

# Religion in the Roman Empire

Volume 1

No. 1

2015

Editorial 1–7

## Individual Appropriation in Lived Ancient Religion

**Rubina Raja, Jörg Rüpke**

Appropriating Religion: Methodological Issues in Testing the ‘Lived Ancient Religion’ Approach 11–19

**Lucinda Dirven**

The Mithraeum as *tableau vivant*. A Preliminary Study of Ritual Performance and Emotional Involvement in Ancient Mystery Cults 20–50

**Marlis Arnhold**

Male Worshipers and the Cult of Bona Dea 51–70

**Lara Weiss**

The Consumption of Religion in Roman Karanis 71–94

**Jörg Rüpke**

The ‘Connected Reader’ as a Window into Lived Ancient Religion: A Case Study of Ovid’s *Libri fastorum* 95–113

**John A. North**

Roman Funeral Rituals and the Significance of the *Naenia* 114–133



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# Religion in the Roman Empire

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*Publisher:* Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, Postfach 2040, 72010 Tübingen

Can be purchased at bookstores.

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Typeset by Martin Fischer, Tübingen.

Printed by Gulde-Druck, Tübingen.

Printed in Germany.

ISSN 2199-4463 (Print Edition)

ISSN 2199-4471 (Online Edition)

# Editorial

## Abstract

'Religion in the Roman Empire' (RRE) intends to further new and integrative perspectives on religion in the Ancient World combining multidisciplinary methodologies. Starting from the notion of 'lived religion' it will offer a platform for recent and still incipient research to modify and cross the disciplinary boundaries between 'History of Religion', 'Archaeology', 'Anthropology', 'Classics', 'Ancient History', 'Jewish History', 'Rabbinics', 'New Testament', 'Early Christianity', 'Patristics', 'Coptic Studies', 'Gnostic and Manichaean Studies', 'Late Antiquity' and 'Oriental Languages'. We hope to stimulate the development of new approaches which can encompass the local and global trajectories of the pluralistic, multi-dimensional religions of antiquity.

## A New Journal

'Religion in the Roman Empire' (RRE) intends to establish a new perspective on the religious history of Mediterranean antiquity, starting from the individual, spontaneous, short-lived or organised groups of 'lived' religion instead of simply presupposing the existence of neatly separated organised 'cults' and 'religions' and a too early 'parting of the ways' between such groups. By taking the modern notion of 'lived religion' as one of its starting points, research is invoked that analyses religious 'data' and interprets these as experiences and conceptions of, as well as practices addressed to, the divine, which are initiated, appropriated, expressed, and shared by individuals in diverse social spaces which may not have had an impact on or even contributed to transforming institutional frames. This initiation, expression, and appropriation of the practices and conceptions of lived religion can range through a spatial continuum, from the primary space of individuals in the family, domestic spaces of everyday production, to the shared space of public institutions and trans-local literary communication.

'Religion in the Roman Empire' intends to open and link different research fields, presenting new or revising well-known complexes of evidence in different parts and periods of the ancient to the late antique world. It will con-

centrate on the Roman imperial period without excluding earlier developments in the Western and Eastern parts of the ancient Mediterranean and adjacent areas. Hence, 'Roman Empire' denotes a point of focus, rather than a criterion for exclusion.

## A New Focus

Religious traditions existed and influenced individual and group behaviour, but they were upheld and reworked in the constant interaction of individuals with the agents of traditions and providers of ritual services, 'priests', 'holy men' or professionals in the various fields. Such traditions formed a relevant part of the environment of religious action, but they should not be studied as isolated or even independent factors. Hence, the social, political and economic as well as cultural and inter-religious contexts of micro- and macro-religious phenomena deserve particular attention. Thus, we opt for the singular 'religion' rather than speaking of a plural of 'religions', which presupposes boundaries rather than investigating the evolution and enactment of such boundaries.

'Religion in the Roman Empire' is audacious in the sense that it intends to further innovative and integrative perspectives on religion in the Ancient World and to explore the new multidisciplinary methodologies required for this enterprise. In brief, perspectives like 'lived ancient religion' set out to replace the concepts of 'cults' and 'religions' as integrative frameworks in the description of the phenomena in the field of 'religion'. Thus, it takes up recent and still incipient research to modify and cross disciplinary boundaries (e.g. between 'History of Religion', 'Archaeology', 'Ancient History', 'Classics', 'Jewish Studies') and specialised subfields (e.g. 'New Testament', 'Early Christianity', 'Rabbinic Studies', 'Patristic Studies', 'Coptic Studies', 'Gnostic and Manichaean Studies', 'Oriental Languages'). We hope to stimulate the development of new approaches which can encompass the local and global trajectories of the pluralistic and multi-dimensional religions of antiquity.

From such novel starting points, *Religion in the Roman Empire* focuses on the everyday experience and those practices, expressions, and interactions related to 'religion'. In this context 'religion' is understood as a spectrum of experiences, actions, beliefs and communications hinging on human communication with super-human or even transcendent agent(s), including but not limited to 'gods' and 'God', 'demons', 'angels', and 'heroes'. Ritualisation and elaborate forms of representation are called upon for the success of com-

munication with these addressees. By refocusing on the individual and the situational – that is, on the intrinsic determinants of lived religion – it aims to bring the study of ancient Eurasian religion into a dialogue with global History of Religion as much as with more specialized research on particular regions, epochs, traditions or bodies of texts.

## New Perspectives

When concentrating on practices, relevant evidence is not limited to texts preserving autobiographical experiences and expressions. Most of the evidence at our disposal is best interpreted neither as ‘authentic’ individual expression nor as institutional ‘survival’, but as media, rhetoric and representation – i. e. as cultural work created in interaction. Scattered evidence needs to be contextualised and interpreted by relating it to individual agents, such as Roman magistrates and immigrants, archiereis and astrologers, female land holders and dependent workers. It must furthermore be related to these agents’ use of space and time, their forming of social coalitions, their negotiation with religious specialists or ‘providers’ and their attempts to ‘make sense’ of religion in a situational manner and thus render it effective. In terms of the material and disciplinary expertise involved, the journal welcomes texts reconstructed on the basis of a long manuscript tradition, epigraphic evidence and archaeological remains from material vestiges of rituals, small-scale votives and instruments, up to architectural complexes as well as meta-data created by serialisation or statistical analysis. Thus, historical, literary, archaeological and comparative studies are welcome, as long as they offer innovative and convincing steps towards the proposed reconfiguration of our knowledge of the areas noted above.

Within the field of archaeology there has been a growing focus on the material culture of religion for a number of years. The methodological and theoretical directions which such research has taken have been manifold, attesting to the fact that archaeological material and contexts (or the lack of it) still provide challenges and may offer different perspectives on religion and religious practice. ‘Religion in the Roman Empire’s’ focus on lived religion is intended to add a further perspective to archaeological research within the field of religion and ritual and other devotional practices. We want to stimulate debate and discussions about how archaeology and archaeological research may complement and question the ways in which religious experiences and life are approached in current and previous scholarship. This may include the revision of past contributions in the light of

new material and the presentation of new archaeological material affording new insights into religion in the ancient world or paving new ways of seeing old material.

Religion in prehistory has been highly theorized. Although often criticized for assuming a pervasive visibility of ritual, prehistory is unashamed of its assumption that lives were profoundly influenced and shaped by shared repeated actions which reinforced notions of the group and referred to some sense of alterity. The 'material turn' and the concepts of agency and objects are fully engaged in this theoretical framework. RRE intends to carry over these fruitful approaches into the study of subsequent periods, which, in spite of generally acknowledging the pervasive significance of religion, is often caught up with inadequate notions of sacred and secular, distinctions between public festivals and private expressions of belief, and, in some instances, remains caught in civic models of religion. A consistent and determined approach to find ways of describing both the deep and the superficial interactions between individual experience and the religious structures of their worlds has the potential to offer a much richer and more nuanced account of ancient religions, with a broad impact on understanding literature, archaeology, ancient economies and the anthropology of antiquity.

### **Reciprocal Contextualization**

Research on ancient Judaism has long been pursued in relative isolation from the study of the Roman imperial contexts that shaped so much of ancient Jewish history and literature. Just as Classicists have tended to dismiss Jews as an atypical provincial Roman population, so scholars of Jewish history and literature have tended to presume their isolation from the surrounding local and imperial cultures, particularly when studying Rabbinic and other materials written in Hebrew. The Roman Empire looms large in Jewish history as an agent for the catastrophic changes in the wake of the failures of the revolts of the first and second centuries CE. Until recently, however, little was done to try to understand the Roman contexts of Judaism, then or thereafter. However, many lines of specialised research have begun to show the value of more integrative approaches – whether by re-reading Josephus in relation to Roman historiography, by considering late antique Rabbis as provincial sub-elites, by culling Hekhalot literature for echoes of colonial mimicry and resistance, by looking to documentary and inscriptional data to reconsider ancient Jewish identities, or by revisiting synagogue art and architecture in relation to the broader cultural trends concur-

rent with the Empire's Christianization. Given the range of Jewish literature composed under Roman rule – spanning not just the writings of Philo and Josephus but also some Dead Sea Scrolls and so-called 'pseudepigrapha' as well as early Rabbinic literature, piyyutim, and perhaps also some Hekhalot materials – there may be much to be gained from experimenting with a re-orientation that reads other sources from similarly integrative perspectives, or indeed asking how Jews and Judaism may have participated in the very making of 'religion' in the Roman Empire. At the very least, attention to the Roman imperial context of much of ancient Jewish life and literature may help to facilitate fresh approaches to ancient Jewish history, bridging the pre-70 and post-70 periods but also integrating material culture and different Jewish literary corpora created under Roman rule.

Ancient Judaism thus provides an opportunity for an enriching reciprocal study of religion in the Roman Empire. At first sight, Judaism was a pre-Roman ethnic practice transformed into a naturalized part of the Roman landscape. Details, however, matter. We are unusually well-informed about the paradoxical impact of Roman rule. On the one hand, the impact on the Jews' 'great tradition' is sweeping – the center annihilated, the practice which made Judaism most at home in the Mediterranean religious environment, animal sacrifice, ended. On the other hand, we witness concurrently the massive elaboration of an ostensibly traditional but in fact largely novel system of religious law and thought by a new clerisy. Despite its novelty, there is little that is decisively 'Roman' about Rabbinic law and literature: Roman rule thus generated a religious system whose complexity and strangeness is barely adumbrated in the archaeological record. Consequently, Judaism may well serve to remind us of how little we know about other forms of Roman imperial religious expressions and practices.

The field of New Testament interpretation has undergone a double paradigm shift in the last decades which immediately puts the topics of 'Religion in the Roman Empire' into the centre of attention: On the one hand, the diachronic orientation which dominated the scholarly exegesis for almost a century was more and more complemented and partly even replaced by a synchronic one which led to renewed interest in cultural and religious contexts. On the other hand, the predominant concentration on (mostly Palestinian) Judaism as the 'root' or 'native soil' of Early Christianity was complemented by a new awareness of the importance of Hellenistic culture in all its aspects for Palestinian Judaism and therefore also for the emerging Christian movement from its very beginning. Topics to be discussed in such an interdisciplinary cooperation include 'Religion and Ethics', 'Prayer', 'Cult' (and its transformation and spiritualisation), 'God(s)', 'Mediators',

‘Power and Religion’, ‘*paideia* and Piety’ (focusing on philosophers, orators, Rabbis, teachers as new religious authorities) and ‘Food and Religion’. Even from within the exegetical discipline, the field has considerably broadened and ‘Religion in the Roman Empire’ intends to be instrumental in this development.

The study of early Christianity has often focussed on patristic, apostolic, apocryphal, and apologetic literature that has been preserved and promoted by a Christianity that had already become the state religion of the Roman Empire in late antiquity. Hence, it often suffers from methodological circularity, namely the anachronistically presupposed canonical sources and, based on them, its methodological framework, hardly recognizing that both are only the results and not the norms of the development they are supposed to investigate. While this framework identifies Christianity with the political, cultural and institutional units it is operating in – conceptualized as Roman, Western or Eastern Christianity etc. – it presupposes ascriptions of religious and collective identities as well as fixed structures of Christian life (baptism, the Eucharist and the weekly and annual rites) which need to be questioned rather than taken for granted.

Therefore ‘Religion in the Roman Empire’ welcomes studies of early Christian materials in the broader context of the religiously pluralistic ancient Roman world. All aspects of early Christianity may be considered, including New Testament, apocryphal, or patristic literature; archaeological or papyrological materials; and area studies such as Syriac or Coptic Christianity. Topics could include investigations that engage Christian materials in discussions of wider thematic or material issues, such as lived religion, religion and violence, space and place, ritual, gender studies, women’s studies, masculinity studies, social grouping, group styles, boundary setting strategies (such as ‘orthodoxy and heresy’), scriptural practices, the new materialism, religious mediation, agency, and the new philology, among others. A goal is to encourage analyses that cross or redefine disciplinary boundaries and invite an engagement with lived ancient religion within wider contemporary discussions in the fields of religious studies, social science, and the humanities broadly conceived.

## Invitation

Most issues of ‘Religion in the Roman Empire’ will focus on a particular theme that serves to bring together scholars working in different fields and with different types of sources in order to propose and discuss methodologi-

cal approaches, material evidence or social and historiographic models that interpret religious 'data' within frameworks which are no longer defined by the clear-cut container concepts of 'cults', ethnic or 'polis religions', or the distinction of orthodox and heretical groups figuring in traditional accounts of the ancient history of religion.

'Religion in the Roman Empire' will concentrate on original research articles, but we also invite review articles covering a wider field of recent research or intensively engaging with new stimulating monographs. Thematic issues will bring together specialized articles, but occasional open issues will also encourage continuous submissions of articles to the editors. Articles will undergo double blind peer review.

Jörg Rüpke (Erfurt)  
Reinhard Feldmeier (Göttingen)  
Karen L. King (Harvard, MA)  
Rubina Raja (Aarhus)  
Annette Yoshiko Reed (Philadelphia, PA)  
Christoph Riedweg (Zürich)  
Seth Schwartz (New York, NY)  
Christopher Smith (Rome)  
Markus Vinzent (London)



Rubina Raja, Jörg Rüpke (Eds.)

## **Individual Appropriation in Lived Ancient Religion**



Rubina Raja, Jörg Rüpke

## Appropriating Religion: Methodological Issues in Testing the 'Lived Ancient Religion' Approach\*

### Abstract

This article presents the concept of 'lived ancient religion' as the methodological perspective underlying the contributions to this issue. For antiquity, the term is employed in order to denote an approach that focusses on the individual appropriation and embodiment of traditions, religious experiences and communication of religion in different social spaces, and the interaction of different levels facilitated by religious specialists. This approach is intended to replace the dated (and, with regard to Mediterranean antiquity, anachronistic) model of 'state religion' and 'religions'/'cults' in its variants.

**Keywords:** appropriation of religion, lived religion, social space, religious experience, culture in interaction

### 1 Historical and Sociological Problems in Analysing Ancient Religion

The History of Religion in the ancient Mediterranean is traditionally conceptualised as a history of co-existence, then competition, and finally suppression of religious traditions. Such a framework focusses research on the different units of such a grand narrative. Interaction is just a – contingent – element of the resulting descriptions, usually organised along local, ethnic or confessional lines: Athenian and Roman, Jewish and Punic, Isiac and Christian religion – or 'cult', if one wishes to stress the embeddedness of such a unit within a larger polytheistic framework. Interest is in the character (if not essence) of these units, their specific rules and narratives in ritual and belief

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\* Our research on this article has been financed by the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme of the European Community under agreement no. 295555 (ERC-Advanced Grant 'Lived Ancient Religion'). The contributions of this issue have been developed on the basis of papers given at the opening conference at Erfurt in June 2013, hosted by the Staatskanzlei of the State of Thuringia, the Augustinerkloster and the University of Erfurt. We wish to thank Ursula Birtel-Koltes (Max Weber Center) and Marlis Arnhold (Erfurt/Bonn) for the organisation of the conference.

systems, their architectural infrastructure and institutions, their identity and the way of life and attitudes related to them. In the end, internal decline or external clashes, change and survival form part of such a history.

What is wrong with that? Sociologically speaking, the balance between structure and individual agents is shifted to the one pole of an overwhelming and engaging structure here. Historically speaking, contemporary experiences of the diversity of religious practices and beliefs, of the heterogeneity and plurality of culture, and even of the failure of states (as well as the laborious and reversible process of state formation) have suggested paying more attention to the other pole. If individuality is not restricted to Western modernity, but is an analytically fruitful category for ancient and recent India as well as medieval Europe and the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean, as has been argued recently,<sup>1</sup> more attention must be paid to the other end of the spectrum. This holds true for religion as much as for state formation, for instance.<sup>2</sup> The concept of the polis was a project of an elite. Civic religion in antiquity was too. As in other cultural institutions, from the perspective chosen here, religious traditions are religions in the making.

How might ancient religion be analysed and described if the model of 'state religion' underlying the concepts of 'polis' or 'civic religion' has to be dropped for Mediterranean antiquity? This issue proposes to replace this model by the concept of 'lived ancient religion'.

## 2 Lived Ancient Religion

Within History of Religion, the concept of 'lived religion' has been developed for the description and analysis of contemporary religion by the American anthropologist Meredith McGuire in a book published in 2008.<sup>3</sup> Instead of starting from religious organisations, elaborated belief systems and their always insufficient reproduction by individual members and believers, 'lived religion' focusses on the individual's 'usage' of religion. It is actual everyday experience, practices, expressions, and interactions that could be related to 'religion', which take pride of place. Such 'religion' is understood as a spectrum of experiences, actions, and beliefs, as well as communications

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1 Rüpke 2012b; Rüpke and Spickermann 2012; Rüpke 2013a, 2013b; Rüpke and Woolf 2013; Fuchs and Rüpke 2015.

2 Terrenato and Haggis 2011.

3 McGuire 2008. For the following see also Rüpke 2012a and the brief summary in Rüpke 2014, 118–120. For the reception in Religious Studies see e.g. Piegeler, Prohl and Rademacher 2004; Heimbrock 2007.

hinging on human communication with super-human or even transcendent agent(s), which the ancient Mediterranean usually conceptualised as ‘gods’, but also as ‘heroes’, ‘demons’ or ‘angels’ or even in a pantheistic mode. Even if the existence of such an ontological level is frequently taken for granted, it is a difficult and competitive enterprise to catch its attention, to make it act on one’s own behalf, to feel being listened to, to tap resources inaccessible or even unknown by others. Thus, ritualisation and elaborate forms of representation might be called upon for the success of communication with these addressees.<sup>4</sup>

### 3 Finding and Interpreting Evidence

In thousands of instances it is the remnants of such acts of communication and their media, calling for attention and underlying the relevancy of one’s wishes and gratefulness towards gods and demonstrating the success of these efforts to one’s contemporaries, which dominate our evidence. Classifying such evidence according to the symbols (in particular named gods) used or group memberships (‘cults’, ‘religions’, ‘heresies’) postulated is hardly adequate, even if culturally stabilised forms of rituals and concepts are of importance as constraints (as much as results) of individual action. Individuals themselves are constituted inter-subjectively.<sup>5</sup>

From the extant evidence, the inter-subjective dimension of religious communication can 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.<sup>6</sup> Here the concept of ‘appropriation’ as developed by Michel de Certeau<sup>7</sup> is extremely helpful. Rather than stressing the ‘reproduction’ of culture, appropriation focusses on the partiality, the occasional character, the deficits, the incoherency, but above all on the strategic selectivity of the individual agent’s making prefabricated meanings one’s own. Accordingly, the cumulated effect of these appropriations is the precarious and ever-changing character of what claims to be normative tradition.

Thus, for the analysis of religion in the Roman Empire as well as elsewhere, meanings constructed by situations rather than coherent individual

4 Rüpke 2010. For the concept of ritualisation see Bell 1992; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994.

5 Classical: Mead 1934; Mead and Miller 1982; Archer 1996; Emirbayer and Mische 1998.

6 Ammerman 2007.

7 Certeau 1984, 2007.

worldviews should be identified. Likewise, the focus is on experience rather than symbols and the reconstruction of 'symbolic systems' and ritual rules. 'Experience' stresses the role of the viewer and user of images, of more or less sacralised space in temples, open sanctuaries or domestic and funeral contexts, again starting from the individual without neglecting dominating regimes of visibility.<sup>8</sup> Sound, too, and regimes of hearing should not be underrated.<sup>9</sup> Recent analyses of the phenomena related to experience have produced a concept of experience that takes into account the connection between personal experience and communicated meaning. As Matthias Jung has formulated, 'personal, lived experience in its qualitative-emotional dimension remains dumb and has no power to transform behaviour as long as it is not articulated symbolically ... any system of convictions and practices, that from the first-person point of view is no longer seen as expressive of qualitative experience, becomes increasingly obsolete.'<sup>10</sup> Such a concept of experience also opens up a new perspective for material culture as is shown in an 'archaeology of religious experience'.<sup>11</sup>

Experience also demands a refocussing on the analysis of ritual. Here, one can draw on the notion of 'embodiment', bringing together the materiality of our evidence and corporeal experience as a perspective thereupon. The concept stems from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and his preference for movement and gestures over mind; the body is thus given the principal role in perceiving environments and structuring the world. The performance of gestures, even though they do not cover the whole range of bodily experiences, contextualises natural entities and their bodies by conveying mental dispositions and enacting emotions, and shapes culturally informed meanings. The human body, along with the conditions of perception it entails, is what nuances subjectivity and places the individual self within culture and society, thus turning it into an 'embodied self'.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding communication with the invisible, the represented or even epiphanic 'other', ritual action is encoded in bodily movements. Given that memory is inextricably intertwined with sensorial mechanisms, feelings arising out of sensory input in diverse social contexts are embedded in bodily experience. Thus, religious experience was stimulated by and registered

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<sup>8</sup> E. g. Elsner and Rutherford 2005; Raja 2015; Rüpke 2010 and below the contributions of Arnhold and Dirven. For the concept of visibility see Simon 2010; Jensen 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Meyer 2008, 2009; for ancient religion see e. g. Meyer-Dietrich 2010 and below the contribution by Rüpke.

<sup>10</sup> Jung 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Raja and Rüpke 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Noland 2009.

in the form of sensations and movements as well as in postures taken, for instance, in prayer or in processions. Religious experience is shared by the inter-subjective coordination of bodily movements and reactions. Religious practices in the epoch under analysis were only rarely taught through formal religious instruction. Much more frequently it was acquired through appropriation and imitation of movements stored in and enhanced by memory. Thus images of rituals or gods in corresponding gestures could evoke embodied knowledge. Garments, paraphernalia as well as wreaths, the use of incense and the touch of amulets change bodily status for an extended period of time – demanding attention for gender differences. Literary evidence can help to corroborate hypotheses built on ancient images and artefacts, as will be shown by several contributions in this issue.

#### 4 Case Studies

Lucinda Dirven's article on Mithraic caves as 'tableaux vivants' exemplifies the potential and problems of such a refocussing on ritual performance and individual emotional involvement in ancient cults. According to her interpretation, it is not the production of some religious specialists that construes divine presence in the sanctuaries. Informed in many locations by the special shape of the ritual space, helped by visual effects of controlled natural light and artificial lamps, and intensified by appropriate dress, participants in the ritual stage and reshape narratives and are thus submitted to intense emotions. In arranging and decorating space for these rituals and in the actual performance, traditional meanings are as much reproduced as modified.

It is strategies of inclusion and exclusion, of hiding and exposure, rather than inherent specifics of religious symbols, that allow us to take a closer look at individual appropriations and thus lived ancient religions, as Marlis Arnholt's analysis of religious communication and practices featuring Bona Dea reminds us. Undoubtedly, pervading characteristics have to be acknowledged, for instance with regard to gender discrimination and the exclusion of men in many instances. Concentrating on variety, however, allows one to see the effect of locality as well as social factors and their interaction in creating the unique profile of specific local group styles. Freedmen and slaves demonstrate appropriation of Bona Dea at Ostia, which markedly differs from the literary tradition centring on Rome.

In order to bring 'Lived Ancient Religion' to bear on the available evidence, research has to concentrate on individual appropriation in diverse social spaces, not limiting itself to religious groups. The primary space of the

home and familial interaction (including familial funeral space) – which in its individual elaboration goes far beyond the religion of the ‘Here’ as characterized by Jonathan Zittel Smith<sup>13</sup> – is of utmost importance and will figure in this issue alongside the secondary space of religious experience and interaction in voluntary or professional associations just referred to. Further social spaces accrue, on the one hand, as spaces shared by many individuals or groups in the public sites of sanctuaries or festival routes, and on the other as the virtual space of literary communication and the intellectual discourses formed therein. The very different modes of appropriation of religion are illustrated by the articles of Weiss, North, and Rüpke as well as of Dirven and Arnhold. Only analysis of the whole spectre of social interaction ranging from domestic cult to public spaces and professionals will allow a sufficiently complex notion of individual appropriation in lived ancient religion to form. Of course, the use and construction of these social spaces by individual agents have to be contextualised in terms of locality and time.

Lara Weiss’ article on ‘the consumption of religion in Roman Karanis’ takes up the challenge of an archaeological analysis in the framework of Lived Ancient Religion by focussing on the domestic space of an agricultural town in Roman Egypt, and more precisely in the northern Fayum. The analysis of figurines called ‘dolls’ or ‘statuettes’ is as sensitive to contexts as it is critical of a functional analysis that loses sight of the fact that function, too, is a category mediated by the people dealing with the objects. Context, thus, is as much a situational configuration as a moment in the life of an object. Instead of postulating ancient norms about usage, the historian of religion has to acknowledge a variety of different usages and to reflect on their interactions. Ethnographic comparison might help in controlled imagination.

The challenge to allow for temporal variables in the ritual performance and situational ascription of meaning is reinforced by an important source for ancient religion, that is descriptions or prescriptions organised according to calendars. Ovid’s commentary on the Roman calendar is analysed with this problem in mind. More specifically, however, the article by Jörg Rüpke on the implied or rather ‘connected reader’ as a window into Lived Ancient Religion deals with the problem of identifying evidence for individual appropriation of religion beyond the authors of literary texts. It is not easy to take the text at face value in its description of religious practices. Yet it is an important document for the interaction of specialists’ elaborated descriptions and interpretations in the shaping of contemporary (as well as later) recipients’ construction of religion and appropriate religious action.

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13 Smith 2003, 24–27.

Concentrating on the questions Ovid is asking, or has his figures ask, the article suggests that reader-response criticism offers a tool for reconstructing lived ancient religion. The Why and What and When of the narrated reader allows one to reconstruct a profile of what is questionable and worth knowing for the implied reader by this exceptionally preserved 'antiquarian' text.

Religious traditions are more than a product of providers of religious knowledge and services, 'priests' or professionals. Most of the evidence at our disposal is best to be interpreted neither as 'authentic' individual expression nor as institutional 'survival', but as media, as the result of a 'culture created in interaction'.<sup>14</sup> Institutionalised roles or priesthoods, the reformulation of religion as knowledge that is kept and elaborated by such professionals, and complex rituals are products of historical developments and subjected to change, but they are also testimonies of synchronic tensions and conflicting claims, as is exemplified by the analysis of John North.

Within the different phases of Roman funeral rituals, the final stages are characterised by the performance of a funeral dirge by a group of hired female mourners, the so-called *naenia*. The status of its performers and their female leader, probably hired from the professional undertaker associated with the *Lucus Libitinae*, is ambivalent and in contrast with the praising role of male (and noble) performers of laudatory speeches and other rituals before. Clearly, widely shared concepts of individual heroic status and the post-mortem dissolution of individual identity into the community of the *di Manes* clash, a clash resolved in terms of chronological sequencing, gender and status differences. Religious roles and shared meanings are of importance for any individual appropriation of religion, as North's article reminds us.

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<sup>14</sup> Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Lichterman 2009.

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## The Mithraeum as *tableau vivant*

A Preliminary Study of Ritual Performance and Emotional Involvement  
in Ancient Mystery Cults

### Abstract

The so-called mystery cults invested heavily in emotional experiences in which a feeling of closeness to the divine was the ultimate goal of the initiate. The way this divine closeness was established and envisaged differed from cult to cult. The first part of this contribution discusses ritual, myth, and ritual performance in elective cults and argues that rituals inspired by the cults' sacred narrative played a crucial role in establishing a feeling of closeness to the divine. Following Paul Connerton, I argue that by re-enacting the narrative, those who take part in the cult become contemporaries with the mythic event. The second part of the article sets out to reconstruct the religious experience of the worshippers of Mithras. It can be shown that architecture, iconography, and ritual acts all played a part in actualising the mythological narrative, thereby establishing a collective identity as well as a strong and personal relationship between the individual participant and his god.

**Keywords:** mystery cults, initiation, myth, ritual performance, religious iconography, Mithras

### 1 Introduction

Lived religion, in Jörg Rüpke's sense of individual appropriation of religious traditions, has not been a popular concept in the study of ancient religions.<sup>1</sup> Since Emile Durkheim published his *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* in 1912, the focus in the study of Ancient Mediterranean religion has been on religion as a social phenomenon, a collective and public enterprise. This preference for an approach that seeks the meaning of religion in the social domain is perhaps not surprising, given the incomplete nature of our sources on ancient religion in general and personal religious experience in particular. The indifference regarding individual religious experience was

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1 Rüpke 2013.

magnified by the widely-held opinion that ancient religion was not about belief (in the Christian sense of the word) but about practice. According to this view, Greek religion, but especially Roman religion, was not so much about what people believed in, but about what they did.<sup>2</sup> Combined with the dichotomy between thought and action that is typical of our post-Reformation western world, this emphasis on ritual practice tends to turn ancient religion into a largely formal enterprise, devoid of personal emotions, that has little to do with religion as we know it today.

In much of twentieth century scholarship on ancient religion, the so-called ancient mystery cults are seen as the exception to this rule. Unlike civic or public cults, which are characterised as more detached, in these elective cults the close relationship between individual and deity is thought to be at the centre. Until recently, it was common to see the so-called mystery cults as an alternative to the traditional public cults and as forerunners, and ultimately competitors, of Christianity, in which a personal relationship with the supernatural was supposedly central.<sup>3</sup> Walter Burkert's ground-breaking study on mystery cults changed this picture fundamentally.<sup>4</sup> Not only do recent studies stress that mystery cults were always an essential element of ancient Mediterranean religion and should not be seen in contrast to public cults, no one now believes that they competed directly with Christianity.

This does not alter the fact that mystery cults invested heavily in emotional experiences in which a feeling of closeness to the divine was the ultimate goal of the initiate.<sup>5</sup> Crucial to this encounter with the divine was a ritual of initiation, which is what distinguished the mysteries from the public domain.<sup>6</sup> Non-disclosure of these rituals was fundamental, and consequently there are no literary sources that explicitly describe what went on during initiation. We do, however, have some scattered accounts and pictorial representations that express the intense feelings that accompanied the experience of initiation into mysteries. Both the literary testimonies and the pictorial representations emphasise the closeness of the initiate to the divine. The *locus classicus* is Lucius' description, in Apuleius' novel 'The Golden Ass', of his initiation into the mysteries of Isis:

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2 Beard, North, Price 1998.

3 Turcan 1992, 18–21 is paradigmatic.

4 Burkert 1987, esp. 1–11, for the refutation of three important stereotypes in the study of mystery cults.

5 Waldner 2013, 226.

6 The uniqueness of this category of cult was already noted by ancient observers, who used the term *myéo* or *teleo* in connection with a personal object and the name of a deity: Burkert 1987, 8–9.

‘I reached the boundary of death, and set foot on the threshold of Proserpina, and then I returned, carried through all the elements; in the middle of the night I saw the sun blazing with bright light; *I approached the gods below and the gods above face to face, and worshipped them from near at hand* (my italics).<sup>7</sup>

In representations related to the mysteries, this proximity is sometimes visualised by the interaction of historical and mythological figures.<sup>8</sup> The Lovatelli Urn, for example, illustrates three successive events from the Eleusian mysteries and ends by representing the initiand standing in front of Demeter and Kore, touching the snake in Demeter’s lap without fear. Burkert notes that this scene conceals the secret of the ceremonies by proceeding to a mythical level.<sup>9</sup> This, however, was exactly what the mysteries were all about.

The way this divine closeness was established and envisaged differed from cult to cult. Some texts suggest that the initiates identified with the object of their adoration and/or obtained divine status themselves,<sup>10</sup> whereas others seem to imply that the initiand came eye to eye with the god in an epiphany. The experience possibly even differed from individual to individual. This may be inferred from a passage in Proclus (412–485 CE), in which he describes various experiences during the mysteries (most likely of Eleusis):

‘The mysteries ... cause sympathy of the souls with the ritual (*dromena*) in a way that is unintelligible to us, and divine, so that some of the initiates are stricken with panic, being filled with divine awe; others assimilate themselves to the holy symbols, leave their own identity, become at home with the gods, and experience divine possession (*entheiadzein*).’<sup>11</sup>

It is of course impossible to reconstruct the individual emotional experience in each mystery cult. What we can do, however, is investigate how the different cults set out to establish the feeling of divine closeness. In reconstructing these ritual processes we can use literary and archaeological sources for both

7 *Metam.* 11.23.6–8 (trans. Bowden 2010, 166). This passage may be supplemented by a number of other authors. Cf. the compilation in Burkert 1987, Chapter IV: “The Extraordinary Experience”.

8 Other well-known examples include the frescos in the Villa dei Misteri in Pompeii (Bowden 2010, 130–3) and the floor mosaic in the House of Dionysos in Sepphoris (Talgam, Weiss 2004, 17–8). The Mithraic representations discussed below belong in the same category.

9 Burkert 1987, figs. 2–5, 94–95.

10 A gold leaf from a tumulus grave in Thurii dating to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE states that the initiand has become a god instead of a mortal: Graf, Johnston 2007, 9. Another telling example is the ritual (of an unknown deity) described by Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanorum religionum* 22.1–4. At the conclusion of the ritual, the priest murmurs (in Greek) that the *mystai* will be saved from their travails, just like the god. For an extensive commentary tradition on this distich see Turcan 1982, 313–317.

11 *In Remp.* II 108, 17–30 (Kroll). Cf. Burkert 1987, 114 with note 161.

mystery religions and public cults. By comparing the mystery cults among themselves we may arrive at a better understanding of the similarities and differences within these cults, and a comparison with the surrounding public cults further helps to visualise the emotional experience in the mysteries.<sup>12</sup> It goes without saying that such a project far exceeds the scope of one article. In order to illustrate my point I shall therefore restrict my discussion to the encounter with the divine in the mysteries of the god Mithras.

Of all mystery cults, the mysteries of Mithras have received the least attention from the point of view of individual experience.<sup>13</sup> Since Franz Cumont started studying the cult more than a hundred years ago, the focus has been on reconstructing a belief system by decoding the symbols of the cult.<sup>14</sup> This is due in part to the material at our disposal for reconstructing the ritual practices and beliefs surrounding Mithras, who was popular in large parts of the Roman Empire from 100–400 CE.<sup>15</sup> Whereas there is a rich array of archaeological remains, consisting of cult buildings, statues, reliefs and paintings, inscriptions and an assortment of small finds, testimonials written by initiates are almost entirely absent.<sup>16</sup> All written information about the cult is provided by outsiders and hence suffers from problems of interpretation. The material remains do, however, display a remarkable degree of uniformity, and this incited Cumont and his followers to reconstruct a Mithraic canon. Nowadays hardly anyone believes in Cumont's idea of a Mithraic orthodoxy and the reality of regional variety is increasingly recog-

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12 The importance of public religions for understanding the mysteries (in this case of Mithras) was rightly emphasised by Klöckner 2011, 200–201. She points out that of late, some of the mysteries have become specialised fields of study, which tends to obscure the context that is crucial to a proper understanding.

13 Recent exceptions are Gordon 2009 (who focuses on initiation rituals and the internalisation of these rituals) and Klöckner 2011 (an inspiring article in which the author combines the available sources in order to reconstruct the emotional experience of the participants).

14 Even after Cumont was knocked off his pedestal in the 1970s and a Mithraic doctrine was rejected, symbolism reigned in Mithraic studies. In later works astrology sets the tone: cf. Beck 2006. In his most recent work, Richard Gordon distances himself from the focus on astrology: Gordon 2007.

15 Although the god is attested in most parts of the Roman Empire, he was not equally popular in all regions. The cult flourished mainly in Italy, Germania, and the region along and near the north-western frontier of the Empire. Instances in Spain, North Africa and the eastern part of the Roman Empire are far more rare. For a recent and up to date map of the spread of Mithraic sanctuaries in the Roman Empire see Witschel 2013, 206–207. For an introduction into the cult see Claus 2000 (2012) and Gordon 2012.

16 The most important exceptions are the dipinti from the Mithraeum below Santa Prisca in Rome. Cf. below note 66.

nised.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that worshippers of Mithras shared a material culture that was broadly similar throughout a vast area that stretched from the Antonine Wall to the Euphrates. It is from this material, combined with literary fragments, that I shall attempt in the second part of this article to reconstruct the religious experience of Mithras' worshippers. The material evidence for this cult is particularly telling because it can be shown that architecture, iconography, and ritual acts all played their part in actualising the mythological narrative, thereby bringing the individual participant close to his god. But before beginning such an account, some preliminary methodological remarks ought to be made in order to justify the chosen approach.

## 2 Ritual, Myth and Ritual Performance

Traditionally, scholarship has tended to connect the intense emotional experience and feeling of closeness to the divine in mystery cults with rituals of initiation.<sup>18</sup> In turn, it is customary to compare rituals of initiation with rites of passage, in particular with adolescent initiation rites, where an individual – frequently in a group – goes through a highly charged, disturbing ritual, from which he or she emerges with a new social identity.<sup>19</sup>

Both the fixation on initiation rituals and the equation of initiatory rituals with rites of passage are problematic and do not do justice to the specific emotional experiences within mystery cults. Although our sources suggest that at least some initiation rituals were extremely unpleasant experiences, albeit followed by a feeling of euphoria,<sup>20</sup> these were not the only types of ritual celebrated in these cults. In Eleusis, initiation was the climax of an elaborate ritual cycle,<sup>21</sup> and in the cult of Mithras the most important and

17 On this tension between the universal and the particular in remains from the cult, see Dirven, McCarty 2014.

18 The concept was developed by Arnold Van Gennep and became particularly popular with the work of Victor Turner: Turner 1964 and 1974. For Turner's influence upon the study of ancient religion, see Versnel 1994, 60–74.

19 Cf. Johnston 2004, 105–107 (with some pertinent critical remarks).

20 Particularly revealing (and therefore frequently quoted), is Plutarch's comparison of a near-death experience with the emotions that surfaced during initiation into the mysteries: '[The soul at the point of death] suffers an experience similar to those who celebrate great initiations ... Wandering astray in the beginning, tiresome walking in circles, some frightening paths in darkness that lead nowhere; then immediately before the end all the terrible things, panic and shivering and sweat and bewilderment.' (frg. 178 Sandbach = Stobaeus, *Anth.*4.52.49). Trans. Burkert 1987, 91–92.

21 For a description of the sequence of events, see Foley 1994, 65–71.

frequently celebrated ritual act – the communal meal – was not a ritual of initiation.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, though there are similarities between initiation rituals and rites of passage, it is important also to note the differences between the two. First, not all initiation rituals were as disturbing as rites of passage. Second, unlike rites of passage, which are a once-in-a-lifetime experience, mystery cults were not mutually exclusive, and people could be initiated into as many mysteries as they pleased. There were even some mysteries, moreover, into which one could be initiated more than once;<sup>23</sup> others (such as the mysteries of Mithras), had a grade system of initiation.<sup>24</sup> The third and most important difference between initiations into the mysteries and rites of passage, however, is the marked social component in the latter type of rituals, as opposed to the individual experience in the mysteries. Since the work of Victor Turner, scholars have tended to emphasise joint emotional experience in rites of passage, especially in the so-called liminal phase, which results in a strong feeling of *communitas* among the participants and a new social identity after the ritual.<sup>25</sup> At the centre of the mystery cults was not this communal experience, but the personal encounter with the divine. This is not to say that the concept of community was of no importance. As Angelos Chaniotis has pointed out, the shared ritual experience of initiation did establish the cult community as an emotional community.<sup>26</sup> It is, however, first and foremost the individual, rather than the group, who aims to achieve a privileged and close connection with the divine. Rites of passage do not explain how this personal relationship is achieved, nor do they enable us to retrieve the different experiences in various mystery cults.

Recently, historians who take a cognitive approach towards religion have opted for a more individual and emotional approach to the mystery cults.<sup>27</sup> Following the classification of the anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse, they

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22 We know little about exactly how often Mithras's initiates assembled to celebrate the meal and if and how often this coincided with rituals of initiation. Most scholars assume that the group came together perhaps once a month to share a common meal, whereas initiation rituals were far less frequent: Alvar 2008, 361–364.

23 Cf. the three subsequent initiations (two in the mysteries of Isis, one in the mysteries of Osiris) referred to in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Book XI. Plural initiation was not uncommon in the mysteries of Eleusis either.

24 On the seven grades of initiation in the cult of Mithras, see Alvar 2008, 364–381, with references for further reading.

25 Above, note 18.

26 Chaniotis 2012, 267–269.

27 For example Bowden 2010 (a book for a wider audience but with some thought-provoking new ideas) and Martin, Pachis 2009, with contributions on Mithras by Roger Beck and Ales Chalupa. The introduction to this volume by Harvey Whitehouse is particularly revealing. Cf. also Beck 2006, 93–94.

qualify mystery cults as an imagistic mode of religiosity that contrasts with a doctrinal mode of religiosity.<sup>28</sup> Imagistic modes of religiosity emphasise sporadic intense events that, once experienced, are never forgotten and are associated with episodic or 'flashbulb' recall. What is characteristic for this mode of religiosity is that it is non-verbal and non-dogmatic; ideas are conveyed mainly through images. Those who have gone through the ritual reflect on the experience but are unable to communicate their experience to others. By contrast, the doctrinal mode of religiosity tends to codify revelation in doctrines, transmitted through standard forms of worship that generally have a low emotional impact. Whitehouse stresses that these contrasting dynamics are often found in one and the same religious tradition, frequently among different social groups.<sup>29</sup>

The available sources do indeed suggest that mystery cults were largely imagistic in nature. Qualifying mystery cults as imagistic does not teach us anything new about these cults; nor does the category enable us to fill in the missing links in our information.<sup>30</sup> It does, however, encourage us to re-emphasise a number of well-known citations in ancient authors that state that the ultimate goal of the mysteries was an individual, personal experience, rather than a religious doctrine.<sup>31</sup> It also follows that it would be better to stop looking for a clear-cut doctrine. Seen in this light, past failures to recover these doctrines are not so much due to the secrecy of the mysteries, but to the fact that doctrine was of minor importance in the first place. This implies that in our search for the ways in which people encountered the divine, we should not focus on philosophical and intellectual ideas, but on action, enactment, and performance within these cults. It is through these actions that we may hope to recover some of the emotions of the participants.

An important insight into the actions that established the immediate encounter with the divine can be found in Plutarch, when he explains the foundation of the mysteries of Isis:

'Nor did she (Isis) allow the contests and struggles which she has undertaken, and her many deeds of wisdom and bravery, to be engulfed by oblivion and silence, but into the most sacred rites (*teletai*) she infused images (*eikones*), underlying meanings (*hyponoiai*) and imitations (*mimemata*) of her experiences at the time (*ton tote pathematon*) and

28 One may wonder, however, how 'individual' this approach really is, since the starting point is that individuals largely react in a similar (even universal) way to religious stimuli.

29 Whitehouse 2000 and 2004.

30 Burkert 1987, 69 already noted that the mysteries are unspeakable, *arrêthe*.

31 Aristotle, for example, emphasized that the initiates were not supposed to learn (*mathein*) something, but to experience (*pathein*) the Mysteries (fr. 15 Rose = Synesius, *Dion* 10 p. 48a).

so she consecrated at once a pattern (*didagma*) of piety and an encouragement (*paramythion*) to men and women overtaken by similar misfortunes.<sup>32</sup>

So according to Plutarch, Isis' own experiences were the inspiration for her mysteries, which consisted of images (*eikones*), implicit meanings (*hyponoiai*), and imitations (*mimêmata*).<sup>33</sup> Greek *eikôn* should be taken here in its widest sense, with reference not only to statues, paintings, and other images, but also to symbolic representations that take shape in the architecture of sanctuaries or other objects. In Plato's day, *hyponoia* was the regular word for what later became known as the allegorical interpretation of myth,<sup>34</sup> and it is certainly used here by Plutarch in that sense, whereas *mimêmata* is generally used to describe ritual performance based upon a mythological narrative.<sup>35</sup>

Plutarch's idea that it was a quasi-biographical narrative that inspired the different elements of Isis' mysteries accords surprisingly well with modern research, in which the close correspondence between myth and mystery cults is frequently remarked upon.<sup>36</sup> Examples include the relationship between various elements in the Eleusinian rituals and the Homeric Hymn to Demeter,<sup>37</sup> the myth of Chthonian Dionysos and initiation into the Orphic-Bacchic mysteries,<sup>38</sup> and various rituals in the cult of Isis and Osiris.<sup>39</sup> Although many acknowledge the relationship, actual research into the subject has been extremely thin on the ground. Nobody has ever assembled all the instances that attest to a relationship between myth and ritual in the

32 *De Iside et Osiride* 27, 361de (trans. Griffith 1970, 159).

33 Schuddeboom 2009, 54 points out that Plutarch uses the term *teletè* many times in various meanings, of which 'mystery' is but one possibility. He argues *op. cit.* 55 that in *Is. et Os.* 361e, the word is used in the general sense of religious ceremony, i. e. a ritual act in which secrecy is not required. This follows from the fact that Plutarch is speaking of the situation in Egypt, where Isis mysteries did not exist. Although correct, the wording does recall Isis aretologies in which Isis claims to have founded the mysteries. This has led interpreters to assume that Plutarch identified these Egyptian rites with the Greek mysteries: Griffith 1970, 390–2; Burkert 1987, 78; Beck 2006, 10.

34 Graf 1993, 184.

35 Parker 1989, 154–155.

36 Even Nilsson 1961, 469, who tried to downplay the role of myth for religion, had to admit that rituals had a pervasive effect upon mystery cults such as those of Dionysos, Meter, Demeter, Isis and Mithras. Cf. Graf 1993, 116, who cites the mysteries as one of the few instances in which myth and ritual are clearly related.

37 Foley 1994, 65. Clement of Alexandria tells of a mystic drama in which the abduction of Persephone and the wanderings and mourning of Demeter were re-enacted: *Protrep-tikos* 2.12.2. Cf. Richardson 1974, 24–25; Stephanus of Byzantium writes that the lesser mysteries involved 'an imitation of the story of Dionysos': Stephanus of Byzantium, s. v. *Agra*. Cf. Parker 1989, 154–155.

38 Burkert 1987, 73 lists the references.

39 Merkelbach 2001, esp. 150–174, lists numerous instances (not all of them equally convincing).

mystery cults, let alone compared the connection between myth and ritual in the mystery cults to that in public cults.

The reluctance among present-day historians to look into this connection is no doubt a reaction to the over-simplistic presentation of the relationship between myth and ritual by representatives of the evolutionistic myth-and-ritual school that flourished around the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> In its most extreme form, the myth-and-ritual school argued that every known myth originated as an explanation of ritual. In reaction, classical studies stressed the meaning of myths and minimised ritual. Hence ancient historians have tended to downplay the relationship between myth and rituals and to argue that the two are largely autonomous phenomena. According to Fritz Graf, many myths are only linked to the rituals they explain by a general feeling, a mood.<sup>41</sup> Even when the closer relationship between myth and rituals in the mysteries is acknowledged, the relationship is still generally thought to be a loose and playful one.<sup>42</sup>

Recent anthropological studies confirm that myth and ritual do not reflect each other one to one as the myth-and-ritual school argued. At the same time, however, such studies highlight the intimate correlation between myth and ritual and the way they interact in performance.<sup>43</sup> According to performance theory, the efficacy of ritual lies in its non-intellectual aspects: understanding is generated through emotional and behavioural involvement, which is brought about by the simultaneous presence of many media.<sup>44</sup> The anthropologist Stephen Hugh-Jones was one of the first to study how myth and ritual work practically in a given situation. Hugh-Jones observed myth in a performative setting and concluded that myth and ritual only obtain meaning when related to each other. In other words: 'it is in the context of ritual that the potential meaning of myth is made actual'. Myth and ritual may do something quite different when they work together in the same performative setting. Myths do not say the same as ritual, but they say more if related to ritual and vice versa.<sup>45</sup> The emotional impact of the ritual performance of sacred narrative on the participants cannot be overstated. It is by re-enacting the narrative that those who take part in the cult become con-

40 On the Cambridge school and its critics, see Versnel 1994, esp. 23–48.

41 Graf 1993, 113–116, with several illustrative examples. He refers to the Homeric Hymn to Demeter as one of the few examples in which an *aition* is supposed to account for all the details of the rituals.

42 Burkert 1987, 77.

43 An extremely useful introduction to the power of performance, with ample references for further reading; Kowalzig 2007, 43–53.

44 On this phenomenon, known as *synaistheia*, see Rappaport 1999.

45 Hugh-Jones 1979, 260.

temporaries with the mythic event. In an important sociological study, Paul Connerton pointed out that this accounts for the immense mnemonic power of these kinds of commemorative rituals.<sup>46</sup>

### 3 The Mysteries of Mithras

Taking my lead from Plutarch, I propose here to take the sacred narrative of Mithras as the starting point for understanding the *eikones*, *mimēmata* and *hyponoiai* in his mysteries. In the following sections, I shall first discuss the archaeological remains as evidence that a sacred story in which Mithras is the main protagonist must have been central to his worshippers. Subsequently, I shall turn to the question of how this story was important to the Mithraists and how it can be used to reconstruct the cult. I shall argue against Cumont that there was no such thing as *a* sacred story, from which we may deduce the dogma of *the* cult. The archaeological remains are far too diverse for such a hypothesis to hold. The simple reason why we cannot establish the myth and its exact meaning is probably that no such fixed story existed in the first place. We can, however, go some way to retrieving the role that the story or stories that centred on Mithras and his heroic deeds played in both architecture and rituals and from here show how the participants revived the mythical past and established a feeling of closeness with the divine, in a way that recalls Plutarch's description of the mysteries.

To judge from Plutarch's description of the mysteries of Isis, the underlying mythological narrative not only inspired the *eikones* and *mimēmata*, but was also the basis for the *hyponoiai*, or allegorical interpretation of the mysteries. Over the last thirty years, there has been plentiful attention, notably in the work of Richard Gordon and Roger Beck, for this aspect of the mysteries of Mithras, which had strong astrological connotations.<sup>47</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to repeat their important results. My argument is that allegory is yet another level or code for making sense of what is going on, but that it does not replace the more literal level.<sup>48</sup> The stress on

<sup>46</sup> Connerton 1989, esp. 41–71.

<sup>47</sup> The list of publications by both scholars on symbolism in the mysteries of Mithras is long and I confine myself here to some key publications. Gordon 1976 on the sacred geography of the Mithraeum is an important article. Beck 2006 summarizes many important conclusions from his former research.

<sup>48</sup> The Mithraeum no doubt contained various levels of meaning that were probably not appreciated by all initiates. This may be behind the remark of the church father Origen, who notes 'among them (the Persians) are mysteries which are interpreted rationally (i. e. allegorically) by the learned men, but are taken in their external significance by

the symbolic meaning of the mysteries, however, has led recent scholarship to neglect the role of the sacred narrative in establishing contact with the divine. What follows is an attempt to rehabilitate Mithras' story by arguing that it was indispensable in establishing a feeling of closeness to the divine through *eikones* and *mimēmata*.

#### 4 The Narrative of Mithras

If we take our point of departure from the archaeological remains of the cult, there can be no doubt that a sacred narrative in which Mithras was the main protagonist played a prominent role in his sanctuaries. This may be inferred from the image of Mithras killing the bull that is presented in nearly every sanctuary as the central scene in a narrative which centres on Mithras. Minor variations aside, the image of the tauroctony is more or less the same throughout the empire.<sup>49</sup> A clean-shaven deity in Persian attire kneels with his left leg on a bull and pulls the animal's head back with his left hand, while with his right he stabs a dagger in the animal's shoulder. A snake and a dog rear up, eagerly licking the blood pouring from the wound. Below, there is a scorpion grasping the testicles of the bull. The god is frequently depicted looking over his shoulder towards a raven that is approaching from the left-hand side. The scene is commonly flanked by two youthful figures that replicate the central figure, except for the upturned and downturned torches in their hands.<sup>50</sup> The event takes place in a cave that is frequently adorned by, or made of, astral symbols and that is flanked by the busts of the sun and the moon in the upper corners.

The prominent location, ubiquity, and canonicity of this scene unmistakably show that it was of prime importance to the religious experience in

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rather superficial minds and by the common people. The same may be said of the Syrians and the Indians, and of all who have both myths and interpretative writings', *Contra Celsum* 1.12 [καὶ περὶ Περσῶν· παρ' οἷς εἰσι τελεταί, πρεσβευόμεναι μὲν λογικῶς ὑπὸ τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς λογίων συμβολικῶς δὲ γινόμεναι ὑπὸ τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς πολλῶν καὶ ἐπιπολαιωτέρων. Τὸ δ' αὐτὸ καὶ περὶ Σύρων καὶ Ἰνδῶν καὶ τῶν ὅσοι καὶ μύθους καὶ γράμματα ἔχουσι λεκτέον]. I follow the translation by Chadwick 1980, 15. Beck 2006, 4, translates *symbolikōs* as 'symbolically', with a reference to Chadwick, *op. cit.*, who translates 'external significance' instead. The text is crucial for Beck's argument that the mysteries came into being via their symbols. However, it follows from the following sentence on the Syrians and Indians that *symbolikōs* refers to *muthous*, stories.

49 Literature on the tauroctony is vast. Cf. Turcan 2008 for references to previous publications.

50 The two frequently hold additional objects as well. On their iconography see Hinnells 1976.

Mithraic temples. Notwithstanding its omnipresence, however, it is not clear how exactly it functioned in the practice of the cult.<sup>51</sup> What is important in the present discussion is that the scene is frequently at the centre of a sacred narrative pertaining to the god and his heroic deeds. This follows from the smaller scenes that are often arranged in strips on two, three, or four sides of the tauroctony and that depict events leading up to the battle as well as events following it. This confirms that regardless of all other possible roles, the tauroctony is definitely an element of a sacred story.

In contrast to the tauroctony, which is consistently represented in essentially the same manner, the surrounding scenes vary as to the choice, sequence, and number of scenes in each relief. In a profound study of these scenes, Richard Gordon counted forty-seven side scenes, and this number has since increased due to new discoveries.<sup>52</sup> Although the number and choice of the small scenes varies with each monument and not all episodes are easy to understand, they may be roughly divided into four themes, which by and large represent events that revolve around the killing of the bull: events before Mithras' birth, events from his early life, events leading up to the killing of the bull, and episodes that follow from the kill and involve Sol.<sup>53</sup> There are ten side scenes, from various of these groups, that appear more frequently than others.<sup>54</sup> In the first group, illustrating events preced-

51 In all probability, the scene had various levels of meaning that need not concern us here since our focus is on the narrative. Roger Beck rightly points out that there is a lot of astrological symbolism in this scene; bull, snake, dog, scorpion, raven – nearly all elements have or might have an astronomical or cosmological significance. But this was by no means its only meaning, nor is it necessary to argue with Beck 2006, 25 that it was the most important one. On the tauroctony as a theophany, see Zwirn 1989, who criticizes the over-symbolic interpretation of the narrative advanced by Gordon in his 1976 article.

52 Gordon 1980a, esp. 203–204 and 211. Cf. Beck 2006, 25. The most important new discoveries are a Mithraic relief now in Jerusalem: de Jong 2000, and the paintings in the Mithraeum at Huarte: Gawlikowski 2007. The latter instance is, in my view, an exception to the corpus because it presents us with new scenes that probably derive from another religious tradition. Cf. below, note 63.

53 This is not to say that there was a fixed reading order in the narrative cycle on the monuments. Richard Gordon convincingly points out that it is impossible to establish any such order. But this does not alter the fact that we may distinguish sequences of events that logically follow from each other. The banquet of Mithras and Sol, for example, logically follows the slaying of the bull. In my view, the actual placement of scenes in reliefs does not contradict the idea that there was a narrative sequence in the story of Mithras. What is it does show is that telling the story through images was not the prime objective of these monuments.

54 Gordon 2012, col. 977. Gordon counts nine scenes and distinguishes three groups for he takes events from Mithras' youth and the killing of the bull as one group. The classification in four groups proposed above derives from Zwirn 1989. Cf. Merkelbach 1984, figs

ing the birth of Mithras, Jupiter's slaying of the giants and the sleeping Saturn are particularly frequent. Popular scenes from Mithras' early life include his birth from a rock and him shooting water out of the rock. In the group that centres on Mithras' dealings with the bull, Mithras riding the animal and dragging it to its place of sacrifice (*transitus dei*) are the most frequent scenes. In the fourth and final group of events, those that take place after the tauroctony, we find Mithras' subjection of Sol, the banquet of Mithras and Sol, the pact of Mithras and Sol (*dextrarum iunctio*), and Mithras entering Sol's quadriga.

Although there can be no doubt that a narrative was of prime importance in Mithraic sanctuaries, it is by no means certain how we should interpret the visual evidence, and what role we should ascribe to these *eikones* in the cult. Since there is no relevant narrative in contemporary literary sources, Franz Cumont, the founder of the modern study of the mysteries, set out to reconstruct the myth on the basis of iconographic material found in Mithraea, which he interpreted in the light of the sacred books of Persian Zoroastrianism. By combining all extant representations – and he was the first to assemble these in a corpus of the monuments – he arrived at a prototype of a narrative cycle that was the illustration of a canonical myth. Subsequently, he used this canonical myth as a means of reconstructing Mithraic doctrine. Apart from the Iranian character of the story, which is now almost universally dismissed, two major objections can be made against Cumont's reconstruction.<sup>55</sup> Cumont presupposes there was a canonical story that was illustrated by numerous scenes. He also assumes that all viewers were familiar with this story, which enabled them to read individual monuments accordingly. The available evidence does not substantiate either of these suppositions.

It is clear that Cumont's hypothesis is based on assumptions derived from the character and functioning of Christian art, in which we find illustrations of a single, unalterable text that are designed to communicate this text to the viewer; the primary intention behind such illustrations is to instruct those who are unable to read the text itself.<sup>56</sup> Since the *communis opinio* today is

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46, 48, 61, 77, 89, 90, 97, 121, 133, 156, 157, 158 (after Gordon). I take the *dextrarum iunctio* as a tenth scene that is attested fairly frequently (seven instances). Cf. the list in Gordon 1980a, 216. Possibly, the scene in which Mithras and Sol stand before an altar while carrying a spits is a variation on this scene, since the scene is once fused with the *dextrarum iunctio* (CIMRM 650 from Nersae).

55 On Cumont's theory and the arguments brought forward against it, see Gordon 1975 and Beck 1984.

56 Cumont remarked '... il faudra attendre pour retrouver une tentative analogue, les longues compositions dont les mosaïstes chrétiens décoreront les parois des églises'. Cumont 1913, 230.

that no such sacred, canonical text ever existed in the cult of Mithras, we consequently have to abandon the idea that Mithraic images are illustrations to such a text, let alone that they testify to a Mithraic dogma.

Nevertheless, though the story is not fixed, this does not mean that anything goes, for the actors and animals that figure in the various versions of this story are remarkably consistent.<sup>57</sup> This implies that, together with the visual experience and culturally determined preconditions of the viewer, even unique or very rare scenes could be understood and incorporated into the narrative.<sup>58</sup> A telling example can be found in a fairly recently published relief that is now in Jerusalem. In the lower left-hand corner, we see the unique representation of two figures in Persian dress carrying a large cauldron between them on a pole.<sup>59</sup> Despite the fact that this is the sole instance of such a scene, the figures' clothing and headdress allow them to be identified as the torchbearers Cautes and Cautopates. The two brothers frequently assist Mithras at important moments in his life, such as his birth, shooting water from the rock, the killing of the bull, or his sacred repast with Sol.<sup>60</sup> The cauldron they are carrying must refer to the sacred repast, in which they are frequently represented as serving Mithras and Sol. So the Jerusalem relief represents Cautes and Cautopates preparing the divine banquet. Confirmation for this interpretation may be found in the paintings from Dura-Europos, where we find another unique scene that is reminiscent of the Jerusalem relief: here we see the two brothers carrying the bull on the pole, rather than the cauldron.<sup>61</sup> To my knowledge, the Mithraeum from Huarte (north-west Syria) is the only monument to feature scenes with figures that are totally unique in Mithraic iconography.<sup>62</sup> As an exception, the late fourth-century

57 A number of reliefs incorporate representations of other, non-Mithraic deities in these scenes. For example *CIMRM* 966; 1128; 1137; 1292. These figures do not, however, interact with Mithras or other figures from Mithras narrative and are not narrative in character. Furthermore, statues of the same deities are regularly found as votive gifts in Mithraea.

58 As modern viewers, we are partly dependent upon the corpus of Mithraic monuments to reconstruct the visual experience of the ancient viewer. Equally important, however, are visual traditions outside the Mithraic corpus, which account for many local differences and interpretations.

59 De Jong 2000, figs. 1–2.

60 On Cautes and Cautopates see Hinnells 1976.

61 Already pointed out by de Jong 2000, 56–57.

62 Gawlikowski 2007, figs. 9–12 with p. 360, who connects the monsters to the *daevas* of the Avesta. Gordon 2001, 114 considers them a specifically local Syrian development. In my view, both the lions and the heads on the city wall can be connected to a Manichaean creation story. The lions recall the appearance of the *asreshtar* or archdemons in the middle Persian story of the creation of mankind (*Mir. Man.* I). The painting of the City of Darkness can be related to the same Manichaean cosmogony and illustrates

paintings from Huarte confirm the rule. The scenes of the city wall with demonic heads, and the black, two-headed demons being devoured by ferocious lions probably derive from another narrative tradition and are foreign elements that are here combined with a Mithraic cycle.<sup>63</sup>

If the narrative scenes are not illustrations to a fixed text, than what are they? In order to retrieve the possible function of these representations in the Mithraeum it is important to typify them more precisely. Although there was no set of fixed rules in representing the narrative, and it is impossible to reconstruct a canonical version of the myth on the basis of the extant material, it is clear that the monuments do all share certain characteristics. The omnipresence of the tauroctony shows that there was at least one deed of the god that was crucial to all his worshippers, all over the empire. In virtually all sanctuaries, Mithras' killing of the bull is part of a narrative cycle that revolves around the killing of the animal and depicts the prehistory and consequences of this deed. There seems to be some agreement about parts of the story that are particularly important. Both the tauroctony and the ten scenes referred to above were frequently featured as *ex-votos* inside Mithraea. Within the corpus of votive monuments, Mithras' birth from the rock and the scene known as the *transitus dei* are attested far more commonly than the other eight episodes.<sup>64</sup> It is striking that several inscriptions dedicate the monument to Mithras' birth or his rock of birth, or commemorate the god's *transitus*;<sup>65</sup> I am unaware of similar instances from other cults in

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an episode from the Second Creation, before the Third Messenger incited the demons to emit their light from which the cosmos was created: Dirven, de Jong (forthcoming).

63 Gawlikowski 2007; cf. colour plate 2 in Claus 2012.

64 In Vermaseren's corpus, I counted 34 votive reliefs or altars representing Mithras rock-birth, 8 *transitus* scenes, 1 subjugation of Sol, 3 Sol in quadriga, 2 Mithras shooting water from the rock, 1 pact of Mithras and Sol, 1 Mithras riding the bull, 2 sacred repast. This list is by no means complete, since many Mithraea have been found since Vermaseren published his corpus. Again, the rock-birth is most common, for example the two instances below S. Stefano Rotondo in Rome: Lissi-Caronna 1986, 30–1, pls. XXX–XXXI; idem, 31, pl. XXXII–XXXIII; two in Güglingen, Mithraeum II: Hensen 2013 figs. 42 and 51; one in a Mithraeum in Köln and one in Heidelberg. On the rock-birth see Neri 2000.

65 CIMRM 1490, on the base upon which stood the rockbirth of Mithras: *Petrae/ genetrici/ Felix/ Prudentius Antoni/ Rufi/ p(ublici) p(ortorii) vil(ici) vic(arius)/ ex viso* (Poetovio); CIMRM 1493, on the front of the base of a statue in white marble of the rock birth: *Naturae dei/ Prudens Primi/ Antoni Rufi p(ublici) p(ortorii)/ vil(ici) vic(arius)* (Poetovio). CIMRM 1652, on the base of a relief representing the rock-birth: *P(etrae) g(enetrici) d(ei)/ Aurelius/ Statorius/ v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)* (Aquinoctium); CIMRM 1674, inscribed on an otherwise plain altar: *Petrae/ Genetrici/ P(ublius) Ael(ius) Nigri/ nus sacerdos/ v(otum) s(olvit)* (Carnuntum); CIMRM 1743, inscribed on an otherwise plain altar: *Petrae/ Genetric(i)* (Budapest); CIMRM 1874, inscribed on a plain altar: *Petr(a)e/ genetrici* (Solin); CIL 5.9657, inscribed on a stele: *P(etrae) G(enetrici) A() G()*

the Roman world. It is not exactly clear what conclusions can be drawn from this, apart from the fact that these mythological episodes must have been of primary importance to the dedicants. It can hardly be a coincidence that two verse lines in the well-known dipinti from the Mithraeum below Santa Prisca in Rome also refer to two of the more important events from the narrative: Mithras carrying the bull and Mithras shooting water from the rock.<sup>66</sup> In tauroctony reliefs that depict only a limited number of scenes, too, we tend to see a concentration on the key scenes: Mithras' birth, sometimes combined with the sleeping Saturn, and the *transitus*.<sup>67</sup> Sometimes the same event is even represented twice in one tauroctony relief. Again, the events in question are chosen from the ten most popular scenes: the water miracle,<sup>68</sup> Mithras subjugating Sol,<sup>69</sup> and the *transitus* scene.<sup>70</sup>

We may conclude from the monuments that there was a sacred narrative with a fixed core, but that individual communities had a considerable amount of freedom to visualize and interpret Mithras' story in their own way. Given that there was no such thing as a fixed narrative of Mithras throughout the empire, the variation in the representation of the myth is by no means surprising. In an oral culture, myths are by definition dynamic

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*v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)* (Concordia); Wagner 1956/57, no. 86, inscribed on a plain altar: *Petr(a)/e Gen(etrici){i}* (Wachstein). On the base of a statue of the rock-birth from the Mithraeum below S. Stefano Rotondo is inscribed: *Petram genetricem/ Aur(elius) Bassinus, aedituus/ principiorum cast(rorum) peregrinorum/dedicavit hoc in loco et d(ono) d(edit)/ antistante A. Caedicio/ Prisciano eq(ui)te R(omano) Patre*: Lissi-Caronna 1986, 33. The latter instance commemorates the dedication of the object itself, whereas the other inscriptions commemorate an event (or ritual?).

CIMRM 1497, inscribed on an altar without representation: *Invict(o) Mithrae/ et transitu dei/ Theodorus p(ublici) p(ortorii)/ scrut(ator) stat(ionis) Poet(ovionensis)* (Poetovio); CIMRM 1495: On the base of a statue of Mithras carrying the bull on his shoulders: *Transitu/ C(aius) Caecina/ Calpurnius/ temp(lum) redemi(t) et restitui(t)* (Poetovio); CIMRM 1900, inscribed on an otherwise plain altar: *Tran[situ] / dei M[ithrae] / Host[ilius(?)] / [3]ONI* (Skelani).

- 66 Vermaseren 1965, 193, line 4: *Fons concludit petris qui geminos aluisti nectare fratres*, 'Rock-bound spring that fed the twin brothers with nectar' (an allusion to Mithras causing water to spring forth from the rock) and line 7, p. 200: *Hunc quem aur<ei>s humeris portavit more iuvenctum*, 'This young bull which he carried on his wonderful shoulders according to his will', an allusion to Mithras carrying the bull on his shoulders, here used as a moral exemplum.
- 67 Rock-birth: CIMRM 1727; 1851; 2191. Rock-birth and sleeping Saturn: CIMRM 1656; 2026. Sacred banquet and Saturn or Oceanos sleeping: CIMRM 693. *Transitus*: CIMRM 435
- 68 CIMRM 1083 (Heddernheim, they are each other's mirror image); CIMRM 1283 (Neuenheim); CIMRM 1301 (Besigheim).
- 69 CIMRM 1137 (Rückingen).
- 70 CIMRM 1896 (Konjic).

and are constantly re-presented and re-adapted to their audience.<sup>71</sup> What should surprise us though, and has yet to be convincingly explained, is the relatively high standardisation in the rendering of the sacred narrative. In fact, there is no other contemporary cult in which a sacred narrative plays such a dominant role in both the sacred space and its decoration and which, despite all the differences referred to above, displays such a degree of uniformity over such an expanse of time and territory.<sup>72</sup> Surely this must mean that we should take the visual rendering of the sacred narrative as the starting point for our understanding of the mysteries.

## 5 Myth and Reality in Architecture and Art

Although it is impossible to reconstruct a fixed myth of Mithras, the available evidence does show that Mithras' story was an important source of inspiration for the architecture, rituals, and symbolism of this cult. Not only are representations of the killing of the bull and events related to this sacrifice omnipresent in the Mithraeum, the mythical space of the cave in which this sacrifice took place also inspired the layout of the room in which Mithraists assembled to celebrate their rituals. In the cult image, the killing of the bull is frequently depicted in a cave that is sometimes represented using signs of the zodiac or other astrological symbols.<sup>73</sup> Thanks to Porphyry's *De antro Nympharum*, we know that for worshippers of Mithras the cave in which the bull was killed was claimed to be an *eikôn* of the cosmos.<sup>74</sup> The architecture

71 Graf 1993, 2–4.

72 Recent research tends to stress the heterogeneity of the archaeological material, cf. Gordon 2012, cols. 965–966. Although it cannot be denied that there is variation that seems to have been determined largely by the local situation, the similarities should not be forgotten.

73 Examples of this device that is expressed in a number of ways are numerous. Ceiling of the cave consists of signs of the zodiac: *CIMRM* 1083 (Nida), 1292 (Osterburken); Cumont 1975, 167–9, pl. 23 (Dura-Europos). Ceiling of the cave consists of planets: *CIMRM* 693 (Bononia); signs of the zodiac depicted around the cult niche: Cumont 1975, plate 30 (Dura-Europos); signs of the zodiac depicted in a circle around the tauroctony: *CIMRM* 75 (Sidon), *CIMRM* 390 (Palazzo Barberini, Rome), *CIMRM* 810 (London); stars inside the cave: *CIMRM* 368 (Rome), *CIMRM* 435 (Rome); stars on the inside of Mithras' mantle: *CIMRM* 181 (Capua Vetere), *CIMRM* 310 (Ostia), *CIMRM* 321 (Ostia).

74 'Similarly, the Persians call the place a cave where they introduce an initiate into the mysteries, revealing to him the path by which souls descend and go back again. For Eubulus tells us that Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural cave in honour of Mithras, the creator and father of all. ... This cave bore for him the image of the cosmos which Mithras had created, and the things which the cave contained, by their proportionate arrange-

of many Mithraea is inspired by this very notion and likewise takes the form of a cave or the cosmos.<sup>75</sup> This explains the fairly uniform design of Mithraic sanctuaries, which are for the most part dimly lit, rectangular rooms covered with a barrel vault with benches along its lateral walls, in imitation of a cave. In the west, *spelaeum* is the most common term used for a Mithraic temple.<sup>76</sup> A very small number of Mithraea are indeed decorated with astral signs that turn them into a micro-cosmos in imitation of the mythical cave.<sup>77</sup>

The sanctuaries are not just any cave, but are modelled upon and represent the mythical cave in which Mithras killed the bull. Hence in imitation of the cult image, we frequently find the two torchbearers standing on either side of the longitudinal walls of Mithraic temples.<sup>78</sup> So the ritual space in which Mithras' worshippers assembled not only focused on the representation of a mythological event situated in a cave, but concomitantly re-produced the cave itself. In this respect it is highly significant that the cult image depicts the deity in action instead of as a static cult image, as is the convention. Placing the image in this ritual space meant that the participants attended the very act that brought them forth.

In the architectural arrangement of the Mithraeum we see how mythical and historical reality converge. This device is not confined to the architecture of the Mithraeum, but can also be found in its figurative decoration.

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ment, provided him with symbols of the elements and climates of the cosmos.' *De ant. Nymph.* 6 (trans. Arethusa edition). On the importance of this text (especially chapter 24) for the cosmological setting of Mithras, see Beck 1984, 2053–2055.

75 At Santa Prisca the cult niche was lined with pumice to make it look like a natural cave. Cf. Claus 2000, 51 for similar instances. A number of Mithraea are constructed in its entirety or in part in a natural cave: *CIMRM* 1447 (Zgornka Pohanca); 1882 (Rayanov Grich); 1882, 1883 (both Epidaurum); 2256 (Kreta in Moesia); 2303 (Tirgusor); Huarte (Syria); the Duino Mithraeum near Venice (Italy) and two recently discovered Mithraea in Doliche (Commagene). Cf. the supplementary items on *CIMRM* at [http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/mithras/display.php?page=selected\\_monuments](http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/mithras/display.php?page=selected_monuments).

76 Claus 2000, 42–48. By contrast, in the provinces the word *templum* is used.

77 The ceiling of the Mithraeum below S. Maria Capua Vetere (*CIMRM* 180) and Mithraeum III in Dura-Europos were decorated with stars (visible on excavation photographs, kept at YUAG). A symbolic rendering of the cosmos can be found in the Mithraea of Sette Sfere and Sette Porte in Ostia (*CIMRM* 239 and 287). For an extensive analysis of the astrological symbolism in Sette Sfere: Gordon 1976.

78 Figures of Cautopates and Cautes may be placed at the entrance of the Mithraeum, on either side of the cult niche, or on the benches. The best known example is the pair of torch bearers on the end of the benches of the Mithraeum of Sette Sfere in Ostia: Gordon 1976. In the Mithraeum below Santa Prisca in Rome, niches that contained statues of the torchbearers are inset into the lateral walls, next to the entrance: Bjørnebye 2007, 99 note 312 and 109. Cf. the reconstruction of Mithraeum I at Stockstadt in Hensen 2013, figs. 50 and 52. In Mithraeum II at Güglingen statues of Cautes and Cautopates were standing on both stairs leading to the benches alongside the walls: idem, fig. 51.

A unique example is provided by the largest of the two cult reliefs from the Mithraeum in Dura-Europos (Syria), which was dedicated by a certain Zenobius in 171/2 CE. It depicts the usual scene of the tauroctony (with some minor variations), but in this particular case the dedicant and members of his family, or more probably, his military unit, are shown attending the event.<sup>79</sup> This unique feature is easily explained by local cultic and artistic traditions, in which it was common to picture dedicants on cult reliefs.<sup>80</sup> Despite the fact that this is unique for Dura, the innovation is not at odds with the symbolism of the Mithraeum as described above; the presence of Zenobius illustrates the situation in the Mithraeum, in which worshippers face the cult relief; at the same time, it turns them into observers of the original mythological event.<sup>81</sup> A tauroctony that is now in the Landesmuseum Württemberg not only shows an altar next to the bull, but also has a lamp hanging from the ceiling of the cave, thereby indicating that Mithras' mythic cave is in fact identical with the Mithraeum.<sup>82</sup> In a number of tauroctony reliefs, Cautes and Cautopates are represented standing on pedestals.<sup>83</sup> As such, they recall the freestanding statues and reliefs of the two brothers that are frequently placed on either side of the Mithraeum.

After the killing of the bull, the banquet of Mithras and Sol is the most important representation in the sacred narrative.<sup>84</sup> In a number of representations of this banquet, myth and historical reality coincide, thereby illustrating the crisscrossing of mythical past and ritual present. One of the small scenes found in the Mithraeum at Dura-Europos shows Mithras and Sol reclining on the dead bull, being served by the small figure of a man with the head of a raven.<sup>85</sup> The figure is naked apart from the loincloth around his waist. Undoubtedly, this is an initiate of the first grade *corax*, who here serves the two gods at their meal.<sup>86</sup> A fragment of a white marble relief from Rome now in the Schlossmuseum in Mannheim represents the tauroctony

79 Dirven 1999, 271–272.

80 Downey 1978, 141.

81 A similar example is *CIMRM* 1275, in which someone is represented sacrificing below the killing of the bull.

82 *CIMRM* 1306. Cf. Clauss 2012, pl. 15 (in colour).

83 *CIMRM* 1447; 1450; 1683; 1791 (Cautopates only); 1907; 1919; 2172.

84 Hultgård 2004, 299–324.

85 Cumont 1975, 176–177, pl. 29 (Cumont's description of the figure with the raven's head is imprecise and should not be followed).

86 The existence of the grade *corax* at Dura is confirmed by graffiti found here: Francis 1975, 441. The representation from Dura seems to suggest that initiates actually wore masks, but apart from this representation and the man-raven on *CIMRM* 397 (Rome) and *CIMRM* 1896 (Konic) as well as three instances of a man with a lion-head on terra siliata from Trier (Clauss 2000, 116–117 with fig. 74) there is no firm proof to this effect.

on the obverse, and the scene of a repast on the reverse. As in Dura, the gods are served by a man in a short cloak with the head of a raven.<sup>87</sup> A comparable representation can be seen in a relief from Konjica, now in Sarajevo.<sup>88</sup> Like the relief from Rome, this is an alterable relief, with the tauroctony on its reverse and the feast of Mithras and Sol on its obverse.<sup>89</sup> The two reclining figures are surrounded by standing figures, two of whom have the head of a raven and a lion, which possibly means they are actually worshippers wearing masks.<sup>90</sup> The two reclining figures can certainly be identified as Mithras and Sol, but to the initiates they may also have looked like the Pater and the Heliodromus of the community. This suggestion is enhanced by the fact that Sol is represented clothed rather than heroically naked, as is usual in Mithraic iconography.<sup>91</sup>

Yet another instance of the convergence of the divine and human world is the procession painted on the left wall of the Mithraeum below Santa Prisca in Rome (two layers, dated to 200 and 220 AD). A row of human initiates of the grades Lion and Heliodromos bring gifts – consisting mainly of bread and wine, with the addition of a rooster – to Mithras and Sol, who are represented reclining in a cave at the far end of the wall, near the cult niche.<sup>92</sup> The figure closest to the gods again has the head of a raven.<sup>93</sup> It is no coincidence

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All we have to go on are some very biased remarks made by Christian writers: Gordon 2012, cols. 999–1002, on the problems regarding these sources. Cf. below, note 112.

87 *CIMRM* 397. Cf. Merkelbach 1984, 15, 53; cf. 148a.

88 *CIMRM* 1896 (Konjic).

89 That the banquet is a result of the killing follows from several representations (the painting under discussion is one of these) that depict the two gods reclining on the bull.

90 The status of the two figures with the Phrygian bonnets is not entirely clear. They may either be Cautes and Cautopates, who frequently serve the gods at their sacrificial feast, or representatives of the grade Perses.

91 In representations of Sol's subjugation, his pact with Mithras, or his ascension, the god is normally depicted naked apart from a mantle. Cf. below, note 98. In representations of the sacred banquet, the god is most frequently naked as well, but there are several exceptions to this rule: Nida/Hedderheim (*CIMRM* 1083), Caetobriga, Hispania (*CIMRM* 798) and the paintings from Dura-Europos (*CIMRM* 42 and 49). In the latter case it is remarkable that Sol is fully dressed while having dinner, whereas he is represented naked in the subjugation scene. This points to a conscious choice of the painter. According to Vermaseren, Sol is also wearing a tunic on a relief from Rüdgingen (*CIMRM* 1137). Since the god's stomach muscles are clearly discernible, I think he is only wearing a mantle.

92 Vermaseren, van Essen 1965, 148–155, with pl. LV–LVIII. According to Vermaseren, *op. cit.*, 155, the Father and Heliodromus were seated at the far end of the sanctuary close to the painting of the sacred banquet, thereby stressing the congruence between myth and reality. Vermaseren bases his hypothesis on a sacrificial table that was found at the spot.

93 Ferrua, who studied the paintings before Vermaseren did, claims the figure has the legs of a raven as well: *CIMRM* 483. Body and legs had been lost by the time of Vermaseren's

that the opposite right wall depicts a procession of worshippers approaching an enthroned Pater.<sup>94</sup> Another variation of the idea that myth and ritual converge can be found in one of the side scenes in the painted tauroctony of the Barberini Mithraeum in Rome, in which a large group of men are shown reclining.<sup>95</sup> They are without doubt to be identified as the clientele of the Mithraeum, who are represented here as participating in the mythological narrative. This is similar to a relief from Besigheim that likewise represents a large group of reclining men as part of a Mithraic narrative cycle.<sup>96</sup>

The tauroctony and the banquet are by far the most common scenes in which mythical and historical realities touch. A possible example related to another mythical event can be found on a limestone relief now in the Capitoline Museum in Rome. It represents Mithras slaying the bull, with two other small scenes in the lower corners.<sup>97</sup> The composition on the right-hand side resembles the scene commonly identified as the pact of Mithras and Sol, in which we see the two gods shaking hands (*dextrarum iunctio*) or sharing meat above an altar. On closer inspection, however, the scene on the altar differs in important respects from the usual representations of the scene: the figure of Sol is not only clothed, but also bearded. As a rule, the sun god is represented clean-shaven, and in this particular scene he usually wears only a mantle.<sup>98</sup> This suggests that it is perhaps not Sol who is represented here, but a mortal worshipper. A similar scene can be found on a fragmentary relief from Poetovio.<sup>99</sup> In this latter instance the adjacent representation of Sol's subjugation is equally ambiguous, for here too Sol is depicted with a beard. In some representations of the subjugation of Sol the identity of the sun god is hazy at best; here the god is represented naked, without nimbus or any attributes, so he could easily be mistaken for every man.<sup>100</sup> Normally Mithras

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later investigation of the Mithraeum: Vermaseren, van Essen 1965, 150. If Ferrua was correct, the raven figure is not a human *corax*.

94 Vermaseren, van Essen 1965, 155–160.

95 Schatzmann 2004, 11, fig. 1.

96 *CIMRM* 1301.

97 *CIMRM* 350/1. For a better photograph, see Merkelbach 1984, fig. 47.

98 Unclear: *CIMRM* 1137 (Rückingen); 1194 (Stockstadt). No nimbus, possibly a mantle: 1292 (Osterburcken). Radiate with mantle: 1430 (Virunum); 1584 (Poetovio).

99 *CIMRM* 1579. Cf. Merkelbach 1984, fig 137 for a better picture.

100 The scene is particularly popular in the provinces Germania, Panonia, Dacia and Moesia (cf. the index in Vermaseren, vol. II). With the majority of the monuments, however, the figures are too small and schematic to identify Sol's appearance. The following monuments are relatively certain: Sol naked with nimbus: *CIMRM* 1083 (Hedernheim). Sol naked with mantle and nimbus: *CIMRM* 1430 (Virunum). Sol naked with mantle, no nimbus: *CIMRM* 1974 (Apulum). Sol naked without nimbus and mantle: *CIMRM* 1292 (Osterburcken) where the nimbus is depicted as a solar crown on the ground between the two gods (cf. Merkelbach 1984, fig. 115 for a detail of this

holds an object that is usually identified as a bull's hide or a Phrygian cap, but in a number of instances the god carries sticks or a sword.<sup>101</sup> A very peculiar representation of this scene can be found on a fragmentary relief from Sinitovo (Thrace), in which Mithras is not standing, but seated in a chair with a high back.<sup>102</sup> It brings to mind representations of rituals in which the Father adopts the role of Mithras, and it is to these rituals we shall now turn.

## 6 From Picture to Ritual Reality

The examples discussed above show that mythical past and cultic reality convene in the space of the Mithraeum and in a number of illustrations of the sacred narrative. Of course it does not necessarily follow that this pictorial reality reflects the ritual procedures in the Mithraeum itself. In a number of cases it can be shown, however, that events from the myth that are represented in scenes in or around the tauroctony were indeed played out in the space of the artificial cave or cosmos that was modelled upon Mithras' creative act. As is generally known, the podia on either side of most Mithraea show that communal meals must have been at the centre of these meetings and were the most important ritual celebrated in these temples.<sup>103</sup> Undoubtedly these meals imitated the communal meal of Mithras and Sol that took place after the killing of the bull.<sup>104</sup> A considerable number of illustrations of the mythical event indicate explicitly that the two gods enjoyed their meal in a cave, that is, in the place where the Mithraists celebrated their communal meal as well.<sup>105</sup> The alterable reliefs that depict the tauroctony on one side and the banquet on the other show that mythological representations were indeed associated with and incorporated into the ritual events.<sup>106</sup> We can

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scene) and *CIMRM* 42.12 (Dura-Europos), where it hovers in the air; *CIMRM* 1128 (Heddernheim); *CIMRM* 1579 (Poetovio); *CIMRM* 2244 (Tavalicavo); *CIMRM* 393 (Barberini Mithraeum, Rome).

<sup>101</sup> In the pendant to the pact of Mithras and Sol on the relief from Rome discussed above note 98, Mithras holds two sticks. In 1137 (Rückingen), Mithras' hand rests on a sword.

<sup>102</sup> *CIMRM* 2334 (Sinitovo).

<sup>103</sup> Gordon 2013, 217–218.

<sup>104</sup> The connection between the banquet of Mithras and Sol and the meal celebrated in the Mithraeum is common knowledge. Incidentally, scholars referred to other scenes as well. Cf. the references and commentary in Gordon 1980a, note 7. Cf. Alvar 2008, esp. 375; Beck 2006, 21–25; Klöckner 2011 and Gordon 2012.

<sup>105</sup> Instances are numerous. See, for example, *CIMRM* 1958; 1935; 1975; 2018.

<sup>106</sup> *CIMRM* 1083 (Nida); 1896 (Konjic) referred to above, note 73, is the best known. Recently a two-sided Mithraic icon with bull killing and banquet was found in Prolozac: Gordon 2013, 218.

assume that these pictures were set up according to the ritual actions that were performed. But our sources suggest there is more to it than that; the initiates do not merely imitate the event, they re-enact it and as such dine together with their gods, who are re-presented by the Pater and the Heliodromus, the two highest grades of the community.<sup>107</sup>

The correspondence of the Father and Heliodromus with Mithras and Sol is shown by the well-known floor mosaic from the Mithraeum of Felicissimus in Ostia, in which the grade of the Father is associated with the Phrygian bonnet of Mithras and the sickle, staff, and patera of Saturn, and the grade of the Sun-runner with the halo of the sun, the torch and the whip.<sup>108</sup> Probably the representatives of the grades wore these attributes while performing their ritual roles; in the mosaic the Sun's crown is depicted with ribbons for attaching it, as is typical of such an attribute. In Göglingen an iron halo was found that was probably worn by the Heliodromus of the community.<sup>109</sup> Last but not least, a number of representations show a male figure wearing Mithras' cap.<sup>110</sup> The context of these representations suggests that this figure should be identified as the Pater of the community.

Although the banquet of Mithras and Sol is undoubtedly the best known and most widespread of the mythological events that served as inspiration for rituals celebrated in the Mithraeum, it is by no means the only one. In addition to the banquet, which underpinned the collective religious experience, we know of several other mythologically inspired rituals that determined individual religious experience, notably in rituals of initiation.<sup>111</sup> Several representations suggest that the Father acted out the role of Mithras and took it upon himself to torment members of his community.<sup>112</sup> The most

107 Schatzmann 2004, 12. On the relationship of Mithras and the Pater see Gordon 1980b, note 2. Gordon stresses that the Father imitates Mithras, but is not identical with him. Here, the element of performance offers an important contribution to the debate. Cf. Versnel 2011, 470–80, who characterises ritual play as 'sincere hypocrisy'. In a nutshell, Versnel argues here that someone or something feels utterly real to the participants during ritual performance, whilst at the same time they realise it is all just play. Versnel's line of argument, which I find very convincing, seems largely to have been inspired by an unpublished paper by Richard Gordon.

108 *CIMRM* 299; Beard, North, Price 1998 II, 305–307.

109 Hensen 2013, fig. 60.

110 Above all the Mainz crater and the paintings from S. Maria Capua Vetere, discussed below.

111 On the role of rituals of initiation in the mysteries of Mithras, see Gordon 2009.

112 This possibly explains remarks by later and highly biased Christian authors such as Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 39.5, who mentions 'the punishments of Mithras, justly applied to those who undergo initiation in things like that'. Cf. *Or.* 4.70 and 89. Cf. Cumont 1896, 15. Elaborations can be found in Gregory's scholiast, known as Nonnus Abbas, PG 36,989; 110; 1072 = Cumont 1896 II, 26–30. Finally, there is the text of

famous instance is provided by the piece known as the snake-crater from Mainz, which depicts a ritual of initiation being performed by the Pater of the community.<sup>113</sup> Not only is he dressed as Mithras, he is also firing a bow, a performance that appears to be inspired by the well-known mythological event in which Mithras shoots water from a rock. Of course it is dangerous to arrive at general conclusions on the basis of one instance from a particular Mithraeum, but there are some indications that this ritual was celebrated more widely. The scene of Mithras shooting water from the rock is one of the most popular narrative scenes; it is especially prominent in the Rhine-Danube area, but can also be found elsewhere.<sup>114</sup> Usually we see Mithras accompanied by the torchbearers, recognisable by their Phrygian caps. In a number of instances, however, Mithras' attendants are bareheaded and are depicted kneeling before their god in supplication.<sup>115</sup> Here, the ritual practice possibly interferes with the representation of the mythological event.<sup>116</sup> In addition, one or two arrowheads that have been found in Mithraea may attest to the actual performance of this ritual elsewhere.<sup>117</sup>

The 'subjugation' of Sol by Mithras may have inspired other rituals of initiation that are featured in rare representations of these rituals painted on the podium of the Mithraeum at Capua Vetere.<sup>118</sup> Here the teletarch is wearing a Phrygian bonnet and may therefore be identified as the Father of the community.<sup>119</sup> The initiate is kneeling on one knee in front of him, in a pose that recalls Sol's in the scenes of his obeisance.

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Pseudo-Augustine called 'Ambrosiaster': *Qaest. Vet. et Nov. Test.* CXIV, 11 = Cumont II, 7–8. The latter text talks of initiates being blindfolded and hearing the sounds of ravens and lions, while some have their hands tied with chicken guts and are made to stumble into a water basin, whereupon a man comes with a sword to cut the bonds and calls himself liberator. These texts accord well with pictures on the Mainz Crater, the frescoes at Capua Vetere, and several theatrical props, such as the sword from Riegl: Hensen 2013, fig. 59.

113 Beck 2000; Huld-Zetsche 2004, 213–227.

114 Claus 2000, 71–74.

115 *CIMRM* 1225 (Mainz); *CIMRM* 1935 (Apulum); *CIMRM* 1972 (Apulum); *CIMRM* 2244 (Tavalicavo).

116 Admittedly, these bareheaded kneeling figures are fully clothed and not naked like the initiands on the Mainz vessel and the Capua Vetere paintings.

117 Schatzmann 2004, 19. The famous theatrical sword found in the Mithraeum in Riegl was possibly used in another frightening initiation ritual: Hensen 2013, fig. 59.

118 Gordon 2009, esp. 297. Cf. Claus 2012, pls. 10–14 (in colour). A relief, possibly from Rome, described by Vermaseren, *CIMRM* 609, possibly pictured initiation rituals as well. Unfortunately, there are no photographs of the object that was not found by Vermaseren.

119 Gordon 2009, 298 interprets the headdress of one of the figures as a helmet (fig. 16.5b), whereas in my view it is a Phrygian bonnet. Cf. the colour plates of these severely damaged paintings in Claus 2012.

The pact of Mithras and Sol, iconographically represented by Mithras and Sol shaking hands, was ritually expressed by the self-identification of Mithras' followers as *sundexios*: 'he who has engaged himself by means of a handshake'. Manfred Clauss suggests that this term reflects the ritual which celebrated the acceptance of new members into the Mithraic community.<sup>120</sup> If Clauss' suggestion is correct, this was another ritual modelled upon a mythical event. Possibly this ritual is behind the representation on the altar from Rome referred to above, in which Sol's place is taken by a clothed, bearded figure.<sup>121</sup>

The examples listed above are probably far from comprehensive, and it could well be that future discoveries add new instances to this list. Most notably absent are Mithras's rock-birth and Mithras who carries the bull on his shoulders, the two scenes that figure most frequently as votive gifts in the Mithraea.<sup>122</sup> But of course it is by no means necessary to suppose that all scenes from the sacred narrative inspired rituals. The killing of the bull, for example, was certainly never actualised – the cult image fulfilled this role instead. The fact that we cannot relate all narrative scenes to actual rituals is not a decisive argument against the interpretation proposed here, for, as Stephen Hugh-Jones points out, it is by no means necessary that myth and ritual overlap completely.<sup>123</sup> Nor am I arguing that these rituals and their interpretation were necessarily the same in all Mithraea throughout the Roman Empire; variety in the iconography of the cult shows that the myth was not fixed in all its details and provided numerous possibilities for local interpretation and thus for ritual play and flexibility. Fixed elements included the sacred space of the Mithraeum copying a mythological precedent and the ritual banquet that was revived in this cave-like structure. It is difficult to say how frequently and consistently other elements from the narrative were performed. Here, individual communities seem to have enjoyed a greater amount of freedom.

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120 Clauss 2000, 151–152.

121 According to Merkelbach 1984, 123 all representations of this scene are actually a ritual scene of initiation. Although depictions of mythical events may have alluded to the ritual, it definitely pushes the evidence too far to say that they are in fact ritual scenes.

122 Above, note 64. This is particularly remarkable since the dedicatory inscriptions of some of these monuments (listed above, note 65) perhaps commemorate a ritual event of some sort.

123 Above, note 45.

## 7 Ritual Performance and Closeness to the Divine

The re-enactment of Mithras' deeds by the father of the community during the sacred meal and initiation rituals, and his interaction with the other cult members, undoubtedly greatly enhanced the connection of the initiates with their god. In this respect it is important to note that most Mithraea lacked the traditional, three-dimensional cult image that was set up in virtually every contemporary sanctuary in the Roman world, where the cult statue was considered the abode of the deity and served as the focal point for contact with the divine. In fact, in most representations of the tauroctony, Mithras is looking away from the viewer, which contrasts with later Christian icons in which saints establish contact with the spectator through their eyes. From this it does not follow, however, that Mithras' presence was less important to his worshippers than the presence of deities in other cults.<sup>124</sup> If my analysis of the correlation between mythical narrative and cultic reality is correct, it follows that the Mithraic community established this contact in another and probably more effective way: they were not only spectators but participants in a divine drama. In fact, Mithras was re-presented by the Father in his performance of the appropriate rituals.

It is, of course, extremely hazardous to reconstruct the emotion of individual Mithras-worshippers. A comparison with mythical re-enactment in other mystery cults may, however, contribute to our understanding of divine presence in the cult of Mithras. Since other mystery cults have not yet been studied thoroughly from this perspective, only a few preliminary remarks can be made here. First, it is exceptional that in Mithraism the re-creation of the mythical past is a communal effort, in which all present seem to participate. Of course, other mystery cults also involve theatrical performances.<sup>125</sup> Elements of ritual drama seem to have been particularly prominent in the cults of Isis and Magna Mater for example.<sup>126</sup> But unlike what happened in

<sup>124</sup> Contra Klöckner 2011, 215.

<sup>125</sup> Evidence to this respect can be found in Nielsen 2002, one of the few extant studies on cultic theatres and ritual drama. Nielsen argues that this element of ritual drama was especially prominent in new cults, such as the cult of Isis and Mater Magna. Although thought-provoking, the evidence Nielsen cites is slight, and the subject certainly needs further study.

<sup>126</sup> Merkelbach 2001, esp. 147–174, frequently draws attention to the representation of Isis' myths in ritual plays and the impersonation of the gods by the priests. Cf. the interesting comments made by Angelos Chaniotis in his review of this publication in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 97.2.31. Similar practices took place in the cult of the Great Mother. The castrated *galli* are said to impersonate Attis. Because Attis died under a pine tree, this tree is brought into the sanctuary with fillets hanging from its branches. They are said to be the bandages the goddess used to stop the bleeding. At

the cult of Mithras, this role-playing was confined to priests, who performed their divine roles in public. In Mithraic ritual there were no bystanders, only initiates who all played an active part in order to relive the mythical past together.<sup>127</sup> This holds true especially for the most important and frequently celebrated ritual, the communal meal. Second, it is remarkable that participants of Mithraic groups – with the possible exception of the Pater of the community – did not identify with the main protagonist of the cult. In this respect the cult differs from a number of other mystery cults, such as those of Isis or Dionysos, in which participants identified with the god and hoped to be saved accordingly.<sup>128</sup> In the case of Mithras, the initiates were punished by Mithras (represented by the Father), which suggests that they were clearly distinguished from their god.

The connection between narrative, sacred space, iconography, and ritual performance may serve as an explanation for the creation of a collective memory, which in turn explains the relatively high homogeneity of material remains over a large expanse of time and territory. Iconography and inscriptions served as an important mnemonic device for both the mythological narrative and its ritual re-enactment.<sup>129</sup> Looking at the pictures revived the emotions aroused by the rituals, which had in turn been inspired by the mythological narrative.

## 8 Concluding Remarks

The theatricality displayed by the Mithraeum and its participants is truly stunning. Not only was the Mithraeum an artificial cave, copying a mythological precedent, but participants dressed up and acted out their roles (the Father with his Phrygian bonnet, the Heliodromos with his whip and solar crown), dramatising events from the mythological narrative and using the-

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the same time the tree represents the nymph who lured Attis into infidelity, and for this reason it is cut and killed on account of the wrath of the Meter (*Ov. Fasti* 4.230). Christian authors frequently refer to sacred drama in the mysteries in which priests represent the deities. Robertson 2003, 29–30 lists numerous instances, that should, however, be quoted more reluctantly than Robertson does in his article.

127 There were undoubtedly exceptions. In the Mithraeum in Tienen, for example, it appears that a large crowd (about 100 people) participated in the rituals, probably not all initiates: Martens 2004, 25–48. Interesting though examples like Tienen are, it is important to bear in mind that they are the exceptions to the rule.

128 For instances, see above note 10.

129 For the mnemonic function of the inscriptions and their role in the construction of a cult community that has a privileged connection with a deity, see Chaniotis 2012, esp. 271–272.

atrical attributes such as swords and bows and arrows. The presentation was greatly enhanced by all kinds of lighting effects that were used to illuminate the dark cavern-temples, altars, and cult images and that were crucial in the presentation of the sacred drama.<sup>130</sup> During cultic performances, the Mithraeum became a *tableau vivant*, in which architecture, participants, and ritual acts all worked together to relive the mythological past. This encounter with the divine no doubt made a lasting impression on all present.

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<sup>130</sup> Clauss 2000, 120–130.

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## **Male Worshippers and the Cult of Bona Dea**

### **Abstract**

The article 'Male worshippers and the cult of Bona Dea' discusses the question of the presence of men in the cult of the goddess. To illustrate both the possibilities and limitations of the written and material evidence and the interpretations based on it, a small number of exemplary cases from the cities of Rome and Ostia are presented. Each attests a different form of male presence: a man approaching a sanctuary for medical help and expressing his gratitude towards the goddess; a magistrate for whom the donation of a cult-building provides a chance for representation; others taking part in the cult in what appears as a small neighborhood shrine. The cases underline the urgent need for differentiation in regard to interpretations of the evidence and for caution when it comes to attempts of generalisation. Furthermore, the actual involvement of men in the cult as attested in Trastevere, for instance, ought not to be understood as contradiction to our understanding of the cult as a female affair. The aspects of fertility and sexuality prominent in the discussion of the cult in regard to women, and the cases of men addressing the goddess all allude to the more general aspects of well-being and prosperity which have been acquired in various ways and situations.

**Keywords:** Bona Dea, men, women, Rome, Ostia, well-being, prosperity, fertility, representation, girls' education

### **1 Introduction**

Ever since Hendrik Brouwer's compilation of the written and material evidence for the cult of Bona Dea,<sup>1</sup> the occasional presence of men acting as donors of dedications and building activities in honour of the goddess cannot be denied. The present article aims to shed light on their role within the cult and the sanctuaries, and asks what implications can be derived from these observations for our understanding of the goddess and her cult.

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1 Cf. Brouwer 1989. – Research on this article was supported by the European Community within the 7th Framework Programme (2008–2013) under contract no. 29555 ("Lived ancient religion").

We learn about the presence of men both from literary and epigraphic sources. Whereas the notion of an exclusion of men as a general rule prevails in several of the literary texts,<sup>2</sup> others refer to men being called into the sanctuaries by the female cult attendants,<sup>3</sup> or men celebrating the rituals themselves, to the exclusion of women.<sup>4</sup> The epigraphic evidence, on the other hand, attests both donations and building activities. As in the case of the archaeological data, all of these sources require careful analysis to clarify the meaning of their respective contents. An inscription recalling a dedication by a man, for instance, does not necessarily attest his active engagement in the rites performed within a sanctuary, since the dedication can have been placed anywhere. But the original positioning of an epigraphic text, its visibility, and the size of its letters furnish us with important information regarding the way in which a message was communicated, and to whom it could have been addressed. Including this kind of information into the discussion enables us not only to gain insight into the broader spatial contexts and situations in which the inscriptions have been set up, but also leads us to a more differentiated picture of the role of men in the cult, as well as the cult and perception of the goddess as such. It hardly needs saying that the limits of such an approach lie in the state of preservation, investigation, documentation and publication of the various finds.

However, when talking about the role of men in the cult of Bona Dea, we face a second problem which consists in the modern myths about the cult prevailing in scholarship. Bona Dea is a women's goddess;<sup>5</sup> there is no question about that. Her cult is associated with the aspect of fertility and as such, it potentially involves erotic elements.<sup>6</sup> This, however, does not automatically render the performed rituals orgiastic, as has been vividly imagined,<sup>7</sup> even though this provided (in my view under certain conditions only) room for an appropriation of the cult in this sense.<sup>8</sup> Having analysed, among others, the aspect of drinking wine, the works of Giulia Piccaluga and Hendrik

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2 The problem with the literary evidence is that the various authors are not always explicit on the question of to what the exclusion of men refers. In some cases a ritual is referred to, whereas others talk about a sanctuary. Again in others, the respective author does not specify his point of reference.

3 Ov. *Ars* 3.633–638.

4 Iuv. 1.2.82–90.

5 Cf. Marcatilli 2010.

6 For instance: Marcatilli 2010, 16.

7 Cf. Mulroy 1988, 165–170. Mulroy interprets the December festival in honour of Bona Dea as a Bacchanal without any differentiation as to excesses taking place in the actual sense and controlled transgressions which present an entirely different quality of action.

8 Ovid and Juvenal can be understood in this sense: Ov. *Ars* 3.633–638; Iuv. 1.2.82–90.

Simon Versnel<sup>9</sup> rather underlined that the cult served to educate and prepare girls for their life as women, that is, marriage. Fertility thus implied prosperity and continuation as well as general well-being, the maintenance of which, with respect to women, was guaranteed by chastity and proper behaviour.

Then, however, the aspect of well-being could also be addressed in a more general sense and by cult attendants who did not focus on female life and girls' education. It is above all here, as this article shows, where we find men as worshippers of Bona Dea. The cult (as well as its sanctuaries) ought to be perceived as much more differentiated and complex than has been done so far. Men also approached the goddess in various ways, however, so we must analyse the evidence of male worshippers case by case.

In order to illustrate the points outlined in these introductory remarks the article takes a close look particularly at the epigraphic and archaeological evidence from various sites in Rome and Ostia, thus maintaining a view about a particular spatial and temporal frame. It is of course tempting to extend this analysis to a broader geographical frame, but this could not be realised without reducing the depth of the analysis that, in my opinion, is absolutely necessary given that the evidence has often been misinterpreted.

## 2 The Case of Felix Asinianus in Rome

Both the literary and epigraphic evidence occasionally point to the medical authority of Bona Dea, and we can say with certainty that herbs were grown at least in some of the sanctuaries.<sup>10</sup> However, the preserved evidence generally does not suffice to support the identification of various rooms of the excavated sanctuaries as *apothecae*.<sup>11</sup> One must wonder, in fact, if the aspect of the cult was that dominant at all.<sup>12</sup> The case of Felix Asinianus illustrates

<sup>9</sup> Piccaluga 1964, 223–235; Versnel 1992.

<sup>10</sup> See below, Macr. *Sat.* 1.12.26.

<sup>11</sup> The widespread idea that sanctuaries of Bona Dea comprised *apothecae* derives from the passage of Macrobius about herbs being grown by the priestesses of the goddess (for this passage, see below). Consequently, various rooms in a number of sanctuaries have been identified as *apothecae* without previous analysis of the remains (for instance: Floriani Squarciapino 1959–60, 93–95; this, however, is not a problem that is limited to the older literature). There is no evidence beyond the passage of Macrobius that would support these identifications of the structures, even though the priestesses may in fact have had medical knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> The medical competence of Bona Dea is attested by different sources but occasionally only. In *CIL* 6.75 the goddess is called upon under the epithet *Oclata* (see below); another inscription associates her with Hygieia (*CIL* 6.72); for Macrobius, see below.

the possibilities and limits of the evidence, as well as the necessary but often lacking caution when it comes to interpretation.

Felix Asinianus thanked the goddess for her help with a dedication attested only by a small marble slab carrying an inscription.<sup>13</sup> We learn from the text that the dedicator received medicine presumably from a sanctuary of Bona Dea and was cured through it. Whether he had in fact been allowed to enter a sanctuary of the goddess on this occasion – or if he consulted a priestess outside of such a one, or by means of a female mediator – remains a matter of speculation. Since the slab was found outside of an identified cult-site – according to the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* already in 1794 (!), together with a second inscription at the Framia estate, near the third milestone of the via Ostiense in Rome<sup>14</sup> – no further information can be obtained from the context in which it was found. Thus, the inscription tells us of the gratitude of Felix Asinianus for the help, but not how he received it:

*Felix publicus | Asinianus pontific(um) | Bonae Deae Agresti Feliculae(?) | votum solvit iunicem alba(m) | libens animo ob luminibus | restitutes derelictus a medicis post | menses decem beneficio Dominae medicinae sanatus per | eam restituta omnia ministerio Canniae Fortunatae.*

Felix Asinianus, public slave of the priests, has fulfilled his vow to Bona Dea Agresta Felicula, sacrificing a white heifer, willingly and heartily, for the restoration of his eyesight. When the physicians had given him up, he recovered after ten months of taking medicine by the grace of the Mistress. With her help everything was restored during the office of Cannia Fortunata.<sup>15</sup>

The question arising from this dedication is not about the medical competence ascribed to the goddess, but one of the ways in which the cures were administered. This likewise involves the frequency of requests for aid as well as the question of whether all the sanctuaries had the means, and above all, the knowledge, to produce and administer cures. Macrobius may report in his *Saturnalia* that herbs were grown for medical purposes by the priestesses of Bona Dea,<sup>16</sup> but he does not give any hint as to how the treatment of sick persons was handled. The available information on the goddess and her cult is generally too scarce to say anything precise about it, or about the role the medical aspect actually played within daily cult business. What is striking about the inscription of Felix Asinianus, however, is that addressing the

<sup>13</sup> CIL 6.68 = ILS 3513; the slab was 0.31–30 m high and 0.40 m wide. Cf. Brouwer 1989, 53 s. no. 44.

<sup>14</sup> 'Repertam esse una cum inscriptione D. Octavi D. I. Modiaci in fundo Framia via Ostiensi ad III lap. A. 1794, videtur colligi posse ex Viscontio' – CIL 6.68.

<sup>15</sup> CIL 6.68 = ILS 3513.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Macr. Sat. 1.12.26.

priestesses of Bona Dea for aid was not the first thought that had occurred to the dedicator. Apparently, he only approached them when everything else had failed. This indicates that the herbs from the sanctuary were indeed intended for or at least normally used by women in the first place, and that access to the cures and access to the sanctuary could indeed be two very different things.<sup>17</sup> This, however, must not have been the established rule for all cult-sites dedicated to Bona Dea.

### 3 The Trastevere Inscriptions

A second case which is often alluded to concerning the question of the medical authority of Bona Dea consists of an inscription in which the goddess is called *Oclata*.<sup>18</sup> It was found in Trastevere, as were four other inscriptions<sup>19</sup> which refer to the same cult and which require a closer look, since they attest not only to a small sanctuary, but also to the presence of male worshippers within the latter. The medical authority presents but one aspect of what is revealed here. In order to be able to reconstruct the situation, however, a closer look at the evidence is necessary.

The discovery of the Trastevere inscriptions within a fairly small area already induced Giuseppe Gatti in 1905 to assume the existence of a sanctuary of the goddess in the immediate vicinity (fig. 1).<sup>20</sup> Whereas three of the inscriptions (*CIL* 6.65–67) have come to light in the area of via Anicia 13,<sup>21</sup> the fourth, *CIL* 6.75, was unearthed 200 m to the southwest, in the garden of S. Maria dell'Orto.<sup>22</sup> The fifth inscription was discovered another 200 m to the west of the church, between present day's viale Trastevere, via

17 To this, one may add Chioffi's observation, that Macrobius gives the only evidence for the production of medicine by the priestesses of Bona Dea (Chioffi 1993, 198). We cannot rule out that the author related a more general function of the sanctuaries dedicated to the cult, but the lack of further references to this aspect is striking. Even though it is very well possible that herbs for medical use were also grown at other sanctuaries than the one referred to by Macrobius, nothing is known about the scale in which this happened.

18 *CIL* 6.75 = *ILS* 3508.

19 *CIL* 6.65–67 = *ILS* 3500–3501a; *CIL* 6.75 = *ILS* 3508; *CIL* 6.36766.

20 Gatti 1905a, 349. A note observing the vicinity of the find spots of *CIL* 6.75 = *ILS* 3508 and the one of *CIL* 6.65–67 = *ILS* 3500–3501a can already be found in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* on behalf of *CIL* 6.75. With *CIL* 6.36766, Gatti adds the fifth inscription to the group of texts. – Cf. Gatti 1905b, 270.

21 Gatti 1905a, 348 s; Brouwer 1989, 24–27 nos. 10–12; Lega 1996, 96 s.

22 Brouwer 1989, 27 s. no. 13.



fig. 1: Map with the find spots of the inscriptions from Trastevere, Rome. Drawing: Arnhold 2014.

S. Francesco a Ripa, and via Cardinale Merry del Val.<sup>23</sup> In view of the find spot of the latter, Paolo Carafa and Paola Pacchiarotti recently associated *CIL* 6.36766 with a second sanctuary instead<sup>24</sup> and thus opposed Gatti's assumption of but one cult-site of the goddess in the neighbourhood. They located the suggested second cult-site at the find spot of the inscription, to the west of viale Trastevere, inbetween the above named streets. However, arguments in favour of their thesis are lacking entirely in their briefly stated assumptions.<sup>25</sup> The known evidence from the find context of *CIL* 6.36766 – two large walls, one made from blocks of tufa, the other of Travertine, both with East-West-orientation<sup>26</sup> – does not suffice to support the identification of a second sanctuary at this site.

Moreover, only two of the three inscriptions from via Anicia 13, *CIL* 6.66 and 67, were, despite the early date of their discovery in 1744, explicitly described as having been found *in situ*.<sup>27</sup> The short descriptions of the circumstances in which *CIL* 6.75 and *CIL* 6.36766 were found, on the other hand, only list these summarily as finds made during the respective construction works.<sup>28</sup> Further specifications as to the precise circumstances in which they were found were not given in their case. It seems that the discoveries at via Anicia 13 have been described in more detail and with more precision than those made more than one hundred years later, in 1861 at S. Maria dell'Orto and in 1905 to the west of viale Trastevere.<sup>29</sup> Given these circumstances, Gatti's association of all five inscriptions with one cult-site, which we can locate in the area of via Anicia 13, has still neither lost its probability nor its attraction.

From Giovanni Marangoni's description of the structures at via Anicia 13 we learn that the inscriptions were discovered in what appears to have been a small courtyard containing a well, an altar made of Peperine stone, and a shrine. The latter consisted of two niches which had been arranged one above the other.<sup>30</sup> Whereas one inscription, *CIL* 6.67, formed part of the shrine, the second, *CIL* 6.66, could be read on the small altar unearthed next to it. Both name Cladus – assumed to have been a slave of M. Vettius

<sup>23</sup> Attilia 2008, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Carafa, Pacchiarotti 2012, 556 n. 173; 574.

<sup>25</sup> Carafa, Pacchiarotti 2012, 574 n. 173.

<sup>26</sup> Note the different measurements: Gatti 1897, 511; Gatti 1905b, 270; Attilia 2008, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Marangoni 1744, 484–488; cf. Lega 1996, 96 s.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Attilia 2008, 22; Brouwer 1989, 27–29 nos. 13–14.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Marangoni 1744, 484–488; Gatti 1905a, 348 s; Gatti 1905b, 270; Brouwer 1989, 24–27 nos. 10–12; Attilia 2008, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Marangoni 1744, 484–488; Lega 1996, 96 s.

Bolanus<sup>31</sup> whose name appears in the third epigraphic text from via Anicia 13 – as donor of the shrine and the altar:

*CIL 6.67 = ILS 3501a:*

*Bon(ae) Deae Restitut(ae) | simulacr(um) in tut(elam) insul(ae) | Bolan(i) posuit item aed(iculam) | dedit Cladus l(ibens) m(erito).*

To Bona Dea Restituta. For the guard of the *insula Bolani* Cladus has set up this image and also the building, willingly and deservedly.

*CIL 6.66 = ILS 3501:*

*B(onae) D(eae) R(estitutae) | Cladus | d(onum) d(edit).*

To Bona Dea Restituta. Cladus gave this gift.

The third inscription, referring to M. Vettius Bolanus, most certainly proprietor of the *insula* mentioned in *CIL 6.67*, derives from the immediate vicinity. According to Marangoni, the inscription was discovered during the construction works of the foundations of the church S. Pascale Baylon which was part of the *Nuovo Conservatorio delle Zitelle*.<sup>32</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup> century author reports the marble slab carrying the text to be two hands wide, and one and a half hands high<sup>33</sup> which present the only obtainable measurements. This could equal approximately a width of about 35–40 cm and a height of 25–27 cm. Marangoni's drawing of the inscribed slab shows the first two lines of the text with larger letters than those of the two bottom lines.<sup>34</sup> In view of the approximate measurements and this information, we gain the impression of a door sign,<sup>35</sup> indicating the entrance to a site, which would be the *simulacrum* in this case. This idea is also supported by the content of the text:

*CIL 6.65 = ILS 3500:*

*Bonae Deae | sacrum | M(arcus) Vettius Bolanus | restitui iussit.*

Cult-site of Bona Dea. Marcus Vettius Bolanus ordered its restoration.

The inscription reveals that M. Vettius Bolanus ordered the restoration of the structures of an existing cult-site. The donations made by Cladus can be interpreted in this way, particularly since the inscriptions were set up during the same period. The palaeographic analysis of the texts hints at an origin

<sup>31</sup> Brouwer 1989, 291 s.

<sup>32</sup> Marangoni 1744, 484. – The inscription stands at the beginning of Marangoni's references on the finds at via Anicia 13 and seems to have been the first discovery, drawing his attention to the site. This would explain the lack of information on the context in which the slab was found, which Marangoni himself only saw when it already had been unearthed and fixed to a newly built wall.

<sup>33</sup> Marangoni 1744, 484.

<sup>34</sup> Marangoni 1744, 484.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Brouwer 1989, 26 n. 41.

in the time of Nero, when we know of a suffect consul M. Vettius Bolanus in 66 CE.<sup>36</sup>

The *insula Bolani*, mentioned in *CIL* 6.67, in which Bona Dea is referred to as a tutelary deity of the building, is generally assumed to have existed in the vicinity of the cult-site.<sup>37</sup> So far, however, none of the known archaeological remains from the neighbourhood could be identified with certainty with this building. Whereas the cult-site itself is occasionally regarded as part of the *insula Bolani*,<sup>38</sup> Claudia Lega suggested this identification for the architectural remains that have been unearthed between viale Trastevere and via Lungaretta during the late 1930s. She based her arguments on several brick stamps with names of members of the *gens Vettii*, which derive from the architectures and can be dated to the Claudian period.<sup>39</sup> The available information neither allow for a precise identification of the *insula Bolani*, nor for a reconstruction of the spatial relation of the *insula* to the cult-site. Even if we assume the *insula* to have existed in the immediate vicinity of the sanctuary, various possibilities for the spatial relation of both architectural complexes to each other have to be taken into consideration: On the one hand, both the *insula* and the cult-site could have been erected contemporaneously some time before the renovation of (only?) the latter in Neronian times. Thus, both would have formed one architectural complex. On the other hand, the cult-site could also antedate the *insula*. In this case it would have originated as a spatially and legally separate unit. At the moment of its renovation through M. Vettius Bolanus and Cladus it either could have maintained this status or lost it by way of being incorporated into the *insula*-architectures, which could also, of course, already have happened some time before the renovation in Neronian times, for instance, when the *insula* was built.

In view of the interpretation of *CIL* 6.65 as a door-sign, it is easy to imagine the cult-site as a separate spatial and architectural complex, which would render the second possibility more likely. However, the lack of information makes it difficult to entirely exclude the option of its interpretation as a courtyard with several purposes, of which cultic actions at the shrine were only one. If, however, one accepts that the inscriptions unearthed in 1861 in the garden of S. Maria dell'Orto and in 1905 to the west of viale Trastevere once belonged to this sanctuary, its interpretation as a separate complex

<sup>36</sup> Brouwer 1989, 24–27 nos. 10–12.

<sup>37</sup> Priester 2002, 39 with n. 103.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Priester 2002, 150 s. (despite his caution on p. 39); cf. Brouwer 1989, 24 s. no. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Lega 1996, 96 s.; cf. Carafa, Pacchiarotti 2012, 556. – For the excavations conducted during the late 1930s: cf. Gatti 1940, 129–141.

receives a stronger base, since either inscription would attest the maintenance of the cult over a period of at least several decades. Deriving from the garden of S. Maria dell'Orto, a small base made of marble carries the following text, mentioning again a male worshipper of the goddess:

*CIL* 6.75:

*Anteros* | *Valeri Bonae* | *Deae Oclatae* | *d(onum) d(edit) l(ibens) a(nimo)*.

Anteros, slave of Valerius, gave this present to Bona Dea Oclata willingly and animatedly.

The inscription has been dated to pre-Augustan times on behalf of the form *Oclata* instead of *Oculata* which resembles an older form and appears also in another inscription, *CIL* 6.9608.<sup>40</sup>

Likewise incised into a marble base, *CIL* 6.36766, discovered to the west of viale Trastevere, presents the only inscription from Trastevere set up for Bona Dea which can be attributed to a female dedicator. With a height of only 10 cm, a width of 25 cm, and a depth of 13 cm, the base was fairly small, which is reflected by the height of the letters.<sup>41</sup> The inscription is generally dated to the Early Imperial period, perhaps on behalf of the old-fashioned form of the letters, as no further comment on this aspect is being made.<sup>42</sup>

*CIL* 6.36766:

*Theogenea* | *C(ai) Rutili* | *Bonae Deae v(otum) s(olvit) m(erito) l(ibens)*.

Theogenea, slave of C. Rutilius, fulfilled her vow to Bona Dea meritoriously and willingly.

As a result, both texts were, as far as one can say, inscribed onto rather small, portable bases, which supports their attribution to the cult site at via Anicia 13, from where they easily could have been transported off at a later date. Thus the veneration of Bona Dea at this site could have begun as early as the Late Republic. The worship of Bona Dea would then be attested throughout the Early Imperial period until the time of Nero, when the architectures of the cult-site were renewed by M. Vettius Bolanus and Cladus. We thus can speak of a proper, if however, most likely rather small sanctuary.

What is crucial for our understanding of the sanctuary is not only its spatial and legal relation to the *insula Bolani*, but also the presence of male worshippers in its cult. Their presence does not indicate an exception from the rule of their exclusion from the cult, but rather a limited range of its validity – which in my opinion was restricted to certain cult-sites only. However, not all inscriptions recalling donations and building activities by men automatically attest their presence in the cult. The decisive element in case of the

<sup>40</sup> Brouwer 1989, 27 s. no. 13.

<sup>41</sup> L. 1: 18 mm; l. 2: 12–18 mm; l. 3: 12–20 mm: Brouwer 1989, 28 s. no. 14.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Brouwer 1989, 28 s. no. 14.

cult site of via Anicia 13 is not the testimony of an individual male agent, as we can find in other cases, but the presence of several male dedicators in light of the overall assemblage of finds.

#### 4 M. Maecilius Furrianus and the Euergetism of Magistrates

*Romae et in plerisque urbibus scimus esse quaedam sacra quae aspici a viris nefas habetur. [...] Quid his facias qui inconcessa scrutari volunt? Nimirum multo sceleratiores qui arcana mundi et hoc caeleste templum profanare impiis disputationibus quaerunt quam qui aedem Vestae aut Bona Deae aut Caereris intraverit. Quae penetralia quamvis viris adire non liceat, tamen a viris fabricate sunt.*<sup>43</sup>

‘We know that in Rome and very many towns, certain sacred things exist, which to be looked at by men is considered a sacrilege. [...] What shall be done with those, who seek to investigate these unlawfully? Doubtless, there are more wicked profaning the secrets of the world and those divine temples by aspiring impious inquiries than those who enter the temple of Vesta, of Bona Dea or of Ceres. These shrines, even though not allowed to be approached by men, were nevertheless built by men.’

In this sense, the euergetism of M. Maecilius Furrianus and many other magistrates, such as consuls and *duumviri*, ought to be understood, for instance, since they present a very different quality of action and communication than the inscriptions from Trastevere. Unlike M. Vettius Bolanus, these donors acted as magistrates and thus in an official function. We may assume that they, in fact, never participated in the cult.

Donating and building the sanctuary of Bona Dea outside of Porta Marina in Ostia, Reg. IV viii 3, M. Maecilius Furrianus communicated his beneficence by means of a set of inscriptions. Fragments of all in all five epigraphic texts are preserved<sup>44</sup> which originally must have been of very similar, if not identical, contents. Each of them communicated at least the name of the donor and the identity of the building, which he financed. The better pre-

<sup>43</sup> Lact. *inst.* 3.20.3–4.

<sup>44</sup> Despite the different number – three – given for the inscriptions by Pensabene and Rieger, the (later) counting by Zevi is being followed here (Zevi 1997, 440–443; cf. Brouwer 1989, 65 n. 115. – However there seems to be a misunderstanding on Brouwer’s side which is difficult to solve). In his earlier analysis, Zevi suggested a reconstruction as four texts (Zevi 1968, 83–88). In case of Pensabene the reasons for the smaller number of texts is not evident (Pensabene 2007, 182 with n. 621), whereas Rieger differentiates between those texts which allow for readings taken for themselves and the fragments of those which do not (Rieger 2004, 240). – Steuernagel left this question open, speaking only about several copies of the same inscription (Steuernagel 2004, 79).

served texts also state that he approved of the construction which indicates particularly that he acted within the frame of his official duties:<sup>45</sup>

1) *AE* 1946, no. 221 = *AE* 1968 no. 80; Zevi 1968, 84 s. fig. 1:

*M(arcus) Maecil[i]us M(arci) f(ilius) [F]urr[... duovir] | aedem Bonae Dea[e] ex sua [pecunia fac(iundam) cur(avit)] | idemq(ue) prob[bavit].*

Marcus Maecilius Furr(...), son of Marcus, duovir, had the temple of Bona Dea built at his own expense and approved of it.

Slab reconstructed out of four fragments of white marble. H (max.) 0.64 m; W (max.) 2.02 m; D 0.04–0.05 m. Letter height: line 1: 13 cm; line 2: 11.5 cm; line 3: 10 cm.<sup>46</sup>

2) *CIL* 14.5411; Zevi 1968, 84 s. fig. 2:

*[...]ecili[...]| [...]m Bona[...]| ide[...].*

H 0.61 m; W 0.437 m; D 0.072/0.062 m. Letter height: line 1: 12.7–12.4 cm; line 2: 11.4–11.5 cm; line 3: 10.5 cm; the letter *I* 12.3 cm.<sup>47</sup>

3) *CIL* 14.4679; Zevi 1968, 84 s. fig. 3:

*[...]o vir | [...]c cur.*

H 0.475 m; W 0.575 m; D 0.068–0.07 m. Letter height: line 1: 12.4–12.5; line 2: 11.3–11.4 cm.<sup>48</sup>

4) Zevi 1968, 84–86 fig. 4:

a) *[...]us[...].*

b) *[...] M f Furr[... | ae ex su | prob[...].*

Three parts of a dedicatory inscription, reconstructed from eleven fragments. Part a)

H 0.20 m; W 0.245 m; D 0.069–0.07 m; part b) H 0.64 m; W 0.58 m; D 0.069–0.09 m; part

c) without inscription. Letter height: line 1: 13 cm; line 2: 11.3–11.4 cm; line 3: 10.5 cm.<sup>49</sup>

5) Zevi 1968, 85 s. fig. 5:

a) *[...] M f Furr[... | [...]ae ex[...].*

b) *[...]vir | [...] cur.*

c) *[...]bavit.*

Three fragments of a fifth inscription, not fitting, originally about 2.70 m wide. a)

H 0.225 m; W 0.46 m; D 0.055 m; b) H 0.33 m; W 0.30 m; D 0.055 m; c) H 0.315 m;

W 0.60 m; D 0.03 m. Letter height: ca. 8.8–7–9 cm.<sup>50</sup>

In case four of these inscriptions, the letters had been given a height of 12.4–13 cm in line one, 11.3–11.5 cm in line two, and, where preserved, 10–10.5 cm in line 3. Only the fifth inscription presented letters of a lower height, up to 9 cm.<sup>51</sup>

The slabs carrying the inscriptions, furthermore, were fairly flat. Their respective thickness ranged from 5–7 cm with but two fragments to be

45 Cf. Zevi 1968, 87.

46 Brouwer 1989, 63 s. no. 55.

47 Brouwer 1989, 64 s. no. 56.

48 Brouwer 1989, 65 no. 57.

49 Brouwer 1989, 65 s. no. 58.

50 Brouwer 1989, 66–67 no. 59.

51 All measurements: Brouwer 1989, 63–67 nos. 55–59.

exempted. One of the pieces attributed to text 4 b had a thickness of 9 cm at the bottom of the slab; whereas fragment 5 c was only 3 cm thick.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, the inscriptions must once have been fixed to walls or other structures. Fausto Zevi allocates the larger texts at the outer walls of the sanctuary. For the last of the above listed inscriptions he suggested a positioning inside the precinct or directly above its entrance portal, due to the reduced measurements of this slab.<sup>53</sup> The latter, however, must still have been about 2.70 m long as the author underlines,<sup>54</sup> and thus was in fact hardly suitable for the entrance of the sanctuary's first phase, which was only 1.70 m wide.<sup>55</sup>

The sanctuary as such covered a (more or less) trapezoidal area surrounded by a high wall, which did not allow for visual access. Also, the prostyle temple building inside the precinct lacked a podium that would have elevated its superstructures.<sup>56</sup> Erected with its backside against the outer wall of the sanctuary, the temple stood inside an open courtyard which occupied about two thirds of the cult-site during its first phase. The sanctuary could be entered from its north side by means of a small room serving as vestibule (fig. 2, c). From there a corridor (d) which was flanked by two further rooms on both of its sides (e, f) led into the courtyard. From the latter, the southern half was cut off in a later phase of the building and transformed into a separate architectural unit (fig. 2).<sup>57</sup>

Since only the rooms of the northern part of the sanctuary could have supported a second storey, of which, however, no traces are attested, we must

<sup>52</sup> All measurements: Brouwer 1989, 63–67 nos. 55–59.

<sup>53</sup> Zevi 1968, 87. – The fragments of the inscriptions came to light at various sites throughout Ostia, among others at the sanctuary of Bona Dea outside the Porta Marina, the portico near the same gate and the Forum Baths. This, however, does not contradict the original attribution to the sanctuary, since many of the fragments show signs of reuse and the structures of the sanctuary themselves were razed to ground in late antiquity. In detail: Calza 1942, 163; Zevi 1968, 83–88 (for the find spots and reconstruction); Pensabene 2007, 182 n. 621. 624.

<sup>54</sup> Zevi 1968, 86 n. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Calza 1942, 160. The report in the *Notizie degli Scavi* presents the most detailed description of the structures and the building phases. The entrance situation was altered in the second building phase when a new vestibule was created in front of the existing one (cf. Calza 1942, 164). Since the structures of this new entrance situation were erected leaning against the walls of the so-called Forum of the Porta Marina, they cannot be attributed to a date before the second century CE. According to brick stamps, the architectures of the Forum of the Porta Marina have been erected in *opus mixtum* in Hadrianic times. Older structures are not known so far (cf. Pensabene 2007, 224 s.). Even though this monumental complex severely lacks investigation, the Hadrianic date as earliest possible date for the second building phase of the adjoining sanctuary appears very probable.

<sup>56</sup> Calza 1942, 161.

<sup>57</sup> Calza 1942, 164 s.

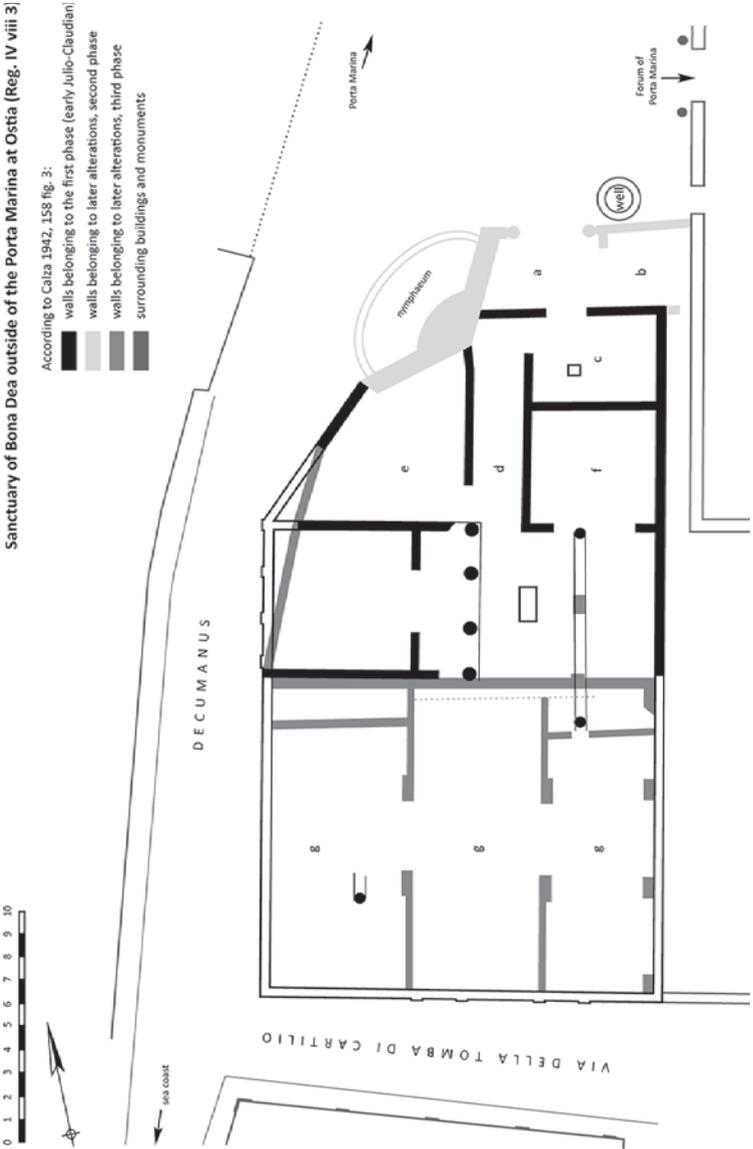


fig. 2: Plan of the sanctuary of Bona Dea outside of the Porta Marina at Ostia. Drawing: Arnhold 2014, after Calza 1942, 158 fig. 3.

assume the original building to have consisted of the ground level structures only. During the first building phase these stretched over an area of altogether approximately  $30 \times 17.5$  m,<sup>58</sup> the north-western building corner of the ground plan being cut off. Conceptualised in this way, the building was equipped by M. Maecilius Furrius with the described set of inscriptions displaying his name, office, and beneficence in up to 13 cm high letters. Both the number of the epigraphic texts and the design of these allow only for an allocation of several of the inscriptions at the outer walls of the sanctuary. Although the entrance to the cult-site had been oriented away from the major road onto a short branch leading away from it (to an area that at least in Hadrianic times must have presented a very important architectural complex),<sup>59</sup> the sanctuary nevertheless was situated directly next to the extra-mural extension of the *decumanus*. From here, the coastal road leading southwards to Antium was only about 100 m away.<sup>60</sup> Displaying one's name, office, and beneficence at this site in several inscriptions and with up to 13 cm high letters guaranteed maximum attention of by-passing travellers. The sanctuary may have been off centre in relation to other buildings and areas of the Late Republican harbour town, such as the forum, but certainly was not situated at a remote place in the sense of lacking visibility or tranquillity as, for instance, Dirk Steuernagel<sup>61</sup> seems to perceive the location.

The way M. Maecilius Furrius communicated his beneficence thus clearly differed in quality from what can be learned from the texts referring to the cult-site at via Anicia 13. However, the circumstance that, in this case, the donor acted as office-holder does not suffice to explain the exceptional number and design of the inscriptions. The available studies in the case lack a profound discussion of possible reasons. Only Fausto Zevi, who has dealt with the preserved fragments of the inscriptions in detail, suggested that the otherwise entirely unknown *duumvir* might have used a rare chance for representation.<sup>62</sup> Even though plausible, a second reason could exist in the relationship of the sanctuary outside of the Porta Marina to the second cult-site of Bona Dea at Ostia.

Founded as early as the second quarter of the first century BCE, the sanctuary in via degli Augustali, Reg. V x 2, likewise presents a second building

<sup>58</sup> Measurements taken from the plan of the building. Calza noted down  $33.20 \times 17.35$  m in his report, which include the structures of the second building phase (Calza 1942, 160).

<sup>59</sup> The so-called Forum at Porta Marina, cf. Pensabene 2007, 222–226.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Heinzlmann 2000, 15 fig. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Steuernagel 2004, 79.

<sup>62</sup> Zevi 1968, 88.

phase in early Julio-Claudian times<sup>63</sup> – the period in which M. Maecilius Furrianius also made his donation.<sup>64</sup> The first building in via degli Augustali is known to have consisted of an open courtyard which was equipped with a portico and benches as well as a roofed kitchen.<sup>65</sup> Only a few years after their construction – perhaps a generation later –, these structures were entirely razed to the ground and rebuilt from the foundations up.<sup>66</sup> Now, if not earlier, the courtyard contained a prostyle temple building with tetrastyle front which lacked a podium.

Whereas several of the structures of the first building phase, namely the portico, benches, and the roof belonging to the kitchen, have been dedicated by Octavia – wife of P. Lucilius Gamala senior, who built the Quattro Tempietti<sup>67</sup> – we know of two female dedicators for the second phase. The name of Valeria Hetaera has been preserved in the inscription on a small pillar, perhaps a base; the one of Terentia on the puteal donated by her.<sup>68</sup>

None of these women, however prominent their names might be, has conducted the overall construction works of each building phase on her own. Their dedications comprised parts of the architectures and, respectively, equipment, whereas the remainder of the structures must have been financed in one or several other ways. This is supported by the fact that the mentioned inscriptions have only been preserved by chance. All three of them were reused as building materials during later building phases of the sanctuary, or were buried during one of these when the ground level of the courtyard was raised.<sup>69</sup> Thus, we do not know who exactly built the overall architectures of the complex. For each building phase both an individual male or female donor and the cult attendants as a group have to be considered as agents behind the works.

Yet the women known from this sanctuary, both in the second quarter and the later first century BCE, represent the social and moral ideals of the highest and politically active circles in society. In the case of Octavia, on the one hand, this is evident in her social status, since she was married to one of the most prominent men in Ostia at the time. In case of Valeria Hetaera and Terentia, on the other hand, the historical context of their dedications and the second building phase of the sanctuary in general cannot be coinciden-

63 Falzone 2006, 411–417.

64 Pensabene 2007, 182.

65 Falzone 2006, 411–413.

66 Falzone 2006, 413–417.

67 Rieger 2004, 238 s; cf. Brouwer 1989, 68 s. no. 63.

68 Rieger 2004, 238 s; Brouwer 1989, 67 s. nos. 60–61.

69 For the building phases in detail: Falzone 2006, 411–419.

tal. Both the rebuilding of the architectures and the dedications took place at a time when, in Rome, a large number of temple buildings was renewed on the initiative of Augustus, and when also the sanctuary of Bona Dea on the Aventine hill received the beneficent attention of the ruler's wife, Livia.

What these social and moral ideals looked like becomes apparent in view of the festival in honour of Bona Dea which took place once a year at Rome in the house of a magistrate with *imperium*. Clodius' intrusion into the cultic celebrations of the year 62 BCE illustrates that these were above all female ideals, since men, and everything male, were banned from the house for the night of the festival.<sup>70</sup> Even though the women decorated the house with many plants, myrtle was kept out since it symbolised Venus and would have brought in an erotic aspect.<sup>71</sup> Wine was drunk, but was only brought in in a honey jar, and was accordingly referred to as milk.<sup>72</sup> Versnel draws attention to the specific combination of these aspects, underlining that, although several of these cultic elements had erotic connotations, their specific handling decidedly worked against such an atmosphere.<sup>73</sup> Thus excluding everything sexual from the ritual, the chaste women were presented as suitable for the central religious act of the nocturnal festival, the sacrifice for the people in the presence of the Vestal virgins. Particularly these were the aspects an Octavia, a Valeria Hetaera, and Terentia (and the social circles which they represented) sought to be associated with. The donation of a sanctuary by a magistrate also – as was the case with M. Maecilius Furrius and the sanctuary outside the Porta Marina at Ostia – has to be seen in this light. Moreover, both with the magistrate's house and the sanctuary built by the duumvir, controlled spaces were created for cultic actions which differed only with respect to the permanence of their existence. Even though we do not know if the December festival was likewise celebrated outside the Porta Marina in Ostia in the exact same way as is described for Rome, the same cultic aspects are implied in a find deriving from this sanctuary. Several authors briefly mention a marble sculpture, representing a penis encircled by a snake, which directly refers to the mythological background of the cult.<sup>74</sup> Since the find was never properly published, it is not possible to say if we are dealing with a ritual object or (perhaps more probable) merely a piece of sculpture.

The beneficence of the duumvir, however, links the cult directly to the ideals of the politically leading parts of society. It is this functional back-

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Plut. *qu. R.* 20.

<sup>71</sup> Plut. *qu. R.* 20; Versnel 1992, 44.

<sup>72</sup> Plut. *qu. R.* 20; Versnel 1992, 33.

<sup>73</sup> Versnel 1992, 44–48.

<sup>74</sup> Meiggs 1960, 352; Pensabene 2007, 182.

ground that is either missing entirely or a lot less present in the cases of Felix Asinianus, the Trastevere inscriptions, and in the literary accounts of Ovid and Juvenal.

## 5 Conclusion

This article shed light on several cases illustrating the various roles men played in relation to Bona Dea in Late Republican and Early Imperial Rome and Ostia. On the one hand, the analysed examples attested actions which happened once only, such as in the case of Felix Asinianus who addressed the goddess in a moment of need and thanked her with a dedication for help received. Any further involvement in the cult can be excluded in his case. The close look at the inscriptions from Trastevere, on the other hand, allowed us to reconstruct a very different situation. Here a small sanctuary was frequented by both men and women who addressed the goddess in what appears as various matters of well-being and prosperity. We learn nothing about girls being educated and prepared for married life at the site and I doubt that actions of this kind took place here, since the character and, as far as is known, the structures of this sanctuary differed for instance from the one found in Ostia. Of the two sanctuaries known from the harbour town only one can be associated with a man, a magistrate, who donated the building. Its high walls and the sculpture find from this sanctuary refer to the myth behind the cult and Bona Dea's role as a women's goddess. Several names of women from the highest social circles are also attested for the second sanctuary. In these two sites, men would hardly be expected to have acted as worshippers.

The presented evidence thus reveals very different aspects of the goddess and her cult. In the Late Republican and Early Imperial contexts from Rome and Ostia she was approached as a divine force guaranteeing well-being and prosperity, as well as the maintenance and continuation of these. Despite being generally regarded as a women's goddess these features occasionally also appealed to men. However, the specific notion of these aspects varied in these cases from the one which we find in the education of girls for married life.

Brouwer's attribution of some sanctuaries to the 'state cult', for instance the site outside the Porta Marina in Ostia, and others, such as the sanctuary in via degli Augustali in Ostia, to the section of 'private religion' neverthe-

less draws a too simplified image.<sup>75</sup> The complexity of the matter and limits of the named categories becomes evident when the question of the ‘daily business’ outside of the major feasts is raised or already when we consider how the feasts as such were celebrated. Particularly for the latter we can only assume that this happened in accordance with the rituals in Rome.

The term ‘state cult’ itself is also problematic since it implies a lot more organisation and planning through the political institutions and creates too much of a one-dimensional view, which the written and material evidence cannot be said to support. The acquisition of spaces, rituals and also ways to behave is entirely omitted in this concept, which therefore does not seem appropriate as an explanation here.

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<sup>75</sup> Brouwer 1989, 407–412. 425–427.

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## The Consumption of Religion in Roman Karanis\*

### Abstract

This article takes a critical look at methodological questions when using artefacts of material culture in the history of religions: how were figurines typified in old excavations and how do we today decide between categorisation of objects as toys or religious objects? Drawing on artefacts excavated at Karanis in the 1930s and also including ethnographic evidence, the paper seeks to overcome the old dichotomy by taking into account the option of an amphibolous use of figurines, that is, a use vividly oscillating between the two alleged poles depending on agent and situation.

**Keywords:** agency, cross, iconography, intention, materiality, play, prayer

Karanis was an agricultural town in Roman Egypt, located in the northern Fayum north-east of the Qarun lake,<sup>1</sup> and excavated by a team from Michigan University between 1924 and 1935. The records now in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology provide the material basis for my research into

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\* I would like to thank all participants of the LAR opening conference as well as my former colleagues at the LAR project and the Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies for their stimulating discussions and feedback in the past two years, especially professor Jörg Rüpke for his kind supervision and support. In addition I would like to thank Kate Cooper for her encouraging comments. Christopher Ratté, Sebastián Encina, and Michelle Fontenot kindly allowed me to visit the archives at the Kelsey Museum in Ann Arbor and readily shared the records and images of the excavation of the University of Michigan with me (here referred to as *Peterson's Notes and Record of Objects*). The ArcGis maps were compiled by Drew Wilburn and Ryan Reynolds after original plans of the Michigan University Excavation at Karanis (Kelsey Museum, Ann Arbor, Michigan). I am most grateful to them for sharing their data with me. The text was kindly polished by Henry Heitmann-Gordon. Last but not least, I would like to thank Anna-Katharina Rieger for her kind assistance in grappling with the technocratic leviathan. – Research on this article was supported by the European Community within the 7th Framework Programme (2008–2013) under contract no. 29555 (“Lived ancient religion”).

1 Unfortunately, few modern maps exist of the Fayum area. A somewhat cumbersome, but detailed map showing the Fayum and indicating the location of the site of Karanis (by its modern name: Kom Aushmin) has been provided by the ongoing U.S. Army Map Service of the CIA, 1954–; Series P502, NH 36–9 Al Fayyum; cf. [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/north\\_africa/txu-oclc-6949452-nh36-9.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/north_africa/txu-oclc-6949452-nh36-9.jpg); accessed on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012.



figure 1: KM 3762, courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

religious beliefs and practices in the house.<sup>2</sup> The role of objects is a crucial starting point for an investigation of lived ancient religion, which will be exemplified in this paper by an analysis of female figurines/dolls.<sup>3</sup> A closer look at the records shows that the terminology employed by the excavators (i. e. figurine vs. doll) can be misleading.<sup>4</sup> For example, the heads of two damaged terracotta figurines are designated as dolls in the *Record of Objects*, but appear as figurines or even ‘orants’ (i. e. categorised as religious images) in the Kelsey Museum database (see figures 1 and 2). The heads in question are not in very good condition, which may suggest that the rather unprepos-

2 Recently summarised by Wilfong 2012. All objects discussed can be found in the online Kelsey Museum Artifacts Database.

3 For previous analyses cf. e. g. Philipp 1972, 12; Ewigleben, Grumbkow 1991, 12. For a discussion of the *Forschungsgeschichte* on Greek terracotta figurines in the domestic context cf. e. g. Rumscheidt 2006, 27–30.

4 Compare Johnson 2007, 77.



figure 2: KM 3763, courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

sessing examples were initially classified as ‘dolls’, whereas the excavators considered the nicer, more intact ones as figurines. This hypothesis seems to find support in the observation that many female figurines made of less precious materials were classified as ‘dolls’ by the excavators: 38 dolls excavated at Karanis and taken back to Ann Arbor display a human iconography. Four of these are made of bone, two of stone, the majority are made of wood and the rest are rag dolls made of textiles such as wool and plant fiber. Only six dolls were identified as ‘female’ dolls: one made of unfired clay, one of unspecified clay, one of bone, and three of wood. As for female figurines, 39 were found at Karanis and taken back (table 2), most of which are made of clay, wood, or textile,<sup>5</sup> although some were made of more precious materials such as marble, faience and alabaster.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson 2003–4, 51.

The observation that fewer figurines made of precious materials have been preserved at Karanis is in line with the expectation that valuables were taken along when the site was abandoned. More significantly for the present study, however, it is clear that the materiality and iconography of the figurines/dolls seems to have influenced the terminology of the excavators. All wooden and textile females were classified as dolls, whereas all figurines made of more precious materials such as faience were considered as 'figurine/sculpture.' On closer inspection, clay, bone and limestone appear as ambiguous material categories that were not easily fit into a material categorisation of doll vs. figurine.

The present paper will reassess the female figurines in context in an attempt to avoid *pre*-defining them as either 'figurines' or 'dolls.' Obviously, the category 'female figurine' is already a pre-selection, but here it is meant as a heuristic rather than an interpretative category and serves as the starting point for a critical analysis of the categorisation provided by the excavators of the site. In the following, materiality and iconography will be discussed and linked with the archaeological evidence of a few case studies. The aim is to see to what extent the earlier categories are still valid and whether materiality and iconography necessarily indicate function. The focus is thus not on specific material categories (such as terracotta,<sup>6</sup> textile, and papyrus<sup>7</sup>), but aims at analysing all kinds of female figurines in context.

## 1 Materiality

If the consumption of the sacred is considered as an embodied experience,<sup>8</sup> texture, shape, material, appearance, and perhaps even taste and smell, must make a conceptual difference.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, various Egyptian texts suggest that objects made to serve a religious purpose were made of precious materials,<sup>10</sup> a tradition well-known from Pharaonic times,<sup>11</sup> and continuing into the Roman Period and later. Materiality is therefore understood as the carrier medium of the religious symbol,<sup>12</sup> which may explain the excavator's classification of 'shabbier' figurines as dolls. Another material aspect is the idea

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6 E. g. Dunand 1979; Teeter 2008; Sandri 2012, 630–647 etc.

7 Johnson 2003–4, 49–64.

8 Paterson 2006, 89–90; Bailey 2008, 1–2.

9 See also Wilburn 2012, 37 with references.

10 Cf. e.g. the monumental study by Aufrère 1991.

11 Compare, for instance, the examples listed by Teeter 2011, 42–43.

12 Bosch 2010, 15.

that some figurines, especially terracotta ones, were too fragile to be used as toys. Such ideas can be countered by noting that evidence for such use – although relatively scarce – is known from elsewhere,<sup>13</sup> and hence cannot be excluded at Karanis. Other ‘dolls’ were, however, found in religious contexts or – at least – in the same room as other religious objects.<sup>14</sup> For example, A254 (figure 3) is a structure located in excavation quadrant F9/10<sup>15</sup> at the edge of the region that was almost completely destroyed by the sebbakhin. Hence, the building’s ground plan is not very clear,<sup>16</sup> but from what is left it seems that we are dealing with a building of which only three rooms have been preserved.<sup>17</sup> 254B looks like a corridor from which the even smaller room or corridor 254A could be entered. 254A contained a small niche in the eastern wall and may have provided access to the main (in any case the largest) room in the building. 254C also contained several niches: two rectangular ones in the south wall, another one in the east wall and a large and perhaps more elaborate round one in the northern wall. The entrance to 254C is somewhat uncertain because the map suggests that it was found blocked. However, Peterson recorded that so little of the walls was preserved for excavation that no doorways were detected at all.<sup>18</sup> The doorway indicated may therefore be a mere hypothesis.<sup>19</sup>

In their diversity, the extensive finds are typical of a domestic setting, indicating that the building was probably a house. As usual, no records have survived that hint at potential owners. Several objects suggest various activities such as textile working and perhaps also carpentry. The large amount of pottery and baskets found in both 254A and C may indicate that these rooms served as some kind of storage and/or kitchen facilities; an idea that may also be supported with the find of a pig skull and the mandible of an unspecified animal in 254A, as well as a goat skull and several shells in 254C.

13 In *Hanghaus 1* in Ephesos – admittedly a completely different context and time period – four terracotta objects were found in a context that suggests their use as toys: a female figurine sitting in a chair, a horse with a rider, the wheel of a small vehicle, and the veiled head of a woman; cf. Lang-Auinger 2003, 238 and cf. Rumscheidt 2006, 118–119 and 131, who notes that the find is an exception.

14 Compare also the discussion by Johnson 2003–4, 57 with reference to a textile doll (KM 7512) found ‘in general association with the figurine of Isis and Harpokrates, the ivory dice, and the wooden doll with an image of the god Harpokrates.’

15 Cf. triangulation chart in Husselman 1979, map 1.

16 Compare also Gottry 1995, 25.

17 For part of the building see Husselman 1979, map 22.

18 *Peterson’s Notes*, 846.

19 The idea that the room might have been transformed into a cellar of a structure built on top, and entered from there can be rejected since the building was apparently used during one layer only; cf. *Peterson’s Notes*, 191.

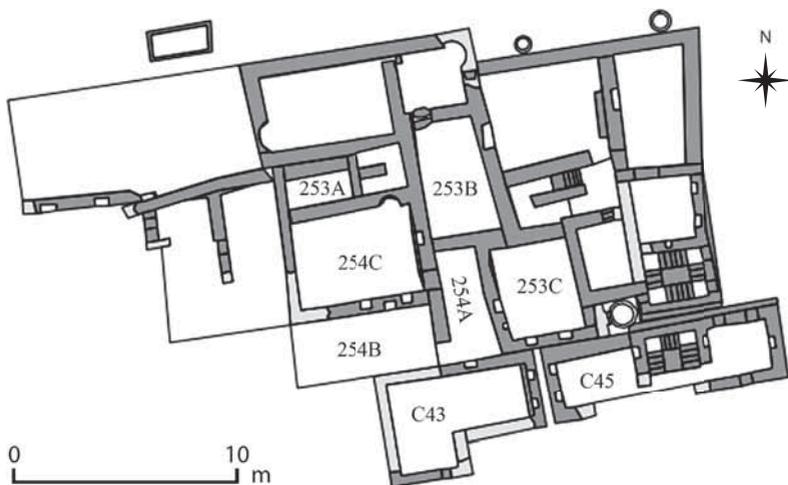


figure 3: A254; map based on data kindly provided by Drew Wilburn and Ryan Reynolds after original plans of the Michigan University excavation at Karanis.

The question would be whether this scattered evidence suggests a relation between (food?) storage and production and potential religious activities.

In room 254A we find the head of a terracotta ‘doll’, painted in red and black on a white foundation, and a castanet, which may suggest play or music, either religious or non-religious, or both. If we think about the ‘doll’ as a potentially religious image, an incense burner found in the same room may suggest offerings, but also purification. In 254C we find a lead amulet in the shape of a star, as well as another incense burner, a wooden ‘doll’, and a ‘doll’ made of bone. Here again, the scattered nature of the finds, on top of their uncertain chronology, makes it difficult to assess the meaning, function and use of these objects, although it should be noted that the burner type might be considered ‘suggestive of later liturgical incense burners.’<sup>20</sup> Hence, the archaeological record is particularly unclear. From the implications drawn from the objects that were found in relative proximity one could argue for the ‘dolls’ being both toys or religious images. This ambiguous situation in fact also applies to the finds potentially related to the figurines: the incense burners might have served for purification or offerings, the castanets might have been used for religious- or non-religious music, as rattles for children or all of the above. As for determining the figures’ function, we have arrived where we started. ‘Dolls’ of different types and materials appear

<sup>20</sup> Gottry 1995, 30 with reference to Cuthbert and Atchley 1909.

side by side and may have been used in religious activities<sup>21</sup> – or as toys. The messiness of the archaeological record in this case study prevents any clear identification of context, let alone proof of function of the figurines/dolls. Most figurines/dolls seem to come from rather unclear contexts, and it was not possible to clearly establish whether a certain type would appear in wealthier households, the other being a cheaper alternative. While this view is frequently found in ancient and modern sources,<sup>22</sup> the evidence from Karanis cannot confirm it. Clearly, the category of materiality is only of limited use in assigning function to figurines/dolls in the messy archaeological record.

## 2 Iconography of the Dolls/Figurines

Another, and perhaps more obvious criterion, for establishing a figurine/doll's function is iconography. Figurines with moveable extremities are usually considered to be strongly indicative of 'dolls', i. e. of a function as toys or playthings.<sup>23</sup> However, not only has this interpretation recently been challenged,<sup>24</sup> but also has no such doll been found at Karanis.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, this category is not very helpful in the present context. The excavators further subdivided the 'dolls' from Karanis into two groups: the human and the female-shaped 'dolls.' Of course all females are also human, so this

<sup>21</sup> This finding has parallels in Pompeii, where possible votives of different materials were found together in the same shrine; cf. e. g. Budetta and Pagano 1988, 36–37, no. 9.

<sup>22</sup> On the depreciation of terracotta figurines in Greek sources; cf. Rumscheidt 2006, 393–394 with references and a critical reading of the lived practice at Priene that challenges the view of the ancient authors. Particularly interesting is an episode of Paul in Ephesos who is indirectly quoted as having proclaimed 'that gods made by human hands are no gods at all,' *Acts* 19, 23–27. Of course aniconism is not an Ancient Egyptian discourse, but the episode from *Acts* seems worth considering as the reference frame for the idea that hand-made images could not be divine images. Whereas bias towards cheap mass-produced objects is relatively widespread in older literature and jumping to conclusions should certainly be avoided, it seems that the biblical framework of early scholars may also have influenced some of their interpretations. I would like to thank Angela Standhartinger for kindly bringing this reference to my attention during the 1<sup>st</sup> LAR conference.

<sup>23</sup> Willemsen 2003, 41 and 51.

<sup>24</sup> Merker 2000, 48–60; Muratov 2000; and Barrett 2011, 158–159.

<sup>25</sup> Willemsen 2003, 51 and 172–176 lists five main types: ivory/bone dolls with movable shoulders, elbows, hips and knees, terracotta dolls with loose limbs, wooden dolls made of one piece, and rag dolls. The only example of a doll with moveable limbs is a Coptic male ivory doll presently in the Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne 2435; cf. Willemsen 2003, 175.

indistinct categorisation is most probably due to the rather indefinite shape of the wooden and textile figurines, which do not show any painted or otherwise specified iconographical detail such as facial features.<sup>26</sup> This is further complicated by the fact that the classification ‘human’ is sometimes applied to a shape that is called ‘female’ in other cases.<sup>27</sup>

In the case of the ‘figurines’, the terminology is much clearer, as the iconography ‘human’ is applied only to fragmentary statuary the sex of which was not identifiable by primary and/or secondary sexual characteristics.<sup>28</sup> This observation indicates that as with materiality, the more elaborated figurines are categorised as ‘sculpture/figurine’ and the less elaborated as ‘dolls’.

### 3 Are All ‘Orants’ Religious Images?

Orants are mainly female figurines with outstretched arms; the term derives from the Latin term *orare* ‘to pray’,<sup>29</sup> Whereas many scholars stress the Christian background of these figurines,<sup>30</sup> the raised arms were common as a symbol of prayer in general.<sup>31</sup> Other interpretations include ‘a fertility goddess’, ‘deified dead’ or a ‘goddess of love’.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, Castiglione connects the squatting orant with ‘the rites of passage for girls’,<sup>33</sup> which may relate to educative play as shall be shown below by adducing ethnographic evidence (paragraph 4; below). In Egypt, such ‘orant’ figurines are mainly known from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century CE<sup>34</sup> The fundamental question for the present paper is: did all female orants have religious significance?

26 For an interpretation of the Karanis examples as dolls see Fluck 2004, 390. Two examples of Roman Egyptian textile dolls that do display a female iconography have been published by Fluck 2004, 383–387. They also derive from Roman Egypt (one from a children’s tomb in Abusir el-Meleq, the other with unclear find spot).

27 Compare Thomas 2001, 26, fig. 38.

28 The only two examples are the hands and feet of a figure and another fragment of what may have been a female statue: KM 2.5904-5 found in 27-C62A-N/27-C62H-A and KM 8212 found in 28-C49C-A and designated as a stone figure in the database. Unfortunately no negative is available in the latter case. Note that Fluck 2004, 388 identifies a skull in the way the textile is wrapped in a parallel textile figurine currently in Vienna (MAK inv. no. 584), which seems highly questionable.

29 Torjesen 1998, 43 with note 5.

30 Torjesen 1998, 44–46 with references.

31 Cf. Bailey 2008, 43.

32 Török 1995, 127.

33 Castiglione 1969, 82 and Török 1995, 127.

34 Polaczek Zdanowicz 1975, 144 and see 146 (fig. 7 with an example from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE).

In actual fact, the iconography is not always clear enough to allow us to distinguish decoration from religiously significant iconography or even magic.<sup>35</sup> The attitude of the arms spread in adoration is occasionally found in other contexts. Paul Perdrizet, for example, has noted a figurine from the Fayum, with an unknown find spot, playing with a dog in a potentially religious setting.<sup>36</sup> The problem here is that Perdrizet identifies the child as Harpocrates,<sup>37</sup> perhaps because of the religious iconography of the child and its surroundings. In fact the dog may also have had a religious connotation,<sup>38</sup> which is where we come full circle again, but this is exactly the reason why this is such a nice demonstration of the difficulty of building arguments on iconography.

If we view the child as a human child, the 'overlap' between religion and play could be significant. In fact, some so-called female orants, i. e. figurines classified as religious images, were found together with toys, perhaps suggesting a context of play as is the case in building A232. A head of a female orant was found there as well as a wooden pull horse. Other finds in A232 are potentially related to religious action such as an incense burner, but we also find other domestic items such as a carpenter's tool. Unfortunately, the architecture of excavation unit A232 is very unclear. The map<sup>39</sup> shows a single-room-building or structure with no entrance or door, nor any clear relation to the surrounding buildings, which makes it even more difficult than usual to discuss the potential object relations found in a certain spot. A232 may simply be a dump and the problem of assigning function to the object pertains.

Other orants were found together with many other religious objects, but without toys, as is the case for the one found in building C409 (figure 4),<sup>40</sup> a small building in the C-layer and located in excavation quadrant H8.<sup>41</sup> In spite of its relatively small size, several finds were made here, many of which could indicate religious activity. The room designations are very unclear so we have to rely on the excavation field numbers: Room H contained a bronze incense burner,<sup>42</sup> a bronze bell,<sup>43</sup> a lamp with a motif of branches,<sup>44</sup>

35 Cf. e.g. Gombrich 1980, 166–167.

36 Perdrizet 1921, 17, no. 58, and pl. LXXVII; cf. Török 1995, 128.

37 Perdrizet 1921, 17, no. 58.

38 Barrett 2011, 187–189 with references, which suggest the Malteser spitz to be a) of Egyptian origin and b) related to the Sothis star.

39 Husselman 1979, map 22.

40 KM 6475 found in 33-C409J-P.

41 Husselman 1979, map 13.

42 KM 1.0734 found in 33-C409H-B.

43 KM 1.0897 found in 33-C409H-C.

44 KM 2.2400 found in 33-C409H-J; cf. Shier 1978, 99.



figure 4: C409 map based on data kindly provided by Drew Wilburn and Ryan Reynolds after original plans of the Michigan University Excavation at Karanis.

and a mirror.<sup>45</sup> In room C we find a marble herm, perhaps of Apollo,<sup>46</sup> and an undecorated pitcher.<sup>47</sup> Other finds include two glass beads,<sup>48</sup> and a coin.<sup>49</sup> In room J we find our female orant,<sup>50</sup> a figurine of Harpokrates,<sup>51</sup> a bronze amulet of the god Serapis,<sup>52</sup> a pitcher with a grape motif,<sup>53</sup> and an undecorated one,<sup>54</sup> a stone base,<sup>55</sup> and an alabaster measure.<sup>56</sup> These objects

45 A pair: KM 1.0724a–b found in 33-C409H–Q.

46 KM 1.0727 found in 33-C409C–H.

47 KM 2.0824 found in 33-C409C–a.

48 KM 7.6688 and KM 7.6740 both found in 33-C409H–M.

49 KM 6.9005 found in 33-C409B–A.

50 KM 6475 found in 33-C409J–P.

51 KM 6454 found in 33-C409J–R.

52 KM 1.0875 found in 33-C409J–G.

53 KM 2.0637 found in 33-C409J–j.

54 KM 2.0833 found in 33-C409J–g.

55 KM 2.5887 found in 33-C409J–B.

56 KM 2.5849 found in 33-C409J–Y.



figure 5: KM 10004 courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

could be domestic, but the building does not show the usual variety of general domestic materials. In fact, an alternative interpretation of the building C409 may be possible: the base just mentioned is classified as an architectural element in the Kelsey Museum database, but in view of the find of a coin hoard in J,<sup>57</sup> as well as the measure and a marble block in room H,<sup>58</sup> one may also think of the building as a (work-)shop, i. e. by identifying the base as workbench and the block as unfinished statuary. In that case, the coin hoard and the measure could be understood as remains of economic activity in the building. A workshop specialized in all kinds of religious implements would indicate that the find context cannot tell us much about the actual

<sup>57</sup> KM 4.0496 found in 33-C409J-C; Karanis coin hoard 13; date: 52/53 CE.

<sup>58</sup> KM 2.5798 found in 33-C409H-E.

use of the objects meant to be sold and used elsewhere, but it could perhaps suggest an intended use of these objects in religious activities.

#### 4 Did some figurines serve as dolls or amulets?

The woolen and wooden figurines from Karanis are often described as dolls, but similar difficulties mar this interpretation. A wooden figurine now in the museum in Athens may illustrate the problem of deriving function from iconography.<sup>59</sup> This figurine displays a shape very similar to the examples from Karanis, but wears a kind of tunic made of yellow wool. This tunic closely resembles known clothing styles.<sup>60</sup> Does the fact that a figurine wears clothing identify it as dress-up doll and mean that it was used in a non-religious context? On the other hand, does the absence of such clothing on the Karanis examples indicate a religious significance? In fact, the ‘dolls’ could be viewed as having a religious iconography, too. Karen Johnson has already noted the similarity of the shape of the textile figurines to that of *tj.t*-amulets, also called Isis knots<sup>61</sup> generally known as protective symbols from Antiquity to the Middle Ages.<sup>62</sup> This similarity in shape between Isis knots and woolen figurines or rag dolls also applies to the wooden figurines. Both ‘types’ consist of a longer vertical part that is crossed by a shorter horizontal one, which have been interpreted as both human and cross-shaped, with the former usually being larger than the latter. This interpretation is probably to be explained by the fact that the smaller items show slightly different ratios. The larger figurines have longer vertical parts than the horizontal compared to the smaller ones. The upper section above the junction between the vertical and horizontal is often pierced, suggesting that both the larger and the smaller wooden figurines were (or at least could be) suspended. The only difference between both types is thus their size/ratio which may explain why certain ones were more immediately associated with cross<sup>63</sup> or human shape respectively. For example, in one case the Kelsey Museum database

<sup>59</sup> Fluck 2004, 399 and pl. XXVI.

<sup>60</sup> Fluck 2004, 399 with reference to Fluck 1999, 139.

<sup>61</sup> Johnson 2003–4, 60–61. For an example of a *tj.t*-amulet inscribed with the spell from Book of the Dead spell 156; cf. e.g. BM EA 20624 published by Taylor 2010, no. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Dauterman Maguire et al. 1989, 3. They state that the knot possibly derived this symbolic quality from Greek *καταδέω* meaning ‘to bind physically’ (or by spells) as well as ‘to enchant’, see also Dinkler 1978, 73–86.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Kelsey Museum 00000.7564 found in 28-109F\*-M and Kelsey Museum 00000.7562 found in 28-C42J-KI and one (Kelsey Museum 00002.1938) made of Mother of Pearl found in 29-B156K\*-A.

is in doubt whether an amulet represents a cross or the god Bes,<sup>64</sup> thereby nicely illustrating the ambiguous iconography and difficulty in distinguishing between both types, which may apply to other ‘dolls’ as well. Neither size nor iconography is valid as a distinct criterion on its own. It appears that there is no reason to believe that amulets must always be small. While this is perhaps plausible for amulets meant to be worn, others may have been hung on walls or furniture. Furthermore, why could children not have played with amulets or been given playthings that bore an additional protective value?

## 5 Interim Result

If we look into the messy archaeological record, there is no evidence that the terracotta orants were always religious images or that wooden or rag figurines all served as toys.<sup>65</sup> Their find situation is a problem for any clear interpretation of who used the figurines and how. The messiness of the record prevents any clear identification of context, let alone proof of function of the figurines/dolls. However, this ambiguity clearly challenges the immediate link between materiality and iconography on the one hand and function on the other, and allows for some deeper thoughts on potential alternatives. Theoretically, the figurines/dolls of the same material and iconography could have served different functions in different situations.<sup>66</sup> There is at least no evidence to the contrary. Georges Nachtergaele has already noted that similar terracotta types appear in both domestic and public spaces allowing no type restriction to the one or the other.<sup>67</sup> Does the messy find assemblages allow us to push Nachtergaele’s observation a little further and suggest that his argument may also apply to other types of figurines found within domestic space?

Clearly materiality and iconography have proven unreliable as criteria for function. Some may still argue for the human shape of the wooden or woolen figurines, but even this identification would not prove their function as dolls. For example, fertility figurines or ‘love dolls’ may have had human

<sup>64</sup> Kelsey Museum 00009.0188 found in 25-297E-B.

<sup>65</sup> For this distinction see, for example, Philipp 1972, 8 with cat. 50 for the question of whether a female figurine shows Isis Lactans or a woman with a child. This type of interpretation is based on earlier studies by e. g. Mircea Eliade (1998 [1949], 57) who argued that whereas in principle any object could obtain sacredness, once it became sacred it could no longer be profane.

<sup>66</sup> Compare Barrett 2011, 330 and see Fluck 2004, 400 noting that ‘[d]ie Übergänge zwischen Spielzeug und Kultobjekt waren sicher fließend.’

<sup>67</sup> Cf. e. g. Nachtergaele 1985, 224.

shape, appearing as male or female adults or children. Most importantly, however, other interpretations are possible simultaneously, such as the Isis knot or cross shapes. So what can the identification of a specific iconography tell us about the use of a figurine? If at all, it seems, iconography can inform us only about the intended use, i. e. the function of an object made for a certain purpose, say, an amulet intended as a protective amulet or a religious figurine meant for worship or used in specific practices, or a doll intended as a toy. However, can we really exclude any overlap between intended and actual use or do we have to consider potential differences between 'actual' function and function assigned to an object by its users? My hypothesis is to establish a distinct conceptual category of objects that manifest the *result of agency*, i. e. an object that is created for a certain purpose like a doll, an amulet or a religious image. In addition, we must also consider objects which are *processed by means of agency*, i. e. objects which are (re-)conceptualised by the agents and thereby used for purposes different from the ones intended by the maker. Both practices (or uses of objects) may exist side-by-side depending on agent and situation (e. g. the use of a woolen figurine as both amulet and toy). A formal distinction between these two usages seems crucial, because it leaves room for the agent to conceptualise objects differently in different situations. The artist that makes a religious figurine has a different relationship to the object than the pious user, or the one that uses the images as toys or to learn religion in play. So if we see different types of figurines/dolls made of different materials appearing side by side in the houses at Karanis,<sup>68</sup> this does not indicate arbitrariness, but only proves that we have a problem in grasping individual reasoning archaeologically. The ambiguity of the find situations presented here illustrates this situation nicely. However, an *argumentum e silentio* is of course always problematic and the absence of evidence does not prove anything. Given that the disarray of the archaeological evidence from Karanis further exacerbates this problem, it seems worthwhile to bolster my theoretical considerations by looking at some ethnographic evidence.

## 6 Ethnographic Evidence

A large variety of usages can in fact be demonstrated by comparing the uses and functions of dolls in various cultures.<sup>69</sup> For example, African dolls found

<sup>68</sup> This finding has parallels in Pompeii, where possible votives of different materials were found together in the same shrine. Budetta, Pagano 1988, 36–37, no. 9.

<sup>69</sup> See also Smith 2004, 325; for further ethnographic references cf. Ucko 1968, 425.

in various tribes could serve to enhance fertility, during initiation, as ancestors, in the cult of the deceased, as models for certain headdresses, in theatre and/or as souvenirs.<sup>70</sup> The use of a doll in one context does not exclude a different use in another context. In the capital of Caduveo, in Nalike, for instance, Claude Lévi-Strauss observed children playing with figurines that were simultaneously conceived as religious figurines.<sup>71</sup> The question is whether such behaviour was an exception,<sup>72</sup> or the rule. Lévi-Strauss understood it as a rule, as a multifunctional use of ritual objects indicative of the arbitrariness and changeability of categories such as ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’.<sup>73</sup> This ‘overlap’ of sacred and profane shows that both spheres worked as a continuum in the practice of everyday life.<sup>74</sup> The term ‘overlap’ is itself highly misleading because it still transports the idea of two defined spheres, which this article tries to overcome. It is hard to fully free ourselves from our own deeply ingrained cultural preconceptions that treat the sacred and the profane as two distinct things. If we were to discard these terms, things would become incomprehensible and we would lose our heuristic instruments to assess religious context. Therefore, we must remain aware that our perception may be fundamentally different from that of other cultures, as the closest we can get is to understand the continuum as a fluid intersection between two spheres. Objects may ‘evoke similar responses from the same person’, but not necessarily at any time and when used by other people.<sup>75</sup> Lévi-Strauss’s theory can also be supported by drawing on the example of the Ashanti in modern Ghana.<sup>76</sup> In this tribe women wear small dolls woven into their clothes to enhance their fertility.<sup>77</sup> In fact carrying dolls around was common practice in many African cultures; young women/girls even often used the same carrier for dolls they later use for their real children.<sup>78</sup> After having fulfilled their purpose, these dolls were discarded, shared with

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70 Compare Bofinger 2006, 10–12.

71 Lévi-Strauss 1955, 179–180.

72 Cf. Sutton-Smith 1986, 27.

73 Lévi-Strauss 1955, 179–180.

74 For a perspective critical of stable categories of sacred or profane, cf. e.g. Rüpke 2012, 232–233 and see also Bado-Fralick and Sachs Norris 2010, 18.

75 Cf. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, 14 and more recently Hodder 2012, 160.

76 Cf. Bofinger 2006, 11.

77 Cf. Bofinger 2006, 11.

78 E.g. Bofinger 2006, 33 (Dan/Liberia); 37 (Akan/Ghana); 56 (Fali/Cameroon); 67 (Mossi/Burkina Faso). In fact, dolls representing future children were also common gifts in Renaissance France and Italy; cf. Cameron and Ross 1996, 14 quoting Klapisch-Zuber 1985, 310–329.

other women, or given to children as toys.<sup>79</sup> The question is thus whether only those dolls that had accomplished their given use were shared. Put differently, could this ‘doll sharing’ take place in one direction only or could it go back-and-forth? In the archaeological record such details can of course hardly be traced, but it is nevertheless important to realise that these figurines from Karanis may also have had multiple functions, e.g. as toy *and* ritual object,<sup>80</sup> depending on agent and situation. In other cases, dolls that succeeded in providing fertility were returned to the responsible priest and ‘display[ed] on his shrine as evidence of his power and spiritual success.’<sup>81</sup> In fact, even when differences in use appear in the modern cases, religious and profane figurines seldom show stylistic differences.<sup>82</sup> Not only is meaning established by whatever a given group decides, but it may also differ from situation to situation and use to use.<sup>83</sup> Whereas a practice in one culture does not prove its existence in another, the observations summarised above seem similar to those made at Karanis. In everyday life it seems that categories of use/function and meaning may not necessarily always be fixed.<sup>84</sup>

## 7 Synthesis: What’s in a doll?

This paper has suggested that the material-driven subdivision of the corpus into dolls and figurines is a modern rather than an ancient criterion for distinction.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, iconography did not provide reliable evidence for the potential use of a figurine/doll, certainly not in a record as messy as that of Karanis. Based on theoretical considerations and evidence from other cultures, it seems that figurines/dolls may have been used as both religious and

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Bofinger 2006, 11.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson 2007, 24.

<sup>81</sup> Ross 1996, 44 with an example from the Asante/Ghana.

<sup>82</sup> Ucko 1968, 422 with references.

<sup>83</sup> Talalay 1993, 38. As an aside, a nice modern Egyptian example are sugar dolls (so-called *arusat el-mulid*) and horses given to girls and boys respectively during festivals; cf. Kane 2013, 84–85. The dolls are especially given on the birthday of the prophet, a tradition which some authors see more or less in line with Graeco-Roman examples, cf. e.g. Amal-Naguib 1986, 3–10. I would like to thank Carina van den Hoven for kindly bringing these dolls to my attention.

<sup>84</sup> Talalay 1993, 38. Note, however, that in other cultures there is also evidence for the same type of figurines serving both purposes, the ‘sacred’ ones being distinguished as such through blessing by a religious specialist; Talalay 1993, 44 quoting Loeb 1926, 246.

<sup>85</sup> The same applies to aesthetics, an aspect beyond the scope of the present paper. Compare Alfred Gell’s argument that the ‘desire to see the art of other cultures aesthetically tells us more about our own ideology [...] than it does about these other cultures’, cf. Gell 1998, 3.

non-religious images irrespective of shape and iconography. In addition, use as a religious image of some sort or as a toy may not necessarily always have excluded the other function. The problem of distinguishing play from religion becomes particularly pressing when considering that play may include the learning of religion,<sup>86</sup> which touches upon the question of children's religiosity.<sup>87</sup> Some previous analyses have approached the tricky problem of distinguishing between religion and play by equating the two,<sup>88</sup> often treating them as set apart from everyday life and following their own set of rules.<sup>89</sup> Ethnographic evidence, however, strongly suggests that one needs to allow for a more complex view and that we should try to give meaning to this complexity. In my view, the solution to the problem is to abandon any strict dichotomy between the sacred and the profane in everyday life. At Karanis, female figurines may *potentially* have served as both toys *and* ritual objects,<sup>90</sup> depending on agent and situation. Put differently, function is a category mediated by the respective agents.<sup>91</sup> This mediation can be performed in both directions (i. e. religious image and toy) without being mutually exclusive.<sup>92</sup> Admittedly, the specific choices and appropriations of the individuals at Roman Karanis are difficult to nail down in the somewhat flawed archaeological record. At the same time this finding provides room to indirectly recognise amphibolous use, that is, to allow for function(s) with more than one meaning.<sup>93</sup> Two aspects must be considered:

1) Amphibolous use of figurines is perhaps not as controversial an idea as it may seem at first sight, since it is an interpretation commonly accepted for other objects of everyday life such as pottery and lamps. Whereas, for example, the lighting of lamps is known as a religious practice from letters in Roman Egypt, not every lamp is evidence of such practices. Likewise, pot-

<sup>86</sup> For the idea of children learning religion see also Barclay 1997, 68.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. e. g. Neale 1969, 93, although I do not follow his argument that all play is 'religious also, even though immaturely so from adult perspective'.

<sup>88</sup> See also the discussion by Neale 1969, 100–103 and 105–125; with references.

<sup>89</sup> On play as creating a different reality in terms of the 'violation of everyday rules', cf., e. g. Sutton-Smith 1986, 140.

<sup>90</sup> Johnson 2007, 24.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Lynch 2010, 43 with reference to Meyer 2006, 15–16.

<sup>92</sup> See also Smith 1987, 104 who notes that an 'object becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way [...] there is nothing that is inherently sacred or profane. These are not substantive categories, but rather situational ones'.

<sup>93</sup> Spariosu 1989, 2 and see also Sutton-Smith 1997, 1; both with reference to play. A similar approach is taken by André Droogers, who defines play as 'the human capacity to deal with two or more realities at once'; ('*het menselijke vermogen om tergelijk met twee of meer werkelijkheden om te gaan*'); cf. Droogers 2010, 131; Talalay 1993, 81; Ucko 1968, 426 and 434 on the range of uses of figurines generally.

tery items may have been used during ritual meals, and for libation offerings as well as during ‘normal meals.’<sup>94</sup> There is no conclusive evidence to counter the idea that similar usage patterns may apply to figurines.

2) Intended use and actual use of objects is not the same. The use of objects may differ in situations. This does not mean that every doll was a religious image or that every religious image served as a toy, but is only intended to point out that one must conceptually allow for an optional different use without immediately assuming that such use must be deviant.

Clearly in the practice of everyday life, form does not (always) follow (possibly intended) function, but people may employ a variety of imaginative and playful appropriations of religious and non-religious practices, which need to be considered when looking into the ancient record.<sup>95</sup>

### **Table 1: ‘Dolls’**

#### **Bone dolls**

KM 2.6418 found in 25-254C-N

KM 2.6419 found in 28-C372-A

KM 8.9601 (doll? toy fragment?) found in 25-5072F-B.

KM 7505 found in 27-C33A-C (dovecote) (female)

#### **Stone dolls**

KM 2.6419 found in 28-C37Z-A (dovecote)

KM 7530 found in 28-C91K-E (dovecote)

KM 2.6420 found in 30-C123CH.5-B (granary)

#### **Wooden dolls**

##### **C-layer:**

KM 7504 found in 27-C51J-J

KM 7500 found in 27-C53H-B

KM 7499 found in 27-C54E-GI

KM 2.6414 found in 30-CS180-B

KM 1.0002 found in 24-5016B-E (female)

##### **A-layer:**

KM 1.0004 found in 24-114D-N

KM 3313 found in 24-162B-A

KM 7526 found in 28-165\*-GI

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Frankfurter 2008, 214 and see more recently Masson 2013, 153.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. van Harskam 2006, 1.

KM 3764 found in 25-215B-J  
 KM 3759 found in 25-225C-B  
 KM 3767 found in 25-227C-B  
 KM 3756 found in 25-227C-C  
 KM 3765 found in 25-254C-F  
 KM 3859 found in 25-308B-G  
 KM 3754 found in 25-312D-C  
 KM 3757 found in 25-334-A  
 KM 3857 found in 25-335A-C  
 KM 7502 found in 29-235\*-B  
 KM 7520 found in 29-235\*-HII  
  
 KM 7510 found in 28-B114D\*-L (female)  
 KM 1.0003 found in 24-114D-AY (female)

### Rag dolls

#### C-layer:

KM 7513 found in 27-CA19-X  
 KM 7512 found in 27-C54A-A  
 JE 65500 found in 27-C62B-A  
 KM 2.6416 found in 33-4017\*-V

#### B-layer:

KM 2.6413 found in 26-B36A-J  
 KM 7508 found in 28-B133A-D  
 KM 7506 found in 28-B168K-Q  
 KM 2.6415 found in 30-B224C-A

#### A-layer:

KM 7523 found in 28-157\*-H  
 KM 3649 found in 25-185D-A  
 KM 1.0113 found in 25-262-NI  
 KM 3541 found in 25-241C-A  
 KM 3648 found in 25-247-A  
 KM 3542 found in 25-295-D

### Fiber/papyrus doll

KM 3856 found in 25-262-B

### Clay dolls

KM 3758 found in 25-237G-D (female; unfired)  
 KM 7525 found in 28-165\*-wII (female)

**Table 2: 'Figurines'****Clay figurines**

**F-layer:** KM 6500 (figurine fragment) found in 29-F19C-P

**E-layer:**

KM 6473 (female orant) found in 29-E24B-G

KM 6474 (female orant) found in 29-E31C-A

**C-layer:**

KM 6472 found in 27-C51J-N

KM 6477 (female orant) found in 27-C57H-B

KM 6483 (steatopygous female) found in 30-C65DM.2-A (granary)

KM 6498 (fragment) found in 29-C122K-T

KM 6475 (female orant) found in 33-C409J-P

KM 6486 (Isaic) found in 33-C414F-L

KM 6484 found in 25-5048-OI

KM 3763 (female orant head) found in 25-5072F-E

**B-layer:**

KM 6470 (female) found in 26-BA1-Q

KM 6496 found in 26-B12L-B

KM 6485 found in 33-B501G-L

**A-layer:**

KM 6448 (standing figure/painted) found in 24-127A-N

KM 3309 (female orant) found in 24-136G-A

KM 3760 (orant head) found in 25-215B-I

KM 3768 (female orant) found in 25-228A-K

KM 3766 (female orant head) found in 25-232A-D

KM 3728 (orant) found in 25-237A-G

KM 3761 (orant head) found in 25-262-L

KM 3762 (female head) found in 25-278A-I

KM 6471 (female orant) found in 25-280A-B

KM 3432 (orant) found in 25-308B-F

**Marble figurine**

KM 2.5819 (fragment of a female head) found in 29-E44D-H

**Faience Figurines**

**E-layer:** KM 2.5984 found in 30-E102B-C

**C-Layer:**

KM 2.5990 found in 30-C49N<sup>1</sup>-B

KM 2.5986 found in 30-C198K<sup>1</sup>-C

KM 2.5992 found in 33-C404P-A

**C/B-layer:**

KM 2.5991 found in 26-BC57E-E

**B-layer:**

KM 2.5989 found in 30-B224B-F

**Alabaster Figurines:**

KM 2.5824 found in 30-C49C-E

KM 8524 (female torso) found in 25-5087B-C

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# The 'Connected Reader' as a Window into Lived Ancient Religion: A Case Study of Ovid's *Libri fastorum*

## Abstract

Ovid's commentary on the Roman *fasti* is one of the literary products of the Augustan period extensively dealing with religious practices in centralised cult and domestic worship. Apart from its role in the development of ruler worship, its documentary value for reconstructing Roman ritual has been intensively investigated. However, the answers given by Ovid as contemporary observer or as Augustan theologian are at least as important as the questions Ovid is asking, or has his figures ask. Reader response criticism, my paper claims, opens up a tool for reconstructing lived ancient religion. The paper will analyse these questions of why, what, and when, in order to reconstruct a profile of what is questionable and worth knowing for the reader, implied by this exceptionally well-preserved 'antiquarian' text.

**Keywords:** Ovid: *fasti*, emotions in ritual, implied reader, urban religion, religious knowledge, Roman religion

## 1 The Problem

'Lived Ancient Religion' is a research program asking for a change of perspective. Religious 'tradition', 'shared social meaning', 'ritual precepts' and 'public religion' are well-researched areas of religious practices and beliefs in the ancient circum-Mediterranean world. Instead, by focussing on 'lived religion', individual appropriation of tradition, personal experiences and responses, the incoherencies of situational interpretation, isolated performances, local and group-specific styles come into focus.<sup>1</sup> If this interest goes beyond listing the myriads of documents of individual performance, consisting of votives, inscriptions, and anonymous depositional remains –

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1 Rüpke 2012c. – This paper is part of a research project 'Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning "Cult" and "Polis religion"', funded by the European Community within FP2008–13 under agreement no. 295555.

which are all deeply shaped by their (usually) formulaic and stereotyped character – the question of evidence becomes crucial. How can we identify individual appropriation and transformation, or the creative reassembling and consequential selections, of elements of tradition made by individuals? How can we evaluate the impact of such individual modifications on the resulting shape of seemingly stable ‘traditions’? Where can we trace the interdependencies of the individual and the social in specific situations?<sup>2</sup>

Individual religious practices depend upon the intellectual as well as embodied availability of ‘traditions’ and their situational salience. Such ‘traditions’ embrace complex belief systems as well as simple sequences of ritual action. ‘Learning’ and ‘memory’ are involved in processes of individual appropriation. These terms refer to processes of acquiring knowledge by formal training or constant repetition, by casual exchange and need-driven inquiry.<sup>3</sup> Paying attention to these forms is a necessary element of any historical reconstruction.

By the late republican period, a small minority of Romans could read and had access to private copies or the first public libraries, or could afford to spend time in, or be invited to, recitations. For them, from the mid-first century onwards, texts on religion were available which were lavish in ritual and theological detail.<sup>4</sup> These texts, where extant, have been used for centuries as the principal sources for the reconstruction of ‘Roman religion’. Occasionally (and more intensively in recent years) they have been detected as offering a glimpse onto the intellectual concerns and the cognitive dimension of late Republican and early Imperial religion. They have come to be regarded as theological enterprises in their own right, establishing their authors as figures of religio-historical importance as much as holders of public priesthods.<sup>5</sup> It is my claim in this paper that analysis of such texts can also contribute to the methodological problems raised by the Lived Ancient Religion approach. But how could such contributions be elicited, how could the user rather than the producer, the usage rather than the production, be illuminated?

2 See for case studies addressing the problem of religious individuality: Rüpke and Spickermann 2012; Rebillard 2012; Rüpke 2013; Rüpke and Woolf 2013.

3 For the concept of memory see Halbwegs 1992; Connerton 1989; Le Goff 1992; Flower 2003; Oesterle 2005; Cubitt 2007; Benoist et al. 2009; Erll 2011; Dignas and Smith 2012; Cusamano et al. 2013; Rüpke 2012b.

4 See Rawson 1985 (for the period as a whole), briefly Ledentu 2004, 329–337.

5 Beard 1986, 1987, 1991; Feeney 1998; Rüpke 2012a.

## 2 Searching for the Readers

One of the most pressing problems in the sociology of ancient literature is the almost total lack of testimonies of readers and their reactions – with the exception of some famous responses, for example of Cicero as a reader of Varro, or about Augustus as a listener to Vergil.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, a dense sequence of manuscript copies, which would at least allow a glimpse into the reactions of copyists through their modifications of the original wording (and layout), is restricted to very few cases, in particular to texts later classified as 'Christian'.<sup>7</sup> Analysis is thus usually restricted to the texts themselves and what can be elicited about the reader therein. Reader response criticism has suggested different approaches to this task, especially in the last third of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

Evidently, the act of reading is a complex process. It is confronting a reader's formation and expectation with a text that confirms or frustrates such expectations and that offers a sequence of representations and meta-representations (that is, representations of others' representations), information and evaluation or – in extreme cases of some magical papyri and Dadaism – just sounds or images. It is permanently forcing the recipients – and for antiquity we have to think of hearers even more frequently than readers – to recalibrate their appraisal.<sup>9</sup> Apart from the different voices of explicit (i. e. narrated) or implicit narrators, the text might offer figures within the plot as models for or alternatives means of reception, so-called narrated readers (or, as I stressed, hearers). The text might also construe an 'intended reader' as somebody of a certain age, gender, social identity or intellectual interest. This would usually be even an 'ideal reader' with all the competences necessary to fully grasp the text. The text as a whole, that is, as a sum of its challenges to connect its unconnected parts, and to combine its different perspectives, would, according to Wolfgang Iser, produce an 'implicit' or 'implied reader'.<sup>10</sup>

For this brief exposition, I am not interested in discussing the merits of the different shades and the ontological statuses of these readers.<sup>11</sup> Evidently, the more implicit the reader is, the more dependent her character is

6 Cic. *acad. post.* 8–9; Donat, *Vita Vergilii* 31.

7 See e. g. Haines-Eitzen 2012.

8 E. g. Booth 1983 (1961); Jauss 1977a, 1977b, 1982, 1987; Iser 1972, 1974, 1976, 1978; overview: Prince 2009.

9 Iser 1994.

10 *Ibid.*, 62–66.

11 For criticism see Genette 1994, 291–292.

on the interpretation of the text as a whole by the literary critique and little more than the indeterminable point where all the loose ends of a text are tied together.<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of my analysis it suffices to say (and eases my task) that literary communication in antiquity, including religious communication,<sup>13</sup> is much more tightly bound to established social relationships than to literary texts of the late early modern and modern periods.<sup>14</sup> This is due to the limited extent of literacy, and its concentration in the upper echelons of society.<sup>15</sup> It is reinforced by the necessity to manually copy books. Distribution usually relies on friends (and friends of friends) rather than on the very limited commercial book market.<sup>16</sup> For the most part reading took place in a network made up of strong *and* weak ties.<sup>17</sup> Again, we usually have no external evidence on the specific religious appropriations of the members, that is, the nodes of such a network. In order to avoid circularity in my argumentation by imputing what I would like to see implied, my analysis will concentrate on narrated figures, but of course collect other clues leading to intended audiences as well. This is what I will call ‘connected reader’, i.e. somebody cognitively and socially connected, in the following.

### 3 Informing and Involving the Connected Reader: A Case Study

The text to test the methodology outlined is Publius Ovidius Naso’s *Libri fastorum*, his commentary on the Roman calendar in its graphic form of the *fasti*, mostly completed after 2 CE, perhaps before 4, but certainly before 8 CE.<sup>18</sup> Roman poetry might not seem to be the best inroad into broadly valid data on ancient religious practice; its audience must be looked for in the Roman elite, despite its critical voices visible in several late republican and early Augustan texts from Catullus and Vergil to Horace and Propertius. It was in the communicative and social space of the elite, however, that such

12 Nünning 1993; radicalised by Willand 2014, in particular 265–297.

13 For the latter concept see Rüpke and Spickermann 2009; Rüpke 2001.

14 Habinek 1998, in particular 103–121.

15 For the discussion see Harris 1989; Corbier 1991; Bowman and Woolf 1994; Curchin 1995; Hezser 2001; Derks and Roymans 2002; Lardinoi 2011.

16 In general Johnson 2012; for circulation see Starr 1987; Mratschek 2010; Haines-Eitzen 2012, 24.

17 For a fruitful application of network theory to ancient religion see Collar 2007; Eidinow 2011 and Collar 2014.

18 For the title and genre see Rüpke 1994. Against common usage, I use the fuller title to fight the widespread misunderstanding of the poem as versified calendar. For a short discussion of the date (not accepting the earlier terminus post quem, to which I tend) see Littlewood 2006, xx.

poetry had a role. These texts 'became part of the Romans' social equipment and came to inform their view of the world', as Sander Goldberg has shown in his study on republican Roman literature.<sup>19</sup> Religious practices, institutions, and history had a substantial share in this view of the world.<sup>20</sup>

Ovid's six books, covering the months of January to June, are, together with Propertius' fourth book of the elegies (to which Ovid reacts),<sup>21</sup> the apogee of this poetry in the early Principate. They are part of the cultural revolution which Andrew Wallace-Hadrill demonstrated to be at the heart of the Augustan 'restoration'.<sup>22</sup> At the same time they were very political statements.<sup>23</sup> In a longer perspective, however, the composition of these texts on Roman religion was also part of the process of insular rationalisation from the third century BCE onwards, which came, at least for religion, to a halt in Augustan times.<sup>24</sup>

For research into constructions of audiences and narrators, Ovid's elegiac poems on an epic scale are particularly rewarding. The homodiegetic narrator (to use Genette's terminology), that is to say a narrator fully embedded in the principal narration, is not omniscient, but himself frequently in need of further information, or reflecting on different explanations. As Joy Littlewood formulates, 'audience involvement is essential to Ovid's *Fasti* narrative, which is a personal exchange with literary Rome, the educated elite'. The self-contained short units of elegiac distiches are in particular suitable to 'colloquial dialogue'.<sup>25</sup> The elaborate dedication of the *Libri fastorum* to Augustus in the first version (probably still to be detected in the beginning of the second book on February)<sup>26</sup> and the dedication to Germanicus in the second and final version from exile (8–17 CE) call for active appropriation by every single reader. These texts are intensively arguing for the importance of the poems' contents to the individual dedicatees, but they are also asking any other reader to consider their importance. Time and again these 'con-

19 Goldberg 2005, 207.

20 See in general Feeney 1998; for history see Feeney 2007a; Rüpke 2012b, 165–173.

21 In particular *Ov. fast.* 2.7–8; see Rüpke 2009.

22 Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 236–239.

23 See Wallace-Hadrill 1988; Barchiesi 1994; Feeney 1994; Herbert-Brown 1994; Fantham 2002.

24 Rüpke 2012a, where I claim the process to be predating the 1<sup>st</sup> century advocated by Moatti 1997. Feeney 2007b is right, however, to point out numerous innovations in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE.

25 Littlewood 2006, lxxiii–lxix and lxxiv, quotations lxix and lxxiv.

26 I follow the thesis of Peter 1874, 10 (accepted e.g. by Bömer 1958, 19; without new arguments rejected by Miller 1991, 143–144).

nected readers' are directly addressed. The opening of the sixth book is an example of this:

*Hic quoque mensis habet dubias in nomine causas:  
quae placeat, positis omnibus ipse leges* (6.1–2).<sup>27</sup>

'This month, too, has dubious causes for its name.  
All will be listed. Pick the one you like.'<sup>28</sup>

Intellectually, this form of literary communication is part of antiquarian literature, which has risen since the second century BCE at Rome. In the face of imperial expansion and rapid social and cultural change, antiquarian descriptions and systematisations of Roman rituals and institutions offered a way to construe a particular cultural identity beyond military dominance and offered a way to negotiate change and tradition. Augustus made full use of that. In that manner, innovations could be rooted in a vision of religious continuity and reaffirmation.<sup>29</sup> "Traditionalism," as Wallace-Hadrill points out, 'brought not inflexibility, but the basis for creative adaptation. Cultural identity invested in a remote past becomes not so much a programme as an alibi.'<sup>30</sup>

But there is more to it. It is my hypothesis that in this discourse description and prescription went hand in hand. In tapping into different local, social, and even ethnic traditions, antiquarianism not only offered a fuller account of the shared cultural heritage, but also a broad range of religious resources, practices and beliefs, for individual appropriation. This detailed and colourful image of religion allowed for more than to serve the narrow ideological function of providing identity for contemporaries. For us, it offers a glimpse into lived ancient religion, even if it is difficult or even impossible to determine in every single instance whether we are dealing with actual or just imagined lived religion. Given the communicative and social context of this type of imagination, it is at least an imagination closely controlled by contemporaries. This holds true for the information given about religious practices as much as for the information implied about a connected reader's interest in these practices. Whereas previous research, interested in religious institutions, has concentrated on the former, this analysis, interested in lived religion, will concentrate on the latter.

<sup>27</sup> I basically follow the text as constituted by Alton, Wormell, and Courtney (Ovidius Naso 1985).

<sup>28</sup> These and the following translations are taken from Boyle and Woodard 2004, who help to grasp the colloquial style.

<sup>29</sup> See Rüpke 2012a, in particular 144 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 239.

In his poem, Ovid did not invent a Roman calendar of festivals. His commentary is a reaction to a series of calendar reforms, starting with the technical reform by Julius Caesar, which changed an age-old instrument of daily use and brought it into the foreground of political and dynastic propaganda. Beginning in the form of a large-sized marble calendar in the sanctuary of the reformed priesthood of the Arval Brethren shortly after the battle of Actium, publicly displayed Roman *fasti* were quickly produced and proliferated in the city of Rome as well as in central Italy and occasionally beyond.<sup>31</sup> Augustus used the calendar to represent his own achievements in the form of extended festival annotations, producing visibility of the rituals referred to, far beyond actual participation. In turn, local elites even of small villages or magistrates of slave *collegia* could display their loyalty by copying these calendars and inscribing themselves into this Augustan world in the form of annual lists of magistrates, likewise called *fasti*.<sup>32</sup> If it had been attractive to know about Roman festivals and the 'Roman year', it now became imperative to know about the *fasti*, the specific graphical form of the Roman calendar. Ovid took up this challenge.<sup>33</sup>

Before any further details are addressed, the very implications of the generic identification of the poem not only as some didactic text but as a commentary have to be pointed out. The whole poem works only on the assumption that the connected reader is actively following the chronological progress by using his or her own copy of the calendar. This is the necessary pretext without which it would be hard, at times impossible, to understand the text. The *locus classicus* is Ov. *fast.* 5.727–728: 'The next place comes with four marks, which, read in order, / denote a sacred rite or the king's flight.' The arbitrary and incomplete introduction of some calendar indications in our editions since Rudolf Merkel's *editio maior* in the 19th century has obscured this fact. The connected reader, hence, is a very active one.<sup>34</sup> The abbreviations or short notes of the calendar and the names used in it are the primary instigation for questions (and at times answers). Ovid's introduction of the rise and disappearance of constellations of stars, dealt with in other genres ('parapegmata'),<sup>35</sup> made the reader even more active. Here, Ovid's treatment implied a criticism of the form of the current calendars

31 See Rüpke 2011 for a reconstruction of the process and Rüpke 1995 for a review of the preserved calendars.

32 Rüpke 1997a, 1997b; Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 246.

33 Rüpke 1994, see also Rüpke 2009.

34 It is not only 'authorial passivity' which invites 'co-authorship' on part of the reader, as claimed by King 2004, 199.

35 Rehm 1949; Rüpke 1996; Lehoux 2007.

in the face of the rise of astrology, a criticism taken up by popular forms of domestic calendars to be found in the Roman Empire.<sup>36</sup>

In terms of reader construction, the *Libri fastorum's* main feature is the direct apostrophe of the reader in second person singular. This was a well-known technique to involve readers (or listeners), shifting the author's authority from the magisterial role of an omniscient narrator to his less visible power to define his readers' interests. In Ovid, the questions of the narrator are attributed to the narrated reader, as if the narrator's answers are caused by an intervention of a present interlocutor. The range of questions is the same as the range of questions raised by the narrator, who is either asking these questions and simply answering them or addressing them to more knowledgeable instances, sometimes human, more often the deities concerned or the Muses.

If asking such questions is normally an honourable business, it can have its risks. The figure of Ino is credited with the same curious set of mind on her arrival in Italy. Her inquiry about the race of the Maenads (6.505) is not very well received. Saturnian Juno stirs up the Maenads by suggesting: 'She is a spy and aims to learn our sacred rites' (6.511). Obviously, Juno prepares a fate for her parallel to that of Pentheus.<sup>37</sup> And yet the wording of the questions as well as the sharp criticism in characterising Juno as *insidiosa* (6.508) suggests that Ovid is well aware of the parallels in inquiring and of the total absence of similar consequences in the present.

Question and answer is the basic mode of discourse. It is usually the single narrator or reader who poses questions. Only five times against twenty-four instances in the whole poem a plural of readers is supposed to ask: *quaeritis*; all these instances occur in the second half of the poem, from book four onwards.<sup>38</sup> 'Why', is the quintessential question (45 times throughout the whole poem). Similar in attitude is asking for origins (*origo*, eleven times) or causes (*causa/ae*, 91 times). The distribution over the books is fairly even in all cases. Even without being asked, simply on perceiving the tacit astonishment of the narrator, an old woman gives the 'cause' for her naked feet (6.415). In the following I concentrate on examples taken from book 6. I try to combine an economy of space, which concentrates on representative examples, with a careful contextual reading, which pays attention to the image of the 'connected reader' as painted within the framework of a typical unit of reception.

<sup>36</sup> Goessler 1928; Wagner-Roser 1987; Rüpke 1995, ch. 12; see also Stern 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Thus Littlewood 2006, 161.

<sup>38</sup> 4.878; 5.1, 526; 6.195, 551. This might point to an imagination of (or even experience with) an audience of several listeners rather than of isolated readers.

#### 4 Knowledge and Ritual Competence in Ovid's Readers

The connected reader, hence, is someone interested in reasons, usually given in the form of stories about origins, mythical or historical. This is conforming to previous antiquarian discourse as well as aetiological myths, which flow together in the interplay of questions and answers. Religion is something that could be explained, and it is not priestly lore, but historical research, which provides answers.<sup>39</sup> The religious data to be explained are frequently names. These names, however, are visual data, they are suggested only by being seen in the calendar which in itself is representing visible cult. Other *explananda* present themselves visually. Temples are frequently 'looking out', occasionally statues or ritual procedures force themselves into the narrator's field of vision.

If narrator and connected reader share an interest in vision, vision also marks a decisive difference. Visual epiphanies are a privilege of the narrator. Surprisingly, this fact empowers the narrator as much as the inscribed reader. The narrator expects the reader to doubt the authenticity of the visions, as some lines in the beginning of book 6 make clear:

*facta canam? sed erunt qui me finxisse loquantur  
nullaque mortali numina visa putent.  
est deus in nobis? agitante calescimus illo; (5)  
impetus hic sacrae semina mentis habet.  
fas mihi praecipue voltus vidisse deorum,  
vel quia sum vates, vel quia sacra cano.*

I will sing facts, but some will call them fiction  
and think no gods appear to mortal men.  
There is a god inside us; his movement makes us glow,  
His power owns the seeds of sacred thought.  
For me above all it's lawful to see a god's face,  
Since I'm a poet *or* sing sacred themes' (6.3–8).

Such visions are a continuous source of knowledge. It is knowledge, however, which is questionable and contested at times. The concept of 'vision' is even adapted to accommodate the direct contact with that goddess whose very characteristic it is to not be represented by a statue and to remain unseen by males, Vesta (6.291). This specific and performative poetic knowledge supplements the type of information that is generically attributed to 'old annals' in two prefatory remarks.<sup>40</sup> Occasionally, ten times throughout the poem, the narrator 'remembers' (*memini, commemini*) what he has seen or even

<sup>39</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 240–242, 248.

<sup>40</sup> 1.7 and 4.11: *annalibus eruta priscis*.

learnt (*didici*) earlier, in one passage of book 6 even ‘in my childhood years’ (6.417). Knowledge in religious matter is learnable.

The connected reader is attributed an interest in knowledge. *E nostro carmine certus eris* – ‘from my song you will gain certain knowledge – is the promise made by the narrator when he talks about obscure Carna (6.104) – again I take my example from book 6, which is representative in these aspects. Certain knowledge about gods made a category of its own for Varro’s classification of gods (*di certi*). Religious data could be subject to ignorance or error; the narrator admits to such states (6.255, 295) and tries to free his readers from such error.<sup>41</sup>

In some instances knowledge implies a change in the course of future action. This relates to knowledge about the character of days, whether they are suitable, or more precisely, better (*melius*) suited for marriage or warfare (6.221–222, 769) or to meteorological knowledge and sailing (6.715; similar 2.453; 4.625). With regard to religious activities superior knowledge seems not to have any consequences. About Semo Sancus Dius Fidius and the names to be used in his cult the narrator learns from Semo Pater that ‘whichever of them you choose, I’ll have the tribute’ (6.215).<sup>42</sup> The long discourse on the identity of the statue covered by togas in Fortuna’s temple – identified as Servius Tullius – remains without consequences as the matrons are exhorted not to touch the heap of textiles (6.621).<sup>43</sup>

Such exhortations to perform cult are extremely rare. Religion described as lived in Ovid is not characterised by different degrees of perfection in reproducing scripted rituals. The connected reader is not admonished to fulfil ritual duties. Regular participation in public cult is not an aim of the didactics of the text. The very few exceptions are rather admonitions to find the apt emotional tone in ritual participation. The first instance is given by the *Feriae Sementivae*, a movable feast, treated in January. The admonitions are directed towards different roles among the rustic inhabitants, animals included (1.663–696). The whole exhortation is formulated as an emotionalised prayer. The *Karistia* or *Cara Cognatio* on 22 February offers the next instance, exhorting the *boni* to give incense and simple meals in domestic cult. Linguistically it is slowly shifting from description to exhortation (2.617–638). It is useful for ordinary girls (*volgares ... puellae*) to venerate Venus on the Vinalia of 23 April (4.865–872), a deity so useful for many things that one should ask her favours in a mocking tone. By contrast, the Quirites should

41 See 2.47 *ne erres*; 2.151 *ne fallare*; 2.453 *tu desine credere* (relating to meteorological phenomena); cf. 2.531 *stulta pars populi*.

42 See Bömer 1958, 349–350 on the deities.

43 See Littlewood 2006, 173 on the historical problem.

celebrate Mars Ultor in a solemn way, by circus, not by scenic games (5.597–598). The matrons should give 'golden cakes' to Mater Matuta, because it is their own festival (6.475–476). The *Quirites* should celebrate Fors Fortuna in a happy mood (*laeti*), and drunkenness is no reason for shame (6.775–758). The plural used in these passages and the clear indication of social groups clearly contrast with the usual singular in addressing the reader.

It is interesting to observe the differences in the description of the festival of Fors Fortuna to the description of the ritual of 15 March, the festival of Anna Perenna. In appearance the two are comparable occasions of excessive drinking on the banks of the Tiber. However, in the first instance (3.523–542) it is an activity of the *plebs*, the narrator (and others) are clearly distanced as observers.<sup>44</sup> On 24 June, the veneration of the deity is characterised as originating in the *plebs*. However, a series of three imperatives and two exhortative subjunctives is addressed to the *Quirites*, that is all the people, to take part in merrymaking.<sup>45</sup>

*ite, deam laeti Fortem celebrate, Quirites;*  
*in Tiberis ripa munera regis habet.*  
*pars pede, pars etiam celeri decurrite cumba,*  
*nec pudeat potos inde redire domum.*  
*ferte coronatae iuvenum convivia lintres,*  
*multaque per medias vina bibantur aquas (780).*

'Go, celebrate with joy the goddess Fors, Quirites;  
 The Tiber's bank has her gift from the king.  
 Rush on down, some on foot, some in a speedy skiff,  
 And don't be ashamed to return home drunk.  
 Garland yourselves, boats, and carry parties of the young,  
 And let wine be drunk aplenty mid-stream' (6.775–780).

The drunkard returning now is not an object of ridicule, drawn by his old and drunken wife, as he was on the occasion of the Anna Perenna festival in March (*senem potum pota trahebat anus*, 3.542). Instead, he is a fairly reliable witness:

*ecce suburbana rediens male sobrius aede (785)*  
*ad stellas aliquis talia verba iacit;*  
*'zona latet tua nunc, et cras fortasse latebit;*  
*dehinc erit, Orion, aspicienda mihi.'*

<sup>44</sup> 3.539: *sunt spectacula volgi*; 3.541 *occurrit nuper (visa est mihi digna relatu) / pompa ...*

<sup>45</sup> Other references do not allow for an unambiguous identification of the participants. When Cicero contrasts the *Tiberina descensio* with the joy of a victor and triumphator (Cic. *fin.* 5.70) one would expect an experience open to his audience. The problem has never been discussed. Bömer 1958, 180–181, doubts that the rites of the Anna Perenna festival are 'fester Bestandteil des öffentlichen Kultus', but does not realise the social demarcation given by Ovid.

‘Look, a man returns from the shrine near the city  
 Unsober, and hurls these words to the stars:  
 “Your belt hides now, and perhaps will hide tomorrow.  
 After that, Orion, I shall see it” (6.785–788).

Unlike *plebs*, *Quirites* includes the connected reader.

There is an interesting movement within the poem on the part of the narrator here. At the end of book 6 the connected reader might be someone who is not only intellectually interested in cult, but might be reminded of his or her (females also are addressed in some of the plural exhortations) social or rather political status and be driven to active participation in religious merrymaking. And yet, the evidence remains inconclusive. First and foremost the recipient constructed by Ovid is someone who witnesses the narrator’s admonitions directed towards different, larger social groups composed of others.

It is only at the very end of a poem reworked in exile to precisely end where it ends, after six months, after half a year and half a calendar, that the role of the observer borders on the role of a religious performer. Ovid’s reader most certainly is an ‘embedded reader’, a reader who sees the passage in front of her or his eyes within the context of the poem at large and is able to take up the clues and hints at comparison organised by the author in the last passage discussed.<sup>46</sup> Here is a second voice in the inscribed narrator, indulgent in merrymaking ritual. The implication has to be spelled out. Not only the implied narrator, but also the connected reader is somebody fully present at Rome. This is published, this is written by an author, who lacked this presence and complained about this very fact elsewhere.

## 5 Antiquarians’ Connected Readers and Individual Appropriation of Religion

Does the connected reader help us in analysing ancient individual appropriation of religion? I maintain it does. To argue this, I have to systematise my findings and to bolster them by further evidence. It is the very specific character of Ovid’s connected readers on the one hand and the coherence of this (of course) authorial construction throughout six books of epic length (and a re-edition) on the other hand, which argue for an adequate ideal or even social portrait of the concerns of Ovid’s addressees.

<sup>46</sup> I have taken the concept of ‘embedded reader’ from Boyd 2006, 172 (adopting J. J. Winkler’s analysis of Apuleius’ mysteries novel to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*).

\* Ovid's commentary on the *fasti* addresses the local reader and supports his (or, as I would like to add in the case of Ovid, her) dominant mainstream political identity. This is not surprising, but also not necessary in antiquarian literature. Callimachus did not restrict himself to Alexandrian readers in his geographically wide-ranging *Aetia*.<sup>47</sup> Propertius problematizes, identifies and had his readers make excursions, for instance to Lanuvium.

\* Ovid does not suppose a reader to be interested in ritual details for the sake of active participation or high-resolution observation. Nevertheless a wide range of ritual practices are touched upon, even far beyond the necessities of a commentary on the Roman *fasti*. This holds true for the complex rite performed by the old woman for dea Tacita<sup>48</sup> as well as the otherwise unattested rites for Vacuna (6.307–308).

\* Ovid does construe a reader who is above all interested in the why and whence. Of course, these are questions that are welcome to the narrator as it offers the opportunity to narrate stories. But even if occasionally the answers remain inconclusive or conflicting, the reader is supposed to regard such etymological or historical knowledge as something that can be 'learned' and 'remembered'. Religious practice and religious symbols invite questions and can be explained. Answers are neither forbidden nor dogmatic. The narrator is quite aware that his own answers are questionable. Explanation is a part of and not the end of religion,<sup>49</sup> it is performance of religion.

\* Ovid's connected reader is made to be interested in visible religion. He or she is made aware of temples and statues and temples without statues, is made aware of the ritual use of otherwise undistinguished space. There is, however, no hint of a private usufruct of such a ritual topography.

\* Instead of a systematics of religion frequently conceptualised in modern research on the blueprint of Varro's *Antiquitates rerum divinarum* as a functionally ordered 'pantheon', gods and temples and the quality of days are quite often shown to be the outcome of historical contingencies and decisions. This is conforming to a trend visible in other contemporary authors as well.<sup>50</sup> Here, the narrator is interested in recent changes and the latest renovation of a temple rather than in a complete chronology. Clearly, religion is presented as a field of creative action for members of the political elite and the emperor in particular.

\* The connected reader is as interested in domestic and local cult as in major public festivals, even if neither annotations in the calendar nor public

47 I am grateful to Tony Bierl to point this out.

48 2.571–582; see McDonough 2004, 357–358.

49 See in particular Beard 1987, 1988, 1989, 1993; Scheid 1992, 1993.

50 Rüpke 2014.

architecture points to the former's existence. Such domestic and local cult, too, is temporally regulated and discontinuous. Its performance on the part of the reader is not presupposed.

\* Specific cults are the opportunity for, or even duty of, specific social, gender, or age groups. The connected reader is supposed to learn about that, he or she is at best indirectly admonished to join in. The largest exhortations for groups of which the reader would most probably be a member of are not very specific cults, but occasions which involve many groups, if not everybody: even animals in the case of the *Feriae Sementivae*, even slaves in the case of Fors Fortuna. In all these cases it is most important for the recipient to get an idea of the emotional tone of the cult. This holds true for the organisers of the cult as well as for any participant.

\* It is not the modern *bricoleur en religion*, who conforms to the connected reader crafted by Ovid. It is an informed and sympathetic observer or bystander, embedded in a structured society, but free to exercise his or her own choices, knowing about the possible extents of individual innovation as about the fitting affective regulation or deregulation when joining in with a traditional cult. Such a reader will have already reached the stage of the trained reader, able 'of themselves to understanding and to make discoveries', as Quintilianus said (*inst.* 2.5.13). For his didactic poetry Ovid will certainly have accepted the same aim, which Quintilianus formulated in the sentence following: 'For what else are we about in teaching than ensuring that our pupils will not always require to be taught?'<sup>51</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

Surveys, interviews, participant observation – methods employed in research on lived religion today<sup>52</sup> – are not available for the study of ancient religion. There is a lot of evidence for a limited range of individual religious activities, for instance votives, tomb inscriptions, or the material remains of funerary rituals. For other fields, we have to rely on occasional anecdotal evidence as given by ancient historiography or in letters. In many instances, however, we see infrastructure rather than their usage, texts rather than testimonies of their reception. Here, anticipation of reaction and focussing of attention in direct or subtle ways by the instigators of architecture or by the authors of texts, step in. Such an approach has been used to learn from texts that which can no longer be learned about authors. But it can also be used to

51 Trsl. D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom 1972, 378.

52 E. g. Heimbrock 2007; Bergmann 2008; McGuire 2008.

learn something about recipients, which is not attested to elsewhere. In this article, the primary interest was not in Ovid, but in his contemporaries' religious practices, presupposing that the text had some insights into contemporaries' appropriation of religion. Through the lens of the 'connected reader' (who in most cases is the inscribed: the narrated hearer), Ovid's *Libri fastorum* are neither a document for a complex but fixed ritual system (as the text has been usually interpreted) nor the document of some individual reflection on such a system (as the text has been interpreted recently). Instead, it is a document of a field of social action, shaped and reshaped by contingent individual and group action, i. e. of lived ancient religion.

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## Roman Funeral Rituals and the Significance of the *Naenia*

### Abstract

Within the different phases of Roman funeral rituals, the final stages are characterised by the performance of a funeral dirge, called the *naenia*, by a group of hired female mourners. The status of the performers and of their female leader, probably hired from the professional undertaker associated with the *Lucus Libitinae*, is ambivalent and in contrast with the role of male (and noble) performers of laudatory speeches. Clearly, widely shared concepts of individual heroic status and the post-mortem dissolution of individual identity into the community of the *di Manes* clash, a clash resolved in terms of chronological sequencing, gender and status differences. While there is no simple information to provide the researcher with firm knowledge about what actually happened in the ritual sequence, the entry in Festus' lexicon allows for a tentative reconstruction.

**Keywords:** funeral rituals, *naenia*, Festus, performance, gender, status

### 1 Introduction

The latter stages of a Roman funeral were marked by the singing of a funeral dirge.<sup>1</sup> If the somewhat fragmentary evidence is to be trusted, the dirge was performed by a group of hired female mourners led by a woman called the *praefica*. This singing ritual is referred to in our sources as the *naenia*. We have no detailed, coherent account of the performance of the *naenia*, which does not differentiate it from many other rituals of Roman life, referred to in

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1 I am most grateful for helpful discussion of this paper at the conference in Erfurt. The word *naenia* is mostly so spelled here, but either *nenia* or *naenia* seems to have been acceptable and there is even variation within the text of the Festus entry, which is printed below as Appendix I. The text emerged from the work of the Festus project at UCL and I am grateful to my colleagues on the project, Michael Crawford and Fay Glinister, while accepting full responsibility for any errors.

many texts and clearly important to the participants, but only reconstructed in modern work by the assembly of scattered references.<sup>2</sup>

This paper is therefore tackling an important, if at first sight unpromising, area of enquiry.<sup>3</sup> Its objective is to see if it would be possible to move closer towards understanding the religious significance of this area of life to the Romans, not by discovering different evidence about it, but by perceiving such evidence as we have in a different light.

The intermediate objectives in this case are:

1. To look for relationships between rituals, as they have been reported to us;
2. To look for reactions to rituals and analyse what sense they make: i. e. to study tensions and responses, rather than only development over time;
3. To look for gender issues implicit in the evidence.

It hardly needs saying that all these objectives must interlock. Given the nature of the information we start from, reconstruction is largely the work of imagination, hopefully disciplined imagination. The information available is in itself very constrained: it consists of literary references spread over a wide range, both chronologically and thematically. Some of the texts are allusive or playful in character. There is no simple information to provide the researcher with firm ground about what actually happened in the ritual sequence. However, the point of departure for this particular enquiry is at least a text, even though a fragmentary and problematic one. Part I of what follows concerns this entry in Festus' Lexicon;<sup>4</sup> Part II widens the enquiry to see what Festus omitted from his discussion.

## Part I

### 1 What was the Point of the Festus Entry?

The entry on *Naenia* in the Lexicon of Festus consists only of a fragment of the original text. We have some letters of every line, amounting to between a quarter and a third of the original total line length. Appendix I offers a plausible reconstruction of at least the main lines of the entry, helped by

<sup>2</sup> The scattered references to *naenia* were collected by Heller 1939, 1943; see also Lodge 1924–32, 104 (s. v. *naenia*).

<sup>3</sup> For accounts of the *naenia*, in addition to Heller's, see especially: Ville de Mirmont 1902; Kroll 1935; Tupet 1976, 176–178; Richlin 2001; Habinek 2005, 233–256; 293–295; Dutsch 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Text in Lindsay 1913 (= L), 154–157: commentary on the entry in Pieroni 2004, 39–46.

various clues, and a translation; it is the outcome of many years of study since the rediscovery of the MS in the fifteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Before considering these clues, it is desirable to define what we can expect from an article from Festus.

Festus himself explains that he was intending to provide a shortened version of an earlier standard work, on the meaning of words by the Augustan antiquarian, Verrius Flaccus, a work that does not now survive. Verrius was able to draw on rich traditions of study in the late republican period and especially on the vocabulary used by the poets of the third, second and first centuries BCE, most of whose work has not survived to us except in quotations and learned glosses. Most of the entries in the Lexicon therefore reflect the culture and learning of the centuries before the regime of Augustus was established. Festus can therefore be seen as a valuable source for the republican period full of incidental information about social life and religious practices. However, the Lexicon, although it contains a great deal of valuable information derived from these sources, should not in any straightforward sense be thought of as an encyclopaedia. The main concern of its entries is with words, particularly unusual or archaic senses of words. Characteristically – and the entry we are concerned with here is in this respect typical – the articles quote early Latin poetic texts and the views of earlier scholars who have expressed views about them. There is little to represent the culture of the years after Augustus' time, even though Festus himself was probably working in the second century CE.

Although our text of Festus is incomplete and sometimes fragmentary, we do have a complete text of a summary by Paul the Deacon, made at the court of Charlemagne: and luckily, in the case of *naenia*, Paul's summary seems to be careful, accurate and helpful:

*Nenia est carmen, quod in funere laudandi gratia cantatur ad tibiam. Sunt, qui eo uerbo finem significari putant. Quidam uolunt neniam ideo dici, quod uoci similior querimonia flentium sit. Quidam aiunt neniae ductum nomen ab extremi intestini uocabulo; Graeci enim neaton extremum dicunt; siue quod cordarum ultima nete dicitur, extremam cantionis uocem neniam appellarunt.*<sup>6</sup>

5 For a general account of the text of Festus and its history, see Glinister and Woods 2007, esp. 1–9.

6 S.v. *nenia*, Paul 155.27 L: 'A *nenia* is a song, which is sung to the flute at a funeral for the purpose of praise. Some think the meaning of the word is "end". Some (others) think the word is so formed because the sound is quite similar to the wailing of the mourners. Others again say that *nenia* the word is derived from the word for the very tip of the intestine; since the Greek word for "last" is *neatos*; or else, because the last string is called *nete*, they called the highest note of the music the *nenia*'.

Paul seemingly implies five elements in the original entry:

Table 1

Definition	<i>Naenia</i> is a song	
Theory 1	The word means an end	Meaning
Theory 2	It was derived by onomatopoeia from mourning sounds	Origin
Theory 3	It was derived from the word for anus, as the end of intestinal tract	Origin
Theory 1 (resumed)	More derivations from the Greek, reinforcing the theory of an 'end'	Greek origin

These same elements appear unmistakably in the same order in the Festus original as well. The combination of Paul's summary and the fragmentary text allows us to be quite confident of the restoration of the missing text in a broad sense, though certainly not in word-by-word detail and in at least one instance the exact wording is important.<sup>7</sup> Both Festus and Paul's summary are then followed by information about the cult of the Goddess *Nenia*: the manuscripts of Paul present this as a separate lemma; the fragmentary condition of the Festus version leave us uncertain as to whether he too had a separate entry for the goddess or whether he offered a single text which Paul chose to divide into two.

## 2 The Definition and Its Implications

*Nenia est [carmen, quod in funere laudandi]  
gratia can[tatur ad tibiam. Ita enim ait Afra-]  
nius in Materter[is:<sup>8</sup> . . . . . inter exse-]  
quias cantit[abant neniā].<sup>9</sup>*

Other evidence suggests that *naenia* was a normal Latin term for a common enough phenomenon; it might therefore seem significant that the Lexicon

7 This is in lines 16–17, where the reading *quan]do efferimus mor]tu[um*, which seem reasonably certain to us, would show conclusively that the scene is a funeral procession; but for other possible readings, see Pieroni 2004, 42–43.

8 218 Ribbeck = 221 Daviault. For Afranius, see the introduction in Daviault 1981, 37–47; Schanz-Hosius 1.141–150.

9 'A *nenia* is a [song,] sung [to the flute at a funeral,] for the purpose of [praise. For Afra]nius [writes thus] in the Maternal Aunts: "They sing [the *nenia*] at funerals (?)". See Daviault 1981, fgt 221, for the reading adopted here: [*Inter exe]quias cantit[abant neniā]*].

should have offered a definition and that the definition should be backed up by a quotation from Afranius, well known as the second-century BCE author of *fabulae togatae*, but by Festus' time a somewhat obscure early poet.<sup>10</sup> It is true that common words do not generally figure in the Lexicon, which is almost always concerned with the obscure and problematic. But this entry itself makes it clear that the range of meaning was disputed, which justifies its inclusion. Meanwhile the use of a verse from an early poet is simply the normal practice of the tradition and carries no implication that Festus or his sources had difficulty finding a more up-to-date text using the word.<sup>11</sup> Heller did in fact infer that the sense of funeral-dirge was not the root meaning of the word, which had rather originally meant 'plaything', but this theory has not been followed and cannot be substantiated.<sup>12</sup>

### 3 Naenia as an End

The next element of the entry argues that the real meaning of the word was 'end' and this view is supported by quotations from Plautus.

*Sunt qui finem sig-]*  
*nificari credu[nt, ut cum ait Plautus in Pseudolo]:<sup>13</sup> 5*  
*']bi ego circumuo[rtor, cado; id fuit nenia ludo;]*  
*idem:<sup>14</sup> 'Huic homi[ni amanti mea era apud nos neniā]*  
*dixit domi'; et ap[ud XXX: '. . . . . usque ad ne-]*  
*niam esto'.<sup>15</sup>*

There are naturally different ways of understanding this evidence: it might mean that by Plautus' time the word had lost its sense of funeral dirge and come to mean just an end in a straightforward sense; or it could mean that the simple sense of dirge persisted, but that the word had come to be used in a wider metaphorical sense as well, as we regularly use the term 'overture' either as the opening music of an opera or as the opening moves in any other kind of transaction. In all the three cases quoted, it seems likely that the

<sup>10</sup> Fragments in Daviault 1981.

<sup>11</sup> For Festus' practice in quoting early poetry, see North 2007b.

<sup>12</sup> Heller 1939, 1943.

<sup>13</sup> *Pseudolus* 1278–1278b.

<sup>14</sup> *Truculentus* 213.

<sup>15</sup> *Bacchides* 887: 'Some people think that the meaning of that word is "end", as when Plautus writes in the *Pseudolus*: "So when [I turn round, I fall down; that was the finale (= *nenia*) of the fun]"; (Plautus) again: 'My mistress has spoken the dirge] over this [loving] man [among us] at home. Also in [XXX . . . . .] right down to the finale (*nenia*)'.

sense is indeed an ending: the clearest case is the first one, where the sense of ending the fun need not imply any evocation of the funeral song as such. It could, of course, be said that all funerals evoke endings, but the implication of this text seems so strong, that it must carry the suggestion that the *naenia* was the very end of the ritual sequence, and so the very last stage of a human life. So in the first two passages (from Plautus' *Pseudolus* and *Truculentus*) the force is strongly that a final end was put respectively to the fun and to the love-affair. The third quotation in the passage may or may not be from Plautus, but in any case 'usque ad ...' clearly suggests the same note of finality, whatever the subject may have been. A more delicate question is whether these passages are treating the *naenia* derisively or mockingly. To read them now, there seems to me no reason to think so, but they are no doubt to be seen as witty, even flippant, uses of a word originally concerned with sad events.

#### 4 The Onomatopoeic Turn

*Quosdam [neniam ideo dicere ait XXX]  
quod e<i> uoci sim[ilior querimonia flentium] 10  
sit.*

The only element in the whole entry that diverts momentarily from the notion of finality is the short section reporting the theory that the origin of the word was onomatopoeic, that it reflected the sounds made by the mourning choir. In itself, this is a not implausible view given the sound of the word itself. Just try chanting it.

#### 5 *Naenia* as Anus

*Quidam aiunt nom[en ductum ab extre-]  
mi intestini uoca[bulo, XXXque testimo-]  
nio utitur Plauti Ꞥ[acchidibus: 'Si tibi est ma-]  
chae{de}ra, a<t> nobi[s] [ueruinast domi, qua quidem]  
te reddam, si tu me [inritaueris, confossio-] 15  
rem soricina naenia?'.<sup>16</sup>*

16 'Others again say that [the word *nenia* is derived from the word for the lowest part] of the intestine, and XXX uses as evidence Plautus [in *the Two Bacchises*: "You may well have] a dagger; but I have [a spit at home], with which, if you [provoke me], I can make you fuller of holes than a mouse's anus". On the much debated significance of the joke

The central theme here is still the origin of the word. The Plautus passage quoted does not help, because the reference of *sorocina naenia* cannot be established: it is even possible to argue that Plautus' sense has nothing to do with the anus, but referred rather to the final squeak of the mouse.<sup>17</sup> However, there is clear evidence from a third-century CE Christian author, Arnobius of Sicca, who was well-informed about Roman ritual practices and certainly used Varro as his source, that the sense of *naenia* as anus did in fact exist and that the word had been used in the context of sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> Arnobius quite clearly implies that the word was used in the context of the sacrificial entrails and he is painfully specific about its exact bodily location.<sup>19</sup>

Habinek, in a very original discussion of the whole character of the *naenia*,<sup>20</sup> makes imaginative use of Arnobius' evidence to reinforce his view that there was always a strong connection in Roman practice between sacrifice and song. In his view *naenia* was a case in point. However, in this instance, his arguments are very far from overwhelming: it is certainly the case that *naenia* has these two distinct senses and that the scholars who postulated this origin for *naenia* as dirge were arguing that the anus-sense was the earlier, from which the dirge-sense was an extension. However, the fact that the two senses were used and that both were connected with rituals can by no means prove that the dirge was accompanied by sacrifice, which is nowhere attested. The theory may be intriguing but is quite unproven. The text about the *naenia* as such concludes with more emphasis on the finality of the song, using Greek musical analogies to explain the origin of the term.<sup>21</sup>

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here, Pieroni 2004, 41–42; Schönbeck 1978, 149–150; on the text, in relation to the MS of Plautus, see Deufert 2002, 172–173.

17 Festus does imply that antiquarians (i. e. Verrius?) thought that the Plautus reference was to the anus; whatever the precise reference, the force of the crude joke/threat would then be '... I'll leave your arse fuller of holes than a colander'. For the colander, see Riess 1941, 159–160.

18 For Arnobius, see North 2007a.

19 Arnobius, *Against the Gentiles* 7.24: *intestini est perrectio, per quam proluviis editur sucis perexsiccata vitalibus* ('it is the intestine's passageway, through which the excreta pass out, once thoroughly drained of life-giving juices').

20 Habinek 2005, 234–237.

21 For the Greek terminology of the lyre-strings, West 1992, 219–220, cf. 64; Pieroni 2004, 43.

## 6 Dea Nenia

Either the last section of the entry or a new entry altogether, following on *Naenia*, reads as follows in Paul's version:

*Neniae deae sacellum extra portam Viminalem fuerat dedicatum*

'A sanctuary had been dedicated to the goddess Nenia outside the Viminal Gate.'

All that remains of the Festus version is the beginning and end:

*sacellum ultra portam[. . . . .]*

*[. . . . .]t aediculam.*

However, the odd tense of Paul's *fuerat* and the word *sacellum*, together with the fact that *sacellum* and *aedicula* both occur in the tiny surviving fragment of Festus, strongly indicate that the entry reported the existence at this point of a sacred enclosure with an altar which had existed before a small temple was dedicated there:

*[Neniae deae]*

*sacellum ultra portam [Viminalem ante etiam]*

*[erat quam XXX in eo loco dedicaui]t aediculam.<sup>22</sup>*

This brief entry has two important implications for this study: first the location of the shrine through an ancient gate<sup>23</sup> leading to a well-known burial area<sup>24</sup> strongly suggests that this was originally a key point, as the funeral procession passed outside the walls going towards the place of burial; secondly, it supports Varro's view of the relation of Nenia to death,<sup>25</sup> as opposed to that of Arnobius.<sup>26</sup> Varro connects the goddess with the ritual lament, apparently identifying the two;<sup>27</sup> whereas Arnobius implies that the function of Nenia was to provide support to the dying person.<sup>28</sup> The location of the temple on the funeral route can hardly refer to the process of dying.

22 '[There used to be] a sanctuary to [dea Nenia] outside the [Viminal] Gate [even before XXX dedicated] the little temple [there].'

23 On which, Coarelli 1996.

24 Bodel 1994.

25 Augustine, *City of God* 6.9.

26 Arnobius *Against the Gentiles* 4.7.

27 According to Augustine Varro gave Dea Nenia her place as the last in his list of gods and goddesses helpful to mankind: *Varro ... clausit ad Neniam deam, quae in funeribus senum cantatur*. ('Varro ... closed his list with dea Nenia, who is chanted at the obsequies of the old'). Why only the old, is not clear to me.

28 *In tutela sunt Orbonae orbati liberis parentes, in Neniae, quibus extrema sunt tempora*. ('Parents who lose their children are under the protection of Orbona; people in their final moments are under that of Nenia'). It may be, of course, that Arnobius saw the final moments as including the funeral and *naenia*.

## Part II

## 1 What Festus Doesn't Tell Us

What Festus' entry emphasizes above all is the element of finality: this emerges from the various theories of origin, from the examples given and from the metaphorical uses; the emphasis is rightly grasped and emphasised by Habinek.<sup>29</sup> On the basis of this point, it seems a very reasonable inference, as we have seen, that the *naenia* was the last ritual before the final interment or cremation. Of course, anything to do with a funeral invites the idea of an ending: but it seems likely that that point by itself will not explain enough. The *naenia* was not just part of the funeral, it was the very final stage. Festus' entry is concerned with the origin of the word, not at all with the substance of the social activity reflected. All the same, much of significance can be learned from the assumptions behind the various usages. So far, this discussion has followed the lines of Festus' entry. It is therefore unsurprising, though striking, to find how much of what else we know about the *naenia* is totally absent. It must have seemed to Festus and his predecessors that nothing was to be learned from other aspects of the ritual, which are therefore ignored. It might, for all Festus has to tell us, have been a wholly male ritual.

Cicero, as a matter of fact, might be thought to give the same impression: he does include the *naenia* in his picture of Roman religion in the *de Legibus*, but he too seems to make it a male occasion:

... *honoratorum virorum laudes in contione memorentur, easque etiam <ut> cantus ad tibicinem prosequantur, cui nomen neniae, quo vocabulo etiam <apud> Graecos cantus lugubres nominantur.*<sup>30</sup>

Cicero's words makes it certain that there was a solemn and respected death ritual that lies behind all this, and that it included not just the famous laudation in the *forum*,<sup>31</sup> but also the *naenia* and the flute-players, but with no mention of the women. Presumably, too, we should regard this account as dealing specifically with aristocratic funerals. It was only they who would have had the *laudatio in contione*, whereas the *naenia* and procession to the burial ground must have been more widely practised. Of course, there could

<sup>29</sup> Habinek 2005, 237–239.

<sup>30</sup> 'Let the praises of honoured men be recounted at a *contio* (public meeting) and let there also follow those praises a song accompanied by flute, named the *nenia*, being the same word as the Greeks use for songs of mourning'. Cic. *Leg.* 2.62. For the reference to a Greek word, sometimes thought mistaken, see Greppin 1987. On noble funerals in general, Price 1987; Flower 1996.

<sup>31</sup> On which see Kierdorf 1980.

be many explanations of these silences: neither of the authors were attempting a full account of the ritual; but other evidence suggests a very different picture.

## 2 Why Women in Death Rituals?

Festus' omission of any information about the role of the *praefica* can be explained to some extent by the conventions of the genre, which focusses always on the word and its history, turning to the wider context only if it was forced on to the author's attention.<sup>32</sup> Partly, however, it might reflect the fact that the presence of women in the context of a funeral was something taken for granted. The association of women with death-rituals was certainly not limited to Rome, but very widespread across many different societies, times and places. It is certainly an aspect that Rome shared with Greece in this period and in others; but also with many modern societies, so that it is a widely shared assumption that dealing with the dead body is women's work.<sup>33</sup> Varro, quoting earlier grammarians as his authorities, supplies the most directly relevant information:

*Praefica dicta, ut Aurelius<sup>34</sup> scribit, mulier ab luco quae conduceretur quae ante domum mortui laudis eius caneret. Hoc factitatum Aristoteles scribit in libro qui inscribitur Nomima barbarika, quibus testimonium est, quod +fretum est+ Naevii:*

*Haec quidem hercle, opinor, praefica est: nam mortuum collaudat.*

*Claudius<sup>35</sup> scribit: Quae praeficeretur ancillis, quemadmodum lamentarentur, praefica est dicta. Utrumque ostendit a praefectione praeficam dictam.<sup>36</sup>*

The observations from earlier grammarians here add invaluable information: According to Servius Claudius,<sup>37</sup> the *praefica*'s job was to direct

32 We do, as a matter of fact, know from an entry preserved only by Paul (250 L), that Festus did offer a definition of the *praefica*, following the same theory on the word's origin, from *praeficere*, as did Varro.

33 Alexiou 1974, 102–128, 131–150; the studies collected in Håland 2008a, 2008b; Holst-Warhaft 2008; and Butler 2008; see also Dutsch 2008.

34 Aurelius Opillus, fgt 11 Funaioli.

35 Servius Claudius fgt 8 Funaioli.

36 Varro *de LL* 7.70 'A woman is called a *praefica* according to Aurelius, who would be hired from the *lucus* (i. e. from the Grove of Libitina) to sing the praises of a dead man in front of his house. Aristotle mentioned that this was the practice in his book called *Nomima barbarika*, for which there is evidence in the ... of Naevius: "This woman, damn it, must be a *praefica*, for she is praising a dead man." According to Claudius: "The woman who would direct (*quae praeficeretur*) the slave girls how to sing the dirge was called the *praefica*." Both these authorities show that the word was derived from *praefectio*.'

37 For Servius Claudius, fragments in Funaioli 1907, 95–98; see Suetonius, *de grammaticis* 3.3, with Kaster 1995, 78–80; Schanz-Hosius 1927, 585.

the contribution of a choir of *ancillae*, slave girls. According to Aurelius Opillus,<sup>38</sup> the *praefica* was hired, but he also provides the crucial clue that the hiring was from the Lucus, which must mean that of Libitina. The work of Bodel<sup>39</sup> has made it quite clear that the Lucus in question was in effect an undertaking business, involved in providing all the means of holding a funeral, and located somewhere in the region of the Esquiline. We therefore have two clues here: first that the Lucus was the source of the hired *praefica* and presumably also of the *ancillae* she directed and secondly that the little temple of Nenia was in very roughly the same area as the Lucus. The quotation from Naevius, despite being robbed of its context of significance, interestingly supports the evidence from Paul that the function of the *naenia* was to praise the dead person.<sup>40</sup> Otherwise, we might be inclined to doubt this, on the grounds that other evidence emphasises the meaninglessness, even infantility, of the *praefica*'s language.<sup>41</sup> There is certainly a real inconsistency here.

### 3 On the Margins?

Habinek's work has provided an invaluable opening up of many aspects related to Roman song in general and the *naenia* in particular; however, when he argues vigorously<sup>42</sup> that our sources for the Roman attitude towards *naenia* and *praefica* consistently express hostility, I have profound doubts. It is true that we can detect a recurrent element of distaste in some of the comments that have been randomly preserved to us. But it is important not to exaggerate the significance of this or the consistency of the attitude. We could find much the same casual reservation in contemporary references to undertakers, implying no more than a reticence, or even superstition, about mentioning death. I would therefore be reluctant to infer from this evidence, as does Habinek,<sup>43</sup> that there is a process of marginalisation, which we can see reflected in such an assemblage of texts over long periods of time. Habi-

38 For Aurelius Opillus, fragments in Funaioli 1907, 86–95; see Suetonius, *de grammaticis* 6, with Kaster 1995, 110–112; Schanz-Hosius 1927, 578–579.

39 Bodel 1994, 38–54; for the undertaking business, *ibid.* 59–54.

40 Naevius 129 Ribbeck = *com. inc.* 11–12 Warmington (p. 143): the name of Naevius' play is presumably concealed in the corruption. The inference being made here must imply a strong association between praise and the *praefica*.

41 For which see especially the passage of Gellius, quoted below n. 50; but also Heller 1943.

42 Habinek 2005, 237–243.

43 See especially Habinek 2005, 36–37: he is arguing that it is part of a strategy of containment of the role of women in the context. On this see also Dutsch 2008, 262–264.

nek's thesis is very important, because he is implying a historical process of growing contempt for the role of women in ritual life, as reflected in texts from Plautus in the second century BCE down to Suetonius and Aulus Gellius in the second century CE. The force of the argument depends on the interpretation of the individual texts, which need to be discussed in turn: in my view, they do not in fact bear the weight required to sustain his conclusions.

The fact is that the different passages quoted have different purposes and ambitions related to their own contexts and preoccupations. In the first place, it is not at all clear to me that Plautus is using the *naenia* as a joke or exploiting it for flippant purposes. There is of course a tone of lightheartedness, as might be expected in a comedy; but assuming that the sense of the word has been extended to mean simply any irreversible ending, there seems to be no need to think that the force of dirge as such is present or that the intention is to make fun of it. Meanwhile in lines such as:

*Neque umquam lauando et fricando  
Scimus facere neniam*<sup>44</sup>

there seems to be no reason at all to suspect that this means anything other than 'we do not know how to put an end to their washing and massaging'.

Meanwhile reference to the *praefica* by Lucilius is not really attack on her at all:

*... mercede quae conductae flent alieno in funere  
praeficae, multo et capillos scindunt et clamant magis*<sup>45</sup>

Evidently Lucilius is making a particular point here. But the point is not hostility towards the activity of the *praefica* as such; no doubt he is glancing a little sceptically at her performance, the professional simulation of authentic grief; but the real butt of the joke is not the *praefica* at all, but the friends and relations of the dead person, who cannot summon up as convincing an expression of grief for their loss as can the *praefica* – she is doing it for the money, but they cannot do it at all.

In a famous mention of the *naenia* by Horace, on the other hand, there is no reason at all to think that he is singling out the *naenia* for any special contempt: he is high-mindedly rejecting the whole complex of elaborate honours to the dead,

<sup>44</sup> Plautus, *Poenulus* 231–231a.

<sup>45</sup> Lucilius 954–955 Marx = 959–960 Krenkel; = SP9 Charpin = 995–996 Warmington. 'Praeficae, who, hired for wages, wail at another's funeral, greatly tear their hair and cry out more (than the others)'.

*Absint inani funere neniae  
luctusque turpes et querimoniae;  
conpesce clamorem ac sepulcri  
mitte superuacuos honores.*<sup>46</sup>

Somewhat more indicative in its own way is a passage from Suetonius reporting a senatorial debate about the funeral honours to be voted to Augustus:

*Senatus et in funere ornando et in memoria honoranda eo studio certatim progressus est, ut inter alia complura censuerint quidam, funus triumphali porta ducendum, praecedente Victoria quae est in curia, canentibus neniam principum liberis utriusque sexus.*<sup>47</sup>

The context makes it clear that this is an extreme proposal, designed specifically to show devotion to the potential recipient, and that the proposal was never implemented: the inference must be that this was a revolutionary change to previous practice, where the singers had always been female, not members of noble families, and paid for their time. There is no reason to think that these ideas were ever put into practice, even for funerals of Emperors. It is true that there is an implication here that the traditional form of *naenia* would not be good enough for an Augustus, i. e. that the *naenia* of the *princeps* should be sung by noble children, not by hired professionals. Once again perhaps, there is a touch of snootiness, but hardly more: ‘not good enough for Augustus’ hardly equates to ‘contemptible.’<sup>48</sup>

Only one text seems to imply any actual hostility towards the *praefica*: it takes the form of a comment by a certain Domitius Insanus, reported by Aulus Gellius:<sup>49</sup>

*Nulla, inquit, prorsus bonae salutis spes reliqua est, cum vos quoque philosophorum illustrissimi nihil iam aliud quam verba auctoritatesque verborum cordi habetis. Mittam autem librum tibi in quo id reperias quod quaeris. Ego enim grammaticus vitae iam atque morum disciplinas quaero, vos philosophi mera estis, ut M. Cato ait, mortualia: glosaria namque conligitis et lexicidia res taetras et inanes et frivolas, tamquam mulierum voces praeficarum. Atque utinam, inquit, muti omnes homines essemus! Minus improbitas instrumenti haberet.*<sup>50</sup>

46 Hor. *carmina*. 2.20.21–24: ‘Scrap the *neniae* of the vacuous funeral and the shabby grieving and moaning; cut back the noise, give a miss to the useless honours of the tomb.’

47 ‘The Senate went so far in their competitive zeal to elaborate the funeral and honour his memory that among other proposals, there was even one that the procession, led by the Victoria from the Senate-house, should pass under the triumphal gate, with the *nenia* being sung by the children boys and girls from the leading families.’

48 The other suggestions also are surely intended to be understood as excessive. Habinek 2005, 235 oddly takes the account as factual.

49 On Domitius ‘the Madman’, see Holford-Strevens 2003, 150–152; he is properly, but elegantly, sceptical about the Madman’s historicity.

50 Aulus Gellius, *NA* 18.7. ‘No hope of salvation left then, he said, when even you, famous among philosophers, haven’t anything close to your hearts except words and the power

Gellius is quoting from his friend the philosopher Favorinus<sup>51</sup> reporting to him about an interchange with Domitius, who was here clearly making an analogy between the dead words that grammarians like to collect and celebrate and the empty words with which professional mourners lament the deaths of their clients. But Domitius is turning the point round here by claiming that it is not grammarians like him, but philosophers who concern themselves with relics of the dead. The point of the satire is once again not aimed at the women as such, but rather at philosophers like Favorinus who, unlike grammarians, rejoice in discussing useless and defunct verbal problems. In this case neither the gender of the singers nor their social status seems to be the point, but rather the content of the verses they sang. The point Domitius is making here may be best understood in connection with another range of usages, in which *naenia* evidently means children's song or even lullaby.<sup>52</sup> The most plausible connection to explain what Domitius is saying here might be to think of the *naenia* as composed of ancient formulae whose meaning had been lost or jumbled.<sup>53</sup>

My purpose in this section has not been to deny that there is any sense of mild distaste in these various references to the ritual, or in others like them, or that there may be elements of gender bias in the attitudes expressed; but I do reject the idea that there is some inherent tension between the official version of an ancient well-respected ritual and the lived reality of an atmosphere of hostility and contempt towards this particular ritual and towards the women who participated in it. The passages quoted do not remotely justify this conclusion.

#### 4 Reading the Ritual?

There is one other ritual, of impeccable antiquity, with which the *naenia* can be compared, at least in some respects, and that is the singing and dancing of the Salii.<sup>54</sup> The most obvious point of connection is the tradition of ancient

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of words. All the same I'll send you a book where you'll find what you're seeking. I am a grammarian, but I seek organised teachings about life and morals; you philosophers are, as Marcus Cato said, mere bone-grubbers (*mortuaria*); for you collect up horrible things, useless, frivolous, like the cries of those female *praeficae*. If only, he said, all human beings were mute, there would be less material to be exploited by immorality.

51 On whom see Holford-Strevens 2003, 98–130.

52 See Heller 1943.

53 This theory would of course carry the implication that the *naenia* like the Salian *carmina* went back to a very early poetic tradition, which would have fed into both traditions: on the origins of poetry in early Rome see Zorzetti 1991; Phillips 1991; Horsfall 1994.

54 For which see, Guittard 2007, 61–97; Habinek 2005, 8–33.

ritual song, but there are other points of resemblance, as well as differences, to be noted. In the first place, both have a tradition of leadership within the group, the *praefica* being matched by the Salian *praesul*, presumably meaning the leader in the dance,<sup>55</sup> but also leader of the singing. Secondly, both are quite rare instances in which there is a participation in traditional ritual activity by women as well as by men. Thirdly, though problematically, the women in question are in both cases said to have been hired (*conducticiae*).

As regards the leadership roles, Habinek develops the idea creatively, even if stretching the evidence somewhat. In the case of the Salian rituals, Festus (again) glosses the word *redantruare* (or *redamtruare*), which must have been a technical term of the Salian sacred vocabulary:

*Redantruare dicitur in Saliorum exultationibus: 'Cum praesul amptuavit', quod est, motus edidit, ei referuntur invicem idem motus. Lucilius (320): 'Praesul ut amptuet inde, <ut> vulgus redamptuet <inde,>' <e>t Pacuvius (104): 'Promerenda gratia simul cum videam Graios nihil mediocriter redamtruare, opibusque summis persequi'.*<sup>56</sup>

Both Lucilius' description of the ritual interchange and also Pacuvius' extension of it into the sphere of diplomatic interchange, with his evidently delighted evocation of Greeks dancing to others' tunes,<sup>57</sup> convey a strong impression: the actions or notes of the leader in each case were carried outwards to the group, whether priests or choir, and hence to all those assembled and in earshot. So the message starts from a single caller (*praefica* or *praesul*) and flows outward into the community. It may be controversial to push the analogy between Salii and *naenia* too far, but the connections are tempting: the presence of women in both cases can hardly be disputed, nor can the importance of their contribution to the ritual activity. The significance of their being hired is obviously much more problematic. If Habinek's argument about the marginalisation of the *praefica* and her choir is right it would apply also, as has sometimes been argued, to the *Saliae*, also presumably lower class women performing for money, unlike the men, noble youths performing traditional public rituals.<sup>58</sup>

55 *Praesul* is apparently derived from *prae-salio* (I leap before).

56 Festus 334 L: '*Redantruare* is a term used in the dancing of the Salii: "When the leader has leaped", that is, set the steps, the same steps are reproduced in turn for him'. Lucilius (320 Marx = 323 Krenkel = 9.22 Charpin): 'That the leader should then leap, that the people should then leap in response'; and Pacuvius (104–106 Ribbeck = 94–96 Warmington): 'Praise be also when I see the Greeks vigorously dancing in response (*redamtruare*) to the leader's steps, and following with all their might'.

57 The actual context in the play (probably his *Chryses*) is of course mythical: but it is hard not to think that a contemporary second-century BCE reference was also perceived.

58 On the *Saliae*, and especially their likely social position see Glinster 2011.

There could be however an alternative way of looking at both the *Saliae* and the *nenia*-singers: perhaps their social status is not really the point, but rather their possession of a high skill in arts that were necessary to the perfect performance of the rituals. There are of course numerous grades of assistants, some slave, some free or freed who play many roles in the pageant of the public cult in Rome.<sup>59</sup> If the right picture, so far as the *nenia* is concerned, is of a group hired from an undertaker, they were presumably skilled slaves or freedwomen belonging to those who ran and owned the business.

So far as the *naenia* is concerned, the outcome of the comparison here seems to be a sharp contrast within the total ritual programme, at least in the case of rich families, which might be formulated in a table:

Table 2

Features of funeral ritual	Opening stage of ritual	Closing stage of ritual
Action	<i>Laudatio</i>	<i>Nenia</i>
Agent	Close relative	Hired help
Gender	Male	Female
Context	Public	Family/community
Location	<i>In comitio</i>	Out from the <i>Domus</i>
Concerned with	<i>Maiores</i>	<i>Manes</i>

The most speculative aspect here is the last row; but it is tempting to think that the praise belonged in the context of distinguished ancestors who were to be remembered and even paraded to future generations, while the *naenia* phase dealt with the placing of the body in the sepulchre, where they would be remembered only as part of the whole community of the dead. However that may be, the contrast between the two phases of the ritual, first and last, is very striking indeed. One aspect of the contrast is the location: out in the most public of space at a *contio*, contrasted with the procession from home to sepulchre, centred round the actual body and its disposal. It is perhaps not surprising that the change of location corresponds with the transfer from male to female prominence; at the same time, it would not seem true that the last phase should be seen as an entirely domestic concern. In fact, if the role of the singing and the professional singers was the same at the funeral as we have seen implied for the *Salian* rituals, then the whole point must have lain in the spreading of the ritualised grief outward into the community, not just as a matter of family expression.

<sup>59</sup> Fless and Moede 2007; Horster 2007.

This study has suggested therefore that there are several aspects of the ritual that emerge as most significant in the evidence we have: first, the apparent profound separation of the male and female elements in the programme; secondly, the outwardly directed singing of the *naenia* in the final female-dominated procession to the burial ground; thirdly, the commercial aspect of the provision of singing skills from the Lucus; finally, the great emphasis placed, especially in the Festus entry, on the association of the *naenia*, the singing ritual, with finality and ending – not altogether surprising of course, but significant all the same. It raises the question as to whether the whole story can shed light more broadly on Roman attitudes towards death and the dead. All these features seem to converge on some of the most traditional Roman ideas on the subject: that in death the individuality of living men and women is merged into the community of the Manes, so that the dead do in some sense still survive and, as a unity, are still capable of offering threats, if not treated properly by their living descendants; but nothing that we know about the Roman tradition suggests any belief in the individual's survival as a potential actor or influence of any kind. This convergence into unity is clearly compatible with the ritual of the *naenia*, but different from the emphasis earlier in the ritual on the achievements of the individual dead. We can see here the divide between the male, aristocratic world of success remembered, memorialised, preserved as exemplary, and on the other side the underlying Roman traditions about the relations between living, the dead and the ongoing community of both. For the individual dead person, however, the *naenia* was indeed the end.

## Appendix

### Festus 154.19 (L)

*Nenia est [carmen, quod in funere laudandi]  
 gratia can[tatur ad tibiam. Ita enim ait Afra-]  
 nius in Materter[is: . . . . . inter exse-]  
 quias cantit[abant neniam. Sunt qui finem sig-]  
 nificari credunt, ut cum ait Plautus in Pseudolo 5  
 .]hi ego circumu[rtor, cado; id fuit nenia ludo;]  
 Idem: 'Huic homi[ni amanti mea era apud nos neniam]  
 dixit domi'; et ap[ud XXX: '. . . . . usque ad ne-]  
 niam esto'. Quosdam [neniam ideo dicere ait XXX]  
 quod e<i> uoci sim[ilior querimonia flentium] 10  
 sit. Quidam aiunt nom[en ductum ab extre-]  
 mi intestini uoca[bulo, XXXque testimo-]  
 nio utitur Plauti B[acchidibus: 'Si tibi est ma-]*

<i>chae[de]ra, a&lt;t&gt; noḃiḣ [ueruinast domi, qua quidem] te reddam, si tū me [inritaueris, confossio-]</i>	15
<i>rem soricina ṅaenia'. [Nenia autem extremum est quan-] do efferimus moṛtu[um; quod extremum aliquid] Graeci neaton. . . . [appellant; siue quod chor-] ḃaruṃ [ult]iṃa [nete dicta est, uocem extre-] ṃam cantionis ṅaeniāṃ [appellamus.]</i>	20

6. ]ḃi ego circumuor[rtor: abi ergo read by Orsini, Lindsay, Moscadi; but no trace of the *r*; tibi circumuortor Plautus MSS

‘A *nenia* is a [song,] sung [to the flute at a funeral,] for the purpose of [praise. For Afr]anius [writes thus] in the Maternal Aunts: “... they were singing [the *nenia*] at the funeral.” [Some people] think that the meaning [is “end”, as when Plautus writes in the *Pseudolus*]: “So when I turn round, [I fall down; that was the end (dirge) of the fun]”; (Plautus) again: “My mistress has sung the dirge] over this [loving] man [among us] at home.” Also, in XXX: “. . . . . let it be right to the end.” [XXX says] that some authors [explain the word *nenia* because the wailing of the mourners] is actually rather similar to the sound of the word. Others again say that [the word *nenia* is derived from the word for the lowest part] of the intestine, and XXX uses as evidence Plautus [in *the Two Bacchises*: “You may well have] a dagger; but I have [a spit at home], with which, if you [provoke me], I can make you fuller of holes than a mouse’s anus”. [But in fact the *naenia* is the last stage when] we are carrying out someone who has died [to burial, since the Greek word for ‘last’ is *neatos*; [or else, since the last string is [called the *nete*, we call] the highest note of the music the *nenia*.

Paul 155.27 (L)

*Nenia est carmen, quod in funere laudandi gratia cantatur ad tibiam. Sunt qui eo uerbo finem significari putant. Quidam uolunt neniā ideo dici, quod uoci similior querimonia flentium sit. Quidam aiunt neniae ductum nomen ab extremi intestini uocabulo; Graeci enim neaton extremum dicunt; siue quod cordarum ultima nete dicitur, extremam cantionis uocem neniā appellant.*

‘A *nenia* is a song, which is sung to the flute at a funeral for the purpose of praise. Some think the meaning of the word is “end”. Some (others) think the word is spoken like that because the sound is quite similar to the wailing of the mourners. Others again say that *nenia* the word is derived from the word for the very tip of the intestine; for the Greeks call the very end “the *neaton*”; or else because the topmost string is called the *nete*, they called the highest note of the music the *nenia*.’

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# Religion in the Roman Empire

Volume 1 (2015), No. 1

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2199-4463(201503)1:1;1-X