 2012b; Wallraff 2013; Folkert 1989; Citroni 2006; Thomassen 2010.
[23] See Rüpke 2011.
[24] Gai. *inst.* 2.3-5; on the problem Ando 2011; 2015.

* Only certain rituals (of course addressed to certain gods) are paid out of public funds, in the form of *sacra publica*. Again this does neither exclude other gods nor other forms of worship, but awards not only the necessary means but also the protection of tradition and respectability, demonstrated by the involvement of *magistratus* or *sacerdotes publici*, state officials and religious practitioners from the upper echelons of society legitimized by formal elections or cooptations.[25]

* Knowledge that might be termed 'canonical' is defined by texts only in exceptional cases. For Rome, the notable exception I think of are the Sibylline books, oracular texts collected, reviewed and endorsed or alternatively burnt after the loss of the original collection at the time and by the authority of Augustus.[26] Otherwise, knowledge is conceptualized as traditional and hence bound to persons. It is the *mos maiorum*, which is typically invoked by claim-makers. This 'tradition' offers the flexibility of the unwritten as much as the varieties of a multi-vocal past of competing individuals and families.[27] In the conception of a regulated religion by M. Tullius Cicero in his treatise "On laws, it is the public priests who authoritatively 'know' about matters religious and accord or acknowledge the legitimate rituals and even gods.[28] In Tiberian times, Valerius Maximus fully endorsed this idea and built his collection of contemporary and earlier *exempla* – as far as religion is concerned – on this notion.[29]

If canonization is a medium of control – not exclusively, but also *within* the realm of religion – it presupposes competition within this very field, that is, a form of conflict that cannot be solved by subduing, driving out or destroying the competitor as in the case of external enemies. Obviously, canonization does not include an 'international' field, the rules of which are described as 'every state has its religion and we have ours'.[30] Universality comes in as a local argument only.[31]

The thesis that I will try to plausibilize in the following is that the formation of social groups in the form of religious traditions organized and controlled by processes of canonization is a phenomenon related to urbanity, to urban styles of life and the conditions of the city and proliferating into the countryside from here. Of course, such a far-reaching claim cannot be inductively proven. Hence, I will dedicate the rest of my paper to at least plausibilizing such a claim by way of reconstructing the characteristics of life in cities that make such developments seem adaptive, if I may choose a term redolent of the concept of (cultural) evolution.[32]

4. Reflecting on the urban

The city as a focal point of movements and relations and as a particular social and spatial arrangement has never been a major concern of research as a condition crucial to the religious practices of antiquity and as the driving force of religious change. In almost all

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[25] See Scheid 2003; Rüpke 2007b.
[26] Suet. *Aug.* 31.1.
[27] See Wallace-Hadrill 1997; 2008; Habinek *et al.* 1997; Habinek 1998; Rüpke 2012.
[28] Cic. *leg.* 2.20. See Rüpke 2016c: 29, 38-42.
[29] Rüpke 2016a.
[30] Thus formulated in Cic. *Flacc.* 69.
[31] Rüpke 2009.
[32] See Klostergaard Petersen 2012.

research on cities in the deep past (i.e. prior to the late medieval and early modern period) it is mainly assumed that the task is to illustrate how the viability of the city is grounded in a religious identity that is by the same token also a political one.[33] And yet, classic studies on ancient religion do offer valuable points of departure. Research on the relationship of religion and urbanity in a historical perspective was actually begun by a classicist, Numa Fustel de Coulanges's *La cité antique*.[34] Whereas in Urban Studies Fustel is acknowledged as a pioneer,[35] his name is surprisingly absent from many studies of ancient polis religion, even if some of his ideas are very present, above all in the complex model of centre and periphery *(chora)* proposed by François de Polignac for Greek poleis.[36] Polis religion has widely been used in order to capture the location of temples in critical, usually central places and the creation of public space for public rituals,[37] but the focus has been on civic identity rather than spatial practices.

It is evident that an equivocal concept of 'city' cannot grasp the different forms of larger or denser settlements, central places and functional centres offering multiple services[38] that have been addressed as 'cities' or are consciously denied the label of 'city'.[39] For the present argument, focusing on Mediterranean antiquity, this problem can be bracketed by falling back on a polythetic definition formulated in a tradition that originated in, and dealt with, modern American cities,[40] though modified according to this inquiry's interests.[41] The common focus is the perspective on urban space as a 'lived space', a built environment that is appropriated, used and reshaped by agents who entertain their individual (and collective) notions of these spaces and their living therein.[42] It is not the city, but life in the city, the way of life developed in and shaped by cities, that is focussed on.[43]

First of all, 'city' is a spatial form that organizes and regulates phenomena of density on a larger scale. This high density as a basis for some of the following is in social terms above all an increase in the contact zones and contacts of inhabitants and visitors.[44] As urban growth relied above all on immigration, be it permanent or temporary, the attractiveness of cities was important; a city is hence a place offering specific opportunities and evoking certain hopes. This has been addressed by the concept of urban aspirations.[45]

The heterogeneity of the city is an important dividing line with regard to even larger villages. The city is a place engendering diversity, not only as a result of the heterogeneous

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[33] See the studies in Yoffee 2015; exception: Sinopoli 2015, focused on religion in cities dominated by competing merchants.

[34] Fustel de Coulanges 1864; 1956.

[35] See Yoffee *et al.* 2015: 7.

[36] de Polignac 1984.

[37] e.g. Zuiderhoek 2017: 65.

[38] e.g. Smith *et al.* 2015.

[39] Cf. Smith 2003.

[40] Wirth 1938: 1964.

[41] Thanks go to Emiliano Urciuoli, Asuman Lätzer-Lasar, Maik Patzelt and Harry O. Maier as collaborators in the drawing of this list.

[42] See Lefebvre 1974; Löw 2016.

[43] E.g Manderscheid 2004; for antiquity e.g. Kolb 1984; Cunliffe *et al.* 1995.

[44] Löw 2008.

[45] See van der Veer 2015.

origins of its inhabitants but as its permanent production. Thus, conflict is endemic. As a consequence, homogenization and standardization are of interest for the government. To make the city 'legible', systems of documentation, writing above all, have been typically invented and furthered in the close quarters of alluvial plains or cities.[46] Cities are places subject to administrative attempts at comprehensive organization. It is in the service of the latter that ancient religion has been seen above all, resulting in a very narrow view of religion and above all religious change.[47]

Characteristic is a division of labour, even if many city-dwellers occupations' and/or livelihoods might be related to agriculture, whether as investments or actual practice. Even in Mediterranean antiquity, a city is usually a place inhabited by a substantial population of non-food-producing individuals pursuing different trades (including intellectual occupations) on the basis of an agricultural surplus. Intellectualization, based on urban writing systems, was a major effect. Such intellectuals are also important for the elaboration, but not instigation of the last characteristic: a city is a place that is recognized as city and defined contrastively against (culturally variable forms of) non-city. In the long run, imaginaries of cities, one's own and others', are developed. Certainly, economies of scale for such processes cannot be disregarded. In terms of intellectual production, cities like Antioch, Alexandria and Rome were exponentially productive. And yet basic institutional conditions like writing, books or even theatres and similar places of complex mass communication beyond rhetorical addresses of the rulers were present even in much smaller cities.

To sum up, given the quality of religious communication to produce a specific agency, religious practices might be intimately bound up with the dualism of strive for homogeneity, that is power and administration, and diversity, that is securing spaces for the preservation or development of specific ways of living and identities. This potential need not be exploited in every path of urbanization nor in every phase of a city's lifetime, but it certainly was important and much mobilized in classical Greek, Hellenistic and imperial phases of urbanization.[48] It is with a view at these periods and forms of urban life that I pursue my argumentation.

5. Urbanism and the formation of religious groups

As stated above, frequent encounters and dense networks, but also fluid and exchangeable relationships are typical of cities.[49] Religious communication, bringing the 'beyond' temporarily or permanently into communicative space, is a practice induced and shaped by and re-creating space.[50] In the ancient Mediterranean world, religious communication was reinforced by sacralizing objects or spaces and was manifest in material form even in non-religious uses of space.[51] Creating religious space was part of an ongoing process of claiming and appropriating urban space as a whole. Within the many overlapping

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[46] For the former Mann 1986; for the latter Law *et al.* 2015.
[47] See Rüpke 2018b.
[48] A short overview: Zuiderhoek 2017.
[49] Simmel 1917; Blum 2003.
[50] Becci *et al.* 2013; Rüpke 2017.
[51] Insoll 2009; Droogan 2013; Raja, Rüpke 2015b.

spaces, religion thus could also create, over-determine and negate other spaces. This might be temporary in the case of dances or processions[52] or permanent in the case of images and architecture. In both cases, the presence of signs or traces of religious practices shapes urban 'lived space' and stimulates memories of a particularly tenacious character.[53]

The same holds true if we turn to the appropriation of time. Synchronization and de-synchronization are interests and activities that are present simultaneously. On the one hand, big spaces were laid out for religious action bringing together a multitude of people at the very same moment. 'Games', races as well as plays performed on *scaenae,* were a religious technique of centralization and synchronization that spread rapidly in the ancient Mediterranean world.[54] Nevertheless, for centuries ancient Rome shunned the building of permanent theatres in order not to provide space for any counter-publics.[55] The use of religion to produce such counter-publics is hardly visible in Rome during the republic, but appears in an exemplary manner and in exceptionally controversial form with the *Bacchanalia* closed down, destroyed or restricted by the legal and military efforts following the *Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* in 186 BCE.[56] Otherwise, it is the many small sanctuaries, frequently not as clearly identifiable in the archaeological record as the Mithraic caves, that appear in the imperial period along the circuses and amphitheatres that demonstrate the parallel strands of unity and diversity.[57]

In Athens and other Greek poleis, Orphic groups might have developed early[58] as part of an urbanity that also found its expression of unity (above all of a male and freeborn citizen body) in rituals and monumentalized central places and architectures. For a long period, the development of different bodies of knowledge taking the form of texts was a means of developing and supporting diversity rather than unity. At least so it seems from the bird's eye view. On the level of competing intellectuals and their attempts to forge stable networks of followers, the opposite is true. It is new texts that claim authority, investing in a self-canonization by means of authorial personae and narrative voices.[59]

For all this competition, urban space was not simply a mere spatial *setting*. To capture this, a further term is of help. Recent urban studies have taken up the term 'aspirations' from studies of social mobility[60] to describe driving motifs and attitudes of immigrants as well as inhabitants, that is, the hopes and ideas connected with urban life and the employment of religion for such ends, resulting in 'urban religious aspirations'.[61] It is part of the way of life described as urbanity to develop an image of the chosen or given city that might motivate temporary or permanent migration and is a driving force of adaption and integration with regard to survival, economic success and possibly even the development of

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[52] See e.g. Connor 1987; Fless *et al.* 2007; Chaniotis 2013; Stavrianopoulou 2015.
[53] Rau, Schwerhoff 2008; Hurlet 2014; Dey 2015; Galinsky 2016; Latham 2016.
[54] Bernstein 2007.
[55] Dupont 1986; Sear 2006; Goldberg 2007; Manuwald 2011.
[56] See Pailler 1988; de Cazanove 2000; Flower 2002.
[57] Arnhold 2015; Van Andringa 2015.
[58] See Guthrie 1966; Obbink 1997; Bernabé Pajares 2008 ; Burkert 2011; Edmonds 2011; Bremmer 2016; Jackson 2016 and Edmonds III 2013.
[59] Becker 2012b, a.
[60] Appadurai 2004.
[61] Goh *et al.* 2016.

cultural capital. It is here that again religion and religious agency comes in, for instance, urban identities couched in religious terms even in the fourth to sixth centuries CE.[62] The transactional tissue of high-density urban activities has plausibly been claimed to foster human reflexivity and led to cultural innovations by addressing problems in novel ways.[63]

This creative stimulus is two-fold. On the one hand, religious innovations enlarge agency in attempting to deal with the specific problems raised and the opportunities provided by cities; the Attic drama of the Dionysiac festivals at Athens and the proliferating games of the Roman republic are cases in point. On the other hand, new cultural productions may generate new urban issues, challenge socio-political and religious leaderships, and eventually complicate the life of city dwellers instead of simply facilitating it. Prophecy and the struggle to contain it offers an example.[64] As outlined above, religious communication is part and parcel of this, reflection as much as resource and driving force. Non-urban space might invite religious communication in a plurality even of distant places like tombs or extra-urban sanctuaries that do not enter direct competition by the lack of diverse and institutionalized stake-holders and might enforce unity even in domestic space by way of social pressure in the overlapping of primary and secondary groups. In contrast, dense interaction and the carving out of particular spaces within city-space demands explicit forms of shared meanings or identities or networks. High visibility and a large range of aesthetic forms is characteristic for the iconic religion prominent in cityspace,[65] phenomena that can be captured by the concept of sacralization as developed above. In a way unknown to smaller settlements and their social groups, religious communication produces and depends on sacralizing space, time and material environment, and participates in shaping the built environment as well as social structures. It is cities and the urbanity developed therein that for such groups afford and necessitate the formation of recognizable traditions and maybe even the form of intensiveness and selectivity called 'canonization'. Here, sacralization is taken to a further degree of intensity and mobility at the same time. This does neither exclude creativity nor copying urban phenomena by non-urban actors. But it seems plausible that it was cities that asked for and offered the conditions for development, institutionalization and thus transmission.

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[62] Caseau 1999; Dey 2014; Jacobs 2014.

[63] Soja 2000, 14-15; see also Storper 1997. I am grateful to Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli for these references.

[64] E.g. the Roman *carmina Marciana*, late republican and early imperial *vates* or Judaeo-Christian apocalyptics, see Potter 1990; Momigliano 1992; Wiseman 1992; Bendlin 2002; 2011.

[65] See Knott *et al.* 2016.

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ЈОРГ РУПКЕ
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**РЕЛИГИЈСКО ДЕЛОВАЊЕ, САКРАЛИЗАЦИЈА И ТРАДИЦИЈА
У ДРЕВНИМ ГРАДОВИМА**

Резиме

Овај рад представља теоретско разматрање концепта религије који је користан за питања традиције и канонизације у древној медитеранској религији. У истраживању се полази од појма религиозног деловања и динамике религије у изградњи улоге трајнијих предмета у религијској комуникацији. Уводи се појам сакрализације и различитих степена и темпоралности светог да би се обухватили процеси изградње традиције. У раду се тврди да се такви процеси најчешће дешавају у урбаним контекстима.

Кључне речи: религијско деловање, сакрализација, урбана религија традиција, канон.