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Open Submissions

Brent D. Shaw

Charity and the Poor in Roman Imperial Society

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Urban Landscapes and Religious Shifts
in Lucian's *Alexander*

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Grasping Urbanity: Propertius' Book 4
and Urban Religion of the Augustan Period

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Helpful Gods, Preaching Stoics, and Gossip
from the Crossroads: Urban Religion
in Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles*



Mohr Siebeck

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Charity and the Poor in Roman Imperial Society

Abstract

The relationship between moral codes of giving and the hard facts of poverty is complex and problematic. On the one side are different ideologies of giving adopted by persons possessing wealth and other resources. On the other are persons in considerable need who could be the recipients of giving by the well-off. But these two spheres of interest have overlapped only partially in the manner of a classic Venn diagram. Even in the special cases where the givers and recipients were linked by a hypothetical mutual interest and benefit – as with Christian charitable giving – the specific logic remains unclear. Rather than focusing on either wealth or poverty as such, the great social and material inequalities that underlay both are perhaps a better gateway to understanding the place of charity as a type of giving.

Keywords: charity, philanthropy, liberality, euergetism, poverty, equality, social justice, the poor, Christianity, bishops

The novelist Anthony Trollope, who had plenty of opportunity to witness the society of his own time, observed: ‘I have sometimes thought that there is nothing so venomous, so bloodthirsty as a professed philanthropist.’¹ If not actually a bloodthirst, the manifest self-interest of the givers has been recognised in every age, including Trollope’s.² To understand the nature of the self-interest, we must begin by focusing our attention on the rich, the source of the venom, and not on the recipients of their generosity.³ I do not think it a happenstance that the modern historian who has made the most concerted attack on the problem for Mediterranean antiquity moved his focus from poverty to wealth.⁴ As far as substantial generosity is concerned, money, and not the lack of it, is what has always mattered. In assuming this

1 Trollope 1862, ch. 16; latterly, they have been seen as actually dangerous: Giridharadas 2018, 173.

2 See Himmelfarb 1991, 198, for nineteenth century England.

3 One of the central critical arguments made by Brown 2012; see the apposite remarks by Harper 2013.

4 Brown moving from 2001 to 2012, whose focus is more on wealth and its disposition.

focal point, however, we must never forget that charitable giving by the wealthy has always been a negligible economic fact. The givers could not be interested in a general transformation of the condition of the poor. Charity could never achieve such a transformational objective.⁵ Very likely, the wealthy were aware of the fact, an awareness that governed their attitudes and actions.⁶ As Tolstoy trenchantly observed: 'I climb on a man's back, choking him and making him carry me, and yet I assure myself and others that I am sorry for him and that I wish to lighten his load by all means possible ... except by getting off his back.'⁷ Charity is encompassed by the 'sorry' and the 'wish.' The problem is further complicated by the fact that in not a few social orders, the custom of giving has been an essential element of being rich. It was as much a part of the self-definition of a Frick, a Carnegie, or a Rockefeller as it is of a Gates, a Buffett, or a Soros. To possess the virtue of being liberal, you have to have the wealth to pay for it. As Aristotle pithily observed, if the radical idea of the abolition of private property was actually achieved, it would destroy liberality.⁸ To have generous givers on any scale, there must be a markedly unequal distribution of private property, and the giver has to have a lot of it. It is a fairly dependable algorithm: the greater the social and economic inequality, the greater the potential for charitable giving.

What, then, of the poor? We might accept that they have been *one* of the habitual objects of charity, but we must also accept that it is a fool's task to try to define who the poor were or to estimate in detail their numbers in the Roman empire. Any idea of who the poor are has always been something that is customary, regional, and relative in nature, and these factors and others strongly affected who counted among their numbers. This means that there is really no such thing as 'the poor' but a spectrum of poor persons, different according to each society and situation, and that the words designating them are similarly diverse and relative in meaning.⁹ The mod-

5 As even the Christian charity of the bishops in late Antiquity certainly did not: Sotinel 2006, 113–114, with a good test case from fifth-century Gaza.

6 They were certainly aware of this in the case of individuals: Cic. *Off.* 2.54; Sen. *de Beat. Vit.* 23.5–24.1; see Parkin 2006, 65–66.

7 Tolstoy 1925, 54, begins with the statement: 'I belong to a class who by various devices deprive the working people of necessities ...' and ends: 'It is really so simple. If I want to aid the poor, that is, to help the poor not to be poor, I ought not to make them poor.'

8 Aristot. *Pol.* 1263b.1–15: the criticism of Plato is not so covert. The terms for 'liberality' are those derived from the opposite of slavery: the giver has to be able to be *eleutheros* and *eleutheriotētos*.

9 The literature is oppressive in its extent. Geremek 1997, 1–13, a good assessment of historical work to the late 1990s; and Cohen 2005 for a well-documented premodern instance in the Mediterranean, with emphasis on the utility of the Annaliste-derived distinction

ulated social orders of Roman society included a substantial body of 'middling persons' beneath the wealthy. Even so, the numbers of persons whose incomes and properties were so modest that their precarious existence could be severely impaired by a single bad event were certainly much greater.¹⁰ Those who experienced that one bad event – a serious illness, a catastrophic harvest, a debilitating injury, the death of the head of household, or who had their lifetime's resources taken from them – must have been numerous.

How many? Let us begin by setting the bar low. The Roman economic and social order was, like our own, vertiginously attenuated, with very few very rich at the top and huge numbers of the not-so-well-off at the bottom. Even generous estimates that postulate significant numbers of persons of 'middling' economic status – up to one-tenth of the entire population – still leave perhaps upwards of six to eight-tenths who were persons who lived close to having just enough from one year to the next. They were like the class of persons categorised as 'the working poor' in early modern Europe. It is these last who were constantly threatened by risks, financial and property losses, and health and environmental disasters that could precipitate them into dire circumstances.¹¹ They were like the mass of the urban working people at Rome, who, we are told, bought their bread from one day to the next and for whom any stoppage in supplies signalled an instant crisis.¹² Out of the ranks of these persons of modest means were continually produced the large numbers whom we might call the desperate poor. It was easy to picture them. They were like the imagined poor of the town of Plataea in a Roman novel. Bears being kept for a wild-beast hunt had perished from heat and disease, so their rotting carcasses had been thrown into the streets of the town. Forced by 'rough poverty,' *inculta pauperies*, the poor rushed to devour the foul meat, their 'free lunch,' *dapes gratuita*.¹³ People of the time knew who these poor were. John Chrysostom reported that persons of very modest means were hauled into court, but the better off never bothered themselves with mendicants who had nothing worth contesting. They were

between 'structural' and 'conjunctural' poverty. On relativity and diversity, and their consequences, see Whittaker 1993, 279–280.

10 See Scheidel 2006; and Scheidel and Friesen 2009: there was not a stark separation between a tiny group of super wealthy and a mass of poor. For a comparison of the kinds of urban poor who might be so exposed, see Cohen 2005, 53–59, for a selection of occupations in mediaeval Cairo, all of which had parallels in Rome.

11 Scheidel and Friesen 2009, 62, estimating that the top 1.5 % of the population controlled about one-fifth of the total wealth; and that 'middling' groups, perhaps 10 % of the population, controlled another fifth; for a different estimate, see Whittaker 1993, 276.

12 Tac. *Hist.* 4.38.2: *volgus, alimenta in dies mercari solitum, cui una ex re publica annonae cura.*

13 Apul. *Met.* 4.14.

not worth the effort.¹⁴ He estimated the numbers of such poor persons in his native Antioch to be about a tenth of the whole population – persons so alien in their distinctive visibility and permanent destitution that they were like ‘another people’ in the city.¹⁵ Over the generations of late antiquity, the more highly monetised economy probably generated harder defined lines between those without adequate resources and those with them. The sometimes stark difference between the *inopes*, *egentes*, *pauperes*, the resourceless, and the *locupletes*, *divites*, *opulenti*, the rich and powerful, highlighted the position of those who lacked adequate protection and who were especially vulnerable to oppression and exploitation.¹⁶ The terms were embedded in a discourse about the powerful and the powerless that marked both the Christian and the secular ideologies of the time.

Givers might perhaps aim at temporarily alleviating the condition of some of these truly indigent persons whom they knew in their local community and whom they thought to be deserving of an occasional handout.¹⁷ Even in this case, it was often more than just suffering that elicited the response: the recipient had to be thought to be worthy of the benefaction. The moral yardstick of being estimated to be ‘deserving’ from the perspective of the giver was critical. This judgment was complicated because the standards of measuring who was deserving changed over time. The attitude of selectivity went all the way down to those of the lowest formal status. The charitable act of granting freedom to slaves, for example, was to be performed for slaves perceived as deserving. It was to be refused to the undeserving.¹⁸ The valuation had to face ever-latent prejudices against the indigent, as illustrated by a wall graffito of a frustrated taverner found at Pompeii: ‘I detest poor people (*abomino pauperos*). If someone asks for something for free, he’s an idiot. Let him hand over the money – then he’ll get what he wants.’¹⁹ To be extended help, the person had to be deserving of it in the first place; they had to have some resources or some status that would justify their being deserving. In this precise fashion – the measurement of social worth and

14 Ioh. Chrys. *Hom. in Act. Apost.* 13 (PG 60: 110); see Humfress 2009, 384.

15 Ioh. Chrys. *Hom. In Matt.* 66.3 (PG 58: 630); see Giuffrida 2009, 199; for further comment: Whittaker 1993, 276.

16 See Ambr. *de Fide* 4.81; Freu 2007, 65; with further comment by Banaji 2012, 599–600; for some counter-arguments based on an analysis of the laws in the *Codex Theodosianus*, see Grodzynski 1987.

17 Amongst a multitude of studies, that by Giridharadas 2018 makes this simple point with force.

18 See, e.g., Cic. *Leg.* 3.25; see Mouritsen 2011, 32–33, on formal legislative constraints along the same lines.

19 CIL 4.9839b (Pompeii); see Whittaker 1993, 274.

the reinforcement of a moral order – poor people have always had a special relevance for the wealthy, and even the slightly better off.

If only the better-off could engage in charitable giving on any scale, then those in need *could* be one of the logical recipients of their gifts. Both the motives and the objects are manifest, for example, in Ciceronian and Senecan ideology.²⁰ Given the superior position of the wealthy and the dependence of the poor, the latter were perhaps an obvious choice but, in the end, the giving was always a choice for the givers. The aspect of choosing, however, was not a core cause but a behavioural response. At its core, charitable giving has always been fuelled by serious inequalities in the distribution of wealth. The more equal the distribution of wealth, the less the need for charitable giving – and, in fact, the less it is in evidence.

This last fact raises a collateral difficulty for an analysis of charity. In the long-term history of the Roman Mediterranean, generous giving was more complex than just having the wealthy on one side and needy persons on the other. Charity overlapped with a different historical sociology of giving. The latter was a combination of personal patronage and civic beneficence that we have come to label ‘euergetism’ or communal ‘do-gooding.’ For the city and territorial states of the Mediterranean, both types of giving were strongly urban-centred phenomena. As an urban phenomenon, the poor were the dark flipside of the high-minded civic euergetism of the elite. We are therefore often persuaded to see the poor as almost solely a city-centred phenomenon. This peculiar focus on ‘the poor’ in the city, a focus that was often further confined to one’s fellow citizens, was an ideological perspective generated by the idea-producing cultural elites of the cities. This is yet another measure of the ways in which inequality is central to our problem. Whereas by far most of the poor were in fact in the countryside, most civic generosity, carefully celebrated for public approval, was in the cities. The pictures produced in our sources reflect these biases. The wealthy givers are heavily on the record; most of the poor are not. The double deficit produces the impression that giving was solely ‘a chapter in the cultural history of the upper classes.’²¹ If we understand the quality of the links between giving and poverty, we have to grasp the specificity of types of giving since it must be emphasised that the wealthy could give in many different ways. In our own day, if they so wish, in addition to charities the rich can give to the yacht or country club, to medical research, or more directly to their own

20 E.g., Cic. *Off.* 1.68, 2.36–37, 2.52–69; and Sen. *Ben.* 3.8, 4.10–11, and 5.11; see Parkin 2006, 62–63: as she remarks, these statements still assume respectable recipients who are capable of returning favour, honour, gratitude, and so on.

21 Mandler 1990; most of the poor rural: see Whittaker 1993, 275–276.

private foundations.²² For the Romans who possessed the surplus resources, there were, similarly, a series of choices. In the first place, to give or not to give; and if to give, to give how much and to whom. Charity in the sense of giving to 'the poor' or 'the needy' was just one possible element in a more expansive spectrum of potential benefactions. Furthermore, in terms of euergetism, this possible source of assistance was only present where the peculiar social institution was present, which was far from everywhere in the empire – and wherever it did exist, we have very little good evidence of its extent.²³

It should not be forgotten that the urban focus of the public records of giving distorts in precisely this way: neither small remote communities nor the rural poor scattered in the countryside counted for much. Their wretched hamlets and miserable poverty were not sufficiently visible or valued by the better-off to count. But it was here, arguably, that the worst of the really destructive poverty was concentrated.²⁴ In the huge expanses of the countryside the marginal poor, facing the challenge of something as common as a series of bad harvests, were sometimes forced to the extremes of selling their wives or children, or both, into servitude. We find them populating the servile landscape from Solon's Athens to Augustine's Africa.²⁵ No charity was going to change the basic causes or the hard results of this poverty. A modest charity might well have been present in rural venues. We know next to nothing about it, however, because that world did not engage the givers and the receivers in the production of laudatory public records. Both the civic benefactor and the charitable giver wanted to be seen and to be recognised for their giving. Where charity was brought into focus, it was still the visible poor who counted and they were concentrated in the towns and cities where the rich happened to reside and where the centres of political and cultural power were located.²⁶

22 A modern example: the second greatest beneficiaries of 'charitable' giving in the United States are private universities and colleges; otherwise, the great heavy-hitters in giving, the wealthy tycoons of hi-tech, give mainly to their own foundations: R. Frank, *CNBC Markets* 12 June 2018 (online); L. Albrecht [in] *MarketWatch* 18 June 2018 (online).

23 Not among the Jews of Palestine, for example: Shaw 1989, 247; cf. Brunt 1990, 521–522, with real scepticism about how many of the wealthy actually practiced the ideal.

24 Noted for north Africa, and rightly, by Brown 2012, 342; also recognised for the late post-imperial east by Patlagean 1977, 252–271, on the villages and the countryside; for the little that is known of their support by the wealthy, see Garnsey and Woolf 1989, 155–157, with emphasis on the hard fact of dependency.

25 Solon: Arist. *Ath. pol.* 6; 12.4, with Plut. *Solon*, 15.3–4; for Augustine's Africa: see Aug. *Ep.* *10 (*CSEL* 88: 46–51); for other cases, see Holman 2001, 68–70, with good attention to the attendant economic forces.

26 Pietri 1983, 274; cf. Brown 2012, 512.

This was especially true of the *euergetēs*, the civic ‘do-gooder,’ who was implicated in a reciprocal social economy of influence and honour. His or her giving was often paraded as a gratuitous sharing of wealth, but it was understood by both parties never to be free. The honourable givers always expected a return on their gifts.²⁷ Aware of this social algebra, potential recipients could exploit the bilateral economy by giving honours to potential givers in advance, priming the pump for hoped-for benefactions in the future.²⁸ Giving was part of an exploitative system in which the well-off in a sense ‘bought’ the good will and public assent of their fellow citizens.²⁹ It is this type of giving which dominates our records to the manifest disadvantage of charity. Giving to the utterly despised destitute, like beggars, in the full knowledge that there could not and would not be any payback had to be ‘outside the normal paradigm of return.’³⁰ Such an ‘outside the normal paradigm’ was not an innovation of Christianity. It had always existed in daily practice and in philosophical ideals as reflected in the secular background to the Christian ‘Sentences of Sextus.’³¹ As an ideal, it had a substantial pre-Christian existence found, for example, in the ideas of Seneca, by no means an original thinker.³² Even in this case, the destitute and the formally powerless could exploit an algebra of giving by using tactics of inversion and of dishonour – humiliating, shaming, or even threatening the potential givers to provoke giving.³³ Beggars (demanders) purposefully gathered at places, like the Clivus Aricinus just outside the town gates of Aricia on the Appian way south of Rome, where they could aggressively insist on handouts from travellers who had to take that route.³⁴ The same provocative tactics could also be deployed where euergetic giving was involved, as when the people at Pollentia held the body of a *primus pilus* centurion hostage until his

27 Still one of the best analyses of the moral system, despite subsequent tweaking by others, is Paul Veyne, ‘Qu’est-ce que l’euergetisme?’, in Veyne 1976, 20–28; Christian writers, like Cyr., *De opere et eleosymnis*, 21–22 (CCL 3A: 68–69), recognised the difference in motive and action.

28 On ‘proleptic honours,’ see Domingo Gygax 2016, 45–56.

29 Zuiderhoek 2009, 113–153, who presents a face of giving that countervails one of the main arguments informing Veyne’s 1976 study.

30 Parkin 2006, 79.

31 Finn 2006, 1–4, outlines the pre-Christian roots of the later Christian collection of moral precepts.

32 See Seneca on the Stoic ideal of giving disinterestedly to the shipwrecked, the penniless exile and the destitute beggar: Sen. *de Clem.* 2.5.1; comment by Bolkestein 1939, 142–143; and Hands 1968, 81–83.

33 Parkin 2006, 74–80, is especially good on this.

34 Whittaker 1993, 284, with other similar cases; the same tactic is richly documented for late antiquity: Neri 1998, 62–73; for more striking examples of the tactic, see Grey and Parkin 1993, 286–287.

family agreed to pay for a gladiatorial show.³⁵ A species of public blackmail was the not-too-covert other side of euergetism.³⁶ The threat could be latent and only made evident now and then. Behind the gifts of foods and entertainments given by emperors to the people of the imperial capital, there lurked the threat of chaos and violence should they not do so – as actually happened in times of serious shortages in food supplies.³⁷ Facing the real threat of crowd chaos and urban rioting in the epicentre of the empire, the much lauded *liberalitas principis* looks more like a defensive tactic than outright ‘charity’ or classic euergetism. In a context of radical inequalities, everyone was manipulating access to wealth and resources.

The whole concept of liberality and its relationship to *libertas* or ‘freedom’ is a complex one since it, too, was constantly changing in response to pragmatic circumstances – many of them the types of threats or demonstrations of the type noted in the local municipal contexts of the Roman state. If citizens of the Roman republican state had used their power, their votes, their patrons, and their tribunes to acquire the right of subsidised and (later) gratuitous food distributions to assist in their subsistence, this right was soon limited by the emergence of an empire that greatly outstripped the reality and moral regime of a city state, even a large one. These distributions were never extended as a ‘right’ to all citizens, even those who were fortunate enough to be resident in the imperial metropolis.³⁸ What emerged were the special benefactions of the *annona* supply that were somehow a ‘right’ of these fortunate chosen people of the metropolis but simultaneously a gift given by the reigning emperor. The benefactions were defined by a variation of civic euergetism that had been marooned in a city by a territorial state that expanded far beyond the moral ties linking benefactors with its citizens. But the emperor was something more than a simple generous euergetic benefactor – part of the generosity, at least, was a proactive response to potential threats, as the reality of ‘food riots’ in the city clearly demonstrate. The undertow of the collective demands and threats of those whose subsistence was at stake surely explain a lot of the response of urban benefactors, whether secular emperors or, later, Christian bishops.³⁹

35 Suet. *Tib.* 37.3: the members of the family who were put under threat were the centurion’s heirs.

36 See Coleman 2011, 343–345; although expressed in somewhat more anodyne terms, the same view is argued by Zuiderhoek 2007.

37 As is made evident by Garnsey 1988, 218–243; and Virlouvet 1985, 39–82.

38 The literature is vast: Garnsey 1988, 167–217, is a sufficient history of the political dimensions of these distributions in the republic and the Principate.

39 The gap between political euergetism and the actions of Christian bishops in this regard

These observations indicate a fundamental difficulty. Since inequality is the basis of charity, a big problem, although not necessarily an insuperable one, is the lost voice of those who did not have the wealth. One result – reflecting in our eyes, perhaps, a deep-seated hypocrisy – is that ‘the discourse on poverty is exclusively the product of aristocrats.’ The observation has been made of the Greek cities-states of the Hellenistic and republican age, but it applies across all our peoples and periods.⁴⁰ An important corollary for our investigation is that the poor that we see and the ones on whom the gifts were occasionally bestowed were the poor who concerned the rich or those holding positions of power. The insuperable problem for the historian is that the whole process is seen as a one-way street, a social panorama viewed from one perspective only. Inside this textual world, finding the boundaries of our problem is challenging. Even for modern and early modern societies for which a host of data are available, defining and quantifying ‘the poor’ or ‘poverty’ is a problem of protean difficulty.⁴¹ Although the poor, on various definitions and varieties, certainly existed in very large numbers, they cannot be reconstructed from our existing texts.⁴² Like the disabled, who are a considerable portion of any population, they are largely invisible in our literary sources.⁴³ What we have by default, and sometimes in super-abundance, as in Christian writings, is a discourse *about* the poor and about giving, all of it flowing from the pens of well-off literate elites. Whereas it is marginally possible to write a history of the *idea* of poverty and of charitable giving, it is almost impossible to make an historical

was not that great; Salzman 2017 is right (I think) to emphasise the considerable overlap and interaction between the two.

40 Brélaz 2013, 69.

41 For the application of some modern concepts (‘relative’ and ‘absolute’ poverty, ‘relative deprivation,’ and such) to Roman circumstances, see Prell 1997, 10–28.

42 Claire Taylor is one of the few to face this problem head-on, without blinking, in her 2017 work.

43 Proportions of persons who are disabled, mentally or physically, on different estimates, account for roughly 20 % of modern populations. For the UK the elderly constitute 45 % of the disabled. The official statistics for the United States place the figure at about 19–20 % for the whole population (U.S. Census 2010). Modern Italy, perhaps a more humane society, counts only 15 % of persons in this category. Since disabilities are increasingly acquired as one ages – in the USA for which measurements are available, about eight times as much as the rest of the population – poverty increasingly affects persons classified as disabled. These proportions would only be greater, surely, for any premodern society. The extent to which we cannot measure the phenomenon nor assess its scale for antiquity might be judged from Garland 2010², 28–44, the chapter most focused on poverty (e.g., the question of beggars), where the quantitative aspects of the problem are hardly broached. When compared with the scale of the realities of premodern times, the data to which we have access are manifestly immensely disproportionate to the facts on the ground.

investigation into the reality of the interactions between the rich and the poor in which giving was just one element embedded in a gross maldistribution of goods.

1 Qualities of difference

As far as the ideas are concerned, we can note that pre-Roman and pre-Hellenic societies, including that of the Hebrews, generated a special idea of the poor and their relation to God. As the Psalmist put it, the supreme deity himself was 'the father of orphans, the defender of widows.'⁴⁴ The ideology created a special concept of the poor. They were not just people who happened to be materially deprived. Rather, because of their powerlessness, they shared in a special divine protection. They were humans who lacked basic needs and who were exposed to maltreatment for a reason: the violence of the rich and powerful who oppressed them. What the poor were seeking and demanding was not so much alms or charity as justice – as we might say, social justice.⁴⁵ It is an attitude that is reflected in a sermon of Augustine where he is commenting on the famous saying in the gospel of Matthew where Jesus remarked: 'I say that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' The text provoked Augustine to remark that a rich man might laugh at the rags worn by a poor man, but that the pauper will be able to say: 'But I will enter (i.e., the kingdom of God). These tattered rags are the clothes that will be worn then. Those men will not enter who have committed unjust acts against us, who have oppressed us.'⁴⁶ This difference is at the heart of a classic study of the transformations in who the meritorious poor were in antiquity, and who were therefore seen as deserving of public benefactions.⁴⁷ The poor in the cities of the Roman empire who were a miserable flotsam-and-jetsam of down-and-outs were *not* seen by their betters in the light of justice for the oppressed. Often, they were despised; sometimes they were felt to be a threatening underclass harbouring an inchoate danger. Christian ideologues, on the other hand, who developed ideas inherent in

⁴⁴ Ps. 68:5.

⁴⁵ Powerfully evoked by Brown 2001, 69, and Brown 2012, 79–80; see also, *in extenso*, Houston 2006.

⁴⁶ Mt. 19:24 (Mk 10:25; Lk 18:24); Aug. *Serm. Mainz* 12.9–11 = *Serm. Dolbeau* 5.9–11 = Dolbeau 1996, 79–81: *Ego, inquit, intrabo. Hoc mihi panni isti praestabunt; non intrabunt illi qui nobis iniurias faciunt, qui nos premunt*. See Lepelley 2006, 204.

⁴⁷ Bolkestein 1939, especially 417–437, where he lays out his basic conclusions.

half a millennium of Jewish thinking, propagated an idea of the poor not only as deserving but as embodying a special element of the divine – an elevated element in them that suggested that their low position was not just unfortunate but unjust. If we compare Cicero's *De officiis* ('On Duties') of the mid-40s BCE with another work of the same name, the *De officiis* of Ambrose, Christian bishop of Mediolanum, of the late 380s CE, the difference is readily apparent. Among the basic duties incumbent upon Christians for Ambrose was the giving of charitable gifts to the poor. These gifts received the special Christian term of *eleemosynae* or giving of alms, a duty that surely would have struck Cicero as very odd.⁴⁸ For most Christians, like Chrysostom in Antioch, the ideal of this duty extended all the way across the social spectrum from the wealthy at the top to the poor at the bottom.⁴⁹ That such a duty would be imposed on persons of every social status would truly have been an oddity for Cicero.

The unusualness of the difference was notable on more than on just this ground. Ambrose could equate the new charity to a kind of slavery: It was abasing oneself to serve one's fellow human in the dutiful way that Christ had humiliated himself by becoming a slave in order to free us all.⁵⁰ To say that Cicero could not imagine construing the noble virtue of *caritas* as servitude is an understatement. The shift to the new Christian framework of giving to the poor was a change that 'amounted, in the long run, to an imaginative difference of momentous proportions.'⁵¹ This giving was not a condescension of the wealthy. Rather, it imposed a moral guilt on them for tolerating the unjust suffering of the 'unfortunates' in their midst. The difference with the giving of the classical benefactor has been bluntly stated by Veyne: 'The pagan empire of the third century could have cultivated charitable giving as much as the Christian empire of a century later did ... It was just that it remained the prisoner of a system of thought that subordinated the social category of "the poor" under the universal civil authority of the law – that pagan world did not even perceive "the poor."⁵² In the social value system that Veyne is describing, the givers gave to their fellow citizens, who counted, and not to the poor as such. This was true even when massive gratuitous public banquets were staged on an epic scale, as Publius Lucilius Gamala did at Ostia when he had 217 triclinia set up for his pub-

48 Ambr. *Off.* 1.28.130–30.159 (CCL 15: 47–58), although the sentiment is found throughout; the work probably dates to the late 380s CE: see Davidson 2001, 3–5.

49 Chrysos. *Hom. in Matt.* 52; *Hom. in Hebr.* 1 (PG 52: 523; 63: 20).

50 Ambr. *Ep.* 7.23 (CSEL 82.1: 55); for context, see Garnsey 1996, 199–201.

51 Brown 2012, 53.

52 Veyne 1976, 58.

lic banquet; or the anonymous benefactor at Pompeii in the late 50s CE, setting up 456 tables for the feeding of the populace.⁵³ These great feasts, for 2,000 and 7,000 persons respectively, although large (indeed, amongst the largest of which we know) were celebrated for the benefactor's fellow citizens and not for the poor. Wherever these givings by the town benefactors to mass recipients can be traced in detail, as in the epigraphical texts from the African provinces of the empire, it is manifest that they were given solely to their fellow citizens organised in their formal civic groups and associations.⁵⁴ Christian giving, by contrast, was the institutionalisation of a new, more democratic, system of charitable giving. Seen in this light, Christian charity (as all charity) was the result of the moral system imposed by the economic one. Since one could not give to people who had nothing with the expectation of a return from them, by definition the Christian gift had to be gratuitous, silent, and done for no reward. Only an imagined creation, an omnipotent omniscient god, could promise a reward in an equally illusory future.

Who could give in the new system? This sounds like a strange question since it was surely always the case that anyone *could* give. Given the canons governing euergetism, however, in the dominant public system only the well-off could give. To be part of this particular civic game of giving, one had to have real wealth. The benefactor had to be able to underwrite the building of a bath, an aqueduct, the staging of spectacular games or entertainments, a public feast, or the subsidising of an alimentary program. In this respect, at least as an ideal, Christian charity was different. In its social system, anyone could give. Early on, the teaching of the tale of the widow's mite made the point. A single wealthy civic benefactor in the classical system would give huge amounts; the poor widow gave only two *lepta*, the two smallest value coins in circulation at the time.⁵⁵ But her gift was to count just as much as the gift made by any wealthy woman. Everyone could now give. A new kind of verticality appeared. The novel concept was tied to an ideology that was a democratisation of a traditional concept in which a giver acquired merit and stored up 'symbolic capital' for the future. 'God greatly favours the person who gives food to someone in need from the bottom of their heart, even if the gift is small.' Now a person of even very modest resources could give and acquire 'treasure in heaven,' their own little investment in

53 Osanna 2018, 310–322; *CIL* 14.375 = *ILS* 6147 (Ostia, end first century BCE); and Donahue 2017, 37–38.

54 Hugoniot 2006, 207–235 (based on 109 documented cases).

55 Mk 12:41–44; Lk 21:1–4.

the future.⁵⁶ Now even the poor, including the widow of the gospel of Luke, could join in a common stream of divinely inflected giving along with the super-wealthy Melania. Christian ideology construed the giving of Melania's colossal wealth and the widow's two *lepta* as a similar kind: a charitable giving to God. The individual gifts of the greatest number of ordinary Christians might have been small but, given the very large numbers of adherents that Christian churches were mobilising, the total amounts being collated were hardly inconsequential.

Although a new spectrum of verticality was encouraged by Christian ideology, and by an insistent avalanche of preaching and writing, it was amplified an unusually polarised view of the poor.⁵⁷ They were simultaneously split between 'our brothers,' for whom fellow Christians had a fraternal responsibility, and the irreligious threatening others who were the 'urban barbarians' of late antiquity.⁵⁸ The division itself was not that new. Remarks by two of the more incisive students of modern poverty make as much clear: 'This urge to reduce the poor to a set of clichés has been with us as long as there has been poverty. The poor appear, in social theory, as much as in literature, by turns lazy or enterprising, noble or thievish, angry or passive, helpless or self-sufficient.'⁵⁹ The poor have never been understood as they are: persons who have been made to be disadvantaged and powerless. The polarities of labelling were not new: they can be found far back into pre-Roman periods and they complicate our (and their) attitudes and behaviour towards 'the poor.' What was happening with the spread of the mass ideology of Christianity was a greater homogenisation and 'democratisation' of the concept.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, as new general categories of organising whole human populations replaced the old citizen/non-citizen divide, wider polarities like the barbarian/civilised divide came to the fore. Just as there were 'noble' barbarians as well as bad and threatening ones, so the division between 'the rich' and 'the poor,' once a division made within the polis – *hoi plousioi* versus *hoi penetai* – came to be attached to these more universal categories. Now the poor became more urgently subdivided into the 'good' and the 'bad' poor. This changing valence of 'the poor' had effects on what counted as 'charity.' Like the outsider 'barbarians,' of whom the poor were urban analogues, they could be seen either as 'evil threats' or as 'noble sav-

56 Rufinus, *Praef. Sent. Sext.* (CCL 20: 259) dating as early as the early second century CE; on the treasure, see Brown 2016, 2–6.

57 Brown 2012, 77–78.

58 See Freu 2007, 390–418.

59 Banerjee and Duflo 2012, vii.

60 As famously expounded by Mazzarino 1960, 35–54.

ages' – noble like the hard-scrabble peasant of the republic, with his rural hut, his family to support, and his few *iugera* to plough; or 'barbaric' like the violent 'dangerous classes' of the city.⁶¹ It was the old-style citizen who was deserving of help. The propertyless, feckless, uncivil, riotous, and lazy were felt not to be, but they were thought to be present and in considerable numbers, to be morally bad and even threatening. The responsibility of the individual was thought to be divergent: the indigent who were born into a natural order of poverty were more deserving; conversely, those responsible for their condition were less so.⁶²

The watershed seems to be the gradual focusing of 'the poor' as a term referring to a broad social category of persons. Earlier, poverty, whether considered as *penia* or *ptocheia*, *penuria* or *paupertas*, was a precise fate that affected individual persons. The specific nature of the value and the person seems to have continued throughout all of Roman history. It has been argued, rightly I think, that the law codes show no sign of poverty or poor-ness being anything other than an affliction suffered by an individual. In the Roman law, there is no *social* category of 'the poor,' and consequently, 'each reference to a poor person has to be interpreted in context.'⁶³ The destitute surely did exist. They were the indigent who were well known in their community to be permanently in need. They were not to be confused with the *pauperes*, persons who were relatively less well off than others above them, like the millions of Americans who, in the wealthiest state in the world, live clinging from one pay check to the next.⁶⁴ When Augustine preached to his parishioners about the poor 'his hearers would have known what category of poor persons he referred to. The poor of the church and the poor who lived on alms alone were an easily recognizable underclass.'⁶⁵ In contrast to

61 As seen by Morley 2006, 35.

62 Whittaker 1993, 273–274; Grey and Parkin 1993, 289–290.

63 Humfress 2006, 203: '... late Roman legislators like their classical juristic predecessors were uninterested in any conceptual understanding of poverty per se'; with comments by Osborne in Atkins and Osborne 2006, 19.

64 For example, nearly 800,000 were caught up in the closing of the U.S. Federal government in December-January 2018–19: *New York Times* (10 January 2019); their numbers now (March 2020) more than confirmed by the emergency measures required in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic where, in the 'richest country in the world,' in a matter of weeks, more than 30,000,000 weekly or monthly-paid employees, about 17 % of all employees, were reduced to filing unemployment claims, with many of them thrown onto the mercies of lenders and foodbanks. In India, the shutdown had a more dramatic impact on the large sector (as in the Roman empire) who depended on day-wage labour incomes, their numbers exceeding 120,000,000 (Nikhil Inamdar, Mumbai, *BBC News*: 6 May 2020) or 25 % of the labour market.

65 Brown 2012, 343.

the earlier poor, the new Christian poor to whom Augustine refers were part of a new more generalised class of 'the poor' who transcended individual cities and even states.

Attempts to understand the relations between rich and poor are bedevilled by our near-fatal entrapment inside the world of the literary sources. As with the study of crime in pre-modern times, we are constantly hounded by the ghost of the 'dark figure': in our case, with accurately quantifying poverty and the actual range of *all* the giving and taking. As has been pointed out by more than one observer of the past, there was certainly a lot of small-scale giving by ordinary persons, like the widow of the gospel of Luke. No extensive record of this micro-giving can be discovered in our canonical literary sources or in the public display of expensive public inscriptions. But the basic point stands that the gratuitous giving of generous givers was never limited to the wealthy. In our own society, a recent personal memoir recollects the many acts of generosity and charity from strangers, priests, the fellow indigent, welfare officers, and others that made a difference.⁶⁶ By far most of the elevated writers of our sources, whether secular or Christian, were generally disinterested in recording or documenting such low-level charity.⁶⁷ A whole range of oral stories, myths, popular fables, and vignettes embedded in novels point to the widespread strength of the ideals of *xenia*: the duty to host persons, even (perhaps especially) strangers in need of everything from alimentary sustenance to a roof over their head. Similarly, it is impossible to believe that persons of little worth did not give when they could, were moved to do so, or felt a duty to do so.⁶⁸ It was no innovation of Christianity to claim a divine imprimatur and favour for such behaviour. As many stories of popular hue make clear, traditional divinities not only approved of such giving, but rewarded the good who did it and punished (in stories, at least) those who did not. The story of Baucis and Philemon illustrated these wide moral dimensions of *xenia*.⁶⁹ If one is willing to put in the effort to look around, often in non-canonical sources, there is plenty of evidence in pre-Christian city-states of the Mediterranean for low-level

66 As made clear in the compelling narrative by Kaldheim 2019.

67 Such instances do exist, however, as in the well-known vignette of Augustine encountering a poor beggar who had benefitted from the gift of a few almost worthless coins – *ille pauculis et emendicatis nummulis adeptus erat*: Aug. *Confess.* 6.6.9–10 (CCL 27: 79–80).

68 A conclusion that Parkin 2006, 73–74, rightly claims must rest on 'common sense' in the face of the huge known deficit of specific evidence.

69 Ov., *Met.* 8.611–724. That it was so marginal to mythical stories of the time is surely indicative only of its marginality when seen as orality, not of its widespread presence at the time.

philanthropic giving.⁷⁰ The problem further obscures our understanding of the generality of giving.

2 Differential developments

Euergetism and charity often stood as opposed, not complementary, phenomena. The contrast between the moral worlds of the Greek and Roman Mediterranean and the antecedent 'near eastern' worlds in this respect is striking. In the moral karma of the latter, giving to the destitute was a common element in its ideology, preached by moralists, seers and prophets, and reflected in the proclamations of near-divine monarchs. The need to care for the poor and to give gratuitously to those in need was a divine command.⁷¹ Practices like the freedom of gleaning in the fields after harvest time, a common sharing of private resources with community members in need, seem to be singularly absent or very rarely referred to in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean.⁷² The place where we find consistent hints of such charitable attitudes is in the oral poetry of the 'Homeric' or pre-city-state 'literature.' The rise of the Mediterranean city-state generated novel social and political relations that focused giving in new fashions and forged definitions of new persons who were deserving objects of public giving. The result was a peculiar Maussian economy of giving and receiving.⁷³ More than this, the change implicated hundreds of autonomous small worlds within which new polarities of insiders and outsiders cast the dialogue between the rich and the poor, the few and the many, in a new frame of revindication. In contrast, Christian ideology, largely dependent on the real existence of a completely different political frame of citizenship and belonging, was able to draw on the antecedent pre-polis ideology of 'the poor.' In this other ideology, every person who was poor because of a primal or more immediate act of injustice had a social claim, especially on the rich and the powerful. In its more radical forms, what they were crying out for was not alms but justice, a revindication for having been the victims of the violence and oppression that had made them poor in the first place.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Brown 2012, 59–60, referring to Parkin 2006, who details some of the evidence.

⁷¹ MacMullen 2015; see the formative interpretation of Bolkestein 1939, 34–66.

⁷² Shaw 2013, 234–235; see also Hamel 1990, 216–219.

⁷³ Domingo Gygax 2016, 58–106, the best current study of the emergence of the practice in the context of the polis.

⁷⁴ Brown 2012, 79–80, who connects and explains the resurgence of the new ideology that MacMullen 2015 outlines in its earlier phases.

This historical development challenges us with a primal question of definition: Why is something euergetism and not our idea or practice of charity? Simply because, quite apart from whatever charitable impulses benefactors might have had, the benefactors of classic euergetism had little concern for 'the poor' per se. The benefactions were made in the first instance to celebrate the givers and, in a related sense, the community of which they were part, 'their people' so to speak. Since the givers wanted and expected a reciprocation of honour as part of this social dialogue, they were not looking to slaves and the poverty-stricken or even those of very modest means as their targets. Poverty as such had little to do with this exchange. Rather, it was a peculiar kind of inequality, as Piketty has repeatedly demonstrated, that was essential.⁷⁵ Of the many euergetic inscriptions known and collated for the Greek cities of the Hellenistic period, only one seems to make any mention of the truly needy. On one occasion, a queen came to the rescue of the inhabitants of a city whose inhabitants had been reduced to 'need' by a devastating earthquake.⁷⁶ But even this case is no exception to the dominant ideology since it was to the *citizens* of a city that she made her gift. Euergetic benefactions were made to persons and communities of standing who had a free choice to accept the gift and the potential means to reciprocate in a significant way. By contrast, the destitute were a captive or slavish audience, persons who faced the 'philosophical' Seneca with the problem of whether or not a slave could possibly reciprocate a gift. Being in extreme need, the indigent had no real choice but to accept. Speaking of venom, we might say that charity was always a poisonous gift because it signalled this extreme need, lack of power and resources, and because it 'enslaved' the recipient. Of course, it was also venomous in the sense that Oscar Wilde saw long ago when he remarked of charitable givers that they created and sustained the very injustice that they pretended to relieve: 'They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor.'⁷⁷

In a social-historical distinction that influenced the whole of the Roman world, the 'eastern' moral schemata continued to have real power in those other lands and peoples. In Judaea, Josephus seems either to have misunderstood or to have been latently hostile to the Greek civic ideal and practice

75 Piketty 2014; rather less apparent and less well argued in his follow-on study of 2020. Andrew Carnegie's essay, a fundamental charter of modern charitable giving, simply accepted extreme inequality as an 'unavoidable condition' to which his philanthropy would be an effective remedy: see Giridharadas 2018, 171.

76 See Brélaz 2013, 76.

77 Wilde [1891] 2007, 4: 231–268, quote: 232.

of euergetism.⁷⁸ Later Christian ideologues in the east who were heirs to elements of this ancient ideology remained actively hostile to euergetism. They included the Antiochene preacher John Chrysostom who denounced euergetai more than once in sermons in which he exhibited the new Christian attitudes to the poor.⁷⁹ In line with the older ideas, Christian ideology increasingly tended to conceive of all persons as part of a ‘democracy’ of the faith who were worthy objects of charitable giving. But this raised an old problem in a new guise that was faced both by the imperial state and by Christian bishops, including an aristocratic bishop in the later fourth century.⁸⁰ The bishop was none other than the Ambrose at Milan who made almsgiving one of the core duties imposed on the Christian. Such a widely imposed obligation forced a redefinition of the deserving and undeserving poor. Ambrose became angry when faced with what he saw as able-bodied young men who were scamming the Church’s system of charity – men who faked being sunk in debt or having lost all their property to robbers. The presence of these cheaters, as he saw it, meant that the Church would have to institute a system of making inquiries into its welfare recipients to find out if they were really deserving.⁸¹ The Christian bishops were not alone. In the same decade, the new Theodosian state reacted no differently, issuing the first known secular legislation regulating the indigent who were capable of work:⁸² ‘Let an inquiry be made into each of those persons whom with an “assumed poverty” have appealed to public assistance, both into the soundness of their body and into the strength of their years.’ The state depended on informers to bring to the attention of the authorities any of these able-bodied persons who were not working, who were pretending to be in need whereas in fact they were deemed to be just lazy. The informer’s reward for uncovering such undeserving poor was the seizure of the body of a servile person as his own slave, or of a free man to be his tied *colonus* in perpetuity. In both cases, we see the value of work, *labor*, coming to play the role of a

78 See Shaw 1989, 247, indicating Jos. *Ant.J.* 16.158–159, embedded in a longer discussion of Herod’s euergetism (16.150–159) which, even given the rhetorical emphasis on ‘Jewish custom/law,’ is illuminating on this score. There are, however, examples of such giving in the construction and support of synagogues in the provinces (e.g., the synagogue of Naro in the province of Africa).

79 See MacMullen 2015, 493.

80 See Parkin 2006, 75–77.

81 Ambr. *Off.* 2.16.76–77; a view commonly shared then and later: Neri 1998, 59–62.

82 *CTh.* 14.18.1 (Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius I to Severus, Praefectus Urbi; 20 June 382); cf. *CJ* 11.26.1. Regarding its specific significance for *mendicitas*, I tend to agree with Neri 1998, 59; for a different view, see Grey and Parkin 1993.

discriminating agent in defining the meritorious poor.⁸³ The adage of the apostle Paul – ‘if anyone is unwilling to work, let him not eat’ – was now widely quoted by Christian churchmen – although now with a much different sense imparted to it – to enforce a new moral order of poverty.⁸⁴ In the age of Ambrose, the Christian state was intervening to define the ‘deserving poor’ not as citizens in need, but rather as individuals who no longer had any capacity to do useful labour to support themselves and the society of which they were part.

3 Emerging definitions

In their daily relationships, most persons manifestly recognised those who by any standard, certainly those of their own societies, were destitute. A range of data indicate that ordinary persons, moved out of sentiments of obligation or pity, gave to those who were in obvious need of help.⁸⁵ The terms are ones of extreme difficulty to define in our own terms, much less in theirs. People with few or inadequate resources have hardly ever escaped the moral judgements that accompany any distribution of wealth precisely because the possession of goods considerably alters one’s value in an aesthetic of social acceptability. Even more significant was a shift in ideas that changed poverty from a peculiar characteristic shared by individuals to a general social condition that characterised whole strata in society. When do ‘the poor’ become more than individuals who suffer individual misfortune and destitution and ‘poverty’ more than a misfortune suffered by a given individual?⁸⁶ The long-term persistence of certain types of poverty was probably part of the provocation, but not the only explanation.

Given the distribution of wealth in a given society, one can be absolutely deprived: literally unable to feed or adequately to cloth oneself or to have any proper shelter, and so on. These persons are ‘poor’ when judged against normal expectations of being barely sufficient, even if at the bottom end of the income spectrum. This maldistribution tends to become entrenched

⁸³ Brown 2016, chs. 4–6, traces signs of these debates in churches in the east, particularly in the context of evaluating the worth of monastic establishments; of course, Christian clergy were exempt from this criterion and, logically, they were to be supported by the charity of their parishioners.

⁸⁴ *Const. Apostol.* 2.1–63, 3.4–6; for the Pauline injunction see *2 Thessal.* 3:10–12.

⁸⁵ For a few investigations of this nature, see Parkin 2006, 60–82; see also Longenecker 2010, 60–107.

⁸⁶ For the significance of this revolution in thinking, see Himmelfarb 1991, 102–122, esp. 102–104.

and permanent for any given social and political order. The people at the bottom have the weight of advantageous income and opportunity permanently set against them in what we call by the anodyne name 'structural poverty.' The poor themselves, well aware of their predicament, are appropriately cynical. A Brazilian aphorism from the *favelas*, much appreciated by the writer Henry Miller – 'when shit becomes valuable, the poor will be born without assholes' – tells it all.⁸⁷ At the other end of the spectrum, it has been impossible for the wealthy to imagine the lives of the poor or their poverty. Protracted discussions of poverty or *paupertas*, as almost incessantly in the younger Seneca, were centred on a Disneyesque picture, an ideal concept that the philosopher could oppose to wealth and power for the purpose of the moral edification of himself and his peers who, of course, were not poor. Not that they did not try to understand. Seneca mentions the practice of the wealthy constructing a poor man's cell or a peasant's hut in one of the rooms of their richly-appointed villas so that they could go into it and 'feel poor' for a while.⁸⁸ This was reducing the imagined experiences of the poor to a theme-park 'ride' that you could acquire, briefly, by paying for it. It was a philosophical riff on the kind of 'slumming' among the plebeians by emperors like Antiochus IV or Nero so that they could get 'in touch' with 'ordinary people.'⁸⁹ The almost impossible barrier for us to surmount is to get past the images and ideologies of poverty, and hence of charitable giving, generated by those who had the wealth to give. Part of our difficulty is rooted in their problem of not being able accurately to picture the poor and their situation in any terms that reflected reality.⁹⁰ For the elites who produced our records, giving that was *not* a species of honourable euergetism was a moral practice that was difficult to conceive.

For all these reasons, although I am constrained to work with it, I intensely dislike the term 'charity.' It comes heavily laden with presumptive Judaeo-Christian values and, worse, is purposefully vague as to motives, purpose,

87 According to Erica de Jong, the words were scrawled as a footnote to his letter in the Portuguese: 'Quando merda tiva valor pobre nasce sem cu' (letter to her of 20 April 1974): de Jong 1993.

88 On the *cella pauperis*, vel sim, see Sen. *Ep. Mor.* 18.7, on which see the pertinent remarks by Whittaker 1993, 293–294; 100.6; with Mart. *Epigr.* 3.48. Cf. Sen. *Ep. Mor.* 20.12–13, where the rich could assume a 'pretend poverty' for a few days just to see what it would be like.

89 See Polyb. 26.1 = Athenaeus 5.193D for Antiochus IV; and Tac. *Ann.* 13.25 and 47; Dio 61.8.1–4; 8.24; and Suet. *Nero* 26, for Nero.

90 See Auerbach 2013², 31–33, for a classic statement of the problem; see Neri 1998, 35–36, for yet more problems.

and function.⁹¹ The best that one can do is to offer a definition that embraces a gratuitous gifting or distribution of resources to those who are perceived to be 'needy' as a species of moral comfort. One of the consequent problems is perhaps best exemplified by the imperial *alimenta* programmes in Italy. These schemes were not devised to sustain persons who were impoverished, but rather those who might well have needed help to support the social position that they were optimally supposed to hold.⁹² The criterion necessary to be a recipient was not poverty but birth status: they had to be free-born citizens of municipalities at the centre of the empire.⁹³ Even when public support came from the state, it was a gift or *beneficium* of the emperor, and was construed within the reciprocal code of giving in which the giver expected an honorific return.⁹⁴ The recipients were special Roman citizens who were thought to be deserving because the state needed to have a stable, healthy, well-founded body of freeborn citizens in Italy, the homeland of the empire.⁹⁵ So the emperor, in this case Trajan, was willing to support programs that would help feed, clothe, and pay for other costs of their upbringing. The programs did not include all Roman citizen children since freedpersons who were citizens were deemed unworthy and were normally excluded. The emperor reaped a return of honour, seen as the paternal father-figure head of 'his people.' The recipients were construed as having become his sons and daughters: *pueri Ulpiani, Antoniniani, puellae Faustinae*, and so on.⁹⁶ Apart from two large bureaucratic inscriptions recording the technical aspects of the Trajanic program, the other epigraphical attestations of the schemes are what we might expect in this customary system: public expressions of gratitude from the grateful recipients to their benefactor.

91 So, despite its excellent contents, the problems are already embedded in the title of Hands 1968, where several aspects of these material transfers from 'have's' to 'have-nots' are almost indiscriminately mixed.

92 Woolf 1990, 206–210, demonstrated the high probability that these schemes were not concerned with poverty as such.

93 As confirmed in the private alimentary schemes founded by Pliny at Comum (*Ep.* 7.18.2) and a woman benefactor at Hispalis (modern Seville) in Iberia: both specify the recipients were to be freeborn, specifically *ingenui* – not just any citizens of the towns concerned, as freedman could be; Pliny, *Pan.* 28, says the same of a Trajanic program. Such a measure prevented owners from cynically manumitting their slaves so as to take advantage of such governmental schemes.

94 Woolf 1990, 216–220.

95 The imperial state feeding programs were all restricted to Italy and emphasised the idea of Italia Restituta (*RIC* 2.470: Trajan).

96 *CIL* 11.4351: Ulpiani; SHA, *Diad.* 2.10: Antoniniani; SHA, *Pius*, 8.1–2; *Aur.* 26.6: Faustinae.

Somewhat like the recipients of gratuitous grain distributions at Rome, and later at Constantinople, the children of the *alimenta* were a privileged chosen number out of all of those who were similarly needy. Although they were recipients of substantial assistance, and were glad of it, they were nonetheless persons of an elevated status – a display group for political purposes. Just so, as one worked one's way up the social ladder in terms of higher rank and status, the same principle of relief from so-called 'poverty' is found: this was just a peculiar fashioning of deserving need. In the same way, emperors from Augustus onward supported 'impoverished' senators in order to keep them functioning in a manner that was expected of a senator.⁹⁷ The problem is that no one would have considered these gratuitous gifts to support the perceived social need as 'charity': not the recipients, not the benefactor, and not the witnesses to the distributions. The only possible sign of a meaningful change came with the advent of a Christian emperor who, perhaps buying into a new idea of Christian membership as the one that counted, ordered that *alimenta* should be provided to indigent children (again, those of Italy) so that their parents would not be tempted to kill them or to sell them into slavery.⁹⁸ The advent of Christian emperors, indeed, seems to have provoked the addition of a Christian valuation of 'the poor' as 'deserving citizens' to the traditional ideals of the public benefactor.⁹⁹

Another problem is that the 'a' (charitable giving) and the 'b' (social gifts like public benefactions) overlap in the manner of a Venn diagram. The 'poor' were indeed closely linked to the distributions and the gifts that were given to support them, but it is hardly the case that all or even most of the resources were given to them under this rubric. In sixth-century Ravenna, the bishop Ecclesius (522–532) began the construction of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and San Vitale at Ravenna. Both church buildings were sponsored by a wealthy money manager, the *argentarius* Julian. With the help of this same well-off money man, Ecclesius's successor, Ursicinus (533–536), began the building of the church of Sant'Apollinare in Classe at Ravenna. That is to say, the bishops were able to mobilise the resources of Julian to bankroll the building of three of the largest churches in Italy of the time.¹⁰⁰ But it was the bishops who managed the projects, and it was they who took the credit for them in the name of the supreme deity. In an important

97 Millar 1997, 297–299; see Tac. *Ann.* 2.37–38, for some specific instances.

98 *CTh* 11.27.1 (Constantine to Ablabius, 13 May 313: to the municipalities of Italy) and 11.27.2 (Constantine to Menander, 6 July 322: to provincials, specifically those of Italy); see Woolf 1990, 204–205.

99 See Salzman 2017, esp. 72–73.

100 Deliyannis 2010, 200, with sources.

way, traditional euergetism had been defanged. The sources of wealth had to be importuned, or were acquired by living gift or by last will and testament, and were then rechannelled by the bishop.¹⁰¹ With this innovation, the new charity was one in which clerics, like bishops and priests, not having their own money, solicited the donation of funds by *others* which they then distributed. This type of transfer of money, whether to the community, to citizens of the city or, as here, to the church, was ‘wealth that needed to be laundered.’¹⁰² The church was the laundering bank and its ideas were the detergent. In Christian ideology, even the grossest of material takeovers could be justified in the name of helping the poor. So in 484 CE when the Vandal king Huneric ordered that all of the churches, estates, and other properties of the Catholic churches in Africa were to be transferred into the possession of ‘Homoian’ bishops, he offered the following justification: ‘we do not doubt that all which is transferred to our holy pontiffs (i.e., bishops) will be most useful in supporting the poor.’¹⁰³ The legitimization had a long tradition. The biographer of the bishop Cyprian, writing from Africa well over two centuries earlier, speaks of a rich villa and gardens that belonged to the bishop: ‘he would certainly have sold them to benefit the poor.’¹⁰⁴ Giving to ‘the poor,’ in other words, had become the ultimate justification for transfers of wealth that were in fact going to persons and corporate bodies other than the poor themselves.¹⁰⁵ Despite the fact that a firm line has sometimes been drawn between euergetism and Christian giving, there was a murky middle ground between them.¹⁰⁶ It is possible to see the two types of generosity as implicated in a complex dance in which the mental and social parameters of the one influenced the dimensions of the other.¹⁰⁷

The concept of the deserving poor has necessarily varied over time. One of the formal definitions that has been conventionally applied is the circle who counted as ‘our people’ or ‘our community.’ The poor who were within this circle were sometimes thought of as needing, deserving, meriting,

101 See Finn 2006, 34–89, esp. 35–37, on the sourcing; the re-channeling is a major theme of chs. 2, 5–6 in Goody 1983.

102 Brown 2012, 318.

103 Victor Vitensis, *Historia Persecutionis Africanae provinciae*, 3.14; for context, see Whelan 2018, 44, who points out that both sides attacked each other’s ‘charity’ as a species of bribery.

104 Pontius, *Vita Cypriani*, 15.1: *hortos, inquam, quos inter initia fidei suae venditos et de Dei indulgentia restitutos pro certo iterum in usu pauperum vendidisset, nisi invidiam*

105 Brown 2001, 20: ‘Support for the clergy was the outcome, in Christian circles, of an unprecedented “democratisation” of religious expertise and religious leadership ...’

106 Arguing that the two were fundamentally different: Veyne 1976, 45–67; see Brown 2001, 74–78, and Brown 2012, 53–71 on the nature of the differences.

107 This is the essence of the argument advanced by Salzman 2017.

or having a just claim on gifts that 'we' might give them. Those outside, although similarly poor, did not come within the purview of our charity. They could be described as extremely poor, living like animals, but for this very reason that were often seen as living in a world of barbaric degradation, as persons whose humiliation and squalor was proof of their undeserving status. Rather than being pitied and helped, they were to be feared and detested.¹⁰⁸ We should remember that this was a focalisation of political and philosophical attention and not necessarily one that was concordant with the sum of all actual behaviour. Furthermore, the idea that do-gooding should be restricted to one's own community was prevalent even in the values of the differently organised communities of the east, otherwise Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, with its message that everyone, even those alien to one's community, were one's neighbours, would not make much sense as an objection. There was no natural expectation that a Samaritan, of all things, would show pity and charity to someone not in his or her own community.¹⁰⁹ The boundaries of community whether of a polis or of a people still counted in defining those who were naturally deserving of help.

4 What kind of changes?

Did Christianity change pre-Christian moral codes in this respect? Yes, it did – normatively, at least. Jesus is reported to have specifically reprimanded those who gave in a traditional mode for acquiring public honour (Mt 6:1–4):

You should not perform your acts of social justice (*dikaioσynē*) in front of men in order to be gazed on by them, for then you will have no pay (*misthos*) given from your Father in the heavens. So whenever you give alms, don't blast a trumpet before yourself like those pretenders do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they might be given honour (*doxathōsin*) by others ... When you give alms don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms giving will be done in secret, and your Father, seeing you in secret, will reward you.

As an ideal, this alternative giving was the opposite of euergetism or civic giving. It was to be hidden and private, not to be broadcast in public, and not to be done with any expectation of a reward except in heaven. It is important, however, to be more specific about the nature of the change. In

¹⁰⁸ In modern as well as ancient circumstances, as when Charles Booth and Henry George so described the very poor in London in such terms: see Himmelfarb 1991, 109–110.

¹⁰⁹ Lk 10:25–37, the parable proper is at 10:36–37; the same view of Samaritan-Jewish relations is well encapsulated by another parable, with a similar basic message: Jn 4: 4–26.

theory, Christian values now defined a more universal community. Even if you came from distant communities remote from those of others, you were now brought within the fold of those potentially deserving of giving. But there are several important cautions. The idea that persons well beyond one's own civic community, polis or municipality, were deserving persons had already been achieved in secular fact by the greater reach of the Roman imperial state. The nature of aid to the needy reflected the new system. Emperors sometimes felt moved to intervene with their own resources, effectively those of the Roman state, to bring aid to cities suffering severe damage from earthquakes or other natural disasters.¹¹⁰ The people who were brought under the purview of 'deserving' were now not just the members of one's small urban community or one's fellow citizens but the subjects of a universal empire.

The new universalism of subjectivity was something that both the imperial state and the Christian churches shared. Consequently, the new Christian establishment was able to exploit not only the resources of the wealthy few, as in the pre-Christian past, but also the massed collective resources of very large numbers of ordinary persons. Even if many of the givers were not well off, the sheer scale of their numbers guarantees that the collective receipts must have amounted to a considerable taking. On the other side of this same picture, the large numbers of people in daily need offered an expansive field to be exploited by Christians, especially the priests and bishops who were on the lookout for ways to cultivate popular power to underwrite their positions.¹¹¹ The much larger number and dispersed nature of the recipients, however, meant that the economy of reciprocity that had normally governed gift-giving had to be tweaked. What could one expect from the poor themselves, if they were the object of one's *caritas*? A gift given to the poor was, as bishops and preachers saw it, 'the ultimate, non-reciprocated gift.' The new outreach to the poor was frankly admitted to be 'against the grain of human nature.'¹¹² Even in the 'disinterested' charity of Christians, however, as is clear from the letters of the African bishop Cyprian, it was the givers who determined who were worthy recipients and what was to be given.

110 For a comprehensive account, see Deeg 2019, esp. his conclusions at 227–239. In line with my argument here, I do not see this as a general duty of the emperor to all subjects of the empire, but rather a response only to those of them who were perceived as deserving; see Jones 2014, who, to my mind, reflects this more fragmented 'petition-and-response' nature of the emperor's 'charity' based on perceived status of the community concerned.

111 See, especially, Brown 2001, 45–73; Giuffrida 2009, 200–202.

112 Brown 2012, 76.

That this Christian behaviour was regarded as unusual not just by themselves but by others is confirmed by the words of the emperor Julian spoken at Ancyra in Anatolia in the year 362. In an attempt to re-establish traditional cult in the region of Galatia, he asked why 'we' could not imitate the virtues of the Christians including their 'benevolence towards strangers.' He called for the inhabitants of Galatia to 'establish numerous hostels in each city so that a stranger might be able to enjoy our benevolence not only towards our own people but also to others who might need help.' His concern was that Christian generosity was having the effect of turning people away from traditional allegiances. 'I think that when the poor happen to be neglected and were overlooked by our priests, the impious Galileans observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence.' Julian urged imitation by the non-Christians in Galatia: 'We should share our money with all men, more generously with the good but also with the helpless and the poor so as to meet their needs.' In his view, 'no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans [sc. Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well.'¹¹³ Julian's words hint at an unusual Christian and Jewish universalism, at least as an ideal, but the moral injunction to treat all fellow human beings as you yourself would like to be treated had a long history.¹¹⁴ As much had been called for by others and much earlier, as for example by Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, who urged Christians to care even for their 'enemies' in the pandemic of 252 CE.¹¹⁵ And earlier, the physician Galen of Pergamum noted how Christians did gratuitous good works for non-Christians – albeit, as he saw it, devoid of philosophical grounds for doing so.¹¹⁶ The question involved was one of who the giver considered to be in the charmed circle of one's neighbours or fellow humans.

This observation raises a problem with Christian charity: the fact that in practice it was nowhere near as universal as its own ideology would suggest and not quite like Julian's idealistic picture of it. First of all, by and large only Christians were seen to be the really 'deserving poor' and even within their own communities there were the more and the less meritorious. If a decision had to be made about to whom Christian charity was to be dispersed, it was almost always those inside the Christian community, as Ambrose

¹¹³ Julian, *Ep.* 89a; 84a (Bidez-Cumont) = *Ep.* 22 (Wright); Grant 1977, 124–125.

¹¹⁴ Encoded for Christians in Mt 7:12 (cf. Lk 6:31), referring to the existing 'law' and the 'commands of the prophets'; e.g., Aug. *Conf.* 1.18.29 (CCL 27: 54–55); see O'Donnell 1992, 99. An echo in Latin is first found in SHA, *Alex. Sev.* 51.6–8: 'sive Iudaeis sive Christianis'; cf. *AE* 1959: 251 (Salona).

¹¹⁵ Pontius, *Vita Cypriani*, 9.

¹¹⁶ See Walzer 1949, 15, 65–74.

and Jerome emphasised, who were to be given preference.¹¹⁷ Despite Julian's glowing words, those who were not Christians were frequently cut out of the circle of beneficent giving.¹¹⁸ Almost by definition, Christian giving was to be to good persons in order to improve the moral order and not to 'the malicious, the intemperate or the lazy.' In Ambrose's terms, the giver had to decide between the Christian version of the 'deserving poor' and the one who was responsible for his or her own poverty and who was therefore not deserving.¹¹⁹ If the Old Testament God was the god of widows and orphans, then they were almost always, and in every society, regarded as the touchstone of the deserving. They were the Christian indigent listed on a 'register of poor persons that the church supported,' the *matricula pauperum quos sustentat ecclesia*, that the bishop Augustine reports of his parish at Hippo Regius.¹²⁰ But beyond these persons, it was often a matter of debate as to whom gratuitous support would be given. Even more to the point is the fact that the Mediterranean-wide expansion of Christian communities had created a series of local churches in different regions of the empire. In the struggle to define a common or mainstream Christianity, 'other Christians' who did not conform to the model were deemed to be either schismatics or, worse, heretics. As such, they were manifestly not deserving of charitable giving. Why feed the agents of Satan? The ideal of a great Christian unity was somewhat of a fiction. Even within the normal acceptable churches, the charity was to be distributed to the needy, including those who were in exile on the islands, in the mines or in prisons, provided the reason that they found themselves in such circumstances was for the sake of God's faith. That is, they had shown themselves to be Christians in good standing.¹²¹ Hovering above all of this was the problem of the ideal ultimate giver, the Christian god, whose picture in Augustine is hardly conducive of having Christians think of him as someone much different from the usual hyper-wealthy benefactor of the non-Christian Roman world.¹²²

117 See, e.g., Ambr. *Off.* 1.30.148 and Jer. *Ep.* 120.1; for more discussion of these conflicts and debates within Christian communities, see Finn 2006, 57–60.

118 Cypr. *De opere et eleemosynis*, 25–26 (CCL 3A: 71–72): not to be refused to other Christians. It should be noted that he places huge emphasis on how such sharing was common among the first generation of believers who were so fired by faith as to give away their earthly possessions and to hold all things in common – something that was manifestly not true of his own day.

119 Ambr. *Off.* 2.16.76–77 (CCL 15: 124).

120 Aug. *Ep.* 20.2* (CSEL 88: 95 = BA 46: 294): on the widowed mother of Antoninus, but not, notably, her son who was sent to a monastery; see Lepelley 2007, 4–5.

121 Grant 1977, 135 n. 53.

122 Aug. *Conf.* 1.4.4 (CCL 27: 3).

You [Lord God] are never poor and you are joyful in gaining profits. Although you are never greedy, you still extract interest payments. You receive more in payments than you demand and so are placed under obligation. But who owns anything that is not in fact already yours? You pay off debts although you owe nothing to anyone. You repay debts and yet suffer no loss.

There was a difference in the sense that the honour now acquired by the generous giver was not oriented laterally or to the present, but vertically to God and to the future. Of course, the *dēmos* of a Hellenistic city could give similarly to store up potential rewards in the future, but these rewards were of secular honour in a flesh-and-blood community.

The whole selling point for much of Christian charity was to orient current giving to stored rewards that were to be cashed in by the giver in the future. Present giving was an investment in heavenly treasure. Much taken by the insistence of the bishop Synesius of Cyrene (who was responsible for having converted him and his family) that wealth spent on the poor in this life would be rewarded a hundred times over in the next, the philosopher Evagrius gave the church three gold coins to be distributed as alms.¹²³ Synesius, in turn, presented him with a *grammation*, a handwritten receipt for the money. When Evagrius died several years later, he had his children bury the receipt with him. Three days after his burial, a vision of Evagrius came to Synesius in a dream. Evagrius instructed him to come to collect the receipt, for he had now received everything that was owed to him from his donation and he had therefore counter-signed the receipt. Synesius explained this strange vision to his friend's relatives, who, together with some other clergy and prominent citizens, joined him in opening the philosopher's tomb. They found his body clutching the hand-written certificate, not just signed, as described in the dream, but also exhibiting a brief epistolary statement: 'I, Evagrius the philosopher, to you, the most holy lord Synesius, the bishop, greetings. I took what was written on this little ticket of yours and I was paid. I have no outstanding claim on you for the gold that I gave you, or rather the gold that I gave through you to Christ our God and Saviour.' John Moschus' acquaintance from Cyrenaica assured him that the counter-signed receipt had survived to his own day and could be found in the treasury of the church at Cyrene. The story tells us enough about the mundane effects of the 'treasure in heaven' trope. The earthly rewards of giving for heaven ended up, like Evagrius' receipt, in the coffers of the church. If the new giving was still self-interested, it seems, at least from its proclamations, to be different in

123 The story is related by John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, 195 (PG 87.3: 3077–80), supposedly as told to him by a traveller, Leontios from Apamea, who had come to Alexandria from Cyrene.

kind. If there was not a complete rupture with traditional euergetism, there was a way in which the ideology of a universal faith reconfigured its aims and values. 'For the pagan benefactor, the publication of his generosity by means of an epigraphical text assured his fame in the present and perpetuated his memory in the recollection of future generations. The Christian benefactor assumed a duty before God to be charitable to other humans who were brothers. From them he would receive as much as he had given and more, but he would await this recompense not in this world, but in the next.'¹²⁴ There was still a community, but it was not the civic community of the benefactor's fellow citizens in a city in the immediate here and now. It was a universal community of all the citizens of heaven in an unbounded time. Nevertheless, it was still giving to receive, giving for a reward.

5 Slippages

Even so, there is still a lot of slippage in tackling pre-Christian and Christian charity. One of these slippery avoidances is the annoying fact of slavery. Whole books have been written on poverty and charity in the empire in which something on the order of one-tenth, or so, of the entire population of that world simply disappears from view.¹²⁵ Why? No doubt some slaves were privileged and well off, but by far most were surely not so fortunate.¹²⁶ If their situation was even modestly good, it could vanish in an instant at the whim of the master or at his or her death. Probably because they were not free to be poor, their condition is simply out of mind. In this respect, they are as invisible to us as the actually indigent were to the well-off of the time. But this obvious instance indicates a more general and less obvious problem. Given the unknown dimensions of the poor, any measurement of the actual efficacy of charitable giving is difficult, almost impossible, to achieve. This fact alone signals some cautions about the economic significance of the giving. We do have occasional measurements available from later periods. One of them, from early seventh-century church of Alexandria, indicates that the bishop dispersed something like 1% of the church's wealth on the

124 The conclusion following a detailed study of the literary and epigraphical texts: Duval and Pietri 1997, 395–396 (my translation).

125 For example, there are two sparing references in all of Rhee's 2012 study – which, alas, is rather typical in this regard; perhaps because slaves were so 'notably absent' from the cares of the Christian churches: Brown 2001, 61–63 and 79.

126 At least mentioned by Scheidel 2006, 58: 'Legally bereft of property, they [sc. slaves] were the ultimate poor.' He's right. They could be dispossessed of everything instantaneously at the behest of another, their owner(s).

support of a limited number of the poor of the city.¹²⁷ The best documented pre-modern comparanda to date, the monastic and church establishments of feudal and early modern England, spent something like 4–6 % of their assets on charitable giving. Although larger than the measly 2.5 % once thought to be the norm, the revised figures still leave about 95 % of the resources that were given in the hands of the Christian institutions themselves.¹²⁸ Even where larger amounts were given and were actually targeted at the genuinely needy, these were usually in urban contexts – not, again, among the great expanses of the rural poor. This does not mean that there was no giving to the poor, but much of it seems to have been done locally where villages and kinship units actually did more to alleviate poverty.¹²⁹ Christian charity was not that of the formal civic community, but of the neighbourhood, the little community of church and parish.¹³⁰ Without doubt the great monastic and church establishments of Syria and Egypt did give to the needy. The hard question is: how much? Since they were as purposefully obscure about their funds as any modern ‘charity’ and the sources where they do exist are difficult to decipher, any hard answer to the question is almost impossible. Given that monastic establishments on which we have reliable reports seem to have been ever hungry for material resources to keep their own establishments functioning, the logical conclusion is that most of the gifts they received must have been consumed for the upkeep of the monastic communities themselves. From the little that can be made of their economic structures, the conclusion seems fully justified.¹³¹ The core problem with charitable giving, as with the much-vaunted institution of euergetism, has been to mistake a practice of symbolic or ritual social significance for one of general economic importance. Charity and benevolent civic-minded giving were certainly the former, but never the latter.

Because of the numbers of persons involved, their dispersal and the extent of their distress, structural and contingent poverty in pre-modern societies had enormous dimensions, and the deficit, as such, could never be made up by private donations, even the most extensive and most generous. By

127 Sotinel 2006, 110.

128 Rushton 2001.

129 One of the basic findings of Dyer 2012.

130 As at Carthage, where the visits and distributions to the needy were performed ‘neighbourhood by neighbourhood’: Tert. *Apol.* 42.8 (CCL 1: 157–58); and *Ad Uxor.* 2.4.2 (CCL 1: 388).

131 See, e.g., Heiska 2003, 68–77; Schachner 2005–06, esp. vol. 1, ch. 6, providing detailed data that demonstrate the real economic power of these institutions, but with little evidence about how much of their production and income was actually distributed to ‘the poor.’

comparison, we know that the costs of war are immense, and yet, in the eighteenth century when the French state ran into fiscal distress, despite the huge donations made both by ordinary citizens and large corporate groups provoked by the dual incitements of a national crisis and a fervent patriotism, 'it was no more possible to wage war by patriotic donations in the 1780s than at any other time before or since.'¹³² The example might be extreme, but so is the problem of the poor. So what was the giving achieving? The wealthiest and therefore the most generous giving countries today are claimed to pony up something like 1% of their GDP in gratuitous giving. As a stand-alone number, however, this is a gross exaggeration since it includes the distribution of many funds and foundations that only have the self-interested support of their own programs in mind.¹³³ Of course, the differences here, again, are not always that great. The massive Christian giving of the super-wealthy Melania and her husband Pinianus in the early 400s was to subvert their own special interests: large monastic establishments. And they gave to their favourite religious factions, like the supporters of John Chrysostom in Constantinople, whom they regarded as 'their own.'¹³⁴ The giving did not go to the poor as such. Furthermore, private charity, even sacred charity, paled in comparison to the need.¹³⁵ In the early sixth century, the bishop of Ravenna, head of one of the wealthiest churches in Italy, was expected to spend 3,000 *solidi* a year on support of the poor, while half a century earlier the prefecture at Rome had to spend 15,000 *solidi* a year on the acquisition of pork for the *annona* alone – and pork was only a modest fraction of the value of the grain and olive oil distributions subvented year-in and year-out by the state. At this same earlier time, the church at Rome had a total income of about 25,000 *solidi*, of which it could have spent only a small part on poor relief at a time when an aristocrat would spend upwards of 90,000 *solidi* on the staging of his praetorian games alone. The judgment that 'between the two forms of giving, and the wealth mobilised to meet the demands of each, there was no contest' is well founded.

The extent to which the corporate resources of the church were used in charitable exercises is difficult to judge. Both Cyprian and Augustine refer to the use of the church's wealth to pay the ransom for fellow Christians who had been taken captive by 'barbarians' or by slavers, the ones not much to

¹³² Schama 1989, 61.

¹³³ Producing the depressing prospect well described by Giridharadas 2018, 154–200.

¹³⁴ See Brown 2012, 299–300.

¹³⁵ For what follows, see Brown 2012, 462–63, who cites the primary sources; using the parallel of T'ang Dynasty China, he rightly points out that only the state controlled the big supplies and storehouses that were capable of sustaining large numbers.

be distinguished from the other.¹³⁶ Cyprian specifically glossed his action as one of *caritas*, although it was a specifically Christian charity directed at Christian brothers and sisters. The charity was not insignificant. An initial collection made from clergy and parishioners netted a cool 100,000 sesterces, and Cyprian said that more could be provided if it was necessary.¹³⁷ Similarly, the parishioners in Augustine's church at Hippo Regius were moved to act on their own to raise charitable funds, *eleemosynae*, to redeem the freedom of no less than 120 persons who had been taken into captivity by slavers.¹³⁸ But the practice seems occasional, dictated by a combination of circumstances and the character of the parishioners who felt empathy with the kidnapped. Such moves were not without resistance from members of the church itself: Ambrose, although a powerful bishop at Milan, wrote that he had been much criticised for his willingness to use the resources of his church to pay for the freeing of captives.¹³⁹ In any event, in all of these cases, the charity had the same broad parameters as traditional charity and euergetism: it was directed to the members of one's own community. But as the Christian community considerably expanded in number and then even well beyond the frontiers of the empire in the fourth and fifth centuries, it became more difficult to enforce this social definition of the deserving. In the early sixth century, in 507, Caesarius, the bishop of Arles, exhausted his church's treasury and sacrificed its holy vessels to redeem prisoners, most of whom are specifically said to have been *infideles*, that is not-Christians.¹⁴⁰ A suitable adjustment was made in ideology to bring even these people within the fold of the new *caritas*, but, even so, Caesarius was roundly condemned for his action.

For most second-world economies today that would be close to the Roman empire in relative terms of wealth, the total value of disinterested giving amounts to a tiny fraction of 1% of even their enfeebled GDP's.¹⁴¹ As for the need, the financial support of any one program that might have a serious chance of alleviating real poverty, such as old age pensions, consumes between 4–8% of the GDP of post-industrial economies.¹⁴² Hence the

136 On what follows, see Osiek 1981, 365–386; and Klingshirm 1985.

137 Cyp. *Ep.* 62.3–4 (CCL 3C: 387–88).

138 Aug. *Ep.* *10.3–7 (CSEL 88: 44–50).

139 Ambr. *Off.* 2.15.70–71; 2.28.136 (CCL 15: 122, 146); other instances of hostility are retailed by Finn 2006, 63–64. Even in stringent modern and early modern exclusionary systems in defining 'the poor,' widows and orphans always formed wholly exempt categories.

140 Cyprianus, *Vita Caesarii Arelatensis*, 1.32 (MGH SRM 3); see Klingshirm 1985, 189–190: he faced the outrage of his own clergy.

141 See the CAF World Giving Index report for 2016.

142 See the OECD general report on pension spending by its governments.

frank recognition that substantial redistribution of resources by the state is what is required and not acts of individual charity, no matter how generous they might be.¹⁴³ A comparative instance is offered by the occasional distribution of funds that the Roman state gave to bishops and churches to support the very poor and indigent of the city of Rome and the annual amounts used to support the distributions of grain (and later, olive oil and pork) to support the lives of the ordinary not so well-off of the city. The latter amounts vastly outstripped the former.¹⁴⁴ Even in the cases from the second-world, the state is more involved in subventing the public good than the Roman government ever was. India spends approximately 3.2 % of its GDP on public education as opposed to basically nothing by the empire.¹⁴⁵ There is no probative evidence to show that charity in the Roman world amounted to anything remotely on this scale. Even if Christianity provoked a new, complex, and widespread dialogue about wealth, poverty and charity, it apparently had little effect on redistributing wealth, perhaps because it was felt that charity was the only viable reply to the persistent challenge of widespread poverty. Dialogues about charity and histories of beneficence and giving do tell us something interesting about the ideas and behaviour of social elites. But these insights should not be confused with a claim that they tell us anything useful about the powerless and the indigent other than to cast into high relief the symbolic ideas and actions of the well-off. As Peter Brown has rightly emphasised, all of the debates and moral injunctions about 'the poor' seem to have done little or nothing to change their immiseration over the centuries of late antiquity, or in the ones that followed.

By concentrating on poverty and charity, the arguments are misleading in another fashion that brings us back to euergetism. Charity was always embedded in a larger economy of giving that united rich, middling, and the not-so-well off. The new Christian ethic of giving was not just about giving alms for the destitute but also giving, especially by the wealthy, to support the slaves of God, his clergy, and for the construction of churches, his houses.¹⁴⁶ Great efforts of preaching were made either to condemn the rich or at least to discipline them to acceptable behaviour: to divert their 'mad spending' from gifts made to support the great festivities, entertainments,

143 As exemplary only: O. Jones, 'Inequality: We don't want billionaires' charity. We want them to pay their taxes,' *The Guardian*, Friday, 26 October 2018 (online).

144 Brown 2012, 74–75; see also Salzman 2017, 73: serious on-going support to keep people from falling into real poverty and deprivation is expensive and requires a state-like ability to divert tributary resources to this purpose.

145 Scheidel 2006, 55, for this and other comparisons.

146 Argued in detail by Brown 2001, 20–22; and Brown 2012, esp. 347–358 on the ideological shift found in Roman period North Africa; on both see Shaw 2002, 42–45.

and constructions (like public baths) to ones that supported the people of God, the parishioners who were the objects of the bishops' attentions. We must hope that some persons in need, at least, had their situations of distress alleviated somewhat by these new benefactions. To return to the beginning, however, we might ask: What was in it for the givers? Many in the new system might well have given not expecting any of the rewards of the old non-Christian ethics of giving, but they surely expected something. It has rightly been questioned if there ever was as 'manichaeism', a separation and conflict, between the two modes of giving as Christian preachers would have their audiences believe.¹⁴⁷ Like the City of Man and the City of God, the two cities had always been implicated in a rather delicate, sometimes testy dance. On the grander scale for which we have both the material evidence and the literary descriptions, there are differences but there are similarities. Despite all of the re-orientation pushed by Christian ideology, there were still big givers, however much their giving now had to be mediated by the bishops of the church, and there was still a 'civic' community or people, the *populus Dei*, who governed the giving of the gift.¹⁴⁸ But this charity, too, was not the euergetic culture of antiquity, even late antiquity, nor were its instincts and objects simply a re-orientation or re-tooling of the past.

Without doubt, intense discourses focused on certain categories of persons who were perceived both to be in need and deserving of assistance. These discourses did experience considerable change over time, especially with the impact, sequentially, of a universal empire and then a universal religion. But euergetic benefactions and 'pagan' or Christian charitable gifts, given their strong ideological purpose and symbolic nature, were so implicated in the existing networks of power and wealth that they could not do much more than sustain the existing social relations. Oscar Wilde observed that the worst slave-owners were the ones who were kind to their slaves precisely because they sustained an oblivion of the structures of repression for what they were.¹⁴⁹ Any assessment of the generous givers of antiquity, however moral and changeable their personal motives, must take into account the fact that their actions underwrote the very inequalities of wealth that they exploited in order to be generous. Euergetic benefactions did produce substantial physical and communitarian benefits for Mediterranean cities that helped make them more impressively built urban environments, underwrote festivals and entertainments, occasionally aided some communities in crisis, and assisted a few privileged communal groups in need. Being

147 See, especially, Brown 2013, 23–39, reflecting on the arguments in his 2012 study.

148 Emphasised by Caillet 2012, 11–24.

149 Wilde 2007, 232.

less specifically focused and more dispersed either to individuals or communities, charity could make very little difference to the mass of the urban and rural poor who were caught up in the hardened structures of a deeply-entrenched inequality. What was true of euergetism was just as true of the liberality of small charity. Both served to confirm the superior status of the giver and the dependence of the recipients. The parameters of both kinds of giving were always a strict function of the degrees and types of inequality.

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Urban Landscapes and Religious Shifts in Lucian's *Alexander*

Abstract

Lucian's *Alexander* or *The False Prophet*, while satirising the expansion of the historically attested Glycon cult and its purported founder, offers insights into narratives of religious conversion. This paper discusses the text from the perspective of urban religion and traces the elements that present the emergence of a new religion within a distinct *polis* setting. It further analyses Lucian's work as a narrative of religious expansion, exploring its ramifications in the context of the literary production of its time.

Keywords: Lucian, *Alexander*, prophet, urban religion, conversion, Glycon, snake, cult, Abonouteichos

1 Introduction

One of the most important texts that openly discuss the spread of an emerging religion is Lucian's *Alexander* or *The False Prophet*, a narrative in the form of a biography of a certain Alexander, which mainly satirises the aesthetics of religious practices and changes. This paper situates Lucian's text in its historical and literary context, and, after a brief overview of the current scholarship, offers a reading that traces the representation of urban landscape within the text and how Lucian uses the urban landscape to portray and reflect on shifting religious and philosophical views of his time. Lucian's *Alexander*, in presenting the (historically attested) geographical expansion of the Glycon cult, offers a unique view into the networks of inter-urban communication that make religious shifts happen.¹ It presents religious

1 The cult was established between 140–145 CE and was active until at least the fourth century. Lucian himself must have visited Abonouteichos around 165 CE. As Erik Gunderson (2007, 479 n. 1) notes, this was a time 'full of complex religious innovations and transformations of which this cult is but a single example'. For the Glycon cult, see Jones 1986, 138 and Bendlin 2011, 233 (who discusses the literary representation of oracles); Ogden

expansion, albeit with a humorous, ironic, and satiric tone, in a style that is reminiscent of an inverted military campaign, yet remains focused for its setting on one particular city as it becomes the centre of the cult. The text highlights one specific city, Abonouteichos, which becomes the centre of the cult through a particular figure, Alexander. I further seek to illuminate the importance of urbanity in the literary representation of religious change during the second century CE.

The choice of the name Alexander and the various threads that constitute the biography – such as the references to the snake of Pellaian origins, with the snake being an integral part of biographical narratives about Alexander the Great and his mother's cultic activities – are not merely coincidental. Alexander the Great's military prowess is translated onto a mocked charlatan's religious expansionism in Lucian's homonymous pseudo-prophet. As I argue below, this text provides an eloquent and sophisticated paradigm of the shifting nature of sacred spaces that operate within urban settings; as changes to the religious landscape moved across different towns and regions, Abonouteichos retains the most essential aspect of civic life, the temple, and theatre as the central parts of the city that are both foundations of the town while also becoming agents of religious conversion.

Urbanity is a *sine qua non* in Lucian's understanding of how religion spreads geographically and lasts over time. Religious conversion is mapped onto an urban area, the town from which the cult originated. The foundation of the new god's temple at the centre of the town constructs the town as a classical *polis*. The 'founder' of the new religion operates within urban parameters which he utilises and expands. Ultimately the newly minted religion is presented as a performance very much centred on one, and one only, protagonist, with the supporting actors collectively playing the secondary role. The city also becomes a protagonist. One founder, one temple, one altar radically reorient the city's religious direction as the city becomes the centre of the cult in a greater network of other towns and regions.

I will also briefly trace here the theatrical references that appear throughout the text to show how a cult is presented as a spectacle, one presented first at the urban level. Inspired by an Urban Religion approach, this paper builds upon such questions as how religious expansion is constructed initially from a person and their immediate social circles, then spreads to the level of the

2013, 325–341; Wendt 2016, 2–4. For the historicity of Lucian meeting Alexander and visiting Abonouteichos, see Flintermann 1997; for the figure of Alexander see Elm von der Osten 2006 and Sfameni Gasparro 2013; and for Alexander as a religious entrepreneur and how he 'spotted' an opportunity in the Pontic area using older and nearby cult practices, see Bremmer 2017.

city, before expanding into a wider network. The founding city, though, remains a central point of reference throughout the text. I also ask how not just the landscape but also the soundscape of the expanding cult create the emerging 'religion-scape', and to what extent materiality plays a role in the shifting religion-scape.

2 Emerging cult, the city of Abonouteichos and inter-urban network

Lucian's *Alexander* presents a close-up of Alexander's appropriation of the cult of Asclepius in Abonouteichos, a city on the south coast of the Black Sea. The text takes the form of an epistle addressed to an Epicurean named Celsus (who was the author of a work 'Against Magicians') but nevertheless adheres to the conventions of the genre of biographical writing.² While following a chronological order that presents the life of Alexander (priest/prophet figure) from his early childhood through adolescence and on into adulthood, the cult he establishes is also traced from its nascent form into a significant presence across a wide geographical area. In addition, it is mapped onto a complex mythical and historical network of people and cities that offer representations of sustained cultic performance. This text subtly measures the false prophet Alexander against Alexander the conqueror in a sustained comparison that starts at the very beginning of the work (Luc. *Alex.* 1). This inversion of one Alexander against the other is strategic in also mapping the process of religious expansion against that of a military expedition. Just as an expedition is marked by specific events (such as battles) at distinct places, so religious expansion is a moving force that first operates in specific spaces within a city before becoming part of a greater network of different places.

Alexander the Great's biographer, Arrian, a student of Epictetus, is explicitly mentioned (Luc. *Alex.* 2), albeit not for his biography of Alex-

2 See Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.68; 5.86. Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 4.28–42 seems to have used this work. For analysis, see Flint et al. 1999, 142–143. For issues of genre and narrative type relating to *Alexander*, see Branham 1984, 144 who writes about Lucian's 'recreation of inherited motifs, through the wry and subtle use of literary personae, settings, and narrative patterns and, in general, through a peculiarly Lucianic penchant for juxtaposing traditional but incongruous styles and familiar but incompatible perspectives.' For *Alexander* as a type of narrative that departs from biographical writing and becomes a ψόγος, with personal or even ideological motives, see Bompaire 1958. For *Alexander* as parody in understanding religious conversion, see Elm Von der Osten 2006; Billault 2010; and Rostad 2011.

ander but for his portrait of a villain named Tillorovos. Lucian states that his biography is intended for a 'much crueller brigand' than Tillorovos (Τιλλορόβου γοῦν τοῦ ληστοῦ κάκεινος βίον ἀναγράψαι ἡξίωσεν. ἡμεῖς δὲ πολὺ ὠμοτέρου ληστοῦ μνήμην ποιησόμεθα, *Alex.* 2). While Lucian situates his work within the tradition of historiographical writing, even alluding to Herodotean and Thucydidean historiography and underscoring his paideia with his choice of Ionic Greek, he simultaneously places himself in a competitive frame with Arrian.³ Both the authorial voice and the subject matter of his focus, the figure of Alexander, is continuously undermined and deconstructed.⁴ This inversion, with the two Alexanders starkly juxtaposed, places Lucian's work in an agonistic relationship with that of Arrian, which he reads and deconstructs. Lucian's Alexander mimics Arrian's Alexander in conquering but does so through a religion that is both fake and incredulous. However, the theatrical presentation of the religion propels it to the status of a cult for the naïve people of Abonouteichos and beyond. Indeed, by the end of the epistle/biography the city itself has changed its name to Ionopolis, again pointing to the paideia ideal but also emphasising the conversion of the entire town.⁵ Change and conversion lie at the heart of Lucian's literary interests but they also provide him with a historical angle through which he can produce a commentary on his own time. With his overtly satirical tone and his mocking of religious shifts as he comments on them, he also casts considerable suspicion on change itself.

Alexander the false prophet is presented as a conqueror whose brigandage stretched across the entire Roman empire.⁶ Lucian specifically mentions that *his* Alexander's brigandage took place not in the mountains or other rural settings but rather in cities (emphasis below mine):

μὴ ἐν ὕλαις καὶ ἐν ὄρεσιν, ἀλλ' ἐν πόλεσιν οὗτος ἐλήστευεν, οὐ Μυσίαν μόνην οὐδὲ τὴν Ἰδὴν κατατρέχων οὐδὲ ὀλίγα τῆς Ἀσίας μέρη τὰ ἐρημότερα λεηλατῶν, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαν ὡς εἰπεῖν τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ἐμπλήσας τῆς ληστείας τῆς αὐτοῦ. (*Alex.* 2).

3 For Lucian's dialects and his choices in this work, see Bentley 2009 who argues that Lucian used his choice of Greek dialect in the *Alexander* to include echoes of Herodotus, other neo-Ionic authors, Attic Greek, and contemporary Greek. At the same time, he appeals to scholarly circles and also alludes to Thucydides.

4 To this extent, the authorial voice in *Alexander* is not very different when compared to that in *Nigrinus*, a puzzling text which also presents the theme of religious conversion. For *Nigrinus*, Whitmarsh (2001, 274) has argued that 'For the reader, the pleasures of this text lie in testing the simultaneous embodiment and evanescence of the author's ego'.

5 As Gunderson 2007 argues, Lucian builds a counter-cult in honour of learning and culture as he satirises Alexander becoming the prophet of truth and paideia.

6 For a discussion of Alexander and his psychological profile as a typical malignant narcissist who was interested in attracting attention and using his charm for personal profit only, see Kent 2008.

He was plundering not in forests and mountains, but *in cities*, and didn't just ravage Mysia and Ida, nor only a few of the more deserted districts of Asia, but instead he filled the whole Roman Empire, I may say, with his brigandage.⁷

Lucian's characters are part of an urban ecology of different ways of acting. What is seen and experienced, and what is perceived as real, is part of an ongoing exchange between 'subject' and 'other' throughout Lucian's theatrical world. And this world cannot exist without its urban frame.⁸

The narrative initially follows the norms of the biographical tradition, with Alexander coming of age and also learning the tricks of his masters. Lucian's description of his central character points towards literary genres of the past. The story of his mature adulthood alludes to Homeric descriptions (he is 'truly godlike, radiant eyes that look inspired by the divine', *Alex.* 3). As a boy he was handsome and was the lover of a professional sorcerer (γόης in Greek), a term that points towards platonic references: this sorcerer, a man known as Cocconas, student of Apollonius of Tyana, knew how to perform magic (μαγείας), miraculous incantations, love charms, curses against enemies, and knew how to find hidden treasures and inheritances (which implies criminal activity). While twisting the platonic world of lovers and charmers, Lucian presents his Alexander as his teacher's best student, a sophist-like figure who learns diligently while his teacher fervently dedicates all his 'expertise' and knowledge to him. Alexander learns the performance of 'healing' from his teacher, who was purported to be a healer who knew how to 'mix good and bad drugs', marking another Homeric touch that alludes to Helen's presence, the φάρμακα λυγρά, and the female witches of Homer while also inverting heroic paradigms. As Alexander and Cocconas invent the new god, Glycon, a performance of healing rituals and the language of divine epiphany are employed to mark the new divinity and his dedicated practitioners.⁹

When Lucian describes Alexander, he pays particular attention to his *prosopon*, presenting it as if it were a mask composed of hair, eyes, and voice. His voice is described as φώνημα ἡδιστόν τε ἄμα καὶ λαμπρότατον (*Alex.* 3), both positive qualities. Alexander is an actor, and the voice was perhaps one of the most critical components of ancient theatrical performance. He is also placed in a time when rhetorical education was of central

7 All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

8 On this, see Andrade 2013, 274–284.

9 For the employment of the theme of divine epiphany, see Dickie 2004. A series of audience-related responses are the focus of Lucian's work: astonishment, followed by adoration, prayers, and sacrifices. Lucian portrays the response of the people of Abonouteichos to the emergence before their eyes of the god Asclepius (*Alex.* 5–14).

importance, so there is nothing surprising in this praise. But the theme of voice is a steering theme. A religious shift is based on communication and on what people are saying and how others receive them. If we apply speech act theory, then the message becomes a reality, as is the case with Alexander's persuasive rhetoric.

During his apprenticeship with Cocconas, a composer of choral songs from the area of Byzantium who was 'abominable' (κοινωνήσας Βυζαντίῳ τινὶ χορογράφῳ ... πολὺ καταρατοτέρῳ τὴν φύσιν, *Alex.* 6), the pair travelled around and made use of what was perceived as the conventional 'magicians' voice' (τῇ πατρίῳ τῶν μάγων φωνῇ, *Alex.* 6). The text gives us a glimpse into the acoustic repertoire of types of voices associated with particular professions. One would today expect those in certain positions, such as priestly figures, to have a specific tone and style of speaking. Alexander's bodily movements build from sound and tone expectations that magnify their authority.

With Alexander's development from an apprentice into the leader of a cult, the text moves in time and space, from one to many, from groups of people to the entire city, as the new cult becomes the leading religious presence in the city, and then spreads first to neighbouring regions and then, ultimately, to Rome. Certain individuals played a vital role in this spread from the beginning. Particularly notable is a Macedonian woman, wealthy enough to provide funding to the pair of pseudo-prophets, who made it possible for them to travel from Bithynia to Macedonia, and to Pella in particular. Again, in a twisting of Alexander the Great's journey, Lucian's Alexander travels from Asia into Macedonia, the cradle of both Macedonian kings and mystery snake cults. Here he buys what he deems to be the most beautiful of snakes, which will become Glycon. As we know from coins, this is a historically attested cult and Glycon was supposedly born under Antoninus Pius (reigned 138–161 CE), so the reference to Pella as a humble village is essential. A place that flourished during the time of Alexander the Great is now seen to be nothing more than a small, insignificant area. In a world in which change is the norm, the portrayal of the decayed city has a further resonance, representing the full circle of growth and decline: a village can become an illustrious city and, in time, fall back into insignificance. Lucian's map extends historically as well as geographically from Abonouteichos to the Pella of Alexander the Great's time. The cities are linked to one another, with the reference to Pella, a place that expanded and flourished but then shrank into insignificance, serving as a fitting parallel for Glycon's cult and the city from which it began. Alexander (in Lucian's narrative) developed mysteries for Glycon from which he banned Christians (his primary target) and

Epicureans.¹⁰ Lucian pays forceful attention to the formation of networks of people and their evolution into networks of cities and cults, while also highlighting conflicts among different groups (Christians, Epicureans, etc.). He painstakingly draws the difference between the followers of religious cults and followers of philosophical systems.¹¹

Alexander begins his career under the postulated patronage of Asclepius, presenting himself as the interpreter of Asclepius' prophecies as embodied in the 'semi-humanoid' snake Glycon.¹² Establishing this cult is a conscious decision modelled upon the oracles of Delphi, Delos, Claros, and Bracchidae (*Alex.* 8) which were both renowned and financially lucrative. The next question Alexander faces is where to establish the oracle. While Cocconas proposes Chalcedon as a place that is close to Asia, Galatia, Thrace, and Bithynia, Alexander counters in purely practical terms that they want a home-base filled with rich and stupid people, such as the Paphlagonians of Abonouteichos, playing on old jokes concerning the intelligence of Paphlagonians.

The first thing the pair aims to do in Abonouteichos is to erect a temple. This attempt is not unlike a colonising practice transferred to an urban setting, as when settlers try to mark out their boundaries by setting the foundation of their temple. Shortly afterwards, Cocconas dies, fittingly, of a snake bite, an event that takes place after he and Alexander deposited special bronze tablets in the temple of Apollo at Chalcedon, supposedly received from Asclepius himself. This death is redolent of notions of sympathetic magic, with the purported healer/founder of a snake-god religion dying from the bite of a viper. The text refers to bronze tablets from 'the Bronze city' (Chalcedon, ἐν τῷ Ἀπόλλωνος ἱερῷ, ὅπερ ἀρχαιότατόν ἐστι τοῖς Χαλκηδονίοις, κατορύττουσι δέλτους χαλκᾶς, *Alex.* 10), emphasising further the sympathetic element responsible for Cocconas' death.

The references to different oracles create a network of cities and prophets which is then made even clearer by an explicit reference to the Sibyl (*Alex.* 11).

Εὐρητο δὲ χρησμὸς ἤδη, ὡς Σιβύλλης προμαντευσαμένης· Εὐξείνου Πόντοιο παρ' ἡσίον ἄγχι Σινώπης ἔσται τις κατὰ Τύρσιν ὑπ' Αὐσονίοισι προφήτης ...

An oracle by now had turned up who purported to be a previous prediction by the Sibyl: 'On the shores of the Euxine sea, in the neighbourhood of Sinope, there shall be born, by a Tower, in the days of the Romans, a prophet ...'

10 See Whitmarsh 2015, 173–185.

11 See Martin 2000 for a discussion of different cults and philosophical traditions that exist together, including the Glycon cult.

12 Ogden 2002, 72.

The fabrication of oracles on bronze tablets brings with it questions concerning orality and literacy. The oracles had to be written down and (presumably) uttered loudly if they were to pronounce the birth of a prophet and a cult. By referring to these bronze tablets, Lucian's text makes a critical contribution to our understanding of the onset and spread of this cult, showing us just how much materiality matters. The snake itself and its corresponding image is nothing but an accompaniment and testament that is necessary for the cult to move on. Words alone are not enough to achieve this end, nor is a performance that lacks specific tangible markers. It is the bronze prophetic tablets associated with the Sibyl, as well as the snake itself and, even more so, the images of the snake that circulated further abroad, that anchor the cult around known associations and references. Both prior to the cult's expansion and afterward, the sense of a material ground is important in making its presence more concrete. As mentioned above, the archaeological evidence attests to the circulation of statuettes of this creature, portraying him as a snake with human hair, and this material evidence is entirely in line with what Lucian describes.

If the central protagonist of Lucian's narrative is a false prophet, so the miracles that cause collective amazement are teratological fakes.¹³ For Lucian, it is not enough to describe occurrences that could, in response to the aesthetics of his time, create a contagious sense of amazement. Rather, he carefully and consciously places these events in an urban setting, delineating the development of the movement within the framework of the city. The new religion begins like an edifice or a town: it has to start at a place that has water at the heart of the foundation (νύκτωρ γὰρ ἐλθὼν ἐπὶ τοὺς θεμελίους τοῦ νεῶ τοὺς ἄρτι ὀρυττομένους – συνειστήκει δὲ ἐν αὐτοῖς ὕδωρ ἢ αὐτόθεν ποθὲν συλλεμβόμενον ἢ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ πεσόν, *Alex.* 13). Alexander, we read, devised a deceptive plot to create a pseudo-epiphany, opening up a goose egg and inserting the snake within before using wax to cover the crack. Having prepared his prop and situated it appropriately, he immediately moved from the temple to the market (ἔωθεν δὲ γυμνὸς εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν προπηδήσας, *Alex.* 13). Movement again bridges time and space, from night to early dawn, and from the foundations of the temple to the market.

The final touch is added when Alexander moves to speak from an altar in the manner of a rhetor, with almost the entire city present as his audience.

ἐδημηγόρει ἐπὶ βωμόν τινα ὑψηλὸν ἀναβὰς καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἐμακάριζεν αὐτίκα μάλα δεξιόθεν ἐναργῇ τὸν θεόν. οἱ παρόντες δέ – συνδεδραμήκει γὰρ σχεδὸν ἅπανα ἡ

13 On the aesthetics of teratological fakes, see Ní Mheallaigh 2014.

πόλις ἅμα γυναιξὶ καὶ γέρονσι καὶ παιδίοις – ἐτεθήπεσαν καὶ εὐχοντο καὶ προσεκύνουν.
(*Alex.* 13)

He was addressing the crowds, having mounted upon a high altar, and was praising the city which would receive the god appearing to them. Those present, for almost the entire town had come with women and old men and children, were stupefied and were praying and worshipping.

The teratological element here is reinforced by the way in which Alexander speaks to the crowd, inserting words that could not be understood by his audience, as if they were in a language that was foreign to them. His movement is carefully choreographed as he leaves the altar and follows the road back to the site of the temple to be (δρόμῳ ἐπὶ τὸν ἐσόμενον νεών, *Alex.* 14). Here he then performs his pseudo-miracle, breaking open the egg to reveal the snake within and proclaiming it to be Asclepius.

How did the founder of the cult behave in relation to the place he selected as the heart of his new religion? As Scott (2011, 116–17) mentions, once Alexander had assumed the role of healer/prophet in the city of Abonouteichos, he no longer travelled. This sets him apart from wandering figures such as Apollonius of Tyana. Travel, as Scott (2011) notes, is not an essential component for establishing a person's status as a divine man. In fact, for Lucian's Alexander, this status was demonstrated instead by the fact that others came to him. Alexander projected as important not only himself but also the town he chose as the birthplace of his cult.

Lucian's presentation of conversion is a full inversion of earlier paradigms. While a comprehensive network of cities is mentioned in the text in order to demonstrate the spread of the cult, the founder himself is not depicted as a travelling, preaching figure but rather remains at the heart of his city. Lucian thus deconstructs paradigms of conversion literature.¹⁴ The pattern that the text creates is built around Alexander as the focal point, the founder and the protagonist who serves, in Lucian's writing, as something like the sun in a heliocentric system, with everything else revolving around him. The references to Delphi, Claros, and Delos emphasise the pattern of a central oracle (and its priests and prophets) to which others flock. According to Lucian, people from as far away as Bithynia, Galatia, and Thrace (18), Ionia, Cilicia, Paphlagonia, and Italy (30) travel to Abonouteichos. When Alexander wants to increase his business, he sends others to mobilise the network, while he remains in the city. Depicting Alexander as something

14 Lucian's works are complex and can be read from multiple angles but the focus on conversion is a theme to which he returns. For the complexity in Lucian's *Nigrinus*, in which he also deconstructs the notion of conversion, see Grethlein 2016. Similar trends can be argued for in the case of Lucian's *Alexander*.

like a chorus leader who is the centre of attention, Lucian's narrative discusses various illustrious participants and agents of conversion. The many, however, the *hoi polloi* who made the whole operation possible, remain in the shadows. The religious entrepreneur and charlatan-in-chief is Alexander himself and Lucian's full focus remains on him and his chosen location. More importantly, in this idiosyncratic text the narrative emphasises the temple, theatre, and agora as the core of the town. This urban setting is reduced to those elements that epitomise the classical polis: not the many houses but the one temple and theatre, not the many shops but the one agora. The leading personality and the associated city, Alexander and Abonouteichos, take over and carry through the conversion narrative almost entirely alone. The person and place are the absolute centre around which all the other towns and people circulate. The city, and even more, the city's centre, marked by foundations of the new temple, is the place to which everyone comes and from which all cult matters are controlled. Only an urban setting, as Lucian emphatically repeats, can facilitate communication and conversion.¹⁵

Materiality once again plays an important role. As the cult expands, so too do the number and variety of icons and statuettes associated with the cult, some made from bronze, others from silver with the name of the god inscribed on them.¹⁶ People who talked about the new god did so by referring to how they saw and touched him. The faculties of sight and touch create a sense of reality, truth, and accuracy that lends gravity to the oral account. Without these material references, the oral accounts of the many people who fled from places such as Bithynia, Galatia, or Thrace would not be sufficiently convincing. The circulation of words is thus anchored around the flow of the iconic representations in different forms and different values (either bronze or silver) in ways that also make the divine a kind of currency that people can use.

Κατ' ὀλίγον οὖν καὶ ἡ Βιθυνία καὶ ἡ Γαλατία καὶ ἡ Θράκη συνέρρει, ἐκάστου τῶν ἀπαγγελλόντων κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς λέγοντος ὡς καὶ γεννώμενον ἴδιοι τὸν θεὸν καὶ ὕστερον ἄψαιτο μετ' ὀλίγον παμμεγέθους αὐτοῦ γεγεννημένου καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπῳ ἐοικότος. γραφαὶ τε ἐπὶ τούτῳ καὶ εἰκόνες καὶ ξόανα, τὰ μὲν ἐκ χαλκοῦ, τὰ δὲ ἐξ ἀργύρου εἰκασμένα, καὶ ὄνομά γε τῷ θεῷ ἐπιτεθέν· (*Alex.* 18)

Little by little, Bithynia, Galatia, and Thrace came pouring in, for everyone who carried the news very likely said that he not only had seen the god born but had subsequently touched him after he had grown to a very significant size in a short time and that he had

15 On the representation of the conversion ethos, and on Lucian more specifically, see Athanassiadi 2017, 25–28.

16 On issues of materiality and religious conversion, see Bremmer 2015.

a face that looked human. Next came paintings and statues and cult-images, some made of bronze, some of silver, and naturally a name was bestowed on the god.

3 Glycon cult, performance, and ritual networks in practice

Different groups of people, and their languages and soundscapes, are prominent in Lucian's *Alexander*. Lucian converts those who read or hear his work into spectators of a cult performance with a theatrical element.¹⁷ As Diskin Clay has convincingly argued, Alexander's operation is a 'solemn farce', a tragoidia, 'very much at home in ... the theatrical culture [of the second sophistic]. They are always on stage and histrionic; their success hung on their ability to convince their audience' (Clay 1992, 3418). Already when describing the grand opening of the oracle and the temple, Lucian presents Alexander's manipulation of the stage in theatrical terms and with attention to language as part of a performance.¹⁸ The references to theatre, but also deception, and dishonesty augment the sense of the duplicity and falsity of the religion as it spreads. But when approaching Lucian's text from the Urban Religion perspective, what matters is that the theatre is a marked point in urban space and a registered reference as the centre of a town, as the physical place that attracts a collective audience. Alexander is an acting agent and, as such, he mobilises the network of people and communities as he consciously spreads his cult. The theatrical space endows the text with a physicality of performance in which audience/performer encounters are possible, while the language of stagecraft and acting evokes a particular sense of materiality.

More than this, Lucian also creates a transactional exchange that imitates an urban setting. Money is a registered reference throughout Lucian's *Alexander*, from the pseudo-prophet's initial targeting of an affluent clientele onwards. Alexander is not interested so much in becoming rich as in expanding the range of services available to him.

λαμβάνων δὲ οὐκ αὐτὸς ἐχρήτο μόνος οὐδ' εἰς πλοῦτον ἀπεθησαύριζεν, ἀλλὰ πολλοὺς ἤδη περὶ αὐτὸν ἔχων συνεργοὺς καὶ ὑπηρέτας καὶ πευθῆνας καὶ χρησιμοποιοὺς καὶ χρησιμοφύλακας καὶ ὑπογραφέας καὶ ἐπισφραγιστὰς καὶ ἐξηγητάς, ἅπασιν ἔνεμεν ἐκάστω τὸ κατ' ἄξιον. (*Alex.* 23)

What he received he did not use for himself alone nor horde away to make himself rich, but since he had many men about him by this time as assistants, servants, collectors of

¹⁷ For readers as spectators, see Gunderson 2007, 506.

¹⁸ See Lefebvre 2016, 205–206, for the use of the term *tragoidia* and *katastrophe* in *Alex.* 60.

information, writers of oracles, custodians of oracles, clerks, sealers, and expounders, he divided with all, giving each one what was proportionate to his worth.

Lucian maps the religious spread onto the urban economy of different professions that Alexander creates around the newly founded cult. At the same time, he depicts Alexander as establishing mechanisms for addressing certain oracles only to the rich. He produces a tiered value-system that privileges the wealthy but without excluding others.

... Ἐκαλοῦντο δὲ οἱ χρησμοὶ οὗτοι αὐτόφωνοι, καὶ οὐ πᾶσιν ἐδίδοντο οὐδὲ ἀνέδην, ἀλλὰ τοῖς εὐπαράφοις καὶ πλουσίοις καὶ μεγαλοδώροις (*Alex.* 26)

These oracles were called autophones, and were not given to everybody promiscuously, but only to those who were noble, rich, and free-handed.

The theme of voice is inserted again carefully here. Voice and language are agents of conversion and tools of communication which enable transformation. The so-called autophonous oracle, from Glycon himself, brings the serpentine voice into the material nexus of wealthy oracle seekers and is an important factor contributing to the spread of the new cult and its reputation. Voice and rumours go hand in hand. The new cult moves quickly, extending across Ionia, Cilicia, Paphlagonia, and Galatia before moving westward to Rome (*Alex.* 30). Again, in Rome, it is the targeting of wealthy and high-ranking officials that facilitates the spread of the cult. A cult is a transaction, moving like money from one place to the next, from one hand to another. The Roman expansion was made possible by a certain Rutilianus, an official whom Alexander not only befriended but targeted for a deeper cultivation by arranging for him to marry into the prophet's family. Rutilianus became Alexander's son-in-law, marrying his daughter, who he claimed he had from Selene (the Moon). The cult takes on a cosmic dimension through this supposed link to the Moon as the imaginary mother-in-law of the rich and powerful Rutilianus.

Religious movements move with varying degrees of success from place to place. Despite his satirical tone, Lucian provides clues for understanding how religious diffusion takes place and, even more, for grasping the representations and perceptions of how this happens. Recent historical work has drawn on network theory for understanding processes of religious diffusion. 'Actors' are formed and a collective 'agency' is produced that causes movements to move further in space and time.¹⁹

19 For network theory in religious diffusion and its applications in antiquity, see Collar 2013, 5–26. For the use of the earliest cult practices and the degree of Alexander's innovation in Abonouteichos, see Chaniotis 2002, who reads it as a case study of a 'successful' religion that blended adoption of earlier practices with some innovation.

Many of the passages highlighted above support the idea that the processes of network formation depicted by Lucian are broadly in line with actual historical processes. Clusters of people are created, as local agents operate in order to increase their gains. Long-distance links become stronger. As we can see, processes of this sort are reflected in Lucian's text: agents such as the Pellaian woman or Rutilianus become leading 'actors' both in transgressing the boundaries of local clusters and also in confirming and enhancing them. Similarly, the wealth and status of these dominant 'actors' are essential factors in religious diffusion.

Viewed from the perspective of the cognitive sciences, rituals are transmitted more easily when there is already a known and materially constrained spectrum of mental register. In other words, doctrinal instruction in a completely unfamiliar set of rituals is less likely to work, whereas cross-references to already existing ritual elements are agents of religious diffusion.²⁰ Human cognition works on the basis of certain regularities that mobilise further processes of selection, processes which assimilate new elements that do not depart too far from existing aspects of ritual behaviour. When reading Lucian's text from this cognitive perspective, we see that Lucian highlights how Alexander's cult moves within already cognitively known parameters that facilitate diffusion among different local, and then more distant, agents.²¹ Lucian clearly has a deep understanding of how 'lived religion' operates. Religion, in the form it takes in the ancient polytheistic system and as Lucian demarcates it, is not belief but action. As Jörg Rüpke put it, 'In the case of polytheistic religions, action, not belief, is primary.'²² The Glycon cult is not born *ex nihilo* but instead builds on existing healing rituals that were popular and known, such as those of the Asclepius cult. It offers a relatively small amount of innovation and deploys common material registers found both diachronically, within similar sects, as well as synchronically, in the ritual action of other, sometimes competing, groups. To give one example, the bronze tablets which Alexander had deposited in Chalcedon, as discussed earlier, prophesied that Asclepius and Apollo would move to the Black Sea and would reside in Abonouteichos. Once these bronze tablets were discovered, the people of Abonouteichos started working on erecting a temple.

20 For a cognitive perspective on religious transmission and the way in which religious behaviour is shaped and motivated, see Whitehouse 2004, 16–24 and Boyer 2001 *passim*.

21 For some, Lucian is less satirical and more historical, as this is not just a satirical work but an attempt to represent historical realities of his time following the style he has championed in his *How to Write History*. For Lucian's *Alexander* as a historical representation, see Ulrich 2015, first published in 1997.

22 See Rüpke 2007, 87. For an extensive theoretical analysis of action as an integral aspect in defining religion in the ancient world, see Rüpke 2018, 30–47.

Alexander then took a goose's egg, and emptying it put a snake inside and sealed with white wax and lead and hid it at the foundations of the temple in a muddy place. The next morning Alexander took a bowl with which, as Ogden puts it, he was able to 'dredge up Asclepius/Glycon's egg' and when the snake came out, he amazed the bystanders who welcomed the new god while Alexander presented himself as a lecanomancy performer with the water in the temple foundations.²³ Synchronically, this type of performance also shows similarities to the ritual actions of other groups against which Alexander was competing, for example early Christian baptismal rituals or other rituals that involved the use of water for divination or purification. Cults that are familiar and already registered in the consciousness of groups and individuals provide a basis for authority but can also serve as models for the foundation of newly constructed religious systems.²⁴

The material register is also critical. The snake is an element associated with oracles and other well-known rituals, especially healing practices. Alexander employs diverse tactics which, from a cognitive perspective, re-route well-known practices and place them in a new setting that attracts new clusters of agents. The Glycon cult makes use of new images that build on existing registers. The cult can thus be seen as making use of minimally counter-intuitive concepts that tends to be more memorable and more easily transferrable than intuitive concepts or concepts that are just odd and deeply counterintuitive. While there is deviation here from existing practices, that deviation does not go so far as to render the new practice completely counter-intuitive, since completely counterintuitive concepts are less sustainable from a cognitive perspective. The text further marks the success of the cult by not only considering its expansion across different regions (including Italy) but also, more importantly, within the city of Abonouteichos itself, which was flooded by visitors coming to see the prophet:

Ἦδη δὲ πολλῶν ἐπὶ πολλοῖς ἐπεισερόντων καὶ τῆς πόλεως αὐτῶν θλιβομένης ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν ἐπὶ τὸ χρηστήριον ἀφικνουμένων καὶ τὰ ἐπιτήδεια διαρκῆ μὴ ἔχουσης, ἐπινοεῖ τοὺς νυκτερινοὺς καλουμένους χρησμούς. (*Alex.* 49)

Already since many were flowing into the city which was being pressed by the crowds of those coming to the oracle and did not have the necessary things all the time, he invents the so-called night oracles.

Alexander's invention here extends the boundaries of the city through the temporal dimension, with night-time activity supplementing the activity of the day.

²³ Ogden 2002, 72. See also Ogden 2013, 327.

²⁴ Gordon 2013, 159–160.

This cognitive perspective further explains the ease with which the cult could transfer across different linguistic groups. Language and voice are salient themes in Lucian's *Alexander*, with Lucian noting that interpreters were employed by the cult to overcome linguistic barriers and to give the emerging religion a more universal character.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ βαρβάροις πολλάκις ἔχρησεν, εἴ τις τῇ πατρίῳ ἔροιτο φωνῇ, Συριστὶ ἢ Κελτιστί, ῥαδίως ἐξευρίσκων τινὰς ἐπιδημοῦντας ὁμοεθνεῖς τοῖς δεδωκόσιν, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ πολὺς ὁ ἐν μέσῳ χρόνος ἦν τῆς τε δόσεως τῶν βιβλίων καὶ τῆς χρησιμωδίας, ὥς ἐν τοσοῦτῳ κατὰ σχολὴν λύοιντό τε οἱ χρησμοὶ ἀσφαλῶς καὶ εὐρίσκοιντο οἱ ἐρμηνεύσαι δυνάμενοι ἕκαστα. οἷος καὶ ὁ τῷ Σκύθῃ δοθεὶς χρησμός ἦν·

Μορφήν εὐβάργουλis εἰς σκιὰν χνεχικραγηλείψει φάος. *Alex.* 51

I may say too that he often gave oracles to non-Greek speakers when anyone put a question in their native language, in Syrian or in Celtic, since he readily found strangers in the city who belonged to the same nation. That is why the time between the presentation of the scrolls and the delivery of the oracle was long, so that in the interval the questions might be unsealed at leisure without risk and men might be found who would be able to translate them fully. Of this sort was the response given to the Scythian:

‘Morphen eubargoulis eis skian chnechikrageipsei phaos.’

Difference in language is, thus, no barrier to religious diffusion. On the contrary, by making use of the material aspect of the medium of scrolls and the extended time period needed to find interpreters, linguistic barriers could easily be crossed and turned into an advantage for the creation of further networks. As Whitehouse (2004, 29) notes, diverse groups of people appear to carry similar notions about supernatural agents, rituals, and myths, with these notions clustering around a cognitive reference, which then becomes a universal attractor. Also of note here is that the semantic difference is compressed into a single city rather than being identified as a feature of a broader inter-urban environment (ἐξευρίσκων τινὰς ἐπιδημοῦντας ὁμοεθνεῖς). This assumes a situation in which the city is the centre of attraction to which others come, just as Alexander himself is the one who stays there, mobilising his network beyond the urban boundaries.

Lucian's *Alexander* begins with the city of Abonouteichos as its focus and ends with its focus on the same place, which is now renamed Ionopolis, just as a new religious landscape is created. Lucian's references to the renamed city need a consistent material stamp and symbol to anchor them, and no better such symbol can be found than the minting of a new coin that marks the religious shift the city has undergone while also portraying the divinity and the founder of the cult with the inscription of the new name. A coin is a new currency, a measure of transaction, but also a tangible cultural locus

that can circulate in different hands. It promotes further networks at the same time as celebrating the founding city, the beginning and end of the space inscribed in Lucian's work.

Ἐκεῖνο δὲ πῶς οὐ μέγα ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις τὸ τόλμημα τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου, τὸ αἰτῆσαι παρὰ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος μετονομασθῆναι τὸ τοῦ Ἀβώνου τεῖχος καὶ Ἰωνόπολιν κληθῆναι, καὶ νόμισμα καινὸν κόψαι ἐγκεχαραγμένον τῇ μὲν τοῦ Γλύκωνος, κατὰ θάτερα δὲ Ἀλεξάνδρου, στέμματά τε τοῦ πάππου Ἀσκληπιοῦ καὶ τὴν ἄρπην ἐκείνην τοῦ πατρομήτορος Περσέως ἔχοντος; (*Alex.* 58)

Was it not also a great piece of impudence on the part of Alexander that he should petition the Emperor to change the name of Abonouteichos and call it Ionopolis, and to strike a new coin bearing on one side the likeness of Glycon and on the other that of Alexander, wearing the fillets of his grandfather Asclepius and holding the falchion of his maternal ancestor Perseus?

The coin depicts the divinity on one side and the founder on the other. Lucian brings together the synchronic elements of founder and divinity while engaging diachronically with the cult of Asclepius also alluding to myths about Perseus. Heroic, divine, and mortal elements are all presented in the symbolic material summation of a coin which can circulate widely. Religion and currencies are thus mapped onto each other. Coin depictions are often a marker of resettlement or religious shifts, as Lucian suggests here. Although the text does not dwell on the possible circulation of the coin or on matters of value, the coin clearly underscores both the religious shift and also the new polis this shift creates. The change of name is simply a testament to this.

4 Conclusion

One might further suggest that *Alexander* is also a twisted hagiography, inverting the kind of narratives about holy men or prophets that abounded from this period onwards. Space is similarly important in such narratives. As David Frankfurter writes, 'The allure of the new center, with its new, expansive divinity, mediated dramatically through a prophet and promising concrete benefits, would have drawn people regardless of their allegiance to the divinity's ideological demands.'²⁵ Religion in Lucian's work is a currency that can change. As such, it is created through a polis frame which it defines, from which it originates, and which it transforms. While Lucian's *Alexander* is not a historical text per se, and it would be a mistake to take it fully at face

²⁵ Frankfurter 2018, 75.

value, it does give us unique insights into perceptions and representations of a religious diffusion that begins from a *polis* setting and mobilises further networks in different places, crossing ethnic and linguistic barriers to do so. The urban frame is paramount as both a start- and an endpoint. Abonouteichos is a city chosen by a false prophet who can manipulate different people and make them work for his cult, yet Lucian's narrative still shows that deep ties run between emergent religions and specific cities as birthplaces of new divinities and their cults. As such, Lucian provides his reader with nuances that help us theorise about religious shifts. The physical elements of the urban environments, the theatre, and the temple, with special reference to its foundation, run as threads through the narrative. Lucian employs diachronic and synchronic connections at many different levels as he presents the diffusion of the cult of Glycon and traces its birth as an offshoot of the broader cult of Asclepius.²⁶ He gives nuanced suggestions about what makes the spectacle of the new religion a successful one over time and across space.

Contemporary theoretical approaches that discuss religious shifts or the diffusion of religions note the cognitive elements that enable and facilitate those phenomena. While the new religion takes over the centre of the city with its main temple, people from different parts of the town and from other towns are the ones who help to bring about the religious transformation. It is quite characteristic that the threat that appears to the emerging religion, when Lucian's encounter with Alexander is narrated at the end of this work, arises outside the city's boundaries, on the seashore (*Alex.* 55). Lucian presents these processes and shows how different groups of people can become agents as they encounter the material of new ritual practices that are not entirely alien but that are different enough, building on earlier and concurrent practices and combining familiarity with novelty. In the end, despite Lucian's satirical tone, the final reference to the newly minted coin of the city (also historically attested) highlights an approach that emphasises the importance of material currency created through the cult and subtly offers Lucian's views of religious transformations and the central role of leading figures. Materiality and symbolism are integrally related to the shifts that the individual can direct. Lucian gives us a more in-depth understanding of how such shifts are both possible and implementable.²⁷

26 See Flinterman 1997; Friese 2015; Mastrocinque 1999.

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Grasping Urbanity: Propertius' Book 4 and Urban Religion of the Augustan Period

Abstract

Propertius' last book of elegies (publ. c. 16 BCE) has been read as a staged conflict between antiquarianism and love elegy. This article argues that the book as a whole is above all a reflection on the spatial and temporal boundaries of the city and the internal impact of the permanent crossing and breaking down of these boundaries. Then and now, imperial expedition and internal treason, permanent and temporary absence, burying outside and loving inside, admission to and exclusion from sacralised and gendered space and finally the vertical dimension of life's above and death's below explore these limits and transfers and constitute the urbanity of the city as well as the urbanity of religion.

Keywords: urban religion, urban growth, religious literature, border crossing, urbanity

1 Religion in the age of urban growth

Religion in the Augustan semi-century has been described in different, but not widely different ways.¹ According to Georg Wissowa, Augustus focused on re-establishing religious order, giving priority to the reconstruction ('Wiederherstellung') of priesthoods and temples.² The explicit claims of Augustus' own *Res gestae* were Wissowa's crown witness, filled in with details

1 I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful critique and constructive remarks. Likewise I would like to thank Elisabeth Begemann for her correction of the English text. Research for this text has been done in the framework of the Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe 'Religion and Urbanity: Mutual Formations', funded by the German Science Foundation (FOR 2779). Cecilia Ames, Córdoba, has been helpful in shaping the argument in discussions during her fellowship at Erfurt; I am also grateful to the audience at the FIEC at London in July 2019. Richard Gordon has taken a last look at the text, I am again grateful to him for his many improvements of the text. Johannes Benjamin Vonderschmidt provided help in providing research literature, Maria Pätzold corrected it thoroughly.

2 Wissowa 1912, 73.

from Cassius Dio. Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price in their 1998 handbook set the Augustan decades in the wider context of ‘the preoccupation of the imperial age with *place*’, pointing to the particular interest of Augustan texts to the ‘physical and symbolic setting of *the city of Rome*.’³ They view Augustus himself through the historiography and poetry of his time, as a ruler dealing with the previous neglect of religion and a model for the future.⁴ He is a refounder and reorganiser of the city, its principal priest, binding members of the elite to him by allotting them positions in various priestly colleges, and establishing his own house on the Palatine as the most important (even if not unique) place for the cult of Vesta and of Apollo – an element of the shift of private and public already highlighted by Wissowa. Urban temple building is intensified and monopolised by the emperors for the ensuing period.⁵ Augustus’ widespread presence in ritual contexts established norms that held for at least two centuries to come.⁶ In his succinct article on the period, Karl Galinsky basically confirmed that image, broadening however the perspective of the visual presence by stressing the possibilities of participation by non-elite agents newly created. If ‘restoration’ is a keyword used by contemporaries, it is also a claim that must be understood as implying innovation as much as continuity.⁷ In my own account of the history of Roman religion I have tried to decentre Augustus, to point to his appropriation of objects as well as processes and the appropriation of his figure by others for their own agenda. Networking, built environment, and the establishment of a translocal space of communication by various media – texts, coins, inscriptions – are some of those activities that started before and continued after Augustus and were not restricted to Rome nor to Roman culture and actors.⁸

In all of these accounts the urban environments – and I would like to stress that we need to keep an eye on contemporary developments in, for example, Jerusalem and Alexandria as well,⁹ hence my plural – and in particular the city of Rome, are objects rather than subjects, places rather than factors in the development. Without doubt, it is the former that we see in our sources, but reflections on spatiality in general and urban religion in particular invite us to conceptualise our findings within the urbanity framework.¹⁰

³ Beard, North and Price 1998, 168.

⁴ Beard, North and Price 1998, 182.

⁵ See now Arnhold 2020.

⁶ Beard, North and Price 1998, 182–210. Palatine: 189–191. Cf. Wissowa 1912, 75. 77.

⁷ Galinsky 2007, 71.

⁸ Rüpke 2018, 183–210.

⁹ Recently stressed by Rubina Raja, Aarhus.

¹⁰ For ancient religion see Urciuoli and Rüpke 2018.

Even before the full impact of spatial theory in Classics, Catharine Edwards' *Writing Rome* framed this as a resonance. She claimed that 'Romans writing about Rome responded to the literary and historical associations of their city as much as to the city's material presence', combining perspectives of appropriation with the notion of construction.¹¹ In this article I propose to move a step further, employing the conceptual tools of religion and urbanity for a more nuanced analysis of Augustan religion as 'urban religion'.¹² This implies examining urban life and the imaginary of urban life, taken together as urbanity,¹³ as well as religion as used and shaped in such practices and imaginaries.

The rationale for combining religion and urbanity is that religion and urbanity are two extremely successful strategies of humans that have co-evolved – successfully, despite the fact of frequent empirical falsification of religious claims about the agency of non-human powers and the medical and epidemiological falsification of cities as places of security.¹⁴ Both terms need a brief explanation. The concept of urbanity goes beyond a phenomenological definition of city. A city can be seen 'as a condensed spatial configuration that is in constant transformation and at the same time a socially condensed configuration: without human actors who build, use and perceive this space, there is no city ... cities are to be understood even more precisely as the juxtaposition, overlapping, and densification of a multitude of spaces that interact through their spatial connectedness or overlapping and form interlaced spaces. These individual spaces can be real spaces within the city (houses in neighbourhoods), but also outside the city (cemeteries, villas), interacting with networks such as aristocratic alliances, dealer networks, or schools of philosophy; they can be imagined, unconnected, or hierarchized through power relations'.¹⁵

Even if we take the cultural constitution of spaces into account, this definition might still be misunderstood as defining density as a measurable and sufficient criterion for calling a place a city. Yet, what is decisive for the approach employed here is a focus on the cultural construction of such spaces not by an academic observer but by the historical actors. It is their practices and imaginations with regard to a specific type of space contrasted

11 Edwards 1996, xi.

12 See Rüpke 2020 for the usage of this concept as a tool in historical research.

13 For the concept see Rau 2013, for the history of the concept Noack 2012.

14 See Rau and Rüpke 2020 for the basic assumptions and arguments for the mutual interdependency; the 'urban graveyard theory' continues to be debated; evidence for ancient Rome has been brought together by Scheidel 2003.

15 Rau and Rüpke 2020, 656, drawing on Lévy 2008.

with non-urban (rural, wild, etc.) places, that transform a settlement of whatever size into an urban entity or 'city'. Drawing on the Latin concept of *urbanitas* and some forms of its transformation in later European history,¹⁶ the term 'urbanity' is proposed here to denote such cultural constitutions of space as urban. We do not need to adopt the arrogant undertone of much of the ancient contrast between *urbanitas* and *rusticitas* in order to work with this term.¹⁷ Urbane-ness need not be restricted to the cultural properties of educated elites and the 'commonweal' defined by them,¹⁸ and even 'urbane' is a concept too narrow to grasp the range of images and imaginations associated with being or longing to be in a city – or even of being afraid to be or get there. It is the whole range of such imaginations and practices that constitute urbanity in the sense employed here, or better: the different urbanities entertained by the permanent and the many temporary inhabitants, occasional visitors and observers and very importantly by the actual or future immigrants, whose 'urban aspirations' move them into cities.¹⁹

Religion, we have theorised, is as much part of urban ways of life as it is a resource in the appropriation, the learning *and* modification of urbanities found in the different social and spatial locations.²⁰ Why should that be the case? I use the term religion to denote forms of human action and experience that are set apart from other cultural forms by consisting of or building on communication with special agents (sometimes including objects) with properties different from the everyday human, agents such as dead ancestors or gods, sometimes following from human dead persons. But it is not the properties these addressees have, but the way in which they are addressed, that makes this communication different. The fact that they are accorded agency is not unquestionably plausible. This relates as much to the ascribed quality of the addressees as to the situation of this ascription and hence its relevance. Religious communication, thus, is a risky form of communication.²¹

Like any other cultural practice, such religious communication is a spatio-temporal practice, it is located in space and time and it engages with space and time. But even more, there is a specific spatial character of religious communication, a conceptual relationship not likewise valid for other cultural practices. 'Religion' as used here is *defined* as action transcending (in

¹⁶ Rau 2011.

¹⁷ E.g., Ramage 1973; Tzounakas 2006 on Tibullus; Rüpke 2020, 62–76 on Cicero.

¹⁸ Thus Purcell 2019, 22.

¹⁹ For the concept of 'urban aspirations' see van der Veer 2015.

²⁰ Rau and Rüpke 2020, 658–659.

²¹ Rüpke 2015b.

a very simple sense) the immediate and unquestionably given situation. If urbanisation is about densification and differentiation of space, about inclusion (or even trapping) and exclusion on a larger scale, religion is uniquely conducive and uniquely in conflict with urbanisation. From this perspective, religious places produce a specific form of co-spatiality.²² They are both places in a super-empirical sense, connected to a translocal network of divine power, and places topographically nesting in the urban fabric, 'trapping' additional meaning and affective qualities of religious communication within it. Thus, they also signal and focus specific urban identities.

Why is it promising to approach religious practices of the Augustan period from such an angle? The Rome of the first century BCE after the Social War must have been the largest construction site on earth of the period, probably unparalleled even by meso-American new cities or the Great Wall of the Han dynasty with regard to work per time unit. Upgrading, replacing, building on marginal and peripheral sites must have been an impressive and oppressive reality in many parts of the city and its former boundaries. For centuries, and in particular during the third and second centuries BCE, religious practices, temple building, and temple usage more permanently, large-scale rituals more ephemerally, had shaped the cityscape. This was, however, slowly coming to an end as far as the senatorial families were concerned. The few temples built during the first century were foci rather than the defining shape of the urbanistic projects of the period, crowning a theatre or giving focus to a new forum. The new genre of monumental altars were landmarks, but not visually dominating the cityscape. Against this general development, the temple of Divus Iulius on the forum was surely an exception. Projects below that level continued to be carried out, despite the opposition they faced. We may think of the Isis sanctuary on the Capitoline hill, for example, or Publius Clodius' temple of Libertas on the edge of Cicero's confiscated Palatine villa.²³ Augustus' Palatine Apollo was as much part of this group as an exception to it.

In this perspective, the chaotic city produced self-reflexive and ordering activities and institutions, calendar reforms and temple restorations, legal codes and new offices. Religious practices and institutionalisations were central to this.²⁴ Shortly before 43 BCE Varro dedicated a book of his quickly written *De lingua latina* to concepts and names of places,²⁵ Vitruvius wrote

22 On the concept, Lévy 2013.

23 See Varro, *ant. rer. div.* 46; Cic. *domo* 108–112.

24 See Rüpke 2012, for the long process of rationalisation, in particular 82–219 and the table 207. For architecture: MacDonald 2016, 200.

25 On Varro, see Spencer 2011 and Rüpke 2017.

probably most of his *De architectura* (dedicated to Augustus after 27 BCE) during the 30s²⁶ and reflected about the systematic placing of religion, both evidently reacting to the explosion of the metropolis.²⁷ Dealing with bustling urban space employed and changed religious practices and ideas. It is the agenda of current research to extend this perspective to further texts, to look into the urban and religious agenda of Horace,²⁸ Vergil,²⁹ Tibullus,³⁰ Propertius (as done here) and Ovid³¹ beyond questions of political identity, which have dominated and narrowed down the analysis of urban as well as of religious change in much of the research on the Augustan period.

Propertius and his last book of elegiac poetry, probably finished around 16 BCE, forms the direct object of the present inquiry. Rome is its very starting point (4.1) and an important theme throughout the book, as are religious practices. To study the one through the lens of the other promises to lead to new insights on Augustan religion as much as on Propertius' poetry. Therefore, the questions I tackle are: How did Propertius characterise life in the city, how did he grasp urbanity, the distinctive features and implications of being in a city, as lived in Rome? And secondly, what is the role ascribed to the gods and the religious practices in this construction of urbanity? I will start with a brief introduction to the text (2) before I offer a more detailed analysis of Propertius' take on the city, which follows scenes and motifs foregrounded by him, but systematised with a view to a recent definition of 'city' (3) that will turn out to be very much in tune with Propertius' perspectives by focusing on the dynamics of urban life: 'Cities are distinguished from other human settlements by two key features: they constitute dense and large clusters of people living and working together, and they are the focus of myriad internal and external flows. This is what makes cities uniquely active and vibrant places that are always more cosmopolitan than culturally uniform.'³² Against this background the conclusion will turn to the question of the role given to religious practices and above all the gods in these constructions (4).

26 Höcker 2002, 267.

27 Rüpke 2017.

28 See the contribution of Egelhaaf-Gaiser, this issue.

29 As presented by Cecilia Ames, Córdoba, in her presentation at the FIEC congress at London, 'Religion, Antiquarianism and Roman Urban Development: An approach from Book VIII of the *Aeneid*'.

30 See Knox 2005 for an early dating.

31 As presented by Catharine Edwards, Birkbeck, London, 'The Great Mother and the Mutilated Body'.

32 Robinson, Scott and Taylor 2016, 5.

2 Propertius' fourth book of elegies

Propertius' fourth book of elegies does not need any further introduction here.³³ His poetry is intentionally highly artificial and personal, inviting a poetological reading of the author's product as much as a view deep into the experiences, phantasies, and emotions of the narrator.³⁴ Without doubt, the density and intertextuality is meant for a highly educated audience and – with regard to the book compositions – readership.³⁵ This does, however, not remove the text's agenda and setting from the lived urban space of Rome in the Augustan period.³⁶ And this includes also, as just stated, an urban and a religious agenda. The first elegy opens with a sort of guided tour in Rome that makes the guided visitor aware of the many dimensions of the cityscape, above all contrasting a pre-urban or proto-urban³⁷ past with the present. It ends with a programmatic statement about religious contents of the speaker's future poetic production: 'I will sing of religion, time, and the names of places' (4.1.68).³⁸ The book is highly organised, as any reader is made aware of when the speaker opening the second elegy demands a different poetic programme from Propertius than the one embodied by the first elegy (4.1B). Book 4 must be read as an artificial composition rather than merely an arrangement of earlier published poems, a composition to a higher degree than every other *Gedichtbuch* of the period.³⁹ Thus, the whole book rather than individual poems form the corpus of my argument.

Recent research on the book has made clear that the ordering principles of the book cannot be conceptualised as an alternation of 'national and erotic' or 'aitiological and elegiac' poems.⁴⁰ My own approach is to read the book as an attempt to come to grips with the many faces of the actual

33 I will in the following quote Propertius according to my own constitution of the text, in which I tend to stick to the text of the archetype, not as a matter of principle, but as a methodological precaution, as any ideas of what Propertius might have written, can only be argued for on the basis of what is attributed to him in our earliest witnesses.

34 See the analyses in Scioli 2015 and the general remarks 24–54.

35 As the poet himself, this elite is as traditional as innovative in including new (often Greek) cultural skills and learning in their fields of competition (Itgenshorst 2013, 392–393).

36 Cf. Itgenshorst 2013, 384, drawing on Husserl's *Lebenswelt*, and Rüpke 2015a, starting from 'lived religion'.

37 For a critique of the concept see Smith 2005.

38 The conjecture *deos* for *dies*, suggested by Wellesley and followed by Heyworth 2007, 424, is problematic in the triad, where it would be just a synonym for *sacra*. It neither explains the Propertian reuse of *sacra* and *dies* as the framing words of 4.6 nor the Ovidian reception (on which Rüpke 2009).

39 Building on Hutchinson 1984.

40 Thus, however, still Günther 2006, 353.

city of Rome, not just as a multi-layered memory-scape,⁴¹ but also a multi-layered space in other respects. Some years ago, Elaine Fantham suggested a broader analysis of the urban elements in the fourth book, including the author's contemporary reality. 'The genre of elegy permits him both a realistic evocation of city scenes and activities',⁴² she states and argues that 'the whole book was designed to reflect the shape and the life of the city'.⁴³ This project was already hinted at in the *recusatio* of 3.9.49–51.⁴⁴ Fantham's careful reading mainly invokes very explicit topographical references in all the poems, basically covering the old centre of Rome.⁴⁵ In the end, however, this promising approach boils down to a focus on Propertius' confrontation between the old and the new, and the relation of the resulting image to the complex attitudes of other contemporary poets to the modern Rome. Propertius yearns for a pastoral world, full of trees and brooks, leading to the paradoxical claim that he privileges 'the lost ... natural innocence of the unpopulated [sic!] pre-urban community'. The loss the poet mourns is the pastoral world, not that of the actual late Republican Rome replaced by Augustan construction work.⁴⁶

Just a year before, Kenneth S. Rothwell had arrived at a somewhat bleaker conclusion. According to him Propertius' 'distaste for landscape outside the city is sometimes explicit: the woods and countryside are at best boring, at worst a place for grief, isolation or fear'.⁴⁷ The start of the city-tour in 4.1 is not just seen as a bucolic idyll. 'If there is a constant reality to this Rome it is not of pastoral peace but of *labor* and *negotium*. The shepherd is joined by the plough-man, the shepherd's pipe in other poets' text replaced by the 'horn (...) calling citizens to assembly', 'an orderly society, with religious and political institutions (the senate, 11–14), and a busy citizenry who anonymously perform their public duty'.⁴⁸ It is hard labour over many generations that has transformed the bare hills into the Rome of today. The result, however, is ambiguous, as moral decay resides in the new luxuries.⁴⁹ Likewise, progress is associated with sacrificial as well as military violence, and this is confirmed by the later poems on Tarpeia (4.4) and Hercules

41 See Smith 2015, 372–373, for a critical remark on the limits of the approach.

42 Fantham 1997, 122.

43 Fantham 1997, 124.

44 Fantham 1997, 126, the verses are read in an inverted sequence.

45 Fantham 1997, 129–132.

46 Fantham 1997, 134–135.

47 Rothwell 1996, 835 with reference to 1.1.9–14; 1.18; 2.19; 3.16; and the fourth book in general.

48 Rothwell 1996, 836.

49 Rothwell 1996, 836–837.

(4.9).⁵⁰ Nature offers neither a rustic idyll in the past nor a golden age in the present, but ‘generally conspires against human progress.’⁵¹ What seem to be *loci amoeni* in those poems are in fact places for treachery and violence.⁵²

Rothwell stresses that this negative image is not monolithic and is undercut by ‘ambiguity and Callimachean wit.’⁵³ Part of this instability in evaluating the topographical and urban space is the deep rupture brought about by labour as much as the course of time. As Carolyn Macdonald has pointed out, the contrast between past and present is not just one of moral evaluation but also one of discontinuity even within the physical landscape. The monuments remain silent. Accordingly, they are left in the background even in 4.9 and 10⁵⁴ – and one might also add 4.6, which is *not* explicitly about the Palatine temple of Apollo. I follow Macdonald in her assumption that the turn to names and etymology – following Varronian precedent – is a reaction to the ‘changed and changing topography ... in an age of accelerated urban transformation.’⁵⁵ And I also agree that this type of etymological approach results in multiple histories, digging up ‘multiple, even conflicting, memories of the city’s former lives ... vestiges of a plurality of peoples, who do not coalesce into a single narrative of Rome or the “Roman.”’⁵⁶ This is, as I would like to add, part of the ironically overstated programmatic phrase *Umbria Romani patria Callimachi* (4.1.64) in the introductory elegy, which combines three ethnically different references with the concept of *patria* and of the programmatic *cognomina locorum* rather than just *loca*. It is, however, not just terms, but speaking, creating a discourse about them, which offers illumination. The whole book provides a guide to understanding and living Rome, a *prontuario*, a guidebook to urbanity,⁵⁷ written by an insider. Certainly, it is only after the praise of Umbrian towns in 4.1.65–6⁵⁸ that Propertius turns towards Rome (4.1.67) and asks for her and her citizens’ favour. The wording suggests that he is thereby defining his technical relationship towards Rome, too. The first line of the quatrain finishes on *ciues* (4.1.67) and there can be no doubt that Propertius was a *ciuis Romanus*. If this relationship between

50 Rothwell 1996, 838–845.

51 Rothwell 1996, 848.

52 Rothwell 1996, 852.

53 Rothwell 1996, 854.

54 MacDonald 2016.

55 MacDonald 2016, 208.

56 MacDonald 2016, 209.

57 I am grateful to Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli for the term.

58 Given the fragmentary status of Roman walls by the time, I follow Camps 1965 *ad loc.* in reading a reference to Umbria, subject of the preceding sentence, rather than supposing an unmarked switch to Rome as upheld by Heyworth 2007, 423.

text and social reality holds, the end of the last line of the quatrain could help to solve an old problem of Propertius' biography: the *equus* – additionally stressed by *meus ... equus* – points to Propertius being a member of the *ordo equestris*. There is no other evidence, but Propertius' obvious wealth, the possibility of a political career (rejected, 4.1.134), and membership in the circle of Maecenas all point in the same direction.⁵⁹

3 Living the lived city

3.1 Topographical complexity

The first aspect of city life the reader or listener must be aware of, is size and complexity. This is made clear in the very first sentence:

Hoc quodcumque uides, hospes, qua maxima Roma est (4.1).

'All what you can see here, my dear guest, where the megacity Rome is ...'

In the intensive intertextuality of the fourth book, readers would be reminded of Aeneas being led around by Euander in Vergil's *Aeneid*, just published by the time of writing.⁶⁰ Formally addressed is an anonymous guest of the anonymous speaker. The addressee is from outside the city. And this is the first point of the book, reinforced by the following verses. It is a book about Rome that allows an outsider to see the inside. The gaze of the visitor is far-ranging, a raised position is presupposed. Possibly – but I will not go deeper into this problem – the place of observation is on the South-western edge of the Palatine. This location would command a close view of the temple of Apollo, the *casa Romuli*, the Tiber as well as the Curia to the Southeast and Northeast, the Capitoline temple of Iuppiter and the built-up area of the Tarpeian rock. The Lupercal would be at one's feet and even a look onto the complex of Vesta might have been possible, if a few steps further up are taken. The *aurea templa* would then primarily refer to the lavishly decorated and recently completely rebuilt Augustan temple for what is today called Apollo Sosianus.⁶¹ Sosianus' wooden cult image from Judaea had certainly joined or replaced a terracotta image, thus making the guide's remarks about 'fictile gods' (5) much more pointed. Likewise the theatre

⁵⁹ See Commager 1974, 38, and Cairns 2006, 1–35, in particular 31 with his comparison to other Augustan poets' equestrian status in their respective *municipia*. For Horace's equestrian status see Schmitzer 1994b, 40–49, and Schmitzer 1994a.

⁶⁰ I am grateful to the reviewer for pointing me to the parallel, see Verg. *Aen.* 8.183–301.

⁶¹ See La Rocca 1988; Haselberger 2008, 45–46.

would refer to the rebuilding of Caesar's directly adjacent theatre, the view aiming at its semi-circle.

The multi-layered character and the successive and overlapping histories and spaces of this small area stand *pars pro toto* at the beginning of a book that will continue into other parts of the city,⁶² each a complex space, full of movement. The *vicus Tuscus* of 4.2, the Tarpeian rock and the Capitoline hill of 4.4 are nearby, 4.3 leads to the Porta Capena (71), 4.5 to the Porta Collina. 4.6 refers (without a geographical adjective, however) to Apollo on the Palatine hill. 4.7 is situated in the Subura, north of the Forum (15), 4.8 on the Esquiline (1). 4.9 is situated at the Aventine and Forum Boarium. 4.10 starts from the Capitoline hill, 4.11 is spoken by a Roman woman and tombstone, somewhere in or around Rome. The reference to her ancestors points to the tombs on the via Appia.

Evidently, Rome is not only conceptualised in terms of temples, theatres, and quarters. Below the larger regions, neighbourhoods come into view (4.8.29, 58–60). Gates have already been mentioned, streets are now added. The via Appia is even directly addressed in 4.8.17. Even beyond the Tiber, 'urban waterways' are mentioned, even if these particular ones have disappeared in the meantime (4.9.6). Living in the city is about movement, as enjoyed by Vertumnus:

*Sed facias, diuum sator, ut Romana per aeuum (55)
transeat ante meos turba togata pedes.*

But father of the gods, may you ensure that the toga'd Roman throng
passes before my feet for all time.

Arethusa in 4.3 is trying to map the movements of her beloved Lycota (35–40), Cynthia is led to her tomb (4.7) or noisily moving through the city in 4.8. Cornelia moves into the netherworld (4.11). Streets are arteries and scenes of urban life,⁶³ as are enclosed spots like the *secreta herba* (4.8.35), the enclosed garden, contrasting with the open *Collinas herbas* of 4.5.11, the meadow at the Porta Collina.

Such complexity is occasionally contrasted with the unity of the city. Rome is directly addressed in the opening elegy (67) or imagined as a *dos*, a dowry, by Tarpeia in 4.4.56. *Murus* or *moenia* also designate such a unity (e.g., 4.4.13, 74). The city is something that can be contemplated in its totality, even Rome is a limited place, a city that can be compared with others, such as Assisi. The urban discourse of Propertius is self-reflexive. It is a discourse about Rome and an indication of his orientation towards Rome.

⁶² Cf. Fantham 1997, 131–132 for the following.

⁶³ See in general Holleran 2011; Poehler, Flohr and Cole 2011.

But above all, it is a discourse about and an indication of the cultural construction of that conglomerate of spaces as urban.

3.2 Diversity and density

The diversity construed in book 4 of the elegies by Propertius is not only an ethnic one, as has been briefly pointed out above. Roman and Umbrian, Latin and Etruscan territories and origins are just one dimension of identities. In addition, social diversity comes into play. The opposition between the shared hearth and the undecorated hut of the founders (4.1.6, 10) and (implicitly) present housing cannot overlook that present housing conditions include the possibility of being reduced to a ‘bent shack’ (4.5.70, *pergula curva*) at the lower end of the social ladder. The ‘secluded lawn’ fitted with ‘summer glasware’ (*uitrique aestiva supellex*, 4.8.37) points to a higher social group, but still below the senatorial order. On his flight, the ‘first shop on a dark pathway’ (*obscurae prima taberna uiae*, 4.8.62) offers refuge.

Most obviously, elegy 4.8 is a repertoire of contemporary city life.⁶⁴ The poem is opened by a scene of night-time noise:

Disce quid Esquilias hac nocte fugarit aquosas (1)
cum uicina novis turba cucurrit agris.

Learn what put the watery Esquiline to flight last night,
 when a local crowd ran in the new park.

Turba, ‘crowd’, is a term that we encounter frequently in Propertius, and in the fourth book in particular. This is not just a number of people, but a sort of disordered unity, variously interacting, even if in overall friendly confusion. Where it is not used as a description of the turmoil of natural forces like the sea, it is above all an urban phenomenon. The deserted Gabii, an example of a dead city right in the first elegy, now lacks such a *turba* (4.1.34). Vertumnus, as we have seen it, enjoys it in a central place of the city (4.12.5, 56). A drunken crowd celebrates the Parilia, unaware of Tarpeia’s treachery (4.4.78), a crowd of the like of Propertius will follow him in writing poetry once he has ended his career as a lawyer or even politician – the complexity of interaction on the Forum is just insane (4.1B.134–6). Across the generations, Cornelia’s family on her mother’s side, the Libones, add up to a crowd of heroes (4.11.31).

While these masses are never really dangerous (unless they pursue you), lack of order and inconsideration (if not ruthlessness) may result in bodily

⁶⁴ Cf. Williams 2018.

harm. In an always misunderstood passage, dead Cynthia bemoans the fact that a tile thrown down onto the street in the course of some building activity had hurt her head while she was being transported to her funeral:

*Nec crepuit fissa me propter harundine custos, (4.7.25)
laesit et obiectum tegula curta caput.*

Nor did a guard sound a split cane near me,
and a broken tile thrown towards me damaged the head (modified trsl.).

It is the very lack of a herald warning the people passing that caused the damage, as the people handling the tiles were not warned off.

3.3 Beyond the city

The amount of traffic across the borders of the city was what attracted me in the first place to analyse the fourth book as a piece on contemporary urban life in the first place. Sustainable urban settlements across history are characterised not only by the density of their internal flows, but likewise by the density of the external flows, their accessibility, their exchange of goods, ideas, and persons with their rural hinterlands as well as (and perhaps even in particular) with other cities. The term *hospes* in the very first line already suggests the author's sensitivity in this regard. This goes far beyond the movement of people into the city, which is suggested by the term *profugos ... Penates* in 4.1A.39, Propertius' own biography in 4.1A and B, or Vertumnus' narrative about his Etruscan origins in 4.2. Again, I restrict myself to some telling examples.

In Arethusa's movement of thought far beyond the city walls to her beloved, but campaigning consort, she makes use of media that represent the world inside the city and thus enable her to move outside in her thoughts (35–38):

*et disco qua parte fluat uincendus Araxes,
quot sine aqua Parthus milia currat equus;
cogor et e tabula pictos ediscere mundos,
qualis et haec docti dispositura dei.*

And I learn where flows the Araxes that must be conquered,
how many miles the Parthian horse [i.e., camel] can run without water,
and I am compelled to learn painted worlds by heart from a map
and what sort of arrangement by a learned god this is.

Disregarding the discussion about the position of these couplets within the original text, the perspective from the city and urban technological achievements is clear; it seems to be the astonishment about the latter which

is expressed in the last verse as given by the manuscript tradition but subjected to many conjectures since.

Crossing the urban boundaries is also Cynthia's excursion to Lavinium in 4.8. The first reason given is unmasked by the 'more likely' (*mage*) reason added, love, that is, a lover (4.8.16). Thus, the relevance of the intention to see an ancient and famous ritual, attracting visitors, is even higher. But even in this constellation no automatism is claimed, no obligation seemed to be hinted at. The ground for the visit is laid by an individual decision, using the provided infrastructure, the via Appia, and services in form of a *carpentum*, a car, part of the book's interest in highlighting movement.⁶⁵

I have already pointed to the funerals that necessarily cross the borderline of the city in 4.7. The same movement is implied in 4.5. However, here a further, long distance movement is spoken of by the procuress in 4.5 even on her way to her grave (4.5.21–26):

*si te Eoa lecta lapis iuuat aurea ripa
et quae sub Tyria concha superbit aqua,
Eurypylisue placet Coae textura Mineruae
sectaque ab Attalidis putria signa toris,
seu quae palmiferae mittunt uenalia Thebae
murraeque in Partis pocula cocta focis
sperne fidem ...*

If the golden gemstone picked on the Eastern shore delights you,
and the shell that lives proudly beneath the Tyrian wave,
or if the Eurypylean weave of Coan cloth pleases,
and crumbling figures cut from Attalus's golden bed-covers,
or the goods sent by palm-growing Thebes,
and fluorspar goblets fired in Parthian kilns,
despise fidelity ...

It is luxury imports from all over the world that are invoked here.⁶⁶ It is the urban capacity, and above all the power of the imperial capital, that allows to dispose of goods taken from afar.

4 Gods and urbanity

Religion is so prominent in the book of poems that Sextus Propertius published in 16 BCE or shortly afterwards that it seems to be strangely lacking

⁶⁵ Prop. 4.8.15, 17–18. See Macaulay-Lewis 2011, without references to Propertius. This is paralleled by the reference to the horses, *equis*, that we must read instead of the manuscripts' *aquis*, at the end of Cornelia's speech in 4.11.102.

⁶⁶ Syndikus 2010, 329.

in my analysis so far. Does Propertius already prefigure the late ancient as well as early modern topic of the godless city? Most certainly not. It is true that some of the elegies, in which gods and religious practices figure most prominently, are located and dated in a spatial and temporary context lacking the urban noise. This holds true for the Actium poem 4.6, celebrating the Augustan achievements of the battle of Actium, somehow looking at the temple of Apollo (4.6.11), but describing actions in an unspecific, neutral place of ritual and celebration, certainly an idyllic grove (4.6.71) as the final scenery. Likewise, the poems about Hercules of the Ara Maxima and Iuppiter Feretrius, 4.9 and 4.10, which present themselves as the most aetiological ones, have a clear spatial reference. Nevertheless, they are somehow removed from the here and now and any urban crowd.

And yet this very distance is of service for the poet's construction of urbanity. Poetic production itself is presented as a ritual activity, communication with the gods, starting from the Muses but including major gods like Apollo and Jupiter. This is a traditional practice, but used here not only to give historical and narrative depth to urban spaces. The poet, thus, creates a space for himself. Such space is contingent on divine agency, that is Apollo's, Hercules' or Jupiter's divine interventions in human affairs at Rome, but it could be appropriated by the speaker and profiled as a space that points beyond the present urban space, spatially as well as temporally. A space of dancing and singing (4.6.70–86), for composing books (4.9.72) and for aetiological reflection (4.10.1–4). These spaces are taken out of the ordinary urban space by intensive ritual action (4.6), time-traveling into a very different waterscape (*urbanas ... aquis*, 4.9.6) or ascending an exhaustingly steep hill in the very centre of the city (4.10.3–4). Some brief observations must suffice.

In contrast to the ideologically and spatially central Palatine temple of Apollo in the spatial centre of the fourth book, the last three poems deal with a surprising selection or presentation of spaces. *Amphitryoniades*, the opening word of elegy 4.9, which denotes Hercules, the descendant of Amphitryon as protagonist, is the longest word of the fourth book – indeed there is no longer word in the whole of Propertius.⁶⁷ Thus, length and content point towards aetiological poetry, and the reader will not be disappointed by this venture into the past. The train of thought is quite forward, although very much different from the Vergilian account in the Aeneid and the

67 The usually printed *Thermodontiacis* in 3.14.14 is not the transmitted form of the adjective. The only other 15-letter-word could be found in the same poem: *puluerulentaque* (3.14.7).

expectations raised by the epic sound of the opening word:⁶⁸ According to Propertius, Hercules' first visit to Rome – evoked by the *ara maxima* – is not primarily marked by his killing of Cacus, but by his destruction of a sacred grove exclusively used by women (4.9.61–2). If Propertius picks up Euander's 'tour' for his *hospes* by recounting the story of Hercules (Verg. *Aen.* 8.184–301), it is a very different, a peaceful place, a green and humid enclosed park, attractive also in terms of sounds (35), a *nemus* and *lucus*.⁶⁹ This tone is preserved despite the radical change of gender rules.

The following poem is in a way strange, too. It is the shortest of the whole book and perhaps the least appealing.⁷⁰ The opening line directly forms a connection to the preceding prayer to Hercules (1–2):⁷¹

*Nunc Iouis incipiam causas aperire Feretri
armaque de ducibus trina recepta tribus.*

Now I'll begin to reveal the origins of Feretrian Jupiter
and the triple trophies won from three chieftains (trsl. A. S. Kline).

Nunc refers to the position of the poem in the order of the book,⁷² *causas* immediately classifies the poem as aitiological. The translation does not reproduce the long hyperbaton that carries the surprise: Of Jupiter the speaker starts to elaborate – but of the hardly known Iuppiter Feretrius and his military accomplishments. The walk to the Capitoline sanctuary below the mighty temple of the Capitoline triad⁷³ is ridiculously exaggerated as a challenging mountain expedition (3–4):

*Magnum iter ascendo, sed dat mihi gloria uires:
non iuuat e facili lecta corona iugo.*

I climb a steep path, but the glory of it gives me strength:
I never delight in wreaths plucked on easy slopes (trsl. A. S. Kline).

Evidently, this distich continues the poetological discourse of the book. The metaphor is however ambivalent with regard to earlier claims and warnings. The steep way and the high hill do not equal a broad stream, but

68 Verg. *Aen.* 8.185–275. See Richardson 1977, 471 and Anderson 1964 for the expectations frustrated by the erotic turn.

69 4.9.24; the positions of these words at the beginning and end of the line illustrate the 'circle' (*orbe*) thus made.

70 For the subject matter, the *spolia opima* and possible contemporary allusions see Rampelberg 1978 and Rüpke 2019, 224–229.

71 Following Helm, the last but one distich should be put at the end of the poem, giving the voice and prayer to the narrator, not Hercules.

72 Becker 1971, 465–466.

73 On the Propertian treatment of architecture, Albrecht 2012.

neither *magnum* nor *non facili* could represent Callimachean (or Neoteric or elegiac) values. Compare the programmatic elegy 3.1 (17–20):

*Sed, quod pace legas, opus hoc de monte Sororum
detulit intacta pagina nostra uia.
mollia, Pegasides, date uestro sarta poetae:
non faciet capiti dura corona meo.*

But what you can read in peace, that work has been carried down from the sisters' mountain,
on a path that has not been trodden before by our page.
You from Pegasus' (source Hippokrene), grant your poet soft garlands;
a hard (i.e., military) crown would not suit my head.

Here, it is not Propertius, who has to *climb* the mountain, but the work is *brought down*; whereas for Ennius, the epic poet, in 4.1.61, a shaggy crown (laurel?) is adequate, this type of poetry demands a softer version. The brevity of the poem contradicts its aspirations, too, despite the historical line leading from Romulus via Cornelius Cossus and Claudius Marcellus to Augustus.⁷⁴ With regard to the spatiality mapped within the poem, however, the metaphor makes sense. The aitiological explanation is about imperial expansion, full of spatial indications of long distances (*ultima praeda*, 4.1.25) and distant geographical locations (the rivers Rhône and Rhine, 4.10.39, 41). Urban refinement as reflected in the poetological programme offers a clear contrast.

The final poem (4.11) continues the play of spatial presence and distance, spoken from and beyond a tomb, a *sepulcrum* (in final position and thus again surprising in the first line of the poem, 4.11.1), again with the voice of a dead woman, Cornelia, who brings together many of the motifs of the book. Her self-praise and apology contextualises ethical standards within the social and religious topography of her city and reflects these in terms of her own space outside the city and yet not confined to that funerary place (4.11.100–102). But these final decisions about her tomb are not left to her.⁷⁵

As by Cornelia, gods are invoked for support in Propertius' endeavour. But for the most part, it is not the authorial voice that speaks in the elegies, but some divine figures: An already fully inspired poet at the beginning, a god in 4.2, dead people, *di manes* technically, in others, the last one included. The divine point of view seems to be important for Propertius' poetic study in what I have defined as urbanity in the beginning.

⁷⁴ See Cristofoli 2016.

⁷⁵ On the potentially subversive tone of this ending, see Johnson 1997.

In sum, religion offers a privileged position of observation in the Propertian text – yet always from a distance, from on high or from below, or from beyond the city, onto and into the city. The divine perspective and religious architecture as well as religious institutions allow for both temporal and spatial focalisation. Temporally it allows for diachronic comparison, then and now, before and after (death). Spatially, the gods on high and the abodes of the dead are no-places that introduce complexity without implying impartiality. Through close observation, through poetic comment on the meta-observation of these transitory places and their human instantiations in the forms of temples or tombs, a focus is produced. It lies on urban morals and urban ways of life, on how to live in a city full of life and constant change.

Urbanity, as construed and performed by Propertius and his narrators, is about sudden and long-term change, situational and biographical instability – even if it is permanence and changelessness that the speakers repeatedly long for. The ‘city’ projected here has boundaries, which are, however, constantly crossed and questioned. Roman-ness is just an elusive perspective, a part of urbane-ness, but it does not define urbanity, the cultural construction of space as urban, in its entirety. It is just a perspective that Propertius needs to engage with, without succumbing to it.

With regard to religion in Augustan Rome, the analysis of Propertius’ fourth book of elegies adds important facets. Religious symbols, whether gods or temples, were employed by other agents, too, and in no less intensive ways. They served as focalisers, as a means of bringing people together or making a point; they test loyalties and identities or explore differences and overlaps. Both traditionalist claims about continuity and constructivist innovations are needed here and repeatedly brought into play. Gods were given more space and accorded more distance. My reconstruction of Propertius’ construction of urbanity suggests that this variable deployment of religious practices, ideas, and institutions is neither fortuitous nor simply normal, something that could be seen in all places and periods. The experience of urban growth and social complexity without a quantitative expansion of traditional religious institutions – just more gods and temples for more people and more space – seems to have required such conceptualisations of contingency and a thrust towards generalisation. These processes were not just reflexive of urban change but started to be driving forces by the second half of the first century BCE, when monumental architectural complexes, marble calendars and mass rituals changed urban space. And when divine speakers took over in a book of poetry.

Appendix on 4.11.102

The last word is transmitted by N, F, L, P¹ as *aquis*, by (lost) A, the model of Petrararch's codex, probably as *equis* (given by D, V, Vo and P2). *Aquis* does not make much sense; it is not one's bones that are driven on the waters of the netherworld, also 'honourable waters' does not fit with the known topography of this region.⁷⁶ *Equis*, however, is most appropriate. *Equo publico honoratus* (or similar) is a standard expression of epitaphs to denote transfer to the *ordo* of the *equites*.⁷⁷ For women, the concession to use a *carpentum* within the city would explain the connection of *equus* and *honoratus* with an active meaning: horses that confer honour. As the right to a *carpentum* was restricted to the female members of the *domus Augusta* and close relatives,⁷⁸ this would have been a real honour for Cornelia and thus worth mentioning in the last line of an epitaph as kind of substitute of a male *cursum honorum*. Alternatively, it might indicate transport of the corpse.⁷⁹ This interpretation is at least a culturally⁸⁰ and paleographically plausible solution to a long-standing problem.

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⁷⁶ Contrary to, e.g., Camps 1965, 167; Richardson 1977, 489, or Helm in his edition. Therefore, some editors choose the *aquis*, a conjecture by Heinsius (accepted, e.g., by Fedeli 1984) without any weighty argument.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., CIL 6.1838: *D(is) M(anibus) / A. Atinio A. f. Pal(atina) / Paterno / scrib(ae) aedil(icio) cur(atori) / hon(ore) usus, ab Imp(eratore) / equo publ(ico) honor(atus) . . . Ornato or exornato* in CIL 6.1617 and 1614. Often just *eq(uo) publ(ico)* is used, e.g., CIL 6.1622.

⁷⁸ See Jucker 1980.

⁷⁹ See Schrupf 2006, 55 n. 140 (I am grateful to Richard Gordon for the reference).

⁸⁰ No extensive description or figural representation of the funeral of a noble female exists. Thus, it is only an assumption that the corpse of a female who had the right to the *carpentum* would have been drawn by it during the funerary rites. Yet, as the *funus* is one of the most important occasions to present all one's status symbols (*imagines, toga praetexta, insignia triumphalia*), it is highly plausible to extend this to analogous female rights.

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Helpful Gods, Preaching Stoics, and Gossip from the Crossroads: Urban Religion in Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles*

Abstract

Scholars generally hold that urban religion plays only a subordinate role in Horace's *Satires* and *Letters*. This article revises this verdict: it is precisely the many casual comments contained in both works which make clear how profoundly everyday religion is integrated into both works and into the topography of the city Rome as Horace portrays it. The small shrines (*compita*) on street corners in urban districts serve as ideal focal points for the conversation (*sermo*) typical of the genre and for personal religious engagement. As the paths of city dwellers of the most varied classes and ranks cross here, the *compita* can be characterised as ideal 'ports of transshipment' for urban gossip and are closely connected to the colourful street life surrounding the Saturnalia. This typically satiric mixture is analysed using *Satire* 2.3 as a prime example.

Keywords: street preacher, individual religion, religious market, *compitum*, Tiber island, Saturnalia

1 Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles* as 'poetry of the big city'¹

Rome plays a central role in Horace's *Satires* as well as in his *Epistles* as setting, motif and idea. The opposition of city and country serves as an ever-present point of reference, one which at the same time connects and separates these two genres of literary *sermo*.²

- 1 This article was translated by Christopher Callanan (Göttingen). My sincere thanks go to Nils Jäger (University of Osnabrück) for his collection of materials and intensive discussion of possible investigative approaches. Thanks also to Kostas Stamatopoulos (Braunschweig) for final proofs before publication.
- 2 This opposition is thematically developed in *Sat.* 1.1.8–11; 2.7.28–32 and of course in the famous *Sat.* 2.6. *Ep.* 1.7; 1.10; 1.14 and 2.2.65–86 also construct a corresponding polarity. Cf. the useful overview of pertinent texts from all the works of Horace (including his lyrics) found in Harrison 2007b.

Hence the first book of *Satires* in particular is localised in the city.³ Scholars have consistently found the explanation for this fact in the chosen genre and its ideal settings.⁴ For it is on city streets and in the marketplaces, at major crossings and central locations that the paths of the inhabitants inevitably and continuously cross, and this occurs across the lines of class and between different social levels. For Juvenal, therefore, it is programmatically motivated that in his first *Satire* he positions his satiric observer on a city street corner, the very place to fill a 'thick notebook' with the follies of mankind.⁵ The bustling metropolis Rome, with its masses of humanity,⁶ colourfully intermingled and densely packed, functions then as a kind of magnifying glass through which the satirically outraged speaker can observe, at very close range, every possible curious, indeed crazy mode of behaviour among his contemporaries. For a literary genre which views as its central task the critique (with or without naming names) of human foibles and vices (*notare vitia*, Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.6), the city then, and all the more The City, the imperial capital Rome, offers an ideal and seemingly inexhaustible source of nourishment.⁷

The focus in Horace's second book of *satires* changes, as the satiric first person narrator spends part of his time in the city and part on his Sabine country estate, to which localities he attributes a contrasting semantic content. In opposition to the restless daily life in the city, dictated by multiple

3 *Sat.* 1.5 constitutes the lone exception: there, the so-called *iter Brundisium* portrays the various stops along the way – country towns, suburban villas and guesthouses – as pearls on a satiric chain. These colourful vignettes of rural-provincial Italy already anticipate the second book of *Satires*, which is localised partly in the city, partly in the country.

4 Representative of this view are Braund 1989, 23; Bond 2001, 80–84; Welch 2001, esp. 179–181; Harrison 2007b, 235.

5 Juv. *Sat.* 1.1.63–68: *nonne libet medio ceras inplere capaces / quadriuiro, cum iam sexta ceruice feratur / hinc atque inde patens ac nuda paene cathedra / et multum referens de Maecenate supino / signator falsi, qui se lautum atque beatum / exiguis tabulis et gemma fecerit uda?* On the self-understanding of the satirist as 'poet of the big city' *par excellence* which is thereby proclaimed, see Braund 1989, 23–26; Tschäpe 2015, 203–215.

6 For a foundational discussion of the central connotations of the construct 'big city' in Roman literature see Tschäpe 2015, 81–179. On mobility and tempo, Tschäpe 2015, 101–105; on noise in the city Tschäpe 2015, 142–147; on how heavily and densely built-up the city was and on the feeling of being crowded in and constricted, Tschäpe 2015, 152–160.

7 One need only think of the windbag 'Mr. X' (*quidam*), who in the middle of the *via sacra* crosses paths with the first-person narrator of *Satire* 1.9, himself entirely lost in thought, and from then on stubbornly refuses to leave his side: it is not the satirist who is here seeking material; on the contrary it imposes itself upon him *against* his will and practically *forces* him to take up his pen and work it up into a *satire*. The statement of the satiric speaker in Juv. *Sat.* 1.1.30–33 points in a comparable direction: *difficile est saturam non scribere. nam quis iniquae / tam patiens urbis, tam ferreus, ut teneat se, / causidici noua cum ueniat lectica Mathonis / plena ipso ...*

distractions and social duties, the option of a simple, unpretentious and peaceful life in the countryside presents itself. The *Sabinum* becomes an ideal place of refuge, one which permits the satirist concentration on his poetry and above all an independent lifestyle. Even highly placed friends and patrons, such as Maecenas, to whom the young poet feels himself obliged⁸ with respect to his time and location – i. e., in the course of his daily passages through the city – are kept at a distance thanks to this independent personal space. On the other hand, the satirist, precisely as lover of the countryside, sees himself trapped in a classic dilemma: if his poetry has its origin primarily and foremost in the milieu of the big city, can he then write satires in the countryside for any extended period of time, or even at all?⁹ And even if he succeeds in this, where will his work find its readers, if not among the friends of Maecenas and in other highly cultured circles of elite city dwellers?¹⁰ As a consequence of this profound contradiction the satirist is himself caught in the literary space of his genre: it is ironic that Horace's comments upon the 'theatre of fools' in the big city attain universal validity precisely due to the fact that they inevitably wind up applying to the *persona* of their author. Even in passages apparently devoted to idealising an old Roman, morally 'pure' life in the countryside, the long shadow of Rome obtrudes at least momentarily.¹¹

8 See *Sat.* 2.6.20–58; 2.7.288–39; Welch 2001 discusses in detail the status-dependent semantics of Horace's portrayal of the city and the resulting distinction he makes between the prestigious venues of the upper class (e.g., the townhouse of Maecenas on the Esquiline Hill) and the 'lower' quotidian world of the working *plebs* (Forum, markets and shops) from which the satirist poet draws his material. Passages in other satires (e.g., *Sat.* 1.6.111–12; 1.9.1–4) draw an idealised self-portrait of the independent poet who is master of his own time and so strolls as he wishes along the streets and piazzas of Rome with no set goal in mind (as Tschäpe 2015, 239–244 correctly emphasises); yet even in these texts the satiric first person is not rid of social duties nor of the – at times long – paths which are necessary to fulfil them (*Sat.* 1.6.45–71; 1.9.16–19).

9 This is valid even for the self-referential statement in *Sat.* 2.6.70–71 according to which the ethically valuable *sermo* of the Satires can be the product only of a dinner party in the countryside. The *fabula* of the city mouse and the country mouse, which his neighbour Cervius goes on to serve up by way of an example, can produce its full effect only when the two environments are viewed in contrastive juxtaposition and in their complex interconnections; in the process, aspects of cultivated urbanity reflect in diverse ways upon the supposedly so rustic and unsophisticated ambience of the countryside.

10 On the circle of Maecenas as the ideal and exclusive target audience of the Satires see *Sat.* 1.10.72–91.

11 E.g., in *Sat.* 2.2 where the farmer philosopher Ofellus is praising humble country life: Ofellus proclaims his teaching to an urban Roman audience, since he has lost his own property to land confiscations (*Sat.* 2.2.107–136). The famous *Sat.* 2.6 (with its tale of the city mouse and the country mouse) is also for a time entirely preoccupied with a detailed portrayal of urban daily life (*Sat.* 2.6.20–59).

The polarity of city and countryside is also quite literally implicit in Horace's letters: as Harrison correctly notes,¹² the genre of Epistles presumes *per se* communication from afar. In contrast to the earlier work, the *Satires*, the majority of the letters presume that the older poet has voluntarily retreated to the philosophically tinged *angulus* of his Sabine country estate; hence they offer in most cases a (more or less) serene distant view of the urban bustle of Rome.¹³ This general impression of distance from Rome is, however, counterbalanced in a few letters, not only in ones written from the city to the countryside (as are *Ep.* 1.4 und 1.14), but occasionally in others tinged by an urban ambience and attitude (e. g., *Ep.* 1.5; 2.1 und 2.2). In Horace's Epistles in total, neither the spatial nor the thematic fixation upon the city is even approximately as strong as in the *Satires*. And yet they too depend upon being circulated and discussed in the capital – this fact is reflected in the contemplative closing letter 1.20 as well as in letters 2.1 and 2.2 – and thus shape a new variety of urban poetry:¹⁴ were it not for the flourishing book trade in the *Forum Romanum* and *vicus Tuscus*¹⁵ and Augustus' new library on the Palatine,¹⁶ the letters would find no readers no matter how great the personal fame of their author might be.

2 Where are the gods? Preliminary consideration of the current state of research

As central as big city Rome is for Horace's *Satires* and his book of Epistles, the gods, divine cult and religion – in this scholarship has heretofore been of one mind – appear to play little or at best a marginal role in the restless daily routine of the urban inhabitants.¹⁷ The transmission of moral values and modes of behaviour is, as a matter of fact, not the task of religion, but rather of (popular) philosophy. It seems then only logical that it is not priests in the service of the state who preach the word of the gods in urban places, markets and streets in the poetry of *sermones*. Instead street preachers and (pseudo-)

¹² Harrison 2007b, 241.

¹³ Ferri 1993, 59–66; Ferri 2007, 123–124 and 128.

¹⁴ This is confirmed by Tschäpe 2015, 231–238, too, in a vivid analysis of *Ep.* 2.2.

¹⁵ *Ep.* 1.20.1–10.

¹⁶ *Ep.* 2.1.214–270.

¹⁷ Griffin 2007, 186 is representative of this view: he notes on the *Satires* that 'gods are remarkable for their absence,' and similarly (187) on the *Epistles*: 'Again, the personal gods appear seldom and have no serious role. ... They are not, it seems, a natural resource to invoke, when the poet is talking seriously about morality, whether in the early *Satires* or in the late *Epistles*.'

philosophers compete with all the rhetorical means at their disposal for the largest possible audience, which they can then seek to convert to the salutary teachings of their respective schools.¹⁸ As a general rule, Horace shows himself strikingly reticent – particularly in direct comparison with other Augustan literary figures – when it comes to the actual names of well-known monuments in the city, be they sacred or profane.¹⁹ The etiological construction of a sacred landscape, so familiar to us from Propertius, Virgil, Ovid and Livy, is for this reason (almost) entirely absent.²⁰ Specifically identifiable statues of the gods and buildings devoted to their cult do not serve their primary purpose, i.e., as the objects or venue of religious worship;²¹ they stand instead in the centre of business and judicial life²² – this at least is suggested by the situational contexts found in the *Satires* and *Epistles*.

Furthermore, the Augustan state gods of the Roman Odes (Jupiter, Apollo), and likewise the personal guardian deities to whom the lyric poet turns (Mercury, Bacchus, the Muses, Faunus) do not appear in the *Sermones* and *Epistles*. Accordingly, Horace does not lay claim in his works in hexameter to being an inspired singer and poet (*vates*), his typical role in his lyrics.²³ It seems reasonable to deduce that the way of dealing with gods, divine cult and religion differs depending on the genre to which the respective works belong;²⁴ whereas lyrics, despite their brevity, figure relatively close to the top

18 We should think in this context of the farmer philosopher Ofellus (*Sat.* 2.2), the Stoic Damasippus and his teacher Stertinius (*Sat.* 2.3), and also of the anonymous culinary sophist of *Satire* 2.4. The multifaceted presentation of these *doctores inepti* as foil and mirror image of the satiric *persona* 'Horace' has been a frequent subject of research: see Harrison 2013, with references to earlier scholarship.

19 This was already noted by Dyson and Prior 1995, 255–256, in comparison with Martial, whose epigrams draw a significantly more concrete and three-dimensional picture of the city's topography and monuments. Tschäpe 2015, 7 points to a difference in concept between Martial and Horace: whereas the former by his frequent naming of localities suggests factuality, a greater degree of fictionalising can be detected in Horace: he is less concerned with calling to mind the concrete image of Augustan Rome than he is with the general impression of a typical big city.

20 *Sat.* 1.8 alone closes with an etiological point – refracted through the comic prism of satire – to explain why the back of the carved Priapus in the gardens of Maecenas is now cracked. In general, however, the goal of *Satires* and *Epistles* is not the construction of a mythical past, but rather a snapshot of a scene from present everyday life.

21 Dyson and Prior 1995, 257 conclude in general for Horace that 'religious activity also receives limited attention.' The two examples they then adduce are both from the *Odes*.

22 For the multiple functions of urban sanctuaries as public meeting points, libraries, market places, deposits et sim. see the helpful overview of Stambaugh 1978.

23 Hor. *Carm.* 1.31.1–2; 3.1.1–4; 4.6.41–44.

24 Griffin 2007, 189: 'The presence of the poetic gods was a great part of what distinguished Horace's more ambitious poems.' See his continued discussion of this point Griffin 2007, 189–214.

of the scale of the common genres, satires and letters are regularly characterised as a lower, pedestrian Muse (*Sat.* 2.6.17: *Musa pedestris*).

As plausible as might at first glance seem the conclusion that the form and content of *Satires* and *Epistles* have *per se* no connection with Roman gods and divine cults, it cannot be maintained, at least not so one-dimensionally. There would seem in my view to be in fact *two* systematic mistakes in such an exegetical approach. The first one involves the tacit assumption that religion is one of the great and weighty themes, and must, therefore, at least primarily deal with the established state gods, such as Jupiter or Vesta, and with the typically Augustan gods (Apollo, Mars, Venus), public festivals and cult observances (like the *ludi maximi*, victory festivals and triumphs) and the prestigious sacred spaces (Capitolium, the Palatine Temple of Apollo). Daily individual activities involving little or no expense but possessing religious character (e.g., oaths and curses, oracles and magic, prayer) run the risk of being overlooked under this assumption.

Secondly, Horatian scholarship appears to consider only those texts relevant which are largely or even entirely preoccupied with gods, myths and cultic observances. Herein lies the explanation for the fact that such great attention has been devoted to the lyric hymns to the gods, because these make clear and evident use of a (poetically enhanced) language of prayer to 'personally' call upon and address the gods and to lavish praise upon their mythical accomplishments. Admittedly such direct communication between poet and divinity has no parallel at all neither in the *Satires* nor in the letters, since in these texts religious spaces, agents and momentary situations are in general mentioned only incidentally, if not merely by way of name dropping. This fundamentally different mode of presentation gives the impression that religion is nowhere the central point, but rather at most 'extra baggage' accompanying social criticism based on moral philosophy. Religious elements sprinkled into the quotidian milieu of the *Satires* and *Epistles* are evidently perceived by scholars as being not even 'actually religious' and are hence immediately and totally removed from consideration.

The approach in question, however, appears motivated not by the ancient state of affairs, but rather by our own expectations, according to which religion occupies a particular, weighty and clearly defined space. But the perspective of the study of religion shows such an assumption to be not only off target, but virtually paradoxical. For here it has long been recognised that religious markers (rituals as well as cult sites) cannot be strictly separated from its social, cultural, political and, not least, urban environment.²⁵

25 *Embedded religion* has become a catchphrase, used by many scholars, see, e.g., Rüpke

It would, therefore, seem appropriate to undertake a new study of the Horatian Satires and Epistles to see what they may potentially reveal about religious markers in the cityscape of Rome. The central question will be where, how and to what purpose religious agents, rites, spaces and periods of time are integrated into everyday city life and thus into the topography of the capital. My procedure is based on the following thesis: it is precisely their usually *incidental* allusions to forms of religious expression which make the Satires and Epistles particular attractive witnesses for the analysis of the shaping and perception of cult practices in their urban frame of reference. It is important to emphasise that the texts we will make use of are not intended to serve as historical sources for the reconstruction of religion as practiced in Augustan Rome. The goal is rather to clarify the literary picture Horace in his Satires and Epistles sketches of a city in which religious and profane areas constantly cross paths and are closely interwoven.

In order to verify my thesis, I will combine an extensive overview of both bodies of text with an in-depth case study. In the next chapter, therefore, I will first formulate general observations on Augustan 'urban religion' as it appears upon analysis of the Satires and Epistles as a whole. The resulting tentative insights will then be tested by an in-depth discussion of Satire 2.3 since this text presents us with a particularly broad spectrum of religious daily practices which are generally, although not exclusively, localised in an urban setting. These momentary sacred situations, however, always appear as flashes in a couple of verses or even words as illustrative case studies. As a result, the Satire can be regarded in both content and form as a highly representative sample case of the style of presentation in the Satires and Epistles.

3 'Urban religion' in the *Sermones*: pervasive themes

How then does urban religion present itself in the Satires and Epistles? I would like to bring my considerations to a point in five observations:

1. *Religious spaces are only in rare and exceptional cases clearly distinguished from the busy city and explicitly marked as sacred.*²⁶ Urban shrines

2001, 11–18; Beard, North and Price 1998 vol. I, 43; with Greece as the example Eidinow 2015. But the accuracy of this 'scholarly trope' has also been strongly questioned, especially by Nongbri 2008; because of this powerful critique I prefer to avoid that term.

26 The carved Priapus watching over a one-time cemetery in the gardens of Maecenas (*Sat.* 1.8) is just such a special case. The cemetery, in which two witches are performing nocturnal magic rituals, is constructed as an isolated opposite pole to the city (s. Welch

or statues of the gods standing in the open are incomparably more often part of the bustle of daily life, in which religious and profane activities transition seamlessly and mingle to form a complex unity.²⁷ The Arch of Janus in the Forum offers a good example of this: in the Epistle to Augustus on the one hand it is drawn – in a manner geared to the noble addressee – into the centre of religious *and* political action, as its open or closed gates signify a state of war or peace.²⁸ Far more frequently, however, this monument, very closely tied symbolically to the *pax Augusta*, is evoked as a well-known centre of financial life, surrounded by financial exchanges and money lenders who have set up business there.²⁹ Usury and financial speculation, so at least the texts suggest, motivate business-savvy city dwellers to offer monthly prayers for the greatest profit possible. The imperial god of peace Janus is hereby humorously degraded to the rank of a dodgy street preacher who teaches young and old that wealth should take precedence over virtue – and who promptly attracts credulous adherents.³⁰ Like the statue of Vertumnus, which stood out of doors near the Forum in the *vicus Tuscus*,³¹ so too does Janus point to the book stores nearby, which now enable the sale of the com-

2001, 184–185, with a different focus); and it is **back to the city** that these disturbers of the peace are then successfully driven by the ‘farting’ Priapus (*Sat.* 1.8.46–47: *nam diplosa sonat quantum vesica, pepedi / diffisa nate ficus; at illae currere in urbem.*). The epitaph on a gravestone near Priapus, which defines an area of 1000 by 300 feet as *locus religiosus* and forbids heirs access to this space (*Sat.* 1.8.12–13: *mille pedes in fronte, trecentos cippus in agrum / hic dabat, heredes monumentum ne sequeretur*), is also imprinting religious legal boundaries on the ground. We do not find such clearly drawn lines, yet nevertheless the Augustan double library at the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine is celebrated in *Ep.* 2.1.214–218, at least semantically, as a quasi-sacred space, in that it is removed from the urban hubbub and reserved solely for leisure and literature (cf. *Ep.* 1.3.16–17).

27 Thus *Sat.* 1.10.37–39 has various poets engage in a literary competition in a temple before a lay judge; *Ep.* 2.1.214–218 celebrates *Apollo Palatinus* as the guardian patron of the library; in *Ep.* 1.5.9–10. Torquatus, the addressee, is invited to a private home for a dinner party on the occasion of the emperor’s birthday (on the importance and sacred nature of the holidays – birthdays, days of accession et sim. – newly introduced in the Augustan calendar for the *princeps* and members of the imperial family see Rüpke 1995, 400–403).

28 *Ep.* 2.1.250–257.

29 *Sat.* 2.3.18–19: on this see section 4.1 below.

30 *Ep.* 1.1.53–56: ‘*o cives, cives, quaerenda pecunia primum est; / virtus post nummos*’; *haec Ianus summus ab imo / prodocet, haec recinunt iuvenes dictata senesque / laevo suspensi loculos tabulamque lacerto.*

31 The *vicus Tuscus*, known for its numerous shops and businesses, was one of the most frequented districts in the city (for the archaeological remains in that region in general, see Papi 1999). On the greater approachability of a ‘street god’ such as Vertumnus, whose bronze statue stood not in a closed off temple area, but rather in the midst of the throng of passers-by, see Schrader 2017, 166–167.

pleted book of Epistles.³² 'Religion' then, in the Satires as well as in the Epistles, is presented as an integrative component of daily life.

2. *Sacred spaces and agents must bid for attention, if they wish to be noticed at all as being 'religious' and 'distinct' in the heterogeneous hubbub of the city.*³³ Various, and possibly even closely related cults on the one hand enter into competition with one another, and on the other hand the routes determined by religious considerations – for processions, for example, through public spaces – intersect with spaces in which activities take place as necessitated by business, trade and other obligations of the urban populace. Satires and Epistles suggest a typical case: at the intersection where a large cart encounters a funeral procession conflict inevitably ensues as to who should cross first.³⁴

Competitive strategies are also deployed between different cult practices and religions.³⁵ Primarily we see in these cases contrasts being played off against one another: Roman-Italic cult versus Jews³⁶ or Egyptian gods;³⁷ orthodox fulfilment of religious duties toward the gods (*religio*) versus perverse superstition (*superstitio*) or dubious methods of foretelling the

³² *Ep.* 1.20.1–2.

³³ For the visibility of cult places, festivals and rituals in the Roman cityscape see the general discussion in Beard, North and Price 1998, vol. I, 260–278.

³⁴ *Sat.* 1.6.42–44: *at hic, si plostra ducenta / concurrantque foro tria funera magna, sonabit / cornua quod vincatque tubas: saltem tenet hoc nos; Ep.* 2.2.72–75: *festinat calidus mulis gerulisque redemptor; / torquet nunc lapidem, nunc ingens machina tignum, / tristia robustis luctantur funera plaustris, / hac rabiosa fugit canis hac lutulenta ruit sus*. The emphatically warlike verbs (*concurrant, sonabit, vikat* bzw. *luctantur, fugit, ruit*) awaken associations connected with a pseudo-epic 'street battle,' in which the goal is not territorial conquest, but rather the right of way. This satiric miniature of a setting typical of epic should put us on our guard before we understand either of these passages as an authentic picture of the reality of everyday Rome. They are rather to be understood as satiric constructions of a 'teeming city:' situations lofty and banal, urban and rural, as well as artisans and soldiers, people and machines blend together in very narrow confines, to create the impression of a densely packed mass of humanity, a minimum of space and turbulent activity everywhere: on this literary portrait of the city, see Braund 1989, 23–24 and Tschäpe 2015, 235–236.

³⁵ Beard, North and Price 1998, 149–156 propose the term 'religious differentiation' as a way of understanding and describing the new social and religious complexity in the late Republic.

³⁶ Thus the satiric narrator, encountering a rural shrine to the water-nymphs, pokes fun at the credulity of Jews (*Sat.* 1.5.97–103); in *Sat.* 1.9.60–71 Aristius Fuscus claims that he cannot rescue his friend from a tight spot, because he must respect the sabbath; the narrator in distress on the other hand is not troubled by any such religious scruples (*'nulla mihi inquam 'religio est'*).

³⁷ *Ep.* 1.1.58–62, for example, closes with the example of a roadside beggar who swears by Osiris to the truth of his words and reaps thereby nothing but harsh ridicule from his Roman listeners.

future;³⁸ public religious expression versus secretive magic,³⁹ obscure vagabond priests or informally cast horoscopes.⁴⁰

The *Satires* in particular derive a humorous point from such a contrast, as *Satire* 1.9 can demonstrate. As the poet strolls along the *via sacra*, a nameless windbag attaches himself to him. During his vain attempt to rid himself of 'Mr. X' (*quidam*), the narrator is reminded of a 'gloomy prophecy' (*Sat.* 1.9.29: *fatum triste*) he once received from an elderly fortune teller, one which he then even quotes verbatim.⁴¹ By this time the narrator has reached the temple of Vesta. This sequence of dark and dubious fortune telling followed immediately by illustrious state cult invites a comparison between the two forms of religious expression. The result is as unexpected as it is comic. For clearly not even the guardian of the sacred fire, which has after all preserved Rome in so many times of crisis, can save the narrator from his current state of embarrassment. The fortune teller seems clearly at an advantage through the mere fact that her rather suspect prophecy takes up all of four verses, whereas Vesta is reduced to the mere mention of her name. Some nameless biddy from the remote Sabellian backwoods has with her 'cheap' prophecy successfully stolen the show from the venerable goddess whose temple shines splendidly in the heart of the city!⁴²

3. The funeral processions mentioned above *bring the mobility of cults and their agents to our attention. Despite what temples and shrines might suggest, urban religion is in no way bound to such fixed points, nor does it depend upon monumental cult structures.* The *Satires*, in particular, document the omnipresence of an unregulated 'religious marketplace' on the

38 The Stoic Damasippus (or his teacher Stertinius) formulates a charge of *superstitio* twice, *Sat.* 2.3.79–80 and 281–295. The poet appeals to 'true dreams after midnight' in *Sat.* 1.1.31–35: Quirinus himself has used such dreams to forbid him, with divine authority, the composition of Greek poetry. In contrast, the mythical seer Tiresias plays the role of a *doctor ineptus* in *Sat.* 2.5.

39 See especially *Sat.* 1.8, in which Priapus, functioning as cemetery guard, drives off two witches; on contempt for all forms of superstition see also *Ep.* 2.2.208–209, where we find a list including dreams, necromancy, miraculous signs, witches, nocturnal spirits and Thesalian magic.

40 As in *Sat.* 1.2.1–2; 1.6.114.

41 *Sat.* 1.9.29–35: *namque instat fatum mihi triste, Sabella / quod pueros cecinit divina mota anus urna; / 'hunc neque dira venena nec hosticus auferet ensis / nec laterum dolor aut tussis nec tarda podagra: / garrulus hunc quando consumet cumque: loquaces, si sapiat, vitet, simul atque adoleverit aetas.' / ventum erat ad Vestae ...*

42 Schmitzer 1994, 16 points to a further religious and narrative nexus, according to which the elderly Sabellian woman (*Sabella anus*) is meant, by the very similarity in sound of the two words, to remind us of the equally prophetic and aged *Sibylla*, who stands in the service of Apollo. The ominous Sabellian would thus hint, through a form of – albeit satirically inverted – *foreshadowing*, at the poet's ultimate rescue by Apollo.

streets and plazas of the city.⁴³ For a modest fee its representatives offer the general public their services as fortune tellers, street preachers or augurs. Naturally, these individuals tend to concentrate at major junctions which attract a great deal of foot traffic, like the Circus and the Forum,⁴⁴ but they can also, much like street vendors, move randomly throughout the city space. Religious daily life in the Epistles and Satires often presents itself then as a highly dynamic supply of cult services.⁴⁵

The poet who strolls through the city in Satire 1.9 makes clear on the other hand that *many cult structures of the city serve as topographical landmarks* and can be associated with a specific semantic content. As in the case of Vesta, so the mere naming of Janus or Apollo suffices to enable the knowledgeable reader to call up before his inner eye the entire backdrop of the Forum and the activities which take place there.⁴⁶

Vesta in Satire 1.9 is moreover merely one stop on a route which becomes apparent to the reader in the course of the poem.⁴⁷ We first meet the poet on the *via sacra*; a few verses later he has reached Vesta. It is there that the wind-bag requests his support in court, be this in the open space of the Forum or in one of the basilicas which border it. The reader then has walked together with the narrator and his unwelcome companion from the Velabrum down to the Forum in the lower part of the city. The narrator has slowly passed the temple area of Vesta, but is now torn from his leisure when he realises how late it has become.⁴⁸ In this way the cult centre of Vesta is located inside the

43 On the unregulated religious marketplace, esp. in the areas of divination and augury, Rüpke 2001, 220–222.

44 Sat. 1.6.113–114: *fallacem circum vespertinumque pererro / saepe forum, adsisto divinis*. Cf. Cic. *div.* 1.132 in relation to the *Circus maximus*.

45 The mobility of religion also shows itself, in addition to the funeral processions already mentioned, in cult processions and triumphs: see Sat. 1.3.10–11 on a priest bearing in solemn procession sacred implements of Juno; Sat. 1.6.23–24 on the splendid triumphal carriage in the urban landscape; Ep. 1.17.33–35 on the triumphal parading of captives before *Jupiter Capitolinus*.

46 In Sat. 2.6.34–35. The *puteal Libonis* serves as a venue for a court summoned to meet there. Provincial and rural shrines also serve as landmarks, as in Sat. 1.5.24–26 the nymph Feronia and the lofty shrine of *Jupiter Anxur* enthroned upon resplendent crags; Ep. 1.10.49 closes with the location: ‘dictated behind the derelict shrine of *Vacuna*.’

47 Scholars have attempted to reconstruct the path taken by the figures in the poem in detail and with the greatest possible precision, in line with the state of construction of the Forum at the time: see Schmitzer 1994, 22–29. It seems more important to me, however, to reflect upon the literary techniques with which such movement through space is constructed and made to serve the needs of the narrative: for in depth discussion of this, see Tschäpe 2015, 68–80.

48 Sat. 1.9.35–36: *ventum erat ad Vestae, quarta iam parte diei / praeterita, et casu tum respondere vadato / debebat*.

Satire on *two* levels: topographically, both by its location near the Forum *and* by means of the time occupied in reading, which – at least roughly – corresponds to the real distance covered by the two literary figures, and also temporally with respect to the daily routine of the inhabitants of the city and, very concretely, the public courts, which meet only during the morning hours. The temple then forms a fixed point of orientation within the action of the poem.⁴⁹

4. *The choice of gods who find more frequent mention in the Satires and Epistles is determined by their function in everyday city life.* In a manner analogous to the lower literary level of both genres it is – at first glance – primarily ‘popular’ and ‘approachable’ gods who decide the course of events as ‘personal guardians and supporters’ of the ‘man on the street.’ In addition to a carved Priapus⁵⁰ and Janus, who was mentioned above, gods who play an important role include the *Lares* and *Penates* of the household,⁵¹ as well as Mercury as the god of luck of dealers and tradesmen,⁵² but also of the parvenu ‘Horace.’⁵³ Upon closer inspection, however, the pantheon of the *Satires* and *Epistles* is more varied than one might first think. The high Olympian gods for one, and also the ‘Augustan’ divinities cannot be banned from the world of the *Satires* and *Epistles*. Apollo, in particular, is mentioned a number of times;⁵⁴ the same is true of Jupiter as the highest of all Roman gods.⁵⁵

How do we explain this juxtaposition of ‘great’ and ‘minor’ gods? The function of Apollo for one at the end of *Satire* 1.9 is instructive here. For it is to his active intervention that the satiric poet attributes his salvation from the clutches of the bothersome parasite. Great Apollo then has been hauled down from his Olympian heights to make himself useful as personal saviour in an everyday situation which is as banal as they come.⁵⁶ Jupiter too is invoked in

49 According to Schmitzer 1994, 17, the Temple of Vesta constitutes a literary marker as well, in that it closes the first section of the poem; thus urban topography is influencing the structure of the text as well.

50 *Sat.* 1.8.

51 *Sat.* 2.3.164–165; *Ep.* 1.7.94–95.

52 *Sat.* 2.3.24–26 und 2.3.68; 2.5.12–14.

53 *Sat.* 2.6.4–15.

54 *Sat.* 1.9.78; 2.5.60; *Ep.* 1.3.15–17; *Ep.* 1.16.57–62 (in alliance with Janus); *Ep.* 2.1.216–218.

55 *Sat.* 1.20–22; *Ep.* 1.1.106.

56 Schmitzer 1994, 26–27 lists Homer and Lucilius as literary models for such divine saviours. This is a primarily epic motif which Horace then reactivates in his *Odes*: there Mercury whisks him – like a hero in epic – away from the midst of the battle of Philippi (c. 2.7.9–14; see Harrison 2007a, 25 on this passage). Hence the sudden rescue by divine hand is accompanied by a crossing of genres; within this framework the high pathos of epic and lyric convention is dragged down into the depths of satire and consciously trivialised.

the first instance and above all in the context of personal desires and oaths;⁵⁷ only secondarily does he manifest his status in his function as the highest god of the Roman state.⁵⁸ It is precisely to the great gods of the state then that the poet can attribute a complex personality: notwithstanding their lofty position they are present and approachable in eminently everyday situations.⁵⁹

5. *The Satires as well as the Epistles reveal then a manifest primacy of individual religion in the city context.* They are only marginally concerned with the political, and hence also with the 'Augustan' dimension of the gods and their cult. Roman imperial state worship is almost entirely side-lined by the everyday services which the 'religious market' provides at little cost for the 'man on the street.' Mention is made in this context of independent experts in divination, i. e., of religious agents who tailor their services to the demands of the general public and the personal wishes of individual clients (such as the Sabellian fortune teller in Satire 1.9).⁶⁰ Festivals too are occasionally imagined as spectacles for the masses;⁶¹ more frequently, however, the influence of the festival calendar upon the milieu of individual city dwellers is highlighted in exemplary instances.⁶² In addition to the cult of the dead and funeral rites, which are mentioned extensively,⁶³ oaths and prayers, vows and curses expressed in concrete situations are omnipresent.⁶⁴ Cults and rites of healing are repeatedly encountered in the *Sermones* as typical situations appertaining to the religion of the individual.⁶⁵

57 *Ep.* 1.18.111–112: *sed satis est orare Iovem, qui ponit et aufert, / det vitam, det opes: aequum mi nimum ipse parabo.* Cf. *Sat.* 1.1.15–22; 1.2.17–18; 2.3.288–291.

58 E. g., *Ep.* 1.17.33–34: *res gerere et captos ostendere civibus hostis / attingit solium Iovis et celestia temptat.*

59 On the approachability of lower grade divinities in particular and the greater accessibility of cult statues standing out of doors and on freely accessible plazas, Schrader 2017, 60–61.

60 *Sat.* 1.6.113–114: *fallacem circum vespertinumque pererro / saepe forum, adsisto divinis.*

61 For a funeral envisioned in *Sat.* 2.3.84–87 the will mandates that the heirs put on elaborate gladiatorial contests, arrange an elaborate funeral feast and make a massive public donation of grain. But this is merely a threat, one which the heirs can avoid by erecting a tomb with an inscription. *Ep.* 2.1.139–155 tells of the joint celebration of a rural harvest festival, and *Ep.* 2.1.103–138 of the hymn of prayer sung by a festival chorus during the Secular Games of Augustus.

62 An occasion to indulge in wine of better quality (*Sat.* 2.3.142–144) and for festival attire (*Sat.* 2.2.59–62), leisure time, an occasion for a dinner party with a circle of family and friends and also a chance to sleep late on the following day (*Ep.* 1.5.9–11). The focus on the individual holds good even for the celebrations of the Saturnalia mentioned in Satires 2.3 and 2.7, both of which take place in a domestic setting (v. section 4.2 below).

63 *Sat.* 1.4.126–127; 1.6.15–17; 1.6.422–444; 1.8.8–13; 2.3.84–99; 2.5.84–88; *Ep.* 1.14.6–8; 2.2.74.

64 *Sat.* 2.3.179–181; 2.5.84–86 and 104–106; *Ep.* 1.1.34–35; 1.7.92–95; 1.16.57–62; 1.17.58–62; 1.18.106–112; 2.1.16–17.

65 They are central concerns in Satire 2.3, for which see section 4.1 below. Cf. also *Ep.* 1.1.28–37; 1.16.12–16.

A difficulty does, however, arise for our stated goal of precisely describing 'religion in the city:' the texts which serve as witness for individual cult practices invoke rites and rituals, but do not follow up with an explicit attribution to a specific context. At best, the rite itself enables at least a plausible conclusion as to a concrete location (in the cases for example of cult practice touching upon the home and the *Lares* or of funeral rites), but occasionally even the general outlines of a localisation are unclear; one cannot then even say whether an *urban* context is envisioned at all.

A specific kind of shrine, for this reason, comes all the more into focus, one closely bound not only to urban surroundings, but at the same time to a satiric context: I mean the numberless altars and chapels which can be found on nearly every street corner,⁶⁶ and which serve as small subordinate centres for individual districts of the city.⁶⁷ These *compita* are relevant for our purposes in two ways: firstly, they constitute meeting places which are easily reached and freely available,⁶⁸ which enable anyone in the neighbourhood to pray or sacrifice along public roads without great expense or formality. For this reason, the greater part of an individual's cult practice took place probably not before the imposing temples located far off in the Forum or on the Capitoline or Palatine hills, but rather at household altars and *compita*. And secondly, thanks to their omnipresence and central locations, *compita* can in literature easily constitute multipliers for rumours and gossip. It is from there but a short step to assign to *compita* and *triviae* a semantic which accords practically ideally with the (supposedly) lower literary level of Horace's 'chats' (*sermones*), their urban setting and the close connection of their content to everyday concerns: these inconspicuous, but doubtless

66 See Flower 2017, 118: 'Rome itself was, therefore, imagined as consisting of an officially recognized network of such nodes that had been characteristic of the city from early times.' Rüpke 2001, 178 speaks of an 'Auspunktieren der Stadtfläche' (filling in the dots of the urban space) undertaken systematically under Augustus. On the architectural form of such *compita* see Flower 2017, 137–159.

67 Only in 7 CE, and so more than 20 years after the publication of the first book of *Satires*, did Augustus of course first prompt the redistricting of Rome into 14 regions and 265 *vici* and, in close association with this, the systematic expansion of the *compitum* cult (in combination with local worship of the *Genius Augusti*); the *compita*, however, and the cult rites practiced at them, were of course present long before.

68 Fundamental on the Latin term *compitum* and the cult practiced there Scullard 1985, 86–90; Scholz 1997; Flower 2017, 116–117. Flower emphasises as the core characteristic and primary function of the (originally rural) *compitum* the meeting of ways, properties and the people who dwell on them: 'The term *compitum*, from *competo*, meaning to "come together," therefore, refers both to the crossroads itself as a physical space and by extension to the shrine for the *lares* set up to mark this spot. These crossroads, as described by most ancient sources and commentators, are the meeting points of several roads, whether three or four or more.'

much frequented shrines can easily be made into *the* religious and social central meeting places of a broad urban population (above all those from the lower classes); for in contrast to the elite represented in the Senate, the daily life and work of these people played out largely within the narrow confines of their district.⁶⁹ It is then only logical that Horace⁷⁰ presents the newest urban gossip as well as his own satirical comments upon the ‘human world of fools in general’ as being especially closely tied to precisely these crowded meeting-places.⁷¹

A first result of our survey of these works can therefore be established: the Satires and Epistles of Horace serve in remarkable fashion as a control of and check upon the view of urban religion in the Augustan period which is predominant in literary studies as well as in archaeological research. The two works do not focus on the great centres of Augustan religious politics, the *Ara Pacis* for example, or the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine but, on the contrary, paint a picture in which religious agents and spaces are understood as integrative components of everyday life in the city. The spaces in which sacred and profane activities occur overlap in the bustle of the metropolis and in the restless movement of its inhabitants. The various products of the ‘religious marketplace’ compete in part amongst themselves and in part complement one another to form a complex unity. This diverse mixture of cult practices has, however, the significant potential to overstep boundaries, overturn values and loosen established rules of order. As a close look at Satire 2.3 will demonstrate, the satiric world of fools of the big city knows no restraint when it comes to religion.

69 The Festival of the *Compitalia* is explained then by Scholz 1997, 112 as a ‘kollektive Feier der Menschen eines Gemeinwesens ..., gebunden an den Ort des täglichen Lebens und Arbeitens’ (the people’s collective celebration of a community ..., bound to their place of work and daily life). Flower 2017, 171 emphasises that the *Compitalia* have the character of a street festival. ‘Most of the festivities at Compitalia seem to have taken place in the streets and at their crossroads themselves. ... At Compitalia, as well as on other exceptional occasions, the streets of Rome were themselves said to celebrate.’ On the proximity of *Compitalia* and *Saturnalia* (in the calendar and in their organisation and atmosphere) see section 4.2 below.

70 As did Juvenal later: cf. note 7 above.

71 Pertinent references for this are offered *Sat.* 2.3.25–26; 281–287 and 2.6.47–50; cf. section 4.1 below. The small case study of *Ep.* 1.17.58–62 evokes core associations with the *trivium* (much frequented, people watching and earthy humour, familiar space for a tightly knit community).

4 'Urban religion' and satiric carnival: a case study of Satire 2.3

This satire is a typical example for the tenor of the second book of *Satires*. Its length alone confirms the poet's new strategy 'to exaggerate, in the mouth of other speakers, the dogmatic, homiletic element of diatribe',⁷² which stood in the foreground of the first book of *Satires*. Most of the satire is by far dedicated to a lecture on human folly. Responsible for the lecture's content, however, is not the satiric speaker, but instead the Stoic Damasippus, who directs his words at the poet 'Horace' as auditor. Damasippus is portrayed as a very recent convert to philosophy, who passes judgment upon human folly, spurred on by the missionary zeal of a newcomer to the fold. In an over the top tirade he describes the capital Rome as a world of fools, all infected with a clinical case of insanity (*insania*).

The criticism of human vices (*vitia*) and the focus upon the city Rome, the comic figure of a *doctor ineptus* as speaker and the dialogue-like frame are representative of the second book of satires.⁷³ Satire 2.3 is particularly closely related to Satire 2.7 in its motifs, situation and genre. Similar to 2.7 it places its pseudo-philosophical lesson under the protective sign of the 'free speech' allowed during the festival.⁷⁴ The topsy-turvy world of the Saturnalia makes it permissible for the Stoic philosopher, as an outsider, and for the slave Davus, who is even socially inferior, to lay bare the inconsistencies between the teaching and the actual way of life of the satirist Horace. As a result of the spacing between them, the one being in the first, the other in the final third of the book, they comprise a carnival frame,⁷⁵ within the confines of which the diverse world of the *Sermones* displays itself. The two texts relate to one another geographically too: Satire 2.3 views far-away Rome from the perspective of Horace's villa, whereas the house slave Davus in Satire 2.7 reflects upon his master's life in the city and is finally forced into silence by the threat of being transferred to the *Sabinum* by way of punishment.⁷⁶

⁷² Muecke 2007, 112.

⁷³ On the constellation of speakers in the second book Harrison 2013; for the particular characteristics of the second book and what distinguishes it from the first see the concise compilation in Muecke 2007; see also Gowers 2005, 58–61 on the 'two new frameworks for the poems of book 2', the *convivium* and the *Saturnalia*.

⁷⁴ Compare the explicit exhortation in *Sat.* 2.7.4–5: *age libertate Decembri, quando ita maiores voluerunt, utere: narra*.

⁷⁵ See Gowers 2005, 60.

⁷⁶ *Sat.* 2.7.117–118: *ocius hinc te / ni rapis, accedes opera agro nona Sabino*. See also the criticism expressed by Davus in *Sat.* 2.7.28–29: *Romae rus optas; absentem rusticus urbem / tollis ad astra levis*.

As a result of its setting in time and space, Satire 2.3 is additionally pertinent in a number of ways to our question regarding the relationship between ‘religion and city.’ For the view of the vibrant capital is delivered here from afar, specifically from the Sabine country estate to which the poet has retreated to work without distraction on his Satires.⁷⁷ In addition, the Stoic delivers his moral sermon on a specific religious occasion, namely the Saturnalia.⁷⁸ Hence it bears the stamp of carnival culture in which social rules and regulations are temporarily suspended.

It is the city of Rome which furnishes the Stoic Damasippus in this Satire with occasion and backdrop, people and material suited to a moral sermon. He utilises, so at least is my thesis, urban topography as a tool to delimit individual phases in his autobiography by means of changes in location and the differing semantic attached to each of the settings. To test this claim, we will in a first section follow hard on the heels of Damasippus and traverse his route through the city.

In a second step we will then investigate the extent to which the Saturnalia festival affects Damasippus’ portrayal of ‘urban religion.’ The carnival world leads to a complex constellation of different speakers and invites them to exchange roles temporarily – a number of scholars have already noted and discussed this.⁷⁹ There has *not*, however, been a study of the way in which the framework of the festival colours urban religious spaces with a carnival tint.

4.1 From the Gates of Janus to the Tiber Island: an urban biography as religious path

Damasippus presents himself to the reader as a failure in life. As an art merchant, he had at first made a great deal of money and was promptly hailed on the streets as the ‘luck-child of Mercury.’⁸⁰ Hence the first phase of his life

⁷⁷ *Sat.* 2.3.11–18.

⁷⁸ *Sat.* 2.3.4–5: *ipsis / Saturnalibus huc fugisti sobrius*. On the programmatic significance of the *Saturnalia* for the entire second book of Satires, see Sharland 2010, 163–196.

⁷⁹ The contributions of Sharland 2009 and Sharland 2010, 225–260 are especially pertinent: in the motif of carnival she sees an exegetical key for a Bakhtinian reading of the Satire and emphasises in particular the function of *role reversals* in the second book of Satires and their influence on the authority of the speaker. Sharland understands the monologue of Damasippus as a carnival opposite pole to the mode of dialogue employed in Horatian Satire; Harrison 2013, 159 on the contrary interprets the Stoic as an *alter Horatius* and emphasises the close relationship between them, indeed their *interchangeability*. Bond 1987 and Bond 1998 illuminates the role of the Stoic Damasippus and his relationship to his teacher Stertinius, whose lecture he is presenting.

⁸⁰ *Sat.* 2.3.25: *Mercuriale / inposuere mihi cognomen*. Cf. *Sat.* 2.3.64–68. In this sobriquet the Satire makes use of the similar sound of Mercury and *merx/mercari* for a humorous

(*Sat.* 2.3.18–26) passed under the spell of capital and the financial exchanges of the Forum Romanum. Having received the call of Stoicism late in life, Damasippus in retrospect views his erstwhile business life in a religious light: his career, so successful at first, was monopolised by Mercury and Janus – that is to say by gods closely tied to the Roman business world.

His meteoric rise gave way to a precipitous fall. For Damasippus' speculations in money lending, undertaken 'at the Arch of Janus',⁸¹ go awry, driving him into financial ruin. In deep despair he intends to throw himself from the Bridge of Fabricius into the Tiber, his head ritually covered.⁸² But at the very moment Damasippus wishes to take his own life, he experiences something miraculous: a street preacher named Stertinius appears out of nowhere and prevents his suicide.⁸³ This sudden entrance of Stertinius makes us think of the epiphany of a quasi-divine saviour⁸⁴ – similar to the helpful Apollo who unexpectedly saves the poet from the windbag in *Satire* 1.9.

Urban topography once more matches the action of the plot exactly. For the Bridge of Fabricius not only constitutes a biographical turning point in the narrative of Damasippus, it also replaces the Roman Forum, which had been the setting, with the district containing the Tiber Island. This new location is inseparable from the entrance of the 'divine helper' Stertinius. He attempts to clarify the saving grace of his Stoic teaching to the surrounding crowd with a telling metaphor: he describes man's insanity using the symptoms of a disease.

etymology, which it then attributes to the voice of the urban populace: see de Vecchi 2013, 316; Harrison 2019, 169–170. Harrison points out that both the philosopher Damasippus and Horace's speaker have a close connection to Mercury: the course of both their lives corresponds with amazing accuracy to 'the god's association with windfalls and good luck, and his link with business and trading.'

81 *Sat.* 2.3.18–19: *postquam omnes res mea Ianum / ad medium fracta est, aliena negotia curo*. That the banks are located near the Arch of Janus is also confirmed by Cic. *off.* 2.25.90. For the topography of *Ianus imus, medius, summus* and the unsure identity with the *aedes* of *Ianus Geminus* see Tortorici 1996.

82 According to Liv. 4.12 the *pons Fabricius* was known as a spot typically selected by members of the *plebs* who in despair took their own life. Hence 'death by drowning' is characterised as a practice of the lower classes: see Sharland 2009, 120: 'the method by which he [Damasippus] was planning to commit suicide (jumping off a bridge) was one usually associated with the lower classes.'

83 That Damasippus interprets the Stoic Stertinius as a 'propitious sign from heaven' is shown by the word *dexter*: in ritual divination (augury from birds, lightning, thunder) 'right' is considered to be a non-verbal affirmation of the gods: cf. Virg. *Aen.* 8.302.

84 Muecke 1993, 137: 'like a divine saviour'; Courtney 2013, 136: 'Stertinius appeared like a *deus ex machina*.'

One might at first tend to explain this medical imagery as a mere topos of the diatribe⁸⁵ and be satisfied. But the insistent nature of Stertinius' constant references⁸⁶ to the semantic field of 'sickness and healing' is truly unusual.⁸⁷ For this reason I wish to suggest that the location has motivated and inspired the contents of the lecture. Stertinius launches into his sermon immediately after the rescue of Damasippus on the Bridge of Fabricius, and so he and his audience have the backdrop of the Tiber Island together with all its sacred sites constantly before their eyes.⁸⁸ The divine 'Master of the house' and the primary authority on this island is of course the God of Healing Aesculapius.⁸⁹ His name is never mentioned in the Horatian Satire, and yet this healing god, a favourite of the people, appears to me to figure behind the scenes in Damasippus' report of his rescue as well as in the sermon of Stertinius. For the cult of Aesculapius is founded upon dream visions in the night:⁹⁰ some inscriptions from the Tiber Island document cases of cures *ex visu*.⁹¹ And so when Damasippus claims that Stertinius appears before his eyes in the manner of a *numen*, he is hereby attributing to his personal rescuer an effective power analogous to that of the divine doctor on the Tiber. When he then goes on to have Stertinius in his sermon emphasise so

85 Muecke 1993, 130–131.

86 Mentioned for the first time *Sat.* 2.3.77–81: *audire atque togam iubeo componere, quisquis / ambitione mala aut argenti pallet amore, / quisquis luxuria tristive superstitione / aut alio mentis morbo calet: huc propius me, / dum doceo insanire omnes, vos ordine adite!* Kiessling 1895, 162; Muecke 1993, 141 and De Vecchi 2013, 322 already pointed out the programmatic character of these verses, which simultaneously offer a disposition of the following speech and reveal that Stertinius is not just speaking to Damasippus, but rather in the typical manner of a street preacher is attempting to gather about himself the widest audience possible. The semantic field 'illness and medicine' returns then as leitmotiv, e.g., *Sat.* 2.3.120–121; 147–148; 157–158; 161–167; 254–255; 288–295.

87 Scholars have repeatedly registered this leitmotiv, but have consistently understood it to be a mere rhetorical strategy (Bond 1998, 88–89 is a good example of this; Muecke 1993, 136: 'Horace deftly introduces one of the leitmotifs of the satire, the disease metaphor. Talking about vices as "mental illnesses" was an approach especially associated with the Stoics, though not confined to them'). The topographical connection of this leitmotiv to the Tiber Island has hitherto remained unnoticed.

88 The strong connection between the *pons Fabricius* and the Tiber Island is supported by the fact that the sacred buildings on the island were splendidly restored in the same period as the *pons Fabricius* and the *pons Cestius* were erected, namely in the first half of the first century BCE: see Degraffi 1996a, 100.

89 Suet. *Claud.* 25.2 speaks of the *insula Aesculapi*, similar already Dion. Hal. 5.13.4. in Augustan times. See also Degraffi 1996a, 99 with further testimonies.

90 On miraculous cures and nocturnal dream visions in the Greek cult of Asclepius, see Krug 1985, 134–141.

91 *CIL* 6.8; 14; 30844; compare *IGUR* 148, containing a list of *sanationes*. For the sanctuary and cult of Aesculapius on the Tiber Island and the archeological remains, see Degraffi 1993.

dramatically that none but the Stoic sage can heal mankind from *insania*,⁹² he is placing his Stoic teacher in direct competition with his neighbour Aesculapius.

The Tiber Island then, so closely tied to the semantics of healing, is kept alive and present throughout the sermon by means of Stertinius' constant references to human illnesses. This religious setting is in addition populated step by step with further cult monuments to enrich the leitmotif of human folly with further cases in point.

To illustrate man's desire for fame, Stertinius accordingly uses a priest of Bellona who was driven mad.⁹³ In this way a goddess is surreptitiously slipped into the sermon whose cult just happens to be represented by not one but two monuments on or adjacent to the Tiber Island.⁹⁴ Then in his final example Stertinius again references the Tiber explicitly in portraying the foolish behaviour of a mother who implores Jupiter to cure her son's chronic fever. Should he recover, she vows, she will order him to display his gratitude on the god's day of fasting by standing naked in the frigid waters of the river. It is then precisely resorting to the gods as refuge which costs the young man, who only recently recovered from his illness, his life.⁹⁵

Whence is this final example of false devotion to the gods (*superstitio*) derived? The worship of the Roman Jupiter after all does not, to our knowledge, involve days of fasting or any cleansing ritual in the river,⁹⁶ and so a number of commentators have taken the position that Jupiter should be understood here as a corruption of the Jewish Yahweh. Yet so cryptic a reference to Jewish religion seems to me entirely far-fetched. For whenever Horace's *Satires* elsewhere poke fun at the Jews or their superstition, it is unambiguously noted that this 'false' cult is Jewish.⁹⁷

92 *Sat.* 2.3.41–48, esp. 45–46: *haec populos, haec magnos formula reges, / excepto sapiente, tenet.*

93 *Sat.* 2.3.222–223: *quem cepit vitrea fama, / hunc circumtonit gaudens Bellona cruentis.*

94 For the sanctuary and cult of Bellona Insulensis, see Chioffi 1993. A connection between Bellona and the cult of Aesculapius seems to be supported by numerous *sacra* from the first half of the first century BCE. At least according to Chioffi it would appear that donations could indicate a therapeutic use of the Tiber water.

95 *Sat.* 2.3.288–295: *'Iuppiter, ingentis qui das adimisque dolores,' / mater ait pueri mensis iam quinque cubantis, / 'frigida si puerum quartana reliquerit, illo / mane die, quo tu indicis ieiunia, nudus / in Tiberi stabit.' casus medicusve levarit / aegrum ex praecipiti: mater delira necabit / in gelida fixum ripa febrimque reducet, / quone malo mentem concussa? Timore deorum.*

96 Kiessling 1895, 184 for verse 289; Muecke 1993, 163 for verse 288; De Vecchi 2013, 337 for verses 288–295.

97 *Sat.* 1.4.142–143: *ac veluti te Iudaei cogemus in hanc concedere turbam; 1.5.100–101: credat Iudaeus Apella, / non ego; Sat.* 1.9.69–70: *hodie tricensima sabbata: vin tu / curtis Iudaeis oppedere?*

There is in my opinion a more plausible explanation for the mention of Jupiter: An inscription found *in situ* attests to there having been a shrine of *Jupiter Iurarius* on the Tiber Island, which may well have been connected to other nearby temples.⁹⁸ In referring to this, the Horatian Satire would then constitute a literary echo of the factual existence of a variety of cult sites next to or connected with one another and located in the vicinity of Aesculapius. Cleansing baths in the river and periods of fasting are attested to for the cult of healing;⁹⁹ the domains and cult practices of two gods could then be merged in the mother's vow. This amalgamation is all the more likely as the cult sites are not only close neighbours, but each primarily serves the individual and private needs of the worshipper: Aesculapius cares for the sick and Jupiter on the Tiber Island lends a ready ear to people's private *vota*.

As a result, Stertinius' criticism of *superstitio* would not be merely a satiric repetition of a Stoic topos. By ending his sermon with the mother's vow he can once again remind us of the particular background of his lecture and utilise the façade of the temple of Aesculapius to advertise for his own alternative Stoic 'path of healing and salvation.'

The confusing mingling of rites and cults contained in Stertinius' (or Damasippus') categorical attack on superstition might at the same time be suspected to reflect a 'carnival effect.' The various rites which are illuminated in Stertinius' palette of human follies and which in the end rise to the level of a worthy point of criticism in their own right, ought therefore now to be viewed through the 'lens' of the Saturnalia, with an eye toward revision and fresh evaluation.

4.2 How to become the satiric talk of the town: or Saturnalia at the *compitum*

Stertinius has already been taking swipes at religious practices long before he arrives at his last major point, *superstitio*. No other Satire of Horace offers so rich an assortment of examples taken from the realm of everyday (and almost always private) practice of religion. All of these have in common the intent to illustrate human faults in general. Whereas in the final section the anecdotal *exempla* are in harmony with the overarching theme of *superstitio*,

⁹⁸ *CIL* 6.379; for the sanctuary (documented since the middle of the second century BCE) and the cult see Degraffi 1996b.

⁹⁹ Aelius Aristides portrays in his *Sacred Tales* at length his own bouts of dieting and baths in cold rivers, which he undertook against the advice of doctors but in accord with instructions sent to him personally in dreams by Asclepius: see 2.18–22; 22.24; 2.50–53; 2.80–82.

the previous snapshots of Roman cult practice are notably *not* branded as 'typically religious.'¹⁰⁰

One might at first think this picture completely validates the general observation that such individual cult acts are omnipresent and therefore treated as a normal part of Roman daily life (cf. Section 2). This view, however, takes no account of the carnival background: due to the Saturnalia the authority of Damasippus is undermined and the intended effect of his lecture is reduced to absurdity. Naturally, the principle of ritual topsy-turvy overturning of order is only one element of the festival culture;¹⁰¹ for such a mechanism of overturning to be at all possible, the rules which are otherwise in force must first be lifted. The establishment of a topsy-turvy world cannot therefore be separated from a temporary suspension of the established order.¹⁰² The festival days permit a temporary diverse mingling of the population, which as a marker of egalitarian liberty wears the felt cap, the sign of manumission (*pilleus*).

Against this background the world imagined by Damasippus and Stertinius bears the marks of a carnival street festival which levels all boundaries. In his lecture the philosopher imagines himself as being *above* these follies, but he too suffers from a typical *insania*, namely his foolish garrulousness.¹⁰³ His grotesquely over the top monologue¹⁰⁴ gets entirely out of hand and seems to know no end.¹⁰⁵ To make matters worse, he presents not a system-

100 As examples of greed, we find the terms of inheritance contained in a grave inscription (*Sat.* 2.3.82–99) and the consumption of cheap wine on holidays (*Sat.* 2.3.142–147). Illustrative of perverted ambition is a man who sacrifices a piglet to the *lares* as thanks for his freedom from the fault of parsimony – only to then embark on a trip to a luxurious spa (*Sat.* 2.3.161–167); there follows a father who upon his deathbed has his sons swear calling curses down upon themselves should they break their oath (*Sat.* 2.3.168–186). For the vice of gluttonous luxury, Stertinius adduces a pair of foolish brothers, whose habit of dining in exquisite and expensive fashion he invites his listeners to evaluate using white chalk or black coal, as they might mark days of good and ill omen on the calendar (*Sat.* 2.3.243–246). And finally, a young man's feverish love offers opportunity to reference an *omen*, one easily discovered by picking pips from Picenian apples (*Sat.* 2.3.250–273).

101 The features characteristic of the *Saturnalia* are concisely summarised by Distelrath 2001.

102 Versnel 1993, 14–163.

103 As Sharland 2009, 114 correctly determines, 'in *Sat.* 2.3 Horace is the victim of *the* most talkative of the *doctores inepti*, the longwinded and overly zealous new Stoic convert Damasippus.'

104 Sharland 2009, 117 speaks of a 'monster satire.'

105 Sharland 2010, 247–253, especially 252: 'Damasippus' moralising is simply too much of a good thing. However, there is no sign of recognition from the intensive Stoic speaker that he may be going on for far too long, as story is heaped upon story.'

atic doctrine but rather a diverse conglomeration which strings examples together in random and poorly connected fashion.

The effect of this diversified world of the Saturnalia on the satiric portrayal of Roman cult sites can be demonstrated especially well in the case of the *compita*. Damasippus refers in fact twice, in prominent passages, to these street shrines. His first mention of a *compitum* is connected by him to the prior, successful phase of his autobiography; in the case of the second shrine on the other hand he is dealing with a typical instance of *superstitio*, and this occurs shortly before his speech finally closes. Hence the street carnival unfolds in the field of tension between these two street crossings. Making the *compita* function in this way as symbolic boundaries for the urban world of fools is made easier by the fact that the Saturnalia and the Festival of the *Compita* share a series of common elements:¹⁰⁶ The connection between the festive transcendence of *topographical* limits in the case of the *Compitalia*¹⁰⁷ and the *temporally* delimited suspension of the rules of social order during the *Saturnalia* seems to me to be particularly worthy of note in this context.¹⁰⁸

In Satire 2.3, however, only the second *compitum* is stage managed as a typical example of ‘urban religion’ (or perhaps *superstitio*): Damasippus tells here of a freedman who every morning ‘upon an empty stomach and with purified hands’ runs to all the *compita* in the vicinity to beg there of the gods that they please snatch him, and him alone, from death.¹⁰⁹ The

106 Scullard 1985, 89: in the Roman calendar the two festivals mark the time before and after the turn of the year. *Saturnalia* and *Compitalia* are both popular festivals of the people; slaves were in each case treated as fully fledged members of the festival community and enjoyed freedoms which were otherwise rare. Much like the *Saturnalia*, the *Compitalia* too were noted for a lax atmosphere and excessive indulgence in wine. It is, however, possible that Dionysius of Halicarnassus, whom scholarship is fond of citing as crown witness for the *Compitalia*, mistakenly transferred elements of the *Saturnalia* (in particular the freedom of slaves, which he so strongly emphasises) to the *Compitalia* (this is suspected by Flower 2017, 121–122 and 162–163). Yet even without the questionable common feature of *role reversal*, the two festivals are in many respects similar: see Flower 2017, 162–174.

107 Flower 2017, 171 on the *Compitalia*: ‘The point of the festival was to share a sacrifice and a merry feast with the “neighbors,” those on the “other side” of whatever property line or corner was being marked. ... What made the *Compitalia* special ... was the fact that everyone in the city (or on the farm) was involved and encouraged to participate together, reaching out beyond their household and street. ... all came together to celebrate *at the boundaries*, thus observing, crossing, and thereby reinforcing these lines that defined the very shape of the familiar, daily world everyone lived in.’

108 See the famous dictum in Seneca *Apocol. 12*: *non semper erunt Saturnalia!*

109 *Sat. 2.3.282–286*: *libertinus erat, qui circum compita siccus / lautis mane senex manibus currebat et ‘unum’, / – ‘quid tam magnum?’ – addens –, ‘unum me surpite morti! / dis*

whimsically bizarre nature of such a prayer is comically further enhanced in that the twice emphasised 'me, me alone' is contrasted with the supposed ease with which this wish could be granted. From the high vantage point of a Stoic sage, Damasippus is neither subtle nor has he any compunction in making the praying freedman the object of mockery and ridicule throughout the city.

The superiority, however, of the Stoic critic stands on feet of clay, as one clearly sees in looking back at the prior mention of the *compita*. There it was Damasippus *himself* who during his string of financial coups was, as 'Mercury's darling,' the talk of the town. However, these halcyon days came to an abrupt end when Damasippus went bankrupt: he then plunged into the lowly class of the impoverished *plebs*¹¹⁰ and viewed suicide as the only way out.

A comparison of the pseudo-religious freedman with the art dealer Damasippus reveals in fact surprising parallels. Whereas Damasippus in his desperation seeks death, this is precisely what the *libertinus* wishes by all means to escape – in this respect the two figures stand in a relationship of contrast to one another. In another respect they seem virtually interchangeable: both come from lower social surroundings.¹¹¹ This makes them both products not only of the urban masses but also of the *compita*; for it is at these crossroads of urban life that their successes as well as their (financial or ethical) failures are ceaselessly observed and commented upon. For this reason the street shrines constitute as well an ideal location for a carnival *reversal of roles*: in the Sabine villa, Horace's uninvited guest Damasippus had at first supplanted the poet in his authority as satiric narrator and had himself laid claim to being the official speaker of the festival.¹¹² In Rome the anonymous *libertinus* then supplants Damasippus; for due to his senseless prayers at neighbourhood *compita* the mockery and derision of the public is now directed at *him*.

In the carnival jester's speech of Damasippus there is then at the *compitum* an overlapping of the voices of the *libertinus* as he prays, of Stertinius as he denounces this very behaviour and of the gossipy crowds as they in turn wag

etenim facile est' orabat, sanus utrisque / auribus atque oculis; mentem, nisi litigiosus, / exciperet dominus, cum venderet.

110 Cf. Sharland 2009, 120: 'After Fortune turned against him, Damasippus slid even lower down the slopes of society.'

111 In the case of the anonymous *libertinus* this is surely beyond dispute; on Damasippus, see Bond 1987, 10: 'we perceive Damasippus to be a new-come Stoic, but also we perceive him to be a product of the rough and tumble world of the marketplace.' Similarly Sharland 2009, 120.

112 On the switching of roles here, see Sharland 2010, 234–235.

their sharp tongues at the fortunes (and failures) of Damasippus. The noise level thereby produced forms a satiric 'background music' characteristic of the literary portrayal and perception of the big city 'Rome.'¹¹³

5 Conclusion

All cult sites and forms of religion to which the figures in Satire 2.3 in their words and actions refer, are integrative components of urban daily life. At their centre we do not find the political dimension of Augustan state divinities. Instead, and to a far greater degree various facets of personal religious experience are predominant in the events satirically described. The religious 'marketplace' which the city of Rome provides shows itself to be manifold and very diverse. The alternative possibilities to seek healing provided on and near the Tiber Island already offer an exemplary manifestation of this diversity: the cult sites of this section of the city form a fine network which permits both a competitive market for adherents as well as a variegated mingling of the clientele. This locally fixed selection of cults is complemented by mobile agents such as the street preacher Stertinius, who advertises his Stoic doctrine as the only true path to 'salvation' and who on the Tiber Bridge attempts to intercept visitors from the nearby Aesculapius.

The *compita* are set before our eyes in Satire 2.3 as a further focal point allowing an especially vivid portrayal of the 'urban religious scene:' being both numerous and spread throughout the city, these humble shrines are ideally suited to become multipliers of gossip about individual city inhabitants as well as of commentary regarding their religious behaviour. Since day for day people of all sorts and of every social class pass these street corners or stream from all directions to them to catch up on the latest gossip and rumours, the *compita* rise in Horace's Satires and Epistles to become communication centres and privileged viewing areas for urban life. The image of a tightly packed crowd pushing and shoving at the crossroads suggests furthermore a satiric connection of the *compita* to the colourful hubbub on the streets during the Saturnalia. Therefore, it is not at all surprising if the urban world of fools which the carnival speaker Damasippus expounds upon by means of a diverse profusion of *exempla* both religious and profane, exists between two *compita* and is symbolically delimited by them.

113 On the 'soundscape big city,' with Martial as example, see Tschäpe 2015, 147–152.

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Open Submissions

Brent D. Shaw

Charity and the Poor in Roman Imperial Society

Abstract

The relationship between moral codes of giving and the hard facts of poverty is complex and problematic. On the one side are different ideologies of giving adopted by persons possessing wealth and other resources. On the other are persons in considerable need who could be the recipients of giving by the well-off. But these two spheres of interest have overlapped only partially in the manner of a classic Venn diagram. Even in the special cases where the givers and recipients were linked by a hypothetical mutual interest and benefit – as with Christian charitable giving – the specific logic remains unclear. Rather than focusing on either wealth or poverty as such, the great social and material inequalities that underlay both are perhaps a better gateway to understanding the place of charity as a type of giving.

Keywords: charity, philanthropy, liberality, euergetism, poverty, equality, social justice, the poor, Christianity, bishops

The novelist Anthony Trollope, who had plenty of opportunity to witness the society of his own time, observed: ‘I have sometimes thought that there is nothing so venomous, so bloodthirsty as a professed philanthropist.’¹ If not actually a bloodthirst, the manifest self-interest of the givers has been recognised in every age, including Trollope’s.² To understand the nature of the self-interest, we must begin by focusing our attention on the rich, the source of the venom, and not on the recipients of their generosity.³ I do not think it a happenstance that the modern historian who has made the most concerted attack on the problem for Mediterranean antiquity moved his focus from poverty to wealth.⁴ As far as substantial generosity is concerned, money, and not the lack of it, is what has always mattered. In assuming this

1 Trollope 1862, ch. 16; latterly, they have been seen as actually dangerous: Giridharadas 2018, 173.

2 See Himmelfarb 1991, 198, for nineteenth century England.

3 One of the central critical arguments made by Brown 2012; see the apposite remarks by Harper 2013.

4 Brown moving from 2001 to 2012, whose focus is more on wealth and its disposition.

focal point, however, we must never forget that charitable giving by the wealthy has always been a negligible economic fact. The givers could not be interested in a general transformation of the condition of the poor. Charity could never achieve such a transformational objective.⁵ Very likely, the wealthy were aware of the fact, an awareness that governed their attitudes and actions.⁶ As Tolstoy trenchantly observed: 'I climb on a man's back, choking him and making him carry me, and yet I assure myself and others that I am sorry for him and that I wish to lighten his load by all means possible ... except by getting off his back.'⁷ Charity is encompassed by the 'sorry' and the 'wish.' The problem is further complicated by the fact that in not a few social orders, the custom of giving has been an essential element of being rich. It was as much a part of the self-definition of a Frick, a Carnegie, or a Rockefeller as it is of a Gates, a Buffett, or a Soros. To possess the virtue of being liberal, you have to have the wealth to pay for it. As Aristotle pithily observed, if the radical idea of the abolition of private property was actually achieved, it would destroy liberality.⁸ To have generous givers on any scale, there must be a markedly unequal distribution of private property, and the giver has to have a lot of it. It is a fairly dependable algorithm: the greater the social and economic inequality, the greater the potential for charitable giving.

What, then, of the poor? We might accept that they have been *one* of the habitual objects of charity, but we must also accept that it is a fool's task to try to define who the poor were or to estimate in detail their numbers in the Roman empire. Any idea of who the poor are has always been something that is customary, regional, and relative in nature, and these factors and others strongly affected who counted among their numbers. This means that there is really no such thing as 'the poor' but a spectrum of poor persons, different according to each society and situation, and that the words designating them are similarly diverse and relative in meaning.⁹ The mod-

5 As even the Christian charity of the bishops in late Antiquity certainly did not: Sotinel 2006, 113–114, with a good test case from fifth-century Gaza.

6 They were certainly aware of this in the case of individuals: Cic. *Off.* 2.54; Sen. *de Beat. Vit.* 23.5–24.1; see Parkin 2006, 65–66.

7 Tolstoy 1925, 54, begins with the statement: 'I belong to a class who by various devices deprive the working people of necessities ...' and ends: 'It is really so simple. If I want to aid the poor, that is, to help the poor not to be poor, I ought not to make them poor.'

8 Aristot. *Pol.* 1263b.1–15: the criticism of Plato is not so covert. The terms for 'liberality' are those derived from the opposite of slavery: the giver has to be able to be *eleutheros* and *eleutheriotētos*.

9 The literature is oppressive in its extent. Geremek 1997, 1–13, a good assessment of historical work to the late 1990s; and Cohen 2005 for a well-documented premodern instance in the Mediterranean, with emphasis on the utility of the Annaliste-derived distinction

ulated social orders of Roman society included a substantial body of 'middling persons' beneath the wealthy. Even so, the numbers of persons whose incomes and properties were so modest that their precarious existence could be severely impaired by a single bad event were certainly much greater.¹⁰ Those who experienced that one bad event – a serious illness, a catastrophic harvest, a debilitating injury, the death of the head of household, or who had their lifetime's resources taken from them – must have been numerous.

How many? Let us begin by setting the bar low. The Roman economic and social order was, like our own, vertiginously attenuated, with very few very rich at the top and huge numbers of the not-so-well-off at the bottom. Even generous estimates that postulate significant numbers of persons of 'middling' economic status – up to one-tenth of the entire population – still leave perhaps upwards of six to eight-tenths who were persons who lived close to having just enough from one year to the next. They were like the class of persons categorised as 'the working poor' in early modern Europe. It is these last who were constantly threatened by risks, financial and property losses, and health and environmental disasters that could precipitate them into dire circumstances.¹¹ They were like the mass of the urban working people at Rome, who, we are told, bought their bread from one day to the next and for whom any stoppage in supplies signalled an instant crisis.¹² Out of the ranks of these persons of modest means were continually produced the large numbers whom we might call the desperate poor. It was easy to picture them. They were like the imagined poor of the town of Plataea in a Roman novel. Bears being kept for a wild-beast hunt had perished from heat and disease, so their rotting carcasses had been thrown into the streets of the town. Forced by 'rough poverty,' *inculta pauperies*, the poor rushed to devour the foul meat, their 'free lunch,' *dapes gratuita*.¹³ People of the time knew who these poor were. John Chrysostom reported that persons of very modest means were hauled into court, but the better off never bothered themselves with mendicants who had nothing worth contesting. They were

between 'structural' and 'conjunctural' poverty. On relativity and diversity, and their consequences, see Whittaker 1993, 279–280.

10 See Scheidel 2006; and Scheidel and Friesen 2009: there was not a stark separation between a tiny group of super wealthy and a mass of poor. For a comparison of the kinds of urban poor who might be so exposed, see Cohen 2005, 53–59, for a selection of occupations in mediaeval Cairo, all of which had parallels in Rome.

11 Scheidel and Friesen 2009, 62, estimating that the top 1.5 % of the population controlled about one-fifth of the total wealth; and that 'middling' groups, perhaps 10 % of the population, controlled another fifth; for a different estimate, see Whittaker 1993, 276.

12 Tac. *Hist.* 4.38.2: *volgus, alimenta in dies mercari solitum, cui una ex re publica annonae cura.*

13 Apul. *Met.* 4.14.

not worth the effort.¹⁴ He estimated the numbers of such poor persons in his native Antioch to be about a tenth of the whole population – persons so alien in their distinctive visibility and permanent destitution that they were like ‘another people’ in the city.¹⁵ Over the generations of late antiquity, the more highly monetised economy probably generated harder defined lines between those without adequate resources and those with them. The sometimes stark difference between the *inopes*, *egentes*, *pauperes*, the resourceless, and the *locupletes*, *divites*, *opulenti*, the rich and powerful, highlighted the position of those who lacked adequate protection and who were especially vulnerable to oppression and exploitation.¹⁶ The terms were embedded in a discourse about the powerful and the powerless that marked both the Christian and the secular ideologies of the time.

Givers might perhaps aim at temporarily alleviating the condition of some of these truly indigent persons whom they knew in their local community and whom they thought to be deserving of an occasional handout.¹⁷ Even in this case, it was often more than just suffering that elicited the response: the recipient had to be thought to be worthy of the benefaction. The moral yardstick of being estimated to be ‘deserving’ from the perspective of the giver was critical. This judgment was complicated because the standards of measuring who was deserving changed over time. The attitude of selectivity went all the way down to those of the lowest formal status. The charitable act of granting freedom to slaves, for example, was to be performed for slaves perceived as deserving. It was to be refused to the undeserving.¹⁸ The valuation had to face ever-latent prejudices against the indigent, as illustrated by a wall graffito of a frustrated taverner found at Pompeii: ‘I detest poor people (*abomino pauperos*). If someone asks for something for free, he’s an idiot. Let him hand over the money – then he’ll get what he wants.’¹⁹ To be extended help, the person had to be deserving of it in the first place; they had to have some resources or some status that would justify their being deserving. In this precise fashion – the measurement of social worth and

14 Ioh. Chrys. *Hom. in Act. Apost.* 13 (PG 60: 110); see Humfress 2009, 384.

15 Ioh. Chrys. *Hom. In Matt.* 66.3 (PG 58: 630); see Giuffrida 2009, 199; for further comment: Whittaker 1993, 276.

16 See Ambr. *de Fide* 4.81; Freu 2007, 65; with further comment by Banaji 2012, 599–600; for some counter-arguments based on an analysis of the laws in the *Codex Theodosianus*, see Grodzynski 1987.

17 Amongst a multitude of studies, that by Giridharadas 2018 makes this simple point with force.

18 See, e.g., Cic. *Leg.* 3.25; see Mouritsen 2011, 32–33, on formal legislative constraints along the same lines.

19 CIL 4.9839b (Pompeii); see Whittaker 1993, 274.

the reinforcement of a moral order – poor people have always had a special relevance for the wealthy, and even the slightly better off.

If only the better-off could engage in charitable giving on any scale, then those in need *could* be one of the logical recipients of their gifts. Both the motives and the objects are manifest, for example, in Ciceronian and Senecan ideology.²⁰ Given the superior position of the wealthy and the dependence of the poor, the latter were perhaps an obvious choice but, in the end, the giving was always a choice for the givers. The aspect of choosing, however, was not a core cause but a behavioural response. At its core, charitable giving has always been fuelled by serious inequalities in the distribution of wealth. The more equal the distribution of wealth, the less the need for charitable giving – and, in fact, the less it is in evidence.

This last fact raises a collateral difficulty for an analysis of charity. In the long-term history of the Roman Mediterranean, generous giving was more complex than just having the wealthy on one side and needy persons on the other. Charity overlapped with a different historical sociology of giving. The latter was a combination of personal patronage and civic beneficence that we have come to label ‘euergetism’ or communal ‘do-gooding.’ For the city and territorial states of the Mediterranean, both types of giving were strongly urban-centred phenomena. As an urban phenomenon, the poor were the dark flipside of the high-minded civic euergetism of the elite. We are therefore often persuaded to see the poor as almost solely a city-centred phenomenon. This peculiar focus on ‘the poor’ in the city, a focus that was often further confined to one’s fellow citizens, was an ideological perspective generated by the idea-producing cultural elites of the cities. This is yet another measure of the ways in which inequality is central to our problem. Whereas by far most of the poor were in fact in the countryside, most civic generosity, carefully celebrated for public approval, was in the cities. The pictures produced in our sources reflect these biases. The wealthy givers are heavily on the record; most of the poor are not. The double deficit produces the impression that giving was solely ‘a chapter in the cultural history of the upper classes.’²¹ If we understand the quality of the links between giving and poverty, we have to grasp the specificity of types of giving since it must be emphasised that the wealthy could give in many different ways. In our own day, if they so wish, in addition to charities the rich can give to the yacht or country club, to medical research, or more directly to their own

20 E.g., Cic. *Off.* 1.68, 2.36–37, 2.52–69; and Sen. *Ben.* 3.8, 4.10–11, and 5.11; see Parkin 2006, 62–63: as she remarks, these statements still assume respectable recipients who are capable of returning favour, honour, gratitude, and so on.

21 Mandler 1990; most of the poor rural: see Whittaker 1993, 275–276.

private foundations.²² For the Romans who possessed the surplus resources, there were, similarly, a series of choices. In the first place, to give or not to give; and if to give, to give how much and to whom. Charity in the sense of giving to 'the poor' or 'the needy' was just one possible element in a more expansive spectrum of potential benefactions. Furthermore, in terms of euergetism, this possible source of assistance was only present where the peculiar social institution was present, which was far from everywhere in the empire – and wherever it did exist, we have very little good evidence of its extent.²³

It should not be forgotten that the urban focus of the public records of giving distorts in precisely this way: neither small remote communities nor the rural poor scattered in the countryside counted for much. Their wretched hamlets and miserable poverty were not sufficiently visible or valued by the better-off to count. But it was here, arguably, that the worst of the really destructive poverty was concentrated.²⁴ In the huge expanses of the countryside the marginal poor, facing the challenge of something as common as a series of bad harvests, were sometimes forced to the extremes of selling their wives or children, or both, into servitude. We find them populating the servile landscape from Solon's Athens to Augustine's Africa.²⁵ No charity was going to change the basic causes or the hard results of this poverty. A modest charity might well have been present in rural venues. We know next to nothing about it, however, because that world did not engage the givers and the receivers in the production of laudatory public records. Both the civic benefactor and the charitable giver wanted to be seen and to be recognised for their giving. Where charity was brought into focus, it was still the visible poor who counted and they were concentrated in the towns and cities where the rich happened to reside and where the centres of political and cultural power were located.²⁶

22 A modern example: the second greatest beneficiaries of 'charitable' giving in the United States are private universities and colleges; otherwise, the great heavy-hitters in giving, the wealthy tycoons of hi-tech, give mainly to their own foundations: R. Frank, *CNBC Markets* 12 June 2018 (online); L. Albrecht [in] *MarketWatch* 18 June 2018 (online).

23 Not among the Jews of Palestine, for example: Shaw 1989, 247; cf. Brunt 1990, 521–522, with real scepticism about how many of the wealthy actually practiced the ideal.

24 Noted for north Africa, and rightly, by Brown 2012, 342; also recognised for the late post-imperial east by Patlagean 1977, 252–271, on the villages and the countryside; for the little that is known of their support by the wealthy, see Garnsey and Woolf 1989, 155–157, with emphasis on the hard fact of dependency.

25 Solon: Arist. *Ath. pol.* 6; 12.4, with Plut. *Solon*, 15.3–4; for Augustine's Africa: see Aug. *Ep.* *10 (*CSEL* 88: 46–51); for other cases, see Holman 2001, 68–70, with good attention to the attendant economic forces.

26 Pietri 1983, 274; cf. Brown 2012, 512.

This was especially true of the *euergetēs*, the civic ‘do-gooder,’ who was implicated in a reciprocal social economy of influence and honour. His or her giving was often paraded as a gratuitous sharing of wealth, but it was understood by both parties never to be free. The honourable givers always expected a return on their gifts.²⁷ Aware of this social algebra, potential recipients could exploit the bilateral economy by giving honours to potential givers in advance, priming the pump for hoped-for benefactions in the future.²⁸ Giving was part of an exploitative system in which the well-off in a sense ‘bought’ the good will and public assent of their fellow citizens.²⁹ It is this type of giving which dominates our records to the manifest disadvantage of charity. Giving to the utterly despised destitute, like beggars, in the full knowledge that there could not and would not be any payback had to be ‘outside the normal paradigm of return.’³⁰ Such an ‘outside the normal paradigm’ was not an innovation of Christianity. It had always existed in daily practice and in philosophical ideals as reflected in the secular background to the Christian ‘Sentences of Sextus.’³¹ As an ideal, it had a substantial pre-Christian existence found, for example, in the ideas of Seneca, by no means an original thinker.³² Even in this case, the destitute and the formally powerless could exploit an algebra of giving by using tactics of inversion and of dishonour – humiliating, shaming, or even threatening the potential givers to provoke giving.³³ Beggars (demanders) purposefully gathered at places, like the Clivus Aricinus just outside the town gates of Aricia on the Appian way south of Rome, where they could aggressively insist on handouts from travellers who had to take that route.³⁴ The same provocative tactics could also be deployed where euergetic giving was involved, as when the people at Pollentia held the body of a *primus pilus* centurion hostage until his

27 Still one of the best analyses of the moral system, despite subsequent tweaking by others, is Paul Veyne, ‘Qu’est-ce que l’euergetisme?’, in Veyne 1976, 20–28; Christian writers, like Cyr., *De opere et eleosymnis*, 21–22 (CCL 3A: 68–69), recognised the difference in motive and action.

28 On ‘proleptic honours,’ see Domingo Gygax 2016, 45–56.

29 Zuiderhoek 2009, 113–153, who presents a face of giving that countervails one of the main arguments informing Veyne’s 1976 study.

30 Parkin 2006, 79.

31 Finn 2006, 1–4, outlines the pre-Christian roots of the later Christian collection of moral precepts.

32 See Seneca on the Stoic ideal of giving disinterestedly to the shipwrecked, the penniless exile and the destitute beggar: Sen. *de Clem.* 2.5.1; comment by Bolkestein 1939, 142–143; and Hands 1968, 81–83.

33 Parkin 2006, 74–80, is especially good on this.

34 Whittaker 1993, 284, with other similar cases; the same tactic is richly documented for late antiquity: Neri 1998, 62–73; for more striking examples of the tactic, see Grey and Parkin 1993, 286–287.

family agreed to pay for a gladiatorial show.³⁵ A species of public blackmail was the not-too-covert other side of euergetism.³⁶ The threat could be latent and only made evident now and then. Behind the gifts of foods and entertainments given by emperors to the people of the imperial capital, there lurked the threat of chaos and violence should they not do so – as actually happened in times of serious shortages in food supplies.³⁷ Facing the real threat of crowd chaos and urban rioting in the epicentre of the empire, the much lauded *liberalitas principis* looks more like a defensive tactic than outright ‘charity’ or classic euergetism. In a context of radical inequalities, everyone was manipulating access to wealth and resources.

The whole concept of liberality and its relationship to *libertas* or ‘freedom’ is a complex one since it, too, was constantly changing in response to pragmatic circumstances – many of them the types of threats or demonstrations of the type noted in the local municipal contexts of the Roman state. If citizens of the Roman republican state had used their power, their votes, their patrons, and their tribunes to acquire the right of subsidised and (later) gratuitous food distributions to assist in their subsistence, this right was soon limited by the emergence of an empire that greatly outstripped the reality and moral regime of a city state, even a large one. These distributions were never extended as a ‘right’ to all citizens, even those who were fortunate enough to be resident in the imperial metropolis.³⁸ What emerged were the special benefactions of the *annona* supply that were somehow a ‘right’ of these fortunate chosen people of the metropolis but simultaneously a gift given by the reigning emperor. The benefactions were defined by a variation of civic euergetism that had been marooned in a city by a territorial state that expanded far beyond the moral ties linking benefactors with its citizens. But the emperor was something more than a simple generous euergetic benefactor – part of the generosity, at least, was a proactive response to potential threats, as the reality of ‘food riots’ in the city clearly demonstrate. The undertow of the collective demands and threats of those whose subsistence was at stake surely explain a lot of the response of urban benefactors, whether secular emperors or, later, Christian bishops.³⁹

35 Suet. *Tib.* 37.3: the members of the family who were put under threat were the centurion’s heirs.

36 See Coleman 2011, 343–345; although expressed in somewhat more anodyne terms, the same view is argued by Zuiderhoek 2007.

37 As is made evident by Garnsey 1988, 218–243; and Virlouvet 1985, 39–82.

38 The literature is vast: Garnsey 1988, 167–217, is a sufficient history of the political dimensions of these distributions in the republic and the Principate.

39 The gap between political euergetism and the actions of Christian bishops in this regard

These observations indicate a fundamental difficulty. Since inequality is the basis of charity, a big problem, although not necessarily an insuperable one, is the lost voice of those who did not have the wealth. One result – reflecting in our eyes, perhaps, a deep-seated hypocrisy – is that ‘the discourse on poverty is exclusively the product of aristocrats.’ The observation has been made of the Greek cities-states of the Hellenistic and republican age, but it applies across all our peoples and periods.⁴⁰ An important corollary for our investigation is that the poor that we see and the ones on whom the gifts were occasionally bestowed were the poor who concerned the rich or those holding positions of power. The insuperable problem for the historian is that the whole process is seen as a one-way street, a social panorama viewed from one perspective only. Inside this textual world, finding the boundaries of our problem is challenging. Even for modern and early modern societies for which a host of data are available, defining and quantifying ‘the poor’ or ‘poverty’ is a problem of protean difficulty.⁴¹ Although the poor, on various definitions and varieties, certainly existed in very large numbers, they cannot be reconstructed from our existing texts.⁴² Like the disabled, who are a considerable portion of any population, they are largely invisible in our literary sources.⁴³ What we have by default, and sometimes in super-abundance, as in Christian writings, is a discourse *about* the poor and about giving, all of it flowing from the pens of well-off literate elites. Whereas it is marginally possible to write a history of the *idea* of poverty and of charitable giving, it is almost impossible to make an historical

was not that great; Salzman 2017 is right (I think) to emphasise the considerable overlap and interaction between the two.

40 Brélaz 2013, 69.

41 For the application of some modern concepts (‘relative’ and ‘absolute’ poverty, ‘relative deprivation,’ and such) to Roman circumstances, see Prell 1997, 10–28.

42 Claire Taylor is one of the few to face this problem head-on, without blinking, in her 2017 work.

43 Proportions of persons who are disabled, mentally or physically, on different estimates, account for roughly 20 % of modern populations. For the UK the elderly constitute 45 % of the disabled. The official statistics for the United States place the figure at about 19–20 % for the whole population (U.S. Census 2010). Modern Italy, perhaps a more humane society, counts only 15 % of persons in this category. Since disabilities are increasingly acquired as one ages – in the USA for which measurements are available, about eight times as much as the rest of the population – poverty increasingly affects persons classified as disabled. These proportions would only be greater, surely, for any premodern society. The extent to which we cannot measure the phenomenon nor assess its scale for antiquity might be judged from Garland 2010², 28–44, the chapter most focused on poverty (e.g., the question of beggars), where the quantitative aspects of the problem are hardly broached. When compared with the scale of the realities of premodern times, the data to which we have access are manifestly immensely disproportionate to the facts on the ground.

investigation into the reality of the interactions between the rich and the poor in which giving was just one element embedded in a gross maldistribution of goods.

1 Qualities of difference

As far as the ideas are concerned, we can note that pre-Roman and pre-Hellenic societies, including that of the Hebrews, generated a special idea of the poor and their relation to God. As the Psalmist put it, the supreme deity himself was 'the father of orphans, the defender of widows.'⁴⁴ The ideology created a special concept of the poor. They were not just people who happened to be materially deprived. Rather, because of their powerlessness, they shared in a special divine protection. They were humans who lacked basic needs and who were exposed to maltreatment for a reason: the violence of the rich and powerful who oppressed them. What the poor were seeking and demanding was not so much alms or charity as justice – as we might say, social justice.⁴⁵ It is an attitude that is reflected in a sermon of Augustine where he is commenting on the famous saying in the gospel of Matthew where Jesus remarked: 'I say that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' The text provoked Augustine to remark that a rich man might laugh at the rags worn by a poor man, but that the pauper will be able to say: 'But I will enter (i. e., the kingdom of God). These tattered rags are the clothes that will be worn then. Those men will not enter who have committed unjust acts against us, who have oppressed us.'⁴⁶ This difference is at the heart of a classic study of the transformations in who the meritorious poor were in antiquity, and who were therefore seen as deserving of public benefactions.⁴⁷ The poor in the cities of the Roman empire who were a miserable flotsam-and-jetsam of down-and-outs were *not* seen by their betters in the light of justice for the oppressed. Often, they were despised; sometimes they were felt to be a threatening underclass harbouring an inchoate danger. Christian ideologues, on the other hand, who developed ideas inherent in

⁴⁴ Ps. 68:5.

⁴⁵ Powerfully evoked by Brown 2001, 69, and Brown 2012, 79–80; see also, *in extenso*, Houston 2006.

⁴⁶ Mt. 19:24 (Mk 10:25; Lk 18:24); Aug. *Serm. Mainz* 12.9–11 = *Serm. Dolbeau* 5.9–11 = Dolbeau 1996, 79–81: *Ego, inquit, intrabo. Hoc mihi panni isti praestabunt; non intrabunt illi qui nobis iniurias faciunt, qui nos premunt*. See Lepelley 2006, 204.

⁴⁷ Bolkestein 1939, especially 417–437, where he lays out his basic conclusions.

half a millennium of Jewish thinking, propagated an idea of the poor not only as deserving but as embodying a special element of the divine – an elevated element in them that suggested that their low position was not just unfortunate but unjust. If we compare Cicero's *De officiis* ('On Duties') of the mid-40s BCE with another work of the same name, the *De officiis* of Ambrose, Christian bishop of Mediolanum, of the late 380s CE, the difference is readily apparent. Among the basic duties incumbent upon Christians for Ambrose was the giving of charitable gifts to the poor. These gifts received the special Christian term of *eleemosynae* or giving of alms, a duty that surely would have struck Cicero as very odd.⁴⁸ For most Christians, like Chrysostom in Antioch, the ideal of this duty extended all the way across the social spectrum from the wealthy at the top to the poor at the bottom.⁴⁹ That such a duty would be imposed on persons of every social status would truly have been an oddity for Cicero.

The unusualness of the difference was notable on more than on just this ground. Ambrose could equate the new charity to a kind of slavery: It was abasing oneself to serve one's fellow human in the dutiful way that Christ had humiliated himself by becoming a slave in order to free us all.⁵⁰ To say that Cicero could not imagine construing the noble virtue of *caritas* as servitude is an understatement. The shift to the new Christian framework of giving to the poor was a change that 'amounted, in the long run, to an imaginative difference of momentous proportions.'⁵¹ This giving was not a condescension of the wealthy. Rather, it imposed a moral guilt on them for tolerating the unjust suffering of the 'unfortunates' in their midst. The difference with the giving of the classical benefactor has been bluntly stated by Veyne: 'The pagan empire of the third century could have cultivated charitable giving as much as the Christian empire of a century later did ... It was just that it remained the prisoner of a system of thought that subordinated the social category of "the poor" under the universal civil authority of the law – that pagan world did not even perceive "the poor."⁵² In the social value system that Veyne is describing, the givers gave to their fellow citizens, who counted, and not to the poor as such. This was true even when massive gratuitous public banquets were staged on an epic scale, as Publius Lucilius Gamala did at Ostia when he had 217 triclinia set up for his pub-

48 Ambr. *Off.* 1.28.130–30.159 (CCL 15: 47–58), although the sentiment is found throughout; the work probably dates to the late 380s CE: see Davidson 2001, 3–5.

49 Chrysos. *Hom. in Matt.* 52; *Hom. in Hebr.* 1 (PG 52: 523; 63: 20).

50 Ambr. *Ep.* 7.23 (CSEL 82.1: 55); for context, see Garnsey 1996, 199–201.

51 Brown 2012, 53.

52 Veyne 1976, 58.

lic banquet; or the anonymous benefactor at Pompeii in the late 50s CE, setting up 456 tables for the feeding of the populace.⁵³ These great feasts, for 2,000 and 7,000 persons respectively, although large (indeed, amongst the largest of which we know) were celebrated for the benefactor's fellow citizens and not for the poor. Wherever these givings by the town benefactors to mass recipients can be traced in detail, as in the epigraphical texts from the African provinces of the empire, it is manifest that they were given solely to their fellow citizens organised in their formal civic groups and associations.⁵⁴ Christian giving, by contrast, was the institutionalisation of a new, more democratic, system of charitable giving. Seen in this light, Christian charity (as all charity) was the result of the moral system imposed by the economic one. Since one could not give to people who had nothing with the expectation of a return from them, by definition the Christian gift had to be gratuitous, silent, and done for no reward. Only an imagined creation, an omnipotent omniscient god, could promise a reward in an equally illusory future.

Who could give in the new system? This sounds like a strange question since it was surely always the case that anyone *could* give. Given the canons governing euergetism, however, in the dominant public system only the well-off could give. To be part of this particular civic game of giving, one had to have real wealth. The benefactor had to be able to underwrite the building of a bath, an aqueduct, the staging of spectacular games or entertainments, a public feast, or the subsidising of an alimentary program. In this respect, at least as an ideal, Christian charity was different. In its social system, anyone could give. Early on, the teaching of the tale of the widow's mite made the point. A single wealthy civic benefactor in the classical system would give huge amounts; the poor widow gave only two *lepta*, the two smallest value coins in circulation at the time.⁵⁵ But her gift was to count just as much as the gift made by any wealthy woman. Everyone could now give. A new kind of verticality appeared. The novel concept was tied to an ideology that was a democratisation of a traditional concept in which a giver acquired merit and stored up 'symbolic capital' for the future. 'God greatly favours the person who gives food to someone in need from the bottom of their heart, even if the gift is small.' Now a person of even very modest resources could give and acquire 'treasure in heaven,' their own little investment in

53 Osanna 2018, 310–322; *CIL* 14.375 = *ILS* 6147 (Ostia, end first century BCE); and Donahue 2017, 37–38.

54 Hugoniot 2006, 207–235 (based on 109 documented cases).

55 Mk 12:41–44; Lk 21:1–4.

the future.⁵⁶ Now even the poor, including the widow of the gospel of Luke, could join in a common stream of divinely inflected giving along with the super-wealthy Melania. Christian ideology construed the giving of Melania's colossal wealth and the widow's two *lepta* as a similar kind: a charitable giving to God. The individual gifts of the greatest number of ordinary Christians might have been small but, given the very large numbers of adherents that Christian churches were mobilising, the total amounts being collated were hardly inconsequential.

Although a new spectrum of verticality was encouraged by Christian ideology, and by an insistent avalanche of preaching and writing, it was amplified an unusually polarised view of the poor.⁵⁷ They were simultaneously split between 'our brothers,' for whom fellow Christians had a fraternal responsibility, and the irreligious threatening others who were the 'urban barbarians' of late antiquity.⁵⁸ The division itself was not that new. Remarks by two of the more incisive students of modern poverty make as much clear: 'This urge to reduce the poor to a set of clichés has been with us as long as there has been poverty. The poor appear, in social theory, as much as in literature, by turns lazy or enterprising, noble or thievish, angry or passive, helpless or self-sufficient.'⁵⁹ The poor have never been understood as they are: persons who have been made to be disadvantaged and powerless. The polarities of labelling were not new: they can be found far back into pre-Roman periods and they complicate our (and their) attitudes and behaviour towards 'the poor.' What was happening with the spread of the mass ideology of Christianity was a greater homogenisation and 'democratisation' of the concept.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, as new general categories of organising whole human populations replaced the old citizen/non-citizen divide, wider polarities like the barbarian/civilised divide came to the fore. Just as there were 'noble' barbarians as well as bad and threatening ones, so the division between 'the rich' and 'the poor,' once a division made within the polis – *hoi plousioi* versus *hoi penetai* – came to be attached to these more universal categories. Now the poor became more urgently subdivided into the 'good' and the 'bad' poor. This changing valence of 'the poor' had effects on what counted as 'charity.' Like the outsider 'barbarians,' of whom the poor were urban analogues, they could be seen either as 'evil threats' or as 'noble sav-

56 Rufinus, *Praef. Sent. Sext.* (CCL 20: 259) dating as early as the early second century CE; on the treasure, see Brown 2016, 2–6.

57 Brown 2012, 77–78.

58 See Freu 2007, 390–418.

59 Banerjee and Duflo 2012, vii.

60 As famously expounded by Mazzarino 1960, 35–54.

ages' – noble like the hard-scrabble peasant of the republic, with his rural hut, his family to support, and his few *iugera* to plough; or 'barbaric' like the violent 'dangerous classes' of the city.⁶¹ It was the old-style citizen who was deserving of help. The propertyless, feckless, uncivil, riotous, and lazy were felt not to be, but they were thought to be present and in considerable numbers, to be morally bad and even threatening. The responsibility of the individual was thought to be divergent: the indigent who were born into a natural order of poverty were more deserving; conversely, those responsible for their condition were less so.⁶²

The watershed seems to be the gradual focusing of 'the poor' as a term referring to a broad social category of persons. Earlier, poverty, whether considered as *penia* or *ptocheia*, *penuria* or *paupertas*, was a precise fate that affected individual persons. The specific nature of the value and the person seems to have continued throughout all of Roman history. It has been argued, rightly I think, that the law codes show no sign of poverty or poor-ness being anything other than an affliction suffered by an individual. In the Roman law, there is no *social* category of 'the poor,' and consequently, 'each reference to a poor person has to be interpreted in context.'⁶³ The destitute surely did exist. They were the indigent who were well known in their community to be permanently in need. They were not to be confused with the *pauperes*, persons who were relatively less well off than others above them, like the millions of Americans who, in the wealthiest state in the world, live clinging from one pay check to the next.⁶⁴ When Augustine preached to his parishioners about the poor 'his hearers would have known what category of poor persons he referred to. The poor of the church and the poor who lived on alms alone were an easily recognizable underclass.'⁶⁵ In contrast to

61 As seen by Morley 2006, 35.

62 Whittaker 1993, 273–274; Grey and Parkin 1993, 289–290.

63 Humfress 2006, 203: '... late Roman legislators like their classical juristic predecessors were uninterested in any conceptual understanding of poverty per se'; with comments by Osborne in Atkins and Osborne 2006, 19.

64 For example, nearly 800,000 were caught up in the closing of the U.S. Federal government in December-January 2018–19: *New York Times* (10 January 2019); their numbers now (March 2020) more than confirmed by the emergency measures required in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic where, in the 'richest country in the world,' in a matter of weeks, more than 30,000,000 weekly or monthly-paid employees, about 17 % of all employees, were reduced to filing unemployment claims, with many of them thrown onto the mercies of lenders and foodbanks. In India, the shutdown had a more dramatic impact on the large sector (as in the Roman empire) who depended on day-wage labour incomes, their numbers exceeding 120,000,000 (Nikhil Inamdar, Mumbai, *BBC News*: 6 May 2020) or 25 % of the labour market.

65 Brown 2012, 343.

the earlier poor, the new Christian poor to whom Augustine refers were part of a new more generalised class of 'the poor' who transcended individual cities and even states.

Attempts to understand the relations between rich and poor are bedevilled by our near-fatal entrapment inside the world of the literary sources. As with the study of crime in pre-modern times, we are constantly hounded by the ghost of the 'dark figure': in our case, with accurately quantifying poverty and the actual range of *all* the giving and taking. As has been pointed out by more than one observer of the past, there was certainly a lot of small-scale giving by ordinary persons, like the widow of the gospel of Luke. No extensive record of this micro-giving can be discovered in our canonical literary sources or in the public display of expensive public inscriptions. But the basic point stands that the gratuitous giving of generous givers was never limited to the wealthy. In our own society, a recent personal memoir recollects the many acts of generosity and charity from strangers, priests, the fellow indigent, welfare officers, and others that made a difference.⁶⁶ By far most of the elevated writers of our sources, whether secular or Christian, were generally disinterested in recording or documenting such low-level charity.⁶⁷ A whole range of oral stories, myths, popular fables, and vignettes embedded in novels point to the widespread strength of the ideals of *xenia*: the duty to host persons, even (perhaps especially) strangers in need of everything from alimentary sustenance to a roof over their head. Similarly, it is impossible to believe that persons of little worth did not give when they could, were moved to do so, or felt a duty to do so.⁶⁸ It was no innovation of Christianity to claim a divine imprimatur and favour for such behaviour. As many stories of popular hue make clear, traditional divinities not only approved of such giving, but rewarded the good who did it and punished (in stories, at least) those who did not. The story of Baucis and Philemon illustrated these wide moral dimensions of *xenia*.⁶⁹ If one is willing to put in the effort to look around, often in non-canonical sources, there is plenty of evidence in pre-Christian city-states of the Mediterranean for low-level

66 As made clear in the compelling narrative by Kaldheim 2019.

67 Such instances do exist, however, as in the well-known vignette of Augustine encountering a poor beggar who had benefitted from the gift of a few almost worthless coins – *ille pauculis et emendicatis nummulis adeptus erat*: Aug. *Confess.* 6.6.9–10 (CCL 27: 79–80).

68 A conclusion that Parkin 2006, 73–74, rightly claims must rest on 'common sense' in the face of the huge known deficit of specific evidence.

69 Ov., *Met.* 8.611–724. That it was so marginal to mythical stories of the time is surely indicative only of its marginality when seen as orality, not of its widespread presence at the time.

philanthropic giving.⁷⁰ The problem further obscures our understanding of the generality of giving.

2 Differential developments

Euergetism and charity often stood as opposed, not complementary, phenomena. The contrast between the moral worlds of the Greek and Roman Mediterranean and the antecedent 'near eastern' worlds in this respect is striking. In the moral karma of the latter, giving to the destitute was a common element in its ideology, preached by moralists, seers and prophets, and reflected in the proclamations of near-divine monarchs. The need to care for the poor and to give gratuitously to those in need was a divine command.⁷¹ Practices like the freedom of gleaning in the fields after harvest time, a common sharing of private resources with community members in need, seem to be singularly absent or very rarely referred to in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean.⁷² The place where we find consistent hints of such charitable attitudes is in the oral poetry of the 'Homeric' or pre-city-state 'literature.' The rise of the Mediterranean city-state generated novel social and political relations that focused giving in new fashions and forged definitions of new persons who were deserving objects of public giving. The result was a peculiar Maussian economy of giving and receiving.⁷³ More than this, the change implicated hundreds of autonomous small worlds within which new polarities of insiders and outsiders cast the dialogue between the rich and the poor, the few and the many, in a new frame of revindication. In contrast, Christian ideology, largely dependent on the real existence of a completely different political frame of citizenship and belonging, was able to draw on the antecedent pre-polis ideology of 'the poor.' In this other ideology, every person who was poor because of a primal or more immediate act of injustice had a social claim, especially on the rich and the powerful. In its more radical forms, what they were crying out for was not alms but justice, a revindication for having been the victims of the violence and oppression that had made them poor in the first place.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Brown 2012, 59–60, referring to Parkin 2006, who details some of the evidence.

⁷¹ MacMullen 2015; see the formative interpretation of Bolkestein 1939, 34–66.

⁷² Shaw 2013, 234–235; see also Hamel 1990, 216–219.

⁷³ Domingo Gygas 2016, 58–106, the best current study of the emergence of the practice in the context of the polis.

⁷⁴ Brown 2012, 79–80, who connects and explains the resurgence of the new ideology that MacMullen 2015 outlines in its earlier phases.

This historical development challenges us with a primal question of definition: Why is something euergetism and not our idea or practice of charity? Simply because, quite apart from whatever charitable impulses benefactors might have had, the benefactors of classic euergetism had little concern for 'the poor' per se. The benefactions were made in the first instance to celebrate the givers and, in a related sense, the community of which they were part, 'their people' so to speak. Since the givers wanted and expected a reciprocation of honour as part of this social dialogue, they were not looking to slaves and the poverty-stricken or even those of very modest means as their targets. Poverty as such had little to do with this exchange. Rather, it was a peculiar kind of inequality, as Piketty has repeatedly demonstrated, that was essential.⁷⁵ Of the many euergetic inscriptions known and collated for the Greek cities of the Hellenistic period, only one seems to make any mention of the truly needy. On one occasion, a queen came to the rescue of the inhabitants of a city whose inhabitants had been reduced to 'need' by a devastating earthquake.⁷⁶ But even this case is no exception to the dominant ideology since it was to the *citizens* of a city that she made her gift. Euergetic benefactions were made to persons and communities of standing who had a free choice to accept the gift and the potential means to reciprocate in a significant way. By contrast, the destitute were a captive or slavish audience, persons who faced the 'philosophical' Seneca with the problem of whether or not a slave could possibly reciprocate a gift. Being in extreme need, the indigent had no real choice but to accept. Speaking of venom, we might say that charity was always a poisonous gift because it signalled this extreme need, lack of power and resources, and because it 'enslaved' the recipient. Of course, it was also venomous in the sense that Oscar Wilde saw long ago when he remarked of charitable givers that they created and sustained the very injustice that they pretended to relieve: 'They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor.'⁷⁷

In a social-historical distinction that influenced the whole of the Roman world, the 'eastern' moral schemata continued to have real power in those other lands and peoples. In Judaea, Josephus seems either to have misunderstood or to have been latently hostile to the Greek civic ideal and practice

75 Piketty 2014; rather less apparent and less well argued in his follow-on study of 2020. Andrew Carnegie's essay, a fundamental charter of modern charitable giving, simply accepted extreme inequality as an 'unavoidable condition' to which his philanthropy would be an effective remedy: see Giridharadas 2018, 171.

76 See Brélaz 2013, 76.

77 Wilde [1891] 2007, 4: 231–268, quote: 232.

of euergetism.⁷⁸ Later Christian ideologues in the east who were heirs to elements of this ancient ideology remained actively hostile to euergetism. They included the Antiochene preacher John Chrysostom who denounced euergetism more than once in sermons in which he exhibited the new Christian attitudes to the poor.⁷⁹ In line with the older ideas, Christian ideology increasingly tended to conceive of all persons as part of a 'democracy' of the faith who were worthy objects of charitable giving. But this raised an old problem in a new guise that was faced both by the imperial state and by Christian bishops, including an aristocratic bishop in the later fourth century.⁸⁰ The bishop was none other than the Ambrose at Milan who made almsgiving one of the core duties imposed on the Christian. Such a widely imposed obligation forced a redefinition of the deserving and undeserving poor. Ambrose became angry when faced with what he saw as able-bodied young men who were scamming the Church's system of charity – men who faked being sunk in debt or having lost all their property to robbers. The presence of these cheaters, as he saw it, meant that the Church would have to institute a system of making inquiries into its welfare recipients to find out if they were really deserving.⁸¹ The Christian bishops were not alone. In the same decade, the new Theodosian state reacted no differently, issuing the first known secular legislation regulating the indigent who were capable of work:⁸² 'Let an inquiry be made into each of those persons whom with an "assumed poverty" have appealed to public assistance, both into the soundness of their body and into the strength of their years.' The state depended on informers to bring to the attention of the authorities any of these able-bodied persons who were not working, who were pretending to be in need whereas in fact they were deemed to be just lazy. The informer's reward for uncovering such undeserving poor was the seizure of the body of a servile person as his own slave, or of a free man to be his tied *colonus* in perpetuity. In both cases, we see the value of work, *labor*, coming to play the role of a

78 See Shaw 1989, 247, indicating Jos. *Ant.J.* 16.158–159, embedded in a longer discussion of Herod's euergetism (16.150–159) which, even given the rhetorical emphasis on 'Jewish custom/law,' is illuminating on this score. There are, however, examples of such giving in the construction and support of synagogues in the provinces (e.g., the synagogue of Naro in the province of Africa).

79 See MacMullen 2015, 493.

80 See Parkin 2006, 75–77.

81 Ambr. *Off.* 2.16.76–77; a view commonly shared then and later: Neri 1998, 59–62.

82 *CTh.* 14.18.1 (Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius I to Severus, Praefectus Urbi; 20 June 382); cf. *CJ* 11.26.1. Regarding its specific significance for *mendicitas*, I tend to agree with Neri 1998, 59; for a different view, see Grey and Parkin 1993.

discriminating agent in defining the meritorious poor.⁸³ The adage of the apostle Paul – ‘if anyone is unwilling to work, let him not eat’ – was now widely quoted by Christian churchmen – although now with a much different sense imparted to it – to enforce a new moral order of poverty.⁸⁴ In the age of Ambrose, the Christian state was intervening to define the ‘deserving poor’ not as citizens in need, but rather as individuals who no longer had any capacity to do useful labour to support themselves and the society of which they were part.

3 Emerging definitions

In their daily relationships, most persons manifestly recognised those who by any standard, certainly those of their own societies, were destitute. A range of data indicate that ordinary persons, moved out of sentiments of obligation or pity, gave to those who were in obvious need of help.⁸⁵ The terms are ones of extreme difficulty to define in our own terms, much less in theirs. People with few or inadequate resources have hardly ever escaped the moral judgements that accompany any distribution of wealth precisely because the possession of goods considerably alters one’s value in an aesthetic of social acceptability. Even more significant was a shift in ideas that changed poverty from a peculiar characteristic shared by individuals to a general social condition that characterised whole strata in society. When do ‘the poor’ become more than individuals who suffer individual misfortune and destitution and ‘poverty’ more than a misfortune suffered by a given individual?⁸⁶ The long-term persistence of certain types of poverty was probably part of the provocation, but not the only explanation.

Given the distribution of wealth in a given society, one can be absolutely deprived: literally unable to feed or adequately to cloth oneself or to have any proper shelter, and so on. These persons are ‘poor’ when judged against normal expectations of being barely sufficient, even if at the bottom end of the income spectrum. This maldistribution tends to become entrenched

⁸³ Brown 2016, chs. 4–6, traces signs of these debates in churches in the east, particularly in the context of evaluating the worth of monastic establishments; of course, Christian clergy were exempt from this criterion and, logically, they were to be supported by the charity of their parishioners.

⁸⁴ *Const. Apostol.* 2.1–63, 3.4–6; for the Pauline injunction see *2 Thessal.* 3:10–12.

⁸⁵ For a few investigations of this nature, see Parkin 2006, 60–82; see also Longenecker 2010, 60–107.

⁸⁶ For the significance of this revolution in thinking, see Himmelfarb 1991, 102–122, esp. 102–104.

and permanent for any given social and political order. The people at the bottom have the weight of advantageous income and opportunity permanently set against them in what we call by the anodyne name 'structural poverty.' The poor themselves, well aware of their predicament, are appropriately cynical. A Brazilian aphorism from the *favelas*, much appreciated by the writer Henry Miller – 'when shit becomes valuable, the poor will be born without assholes' – tells it all.⁸⁷ At the other end of the spectrum, it has been impossible for the wealthy to imagine the lives of the poor or their poverty. Protracted discussions of poverty or *paupertas*, as almost incessantly in the younger Seneca, were centred on a Disneyesque picture, an ideal concept that the philosopher could oppose to wealth and power for the purpose of the moral edification of himself and his peers who, of course, were not poor. Not that they did not try to understand. Seneca mentions the practice of the wealthy constructing a poor man's cell or a peasant's hut in one of the rooms of their richly-appointed villas so that they could go into it and 'feel poor' for a while.⁸⁸ This was reducing the imagined experiences of the poor to a theme-park 'ride' that you could acquire, briefly, by paying for it. It was a philosophical riff on the kind of 'slumming' among the plebeians by emperors like Antiochus IV or Nero so that they could get 'in touch' with 'ordinary people.'⁸⁹ The almost impossible barrier for us to surmount is to get past the images and ideologies of poverty, and hence of charitable giving, generated by those who had the wealth to give. Part of our difficulty is rooted in their problem of not being able accurately to picture the poor and their situation in any terms that reflected reality.⁹⁰ For the elites who produced our records, giving that was *not* a species of honourable euergetism was a moral practice that was difficult to conceive.

For all these reasons, although I am constrained to work with it, I intensely dislike the term 'charity.' It comes heavily laden with presumptive Judaeo-Christian values and, worse, is purposefully vague as to motives, purpose,

87 According to Erica de Jong, the words were scrawled as a footing to his letter in the Portuguese: 'Quando merda tiva valor pobre nasce sem cu' (letter to her of 20 April 1974): de Jong 1993.

88 On the *cella pauperis*, vel sim, see Sen. *Ep. Mor.* 18.7, on which see the pertinent remarks by Whittaker 1993, 293–294; 100.6; with Mart. *Epigr.* 3.48. Cf. Sen. *Ep. Mor.* 20.12–13, where the rich could assume a 'pretend poverty' for a few days just to see what it would be like.

89 See Polyb. 26.1 = Athenaeus 5.193D for Antiochus IV; and Tac. *Ann.* 13.25 and 47; Dio 61.8.1–4; 8.24; and Suet. *Nero* 26, for Nero.

90 See Auerbach 2013², 31–33, for a classic statement of the problem; see Neri 1998, 35–36, for yet more problems.

and function.⁹¹ The best that one can do is to offer a definition that embraces a gratuitous gifting or distribution of resources to those who are perceived to be 'needy' as a species of moral comfort. One of the consequent problems is perhaps best exemplified by the imperial *alimenta* programmes in Italy. These schemes were not devised to sustain persons who were impoverished, but rather those who might well have needed help to support the social position that they were optimally supposed to hold.⁹² The criterion necessary to be a recipient was not poverty but birth status: they had to be free-born citizens of municipalities at the centre of the empire.⁹³ Even when public support came from the state, it was a gift or *beneficium* of the emperor, and was construed within the reciprocal code of giving in which the giver expected an honorific return.⁹⁴ The recipients were special Roman citizens who were thought to be deserving because the state needed to have a stable, healthy, well-founded body of freeborn citizens in Italy, the homeland of the empire.⁹⁵ So the emperor, in this case Trajan, was willing to support programs that would help feed, clothe, and pay for other costs of their upbringing. The programs did not include all Roman citizen children since freedpersons who were citizens were deemed unworthy and were normally excluded. The emperor reaped a return of honour, seen as the paternal father-figure head of 'his people.' The recipients were construed as having become his sons and daughters: *pueri Ulpiani, Antoniniani, puellae Faustinae*, and so on.⁹⁶ Apart from two large bureaucratic inscriptions recording the technical aspects of the Trajanic program, the other epigraphical attestations of the schemes are what we might expect in this customary system: public expressions of gratitude from the grateful recipients to their benefactor.

91 So, despite its excellent contents, the problems are already embedded in the title of Hands 1968, where several aspects of these material transfers from 'have's' to 'have-nots' are almost indiscriminately mixed.

92 Woolf 1990, 206–210, demonstrated the high probability that these schemes were not concerned with poverty as such.

93 As confirmed in the private alimentary schemes founded by Pliny at Comum (*Ep.* 7.18.2) and a woman benefactor at Hispalis (modern Seville) in Iberia: both specify the recipients were to be freeborn, specifically *ingenui* – not just any citizens of the towns concerned, as freedman could be; Pliny, *Pan.* 28, says the same of a Trajanic program. Such a measure prevented owners from cynically manumitting their slaves so as to take advantage of such governmental schemes.

94 Woolf 1990, 216–220.

95 The imperial state feeding programs were all restricted to Italy and emphasised the idea of Italia Restituta (*RIC* 2.470: Trajan).

96 *CIL* 11.4351: Ulpiani; SHA, *Diad.* 2.10: Antoniniani; SHA, *Pius*, 8.1–2; *Aur.* 26.6: Faustinae.

Somewhat like the recipients of gratuitous grain distributions at Rome, and later at Constantinople, the children of the *alimenta* were a privileged chosen number out of all of those who were similarly needy. Although they were recipients of substantial assistance, and were glad of it, they were nonetheless persons of an elevated status – a display group for political purposes. Just so, as one worked one's way up the social ladder in terms of higher rank and status, the same principle of relief from so-called 'poverty' is found: this was just a peculiar fashioning of deserving need. In the same way, emperors from Augustus onward supported 'impoverished' senators in order to keep them functioning in a manner that was expected of a senator.⁹⁷ The problem is that no one would have considered these gratuitous gifts to support the perceived social need as 'charity': not the recipients, not the benefactor, and not the witnesses to the distributions. The only possible sign of a meaningful change came with the advent of a Christian emperor who, perhaps buying into a new idea of Christian membership as the one that counted, ordered that *alimenta* should be provided to indigent children (again, those of Italy) so that their parents would not be tempted to kill them or to sell them into slavery.⁹⁸ The advent of Christian emperors, indeed, seems to have provoked the addition of a Christian valuation of 'the poor' as 'deserving citizens' to the traditional ideals of the public benefactor.⁹⁹

Another problem is that the 'a' (charitable giving) and the 'b' (social gifts like public benefactions) overlap in the manner of a Venn diagram. The 'poor' were indeed closely linked to the distributions and the gifts that were given to support them, but it is hardly the case that all or even most of the resources were given to them under this rubric. In sixth-century Ravenna, the bishop Ecclesius (522–532) began the construction of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and San Vitale at Ravenna. Both church buildings were sponsored by a wealthy money manager, the *argentarius* Julian. With the help of this same well-off money man, Ecclesius's successor, Ursicinus (533–536), began the building of the church of Sant'Apollinare in Classe at Ravenna. That is to say, the bishops were able to mobilise the resources of Julian to bankroll the building of three of the largest churches in Italy of the time.¹⁰⁰ But it was the bishops who managed the projects, and it was they who took the credit for them in the name of the supreme deity. In an important

97 Millar 1997, 297–299; see Tac. *Ann.* 2.37–38, for some specific instances.

98 *CTh* 11.27.1 (Constantine to Ablabius, 13 May 313: to the municipalities of Italy) and 11.27.2 (Constantine to Menander, 6 July 322: to provincials, specifically those of Italy); see Woolf 1990, 204–205.

99 See Salzman 2017, esp. 72–73.

100 Deliyannis 2010, 200, with sources.

way, traditional euergetism had been defanged. The sources of wealth had to be importuned, or were acquired by living gift or by last will and testament, and were then rechannelled by the bishop.¹⁰¹ With this innovation, the new charity was one in which clerics, like bishops and priests, not having their own money, solicited the donation of funds by *others* which they then distributed. This type of transfer of money, whether to the community, to citizens of the city or, as here, to the church, was ‘wealth that needed to be laundered.’¹⁰² The church was the laundering bank and its ideas were the detergent. In Christian ideology, even the grossest of material takeovers could be justified in the name of helping the poor. So in 484 CE when the Vandal king Huneric ordered that all of the churches, estates, and other properties of the Catholic churches in Africa were to be transferred into the possession of ‘Homoian’ bishops, he offered the following justification: ‘we do not doubt that all which is transferred to our holy pontiffs (i.e., bishops) will be most useful in supporting the poor.’¹⁰³ The legitimation had a long tradition. The biographer of the bishop Cyprian, writing from Africa well over two centuries earlier, speaks of a rich villa and gardens that belonged to the bishop: ‘he would certainly have sold them to benefit the poor.’¹⁰⁴ Giving to ‘the poor,’ in other words, had become the ultimate justification for transfers of wealth that were in fact going to persons and corporate bodies other than the poor themselves.¹⁰⁵ Despite the fact that a firm line has sometimes been drawn between euergetism and Christian giving, there was a murky middle ground between them.¹⁰⁶ It is possible to see the two types of generosity as implicated in a complex dance in which the mental and social parameters of the one influenced the dimensions of the other.¹⁰⁷

The concept of the deserving poor has necessarily varied over time. One of the formal definitions that has been conventionally applied is the circle who counted as ‘our people’ or ‘our community.’ The poor who were within this circle were sometimes thought of as needing, deserving, meriting,

101 See Finn 2006, 34–89, esp. 35–37, on the sourcing; the re-channeling is a major theme of chs. 2, 5–6 in Goody 1983.

102 Brown 2012, 318.

103 Victor Vitensis, *Historia Persecutionis Africanae provinciae*, 3.14; for context, see Whelan 2018, 44, who points out that both sides attacked each other’s ‘charity’ as a species of bribery.

104 Pontius, *Vita Cypriani*, 15.1: *hortos, inquam, quos inter initia fidei suae venditos et de Dei indulgentia restitutos pro certo iterum in usu pauperum vendidisset, nisi invidiam*

105 Brown 2001, 20: ‘Support for the clergy was the outcome, in Christian circles, of an unprecedented “democratisation” of religious expertise and religious leadership ...’

106 Arguing that the two were fundamentally different: Veyne 1976, 45–67; see Brown 2001, 74–78, and Brown 2012, 53–71 on the nature of the differences.

107 This is the essence of the argument advanced by Salzman 2017.

or having a just claim on gifts that 'we' might give them. Those outside, although similarly poor, did not come within the purview of our charity. They could be described as extremely poor, living like animals, but for this very reason that were often seen as living in a world of barbaric degradation, as persons whose humiliation and squalor was proof of their undeserving status. Rather than being pitied and helped, they were to be feared and detested.¹⁰⁸ We should remember that this was a focalisation of political and philosophical attention and not necessarily one that was concordant with the sum of all actual behaviour. Furthermore, the idea that do-gooding should be restricted to one's own community was prevalent even in the values of the differently organised communities of the east, otherwise Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, with its message that everyone, even those alien to one's community, were one's neighbours, would not make much sense as an objection. There was no natural expectation that a Samaritan, of all things, would show pity and charity to someone not in his or her own community.¹⁰⁹ The boundaries of community whether of a polis or of a people still counted in defining those who were naturally deserving of help.

4 What kind of changes?

Did Christianity change pre-Christian moral codes in this respect? Yes, it did – normatively, at least. Jesus is reported to have specifically reprimanded those who gave in a traditional mode for acquiring public honour (Mt 6:1–4):

You should not perform your acts of social justice (*dikaïosynē*) in front of men in order to be gazed on by them, for then you will have no pay (*misthos*) given from your Father in the heavens. So whenever you give alms, don't blast a trumpet before yourself like those pretenders do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they might be given honour (*doxathōsin*) by others ... When you give alms don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms giving will be done in secret, and your Father, seeing you in secret, will reward you.

As an ideal, this alternative giving was the opposite of euergetism or civic giving. It was to be hidden and private, not to be broadcast in public, and not to be done with any expectation of a reward except in heaven. It is important, however, to be more specific about the nature of the change. In

¹⁰⁸ In modern as well as ancient circumstances, as when Charles Booth and Henry George so described the very poor in London in such terms: see Himmelfarb 1991, 109–110.

¹⁰⁹ Lk 10:25–37, the parable proper is at 10:36–37; the same view of Samaritan-Jewish relations is well encapsulated by another parable, with a similar basic message: Jn 4: 4–26.

theory, Christian values now defined a more universal community. Even if you came from distant communities remote from those of others, you were now brought within the fold of those potentially deserving of giving. But there are several important cautions. The idea that persons well beyond one's own civic community, polis or municipality, were deserving persons had already been achieved in secular fact by the greater reach of the Roman imperial state. The nature of aid to the needy reflected the new system. Emperors sometimes felt moved to intervene with their own resources, effectively those of the Roman state, to bring aid to cities suffering severe damage from earthquakes or other natural disasters.¹¹⁰ The people who were brought under the purview of 'deserving' were now not just the members of one's small urban community or one's fellow citizens but the subjects of a universal empire.

The new universalism of subjectivity was something that both the imperial state and the Christian churches shared. Consequently, the new Christian establishment was able to exploit not only the resources of the wealthy few, as in the pre-Christian past, but also the massed collective resources of very large numbers of ordinary persons. Even if many of the givers were not well off, the sheer scale of their numbers guarantees that the collective receipts must have amounted to a considerable taking. On the other side of this same picture, the large numbers of people in daily need offered an expansive field to be exploited by Christians, especially the priests and bishops who were on the lookout for ways to cultivate popular power to underwrite their positions.¹¹¹ The much larger number and dispersed nature of the recipients, however, meant that the economy of reciprocity that had normally governed gift-giving had to be tweaked. What could one expect from the poor themselves, if they were the object of one's *caritas*? A gift given to the poor was, as bishops and preachers saw it, 'the ultimate, non-reciprocated gift.' The new outreach to the poor was frankly admitted to be 'against the grain of human nature.'¹¹² Even in the 'disinterested' charity of Christians, however, as is clear from the letters of the African bishop Cyprian, it was the givers who determined who were worthy recipients and what was to be given.

110 For a comprehensive account, see Deeg 2019, esp. his conclusions at 227–239. In line with my argument here, I do not see this as a general duty of the emperor to all subjects of the empire, but rather a response only to those of them who were perceived as deserving; see Jones 2014, who, to my mind, reflects this more fragmented 'petition-and-response' nature of the emperor's 'charity' based on perceived status of the community concerned.

111 See, especially, Brown 2001, 45–73; Giuffrida 2009, 200–202.

112 Brown 2012, 76.

That this Christian behaviour was regarded as unusual not just by themselves but by others is confirmed by the words of the emperor Julian spoken at Ancyra in Anatolia in the year 362. In an attempt to re-establish traditional cult in the region of Galatia, he asked why 'we' could not imitate the virtues of the Christians including their 'benevolence towards strangers.' He called for the inhabitants of Galatia to 'establish numerous hostels in each city so that a stranger might be able to enjoy our benevolence not only towards our own people but also to others who might need help.' His concern was that Christian generosity was having the effect of turning people away from traditional allegiances. 'I think that when the poor happen to be neglected and were overlooked by our priests, the impious Galileans observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence.' Julian urged imitation by the non-Christians in Galatia: 'We should share our money with all men, more generously with the good but also with the helpless and the poor so as to meet their needs.' In his view, 'no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans [sc. Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well.'¹¹³ Julian's words hint at an unusual Christian and Jewish universalism, at least as an ideal, but the moral injunction to treat all fellow human beings as you yourself would like to be treated had a long history.¹¹⁴ As much had been called for by others and much earlier, as for example by Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, who urged Christians to care even for their 'enemies' in the pandemic of 252 CE.¹¹⁵ And earlier, the physician Galen of Pergamum noted how Christians did gratuitous good works for non-Christians – albeit, as he saw it, devoid of philosophical grounds for doing so.¹¹⁶ The question involved was one of who the giver considered to be in the charmed circle of one's neighbours or fellow humans.

This observation raises a problem with Christian charity: the fact that in practice it was nowhere near as universal as its own ideology would suggest and not quite like Julian's idealistic picture of it. First of all, by and large only Christians were seen to be the really 'deserving poor' and even within their own communities there were the more and the less meritorious. If a decision had to be made about to whom Christian charity was to be dispersed, it was almost always those inside the Christian community, as Ambrose

¹¹³ Julian, *Ep.* 89a; 84a (Bidez-Cumont) = *Ep.* 22 (Wright); Grant 1977, 124–125.

¹¹⁴ Encoded for Christians in Mt 7:12 (cf. Lk 6:31), referring to the existing 'law' and the 'commands of the prophets'; e.g., Aug. *Conf.* 1.18.29 (CCL 27: 54–55); see O'Donnell 1992, 99. An echo in Latin is first found in SHA, *Alex. Sev.* 51.6–8: 'sive Iudaeis sive Christianis'; cf. *AE* 1959: 251 (Salona).

¹¹⁵ Pontius, *Vita Cypriani*, 9.

¹¹⁶ See Walzer 1949, 15, 65–74.

and Jerome emphasised, who were to be given preference.¹¹⁷ Despite Julian's glowing words, those who were not Christians were frequently cut out of the circle of beneficent giving.¹¹⁸ Almost by definition, Christian giving was to be to good persons in order to improve the moral order and not to 'the malicious, the intemperate or the lazy.' In Ambrose's terms, the giver had to decide between the Christian version of the 'deserving poor' and the one who was responsible for his or her own poverty and who was therefore not deserving.¹¹⁹ If the Old Testament God was the god of widows and orphans, then they were almost always, and in every society, regarded as the touchstone of the deserving. They were the Christian indigent listed on a 'register of poor persons that the church supported,' the *matricula pauperum quos sustentat ecclesia*, that the bishop Augustine reports of his parish at Hippo Regius.¹²⁰ But beyond these persons, it was often a matter of debate as to whom gratuitous support would be given. Even more to the point is the fact that the Mediterranean-wide expansion of Christian communities had created a series of local churches in different regions of the empire. In the struggle to define a common or mainstream Christianity, 'other Christians' who did not conform to the model were deemed to be either schismatics or, worse, heretics. As such, they were manifestly not deserving of charitable giving. Why feed the agents of Satan? The ideal of a great Christian unity was somewhat of a fiction. Even within the normal acceptable churches, the charity was to be distributed to the needy, including those who were in exile on the islands, in the mines or in prisons, provided the reason that they found themselves in such circumstances was for the sake of God's faith. That is, they had shown themselves to be Christians in good standing.¹²¹ Hovering above all of this was the problem of the ideal ultimate giver, the Christian god, whose picture in Augustine is hardly conducive of having Christians think of him as someone much different from the usual hyper-wealthy benefactor of the non-Christian Roman world.¹²²

117 See, e.g., Ambr. *Off.* 1.30.148 and Jer. *Ep.* 120.1; for more discussion of these conflicts and debates within Christian communities, see Finn 2006, 57–60.

118 Cypr. *De opere et eleemosynis*, 25–26 (CCL 3A: 71–72): not to be refused to other Christians. It should be noted that he places huge emphasis on how such sharing was common among the first generation of believers who were so fired by faith as to give away their earthly possessions and to hold all things in common – something that was manifestly not true of his own day.

119 Ambr. *Off.* 2.16.76–77 (CCL 15: 124).

120 Aug. *Ep.* 20.2* (CSEL 88: 95 = BA 46: 294): on the widowed mother of Antoninus, but not, notably, her son who was sent to a monastery; see Lepelley 2007, 4–5.

121 Grant 1977, 135 n. 53.

122 Aug. *Conf.* 1.4.4 (CCL 27: 3).

You [Lord God] are never poor and you are joyful in gaining profits. Although you are never greedy, you still extract interest payments. You receive more in payments than you demand and so are placed under obligation. But who owns anything that is not in fact already yours? You pay off debts although you owe nothing to anyone. You repay debts and yet suffer no loss.

There was a difference in the sense that the honour now acquired by the generous giver was not oriented laterally or to the present, but vertically to God and to the future. Of course, the *dēmos* of a Hellenistic city could give similarly to store up potential rewards in the future, but these rewards were of secular honour in a flesh-and-blood community.

The whole selling point for much of Christian charity was to orient current giving to stored rewards that were to be cashed in by the giver in the future. Present giving was an investment in heavenly treasure. Much taken by the insistence of the bishop Synesius of Cyrene (who was responsible for having converted him and his family) that wealth spent on the poor in this life would be rewarded a hundred times over in the next, the philosopher Evagrius gave the church three gold coins to be distributed as alms.¹²³ Synesius, in turn, presented him with a *grammation*, a handwritten receipt for the money. When Evagrius died several years later, he had his children bury the receipt with him. Three days after his burial, a vision of Evagrius came to Synesius in a dream. Evagrius instructed him to come to collect the receipt, for he had now received everything that was owed to him from his donation and he had therefore counter-signed the receipt. Synesius explained this strange vision to his friend's relatives, who, together with some other clergy and prominent citizens, joined him in opening the philosopher's tomb. They found his body clutching the hand-written certificate, not just signed, as described in the dream, but also exhibiting a brief epistolary statement: 'I, Evagrius the philosopher, to you, the most holy lord Synesius, the bishop, greetings. I took what was written on this little ticket of yours and I was paid. I have no outstanding claim on you for the gold that I gave you, or rather the gold that I gave through you to Christ our God and Saviour.' John Moschus' acquaintance from Cyrenaica assured him that the counter-signed receipt had survived to his own day and could be found in the treasury of the church at Cyrene. The story tells us enough about the mundane effects of the 'treasure in heaven' trope. The earthly rewards of giving for heaven ended up, like Evagrius' receipt, in the coffers of the church. If the new giving was still self-interested, it seems, at least from its proclamations, to be different in

123 The story is related by John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, 195 (PG 87.3: 3077–80), supposedly as told to him by a traveller, Leontios from Apamea, who had come to Alexandria from Cyrene.

kind. If there was not a complete rupture with traditional euergetism, there was a way in which the ideology of a universal faith reconfigured its aims and values. 'For the pagan benefactor, the publication of his generosity by means of an epigraphical text assured his fame in the present and perpetuated his memory in the recollection of future generations. The Christian benefactor assumed a duty before God to be charitable to other humans who were brothers. From them he would receive as much as he had given and more, but he would await this recompense not in this world, but in the next.'¹²⁴ There was still a community, but it was not the civic community of the benefactor's fellow citizens in a city in the immediate here and now. It was a universal community of all the citizens of heaven in an unbounded time. Nevertheless, it was still giving to receive, giving for a reward.

5 Slippages

Even so, there is still a lot of slippage in tackling pre-Christian and Christian charity. One of these slippery avoidances is the annoying fact of slavery. Whole books have been written on poverty and charity in the empire in which something on the order of one-tenth, or so, of the entire population of that world simply disappears from view.¹²⁵ Why? No doubt some slaves were privileged and well off, but by far most were surely not so fortunate.¹²⁶ If their situation was even modestly good, it could vanish in an instant at the whim of the master or at his or her death. Probably because they were not free to be poor, their condition is simply out of mind. In this respect, they are as invisible to us as the actually indigent were to the well-off of the time. But this obvious instance indicates a more general and less obvious problem. Given the unknown dimensions of the poor, any measurement of the actual efficacy of charitable giving is difficult, almost impossible, to achieve. This fact alone signals some cautions about the economic significance of the giving. We do have occasional measurements available from later periods. One of them, from early seventh-century church of Alexandria, indicates that the bishop dispersed something like 1% of the church's wealth on the

124 The conclusion following a detailed study of the literary and epigraphical texts: Duval and Pietri 1997, 395–396 (my translation).

125 For example, there are two sparing references in all of Rhee's 2012 study – which, alas, is rather typical in this regard; perhaps because slaves were so 'notably absent' from the cares of the Christian churches: Brown 2001, 61–63 and 79.

126 At least mentioned by Scheidel 2006, 58: 'Legally bereft of property, they [sc. slaves] were the ultimate poor.' He's right. They could be dispossessed of everything instantaneously at the behest of another, their owner(s).

support of a limited number of the poor of the city.¹²⁷ The best documented pre-modern comparanda to date, the monastic and church establishments of feudal and early modern England, spent something like 4–6 % of their assets on charitable giving. Although larger than the measly 2.5 % once thought to be the norm, the revised figures still leave about 95 % of the resources that were given in the hands of the Christian institutions themselves.¹²⁸ Even where larger amounts were given and were actually targeted at the genuinely needy, these were usually in urban contexts – not, again, among the great expanses of the rural poor. This does not mean that there was no giving to the poor, but much of it seems to have been done locally where villages and kinship units actually did more to alleviate poverty.¹²⁹ Christian charity was not that of the formal civic community, but of the neighbourhood, the little community of church and parish.¹³⁰ Without doubt the great monastic and church establishments of Syria and Egypt did give to the needy. The hard question is: how much? Since they were as purposefully obscure about their funds as any modern ‘charity’ and the sources where they do exist are difficult to decipher, any hard answer to the question is almost impossible. Given that monastic establishments on which we have reliable reports seem to have been ever hungry for material resources to keep their own establishments functioning, the logical conclusion is that most of the gifts they received must have been consumed for the upkeep of the monastic communities themselves. From the little that can be made of their economic structures, the conclusion seems fully justified.¹³¹ The core problem with charitable giving, as with the much-vaunted institution of euergetism, has been to mistake a practice of symbolic or ritual social significance for one of general economic importance. Charity and benevolent civic-minded giving were certainly the former, but never the latter.

Because of the numbers of persons involved, their dispersal and the extent of their distress, structural and contingent poverty in pre-modern societies had enormous dimensions, and the deficit, as such, could never be made up by private donations, even the most extensive and most generous. By

127 Sotinel 2006, 110.

128 Rushton 2001.

129 One of the basic findings of Dyer 2012.

130 As at Carthage, where the visits and distributions to the needy were performed ‘neighbourhood by neighbourhood’: Tert. *Apol.* 42.8 (CCL 1: 157–58); and *Ad Uxor.* 2.4.2 (CCL 1: 388).

131 See, e.g., Heiska 2003, 68–77; Schachner 2005–06, esp. vol. 1, ch. 6, providing detailed data that demonstrate the real economic power of these institutions, but with little evidence about how much of their production and income was actually distributed to ‘the poor.’

comparison, we know that the costs of war are immense, and yet, in the eighteenth century when the French state ran into fiscal distress, despite the huge donations made both by ordinary citizens and large corporate groups provoked by the dual incitements of a national crisis and a fervent patriotism, 'it was no more possible to wage war by patriotic donations in the 1780s than at any other time before or since.'¹³² The example might be extreme, but so is the problem of the poor. So what was the giving achieving? The wealthiest and therefore the most generous giving countries today are claimed to pony up something like 1% of their GDP in gratuitous giving. As a stand-alone number, however, this is a gross exaggeration since it includes the distribution of many funds and foundations that only have the self-interested support of their own programs in mind.¹³³ Of course, the differences here, again, are not always that great. The massive Christian giving of the super-wealthy Melania and her husband Pinianus in the early 400s was to subvert their own special interests: large monastic establishments. And they gave to their favourite religious factions, like the supporters of John Chrysostom in Constantinople, whom they regarded as 'their own.'¹³⁴ The giving did not go to the poor as such. Furthermore, private charity, even sacred charity, paled in comparison to the need.¹³⁵ In the early sixth century, the bishop of Ravenna, head of one of the wealthiest churches in Italy, was expected to spend 3,000 *solidi* a year on support of the poor, while half a century earlier the prefecture at Rome had to spend 15,000 *solidi* a year on the acquisition of pork for the *annona* alone – and pork was only a modest fraction of the value of the grain and olive oil distributions subvented year-in and year-out by the state. At this same earlier time, the church at Rome had a total income of about 25,000 *solidi*, of which it could have spent only a small part on poor relief at a time when an aristocrat would spend upwards of 90,000 *solidi* on the staging of his praetorian games alone. The judgment that 'between the two forms of giving, and the wealth mobilised to meet the demands of each, there was no contest' is well founded.

The extent to which the corporate resources of the church were used in charitable exercises is difficult to judge. Both Cyprian and Augustine refer to the use of the church's wealth to pay the ransom for fellow Christians who had been taken captive by 'barbarians' or by slavers, the ones not much to

¹³² Schama 1989, 61.

¹³³ Producing the depressing prospect well described by Giridharadas 2018, 154–200.

¹³⁴ See Brown 2012, 299–300.

¹³⁵ For what follows, see Brown 2012, 462–63, who cites the primary sources; using the parallel of T'ang Dynasty China, he rightly points out that only the state controlled the big supplies and storehouses that were capable of sustaining large numbers.

be distinguished from the other.¹³⁶ Cyprian specifically glossed his action as one of *caritas*, although it was a specifically Christian charity directed at Christian brothers and sisters. The charity was not insignificant. An initial collection made from clergy and parishioners netted a cool 100,000 sesterces, and Cyprian said that more could be provided if it was necessary.¹³⁷ Similarly, the parishioners in Augustine's church at Hippo Regius were moved to act on their own to raise charitable funds, *eleemosynae*, to redeem the freedom of no less than 120 persons who had been taken into captivity by slavers.¹³⁸ But the practice seems occasional, dictated by a combination of circumstances and the character of the parishioners who felt empathy with the kidnapped. Such moves were not without resistance from members of the church itself: Ambrose, although a powerful bishop at Milan, wrote that he had been much criticised for his willingness to use the resources of his church to pay for the freeing of captives.¹³⁹ In any event, in all of these cases, the charity had the same broad parameters as traditional charity and euergetism: it was directed to the members of one's own community. But as the Christian community considerably expanded in number and then even well beyond the frontiers of the empire in the fourth and fifth centuries, it became more difficult to enforce this social definition of the deserving. In the early sixth century, in 507, Caesarius, the bishop of Arles, exhausted his church's treasury and sacrificed its holy vessels to redeem prisoners, most of whom are specifically said to have been *infideles*, that is not-Christians.¹⁴⁰ A suitable adjustment was made in ideology to bring even these people within the fold of the new *caritas*, but, even so, Caesarius was roundly condemned for his action.

For most second-world economies today that would be close to the Roman empire in relative terms of wealth, the total value of disinterested giving amounts to a tiny fraction of 1% of even their enfeebled GDP's.¹⁴¹ As for the need, the financial support of any one program that might have a serious chance of alleviating real poverty, such as old age pensions, consumes between 4–8% of the GDP of post-industrial economies.¹⁴² Hence the

136 On what follows, see Osiek 1981, 365–386; and Klingshirm 1985.

137 Cyp. Ep. 62.3–4 (CCL 3C: 387–88).

138 Aug. Ep. *10.3–7 (CSEL 88: 44–50).

139 Ambr. Off. 2.15.70–71; 2.28.136 (CCL 15: 122, 146); other instances of hostility are retailed by Finn 2006, 63–64. Even in stringent modern and early modern exclusionary systems in defining 'the poor,' widows and orphans always formed wholly exempt categories.

140 Cyprianus, *Vita Caesarii Arelatensis*, 1.32 (MGH SRM 3); see Klingshirm 1985, 189–190: he faced the outrage of his own clergy.

141 See the CAF World Giving Index report for 2016.

142 See the OECD general report on pension spending by its governments.

frank recognition that substantial redistribution of resources by the state is what is required and not acts of individual charity, no matter how generous they might be.¹⁴³ A comparative instance is offered by the occasional distribution of funds that the Roman state gave to bishops and churches to support the very poor and indigent of the city of Rome and the annual amounts used to support the distributions of grain (and later, olive oil and pork) to support the lives of the ordinary not so well-off of the city. The latter amounts vastly outstripped the former.¹⁴⁴ Even in the cases from the second-world, the state is more involved in subventing the public good than the Roman government ever was. India spends approximately 3.2 % of its GDP on public education as opposed to basically nothing by the empire.¹⁴⁵ There is no probative evidence to show that charity in the Roman world amounted to anything remotely on this scale. Even if Christianity provoked a new, complex, and widespread dialogue about wealth, poverty and charity, it apparently had little effect on redistributing wealth, perhaps because it was felt that charity was the only viable reply to the persistent challenge of widespread poverty. Dialogues about charity and histories of beneficence and giving do tell us something interesting about the ideas and behaviour of social elites. But these insights should not be confused with a claim that they tell us anything useful about the powerless and the indigent other than to cast into high relief the symbolic ideas and actions of the well-off. As Peter Brown has rightly emphasised, all of the debates and moral injunctions about 'the poor' seem to have done little or nothing to change their immiseration over the centuries of late antiquity, or in the ones that followed.

By concentrating on poverty and charity, the arguments are misleading in another fashion that brings us back to euergetism. Charity was always embedded in a larger economy of giving that united rich, middling, and the not-so-well off. The new Christian ethic of giving was not just about giving alms for the destitute but also giving, especially by the wealthy, to support the slaves of God, his clergy, and for the construction of churches, his houses.¹⁴⁶ Great efforts of preaching were made either to condemn the rich or at least to discipline them to acceptable behaviour: to divert their 'mad spending' from gifts made to support the great festivities, entertainments,

143 As exemplary only: O. Jones, 'Inequality: We don't want billionaires' charity. We want them to pay their taxes,' *The Guardian*, Friday, 26 October 2018 (online).

144 Brown 2012, 74–75; see also Salzman 2017, 73: serious on-going support to keep people from falling into real poverty and deprivation is expensive and requires a state-like ability to divert tributary resources to this purpose.

145 Scheidel 2006, 55, for this and other comparisons.

146 Argued in detail by Brown 2001, 20–22; and Brown 2012, esp. 347–358 on the ideological shift found in Roman period North Africa; on both see Shaw 2002, 42–45.

and constructions (like public baths) to ones that supported the people of God, the parishioners who were the objects of the bishops' attentions. We must hope that some persons in need, at least, had their situations of distress alleviated somewhat by these new benefactions. To return to the beginning, however, we might ask: What was in it for the givers? Many in the new system might well have given not expecting any of the rewards of the old non-Christian ethics of giving, but they surely expected something. It has rightly been questioned if there ever was as 'manichaeism', a separation and conflict, between the two modes of giving as Christian preachers would have their audiences believe.¹⁴⁷ Like the City of Man and the City of God, the two cities had always been implicated in a rather delicate, sometimes testy dance. On the grander scale for which we have both the material evidence and the literary descriptions, there are differences but there are similarities. Despite all of the re-orientation pushed by Christian ideology, there were still big givers, however much their giving now had to be mediated by the bishops of the church, and there was still a 'civic' community or people, the *populus Dei*, who governed the giving of the gift.¹⁴⁸ But this charity, too, was not the euergetic culture of antiquity, even late antiquity, nor were its instincts and objects simply a re-orientation or re-tooling of the past.

Without doubt, intense discourses focused on certain categories of persons who were perceived both to be in need and deserving of assistance. These discourses did experience considerable change over time, especially with the impact, sequentially, of a universal empire and then a universal religion. But euergetic benefactions and 'pagan' or Christian charitable gifts, given their strong ideological purpose and symbolic nature, were so implicated in the existing networks of power and wealth that they could not do much more than sustain the existing social relations. Oscar Wilde observed that the worst slave-owners were the ones who were kind to their slaves precisely because they sustained an oblivion of the structures of repression for what they were.¹⁴⁹ Any assessment of the generous givers of antiquity, however moral and changeable their personal motives, must take into account the fact that their actions underwrote the very inequalities of wealth that they exploited in order to be generous. Euergetic benefactions did produce substantial physical and communitarian benefits for Mediterranean cities that helped make them more impressively built urban environments, underwrote festivals and entertainments, occasionally aided some communities in crisis, and assisted a few privileged communal groups in need. Being

147 See, especially, Brown 2013, 23–39, reflecting on the arguments in his 2012 study.

148 Emphasised by Caillet 2012, 11–24.

149 Wilde 2007, 232.

less specifically focused and more dispersed either to individuals or communities, charity could make very little difference to the mass of the urban and rural poor who were caught up in the hardened structures of a deeply-entrenched inequality. What was true of euergetism was just as true of the liberality of small charity. Both served to confirm the superior status of the giver and the dependence of the recipients. The parameters of both kinds of giving were always a strict function of the degrees and types of inequality.

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Urban Landscapes and Religious Shifts in Lucian's *Alexander*

Abstract

Lucian's *Alexander* or *The False Prophet*, while satirising the expansion of the historically attested Glycon cult and its purported founder, offers insights into narratives of religious conversion. This paper discusses the text from the perspective of urban religion and traces the elements that present the emergence of a new religion within a distinct *polis* setting. It further analyses Lucian's work as a narrative of religious expansion, exploring its ramifications in the context of the literary production of its time.

Keywords: Lucian, *Alexander*, prophet, urban religion, conversion, Glycon, snake, cult, Abonouteichos

1 Introduction

One of the most important texts that openly discuss the spread of an emerging religion is Lucian's *Alexander* or *The False Prophet*, a narrative in the form of a biography of a certain Alexander, which mainly satirises the aesthetics of religious practices and changes. This paper situates Lucian's text in its historical and literary context, and, after a brief overview of the current scholarship, offers a reading that traces the representation of urban landscape within the text and how Lucian uses the urban landscape to portray and reflect on shifting religious and philosophical views of his time. Lucian's *Alexander*, in presenting the (historically attested) geographical expansion of the Glycon cult, offers a unique view into the networks of inter-urban communication that make religious shifts happen.¹ It presents religious

1 The cult was established between 140–145 CE and was active until at least the fourth century. Lucian himself must have visited Abonouteichos around 165 CE. As Erik Gunderson (2007, 479 n. 1) notes, this was a time 'full of complex religious innovations and transformations of which this cult is but a single example'. For the Glycon cult, see Jones 1986, 138 and Bendlin 2011, 233 (who discusses the literary representation of oracles); Ogden

expansion, albeit with a humorous, ironic, and satiric tone, in a style that is reminiscent of an inverted military campaign, yet remains focused for its setting on one particular city as it becomes the centre of the cult. The text highlights one specific city, Abonouteichos, which becomes the centre of the cult through a particular figure, Alexander. I further seek to illuminate the importance of urbanity in the literary representation of religious change during the second century CE.

The choice of the name Alexander and the various threads that constitute the biography – such as the references to the snake of Pellaian origins, with the snake being an integral part of biographical narratives about Alexander the Great and his mother's cultic activities – are not merely coincidental. Alexander the Great's military prowess is translated onto a mocked charlatan's religious expansionism in Lucian's homonymous pseudo-prophet. As I argue below, this text provides an eloquent and sophisticated paradigm of the shifting nature of sacred spaces that operate within urban settings; as changes to the religious landscape moved across different towns and regions, Abonouteichos retains the most essential aspect of civic life, the temple, and theatre as the central parts of the city that are both foundations of the town while also becoming agents of religious conversion.

Urbanity is a *sine qua non* in Lucian's understanding of how religion spreads geographically and lasts over time. Religious conversion is mapped onto an urban area, the town from which the cult originated. The foundation of the new god's temple at the centre of the town constructs the town as a classical *polis*. The 'founder' of the new religion operates within urban parameters which he utilises and expands. Ultimately the newly minted religion is presented as a performance very much centred on one, and one only, protagonist, with the supporting actors collectively playing the secondary role. The city also becomes a protagonist. One founder, one temple, one altar radically reorient the city's religious direction as the city becomes the centre of the cult in a greater network of other towns and regions.

I will also briefly trace here the theatrical references that appear throughout the text to show how a cult is presented as a spectacle, one presented first at the urban level. Inspired by an Urban Religion approach, this paper builds upon such questions as how religious expansion is constructed initially from a person and their immediate social circles, then spreads to the level of the

2013, 325–341; Wendt 2016, 2–4. For the historicity of Lucian meeting Alexander and visiting Abonouteichos, see Flintermann 1997; for the figure of Alexander see Elm von der Osten 2006 and Sfameni Gasparro 2013; and for Alexander as a religious entrepreneur and how he 'spotted' an opportunity in the Pontic area using older and nearby cult practices, see Bremmer 2017.

city, before expanding into a wider network. The founding city, though, remains a central point of reference throughout the text. I also ask how not just the landscape but also the soundscape of the expanding cult create the emerging 'religion-scape', and to what extent materiality plays a role in the shifting religion-scape.

2 Emerging cult, the city of Abonouteichos and inter-urban network

Lucian's *Alexander* presents a close-up of Alexander's appropriation of the cult of Asclepius in Abonouteichos, a city on the south coast of the Black Sea. The text takes the form of an epistle addressed to an Epicurean named Celsus (who was the author of a work 'Against Magicians') but nevertheless adheres to the conventions of the genre of biographical writing.² While following a chronological order that presents the life of Alexander (priest/prophet figure) from his early childhood through adolescence and on into adulthood, the cult he establishes is also traced from its nascent form into a significant presence across a wide geographical area. In addition, it is mapped onto a complex mythical and historical network of people and cities that offer representations of sustained cultic performance. This text subtly measures the false prophet Alexander against Alexander the conqueror in a sustained comparison that starts at the very beginning of the work (Luc. *Alex.* 1). This inversion of one Alexander against the other is strategic in also mapping the process of religious expansion against that of a military expedition. Just as an expedition is marked by specific events (such as battles) at distinct places, so religious expansion is a moving force that first operates in specific spaces within a city before becoming part of a greater network of different places.

Alexander the Great's biographer, Arrian, a student of Epictetus, is explicitly mentioned (Luc. *Alex.* 2), albeit not for his biography of Alex-

2 See Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.68; 5.86. Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 4.28–42 seems to have used this work. For analysis, see Flint et al. 1999, 142–143. For issues of genre and narrative type relating to *Alexander*, see Branham 1984, 144 who writes about Lucian's 'recreation of inherited motifs, through the wry and subtle use of literary personae, settings, and narrative patterns and, in general, through a peculiarly Lucianic penchant for juxtaposing traditional but incongruous styles and familiar but incompatible perspectives.' For *Alexander* as a type of narrative that departs from biographical writing and becomes a ψόγος, with personal or even ideological motives, see Bompaire 1958. For *Alexander* as parody in understanding religious conversion, see Elm Von der Osten 2006; Billault 2010; and Rostad 2011.

ander but for his portrait of a villain named Tillorovos. Lucian states that his biography is intended for a 'much crueller brigand' than Tillorovos (Τιλλορόβου γοῦν τοῦ ληστοῦ κάκεινος βίον ἀναγράψαι ἡξίωσεν. ἡμεῖς δὲ πολὺ ὠμοτέρου ληστοῦ μνήμην ποιησόμεθα, *Alex.* 2). While Lucian situates his work within the tradition of historiographical writing, even alluding to Herodotean and Thucydidean historiography and underscoring his paideia with his choice of Ionic Greek, he simultaneously places himself in a competitive frame with Arrian.³ Both the authorial voice and the subject matter of his focus, the figure of Alexander, is continuously undermined and deconstructed.⁴ This inversion, with the two Alexanders starkly juxtaposed, places Lucian's work in an agonistic relationship with that of Arrian, which he reads and deconstructs. Lucian's Alexander mimics Arrian's Alexander in conquering but does so through a religion that is both fake and incredulous. However, the theatrical presentation of the religion propels it to the status of a cult for the naïve people of Abonouteichos and beyond. Indeed, by the end of the epistle/biography the city itself has changed its name to Ionopolis, again pointing to the paideia ideal but also emphasising the conversion of the entire town.⁵ Change and conversion lie at the heart of Lucian's literary interests but they also provide him with a historical angle through which he can produce a commentary on his own time. With his overtly satirical tone and his mocking of religious shifts as he comments on them, he also casts considerable suspicion on change itself.

Alexander the false prophet is presented as a conqueror whose brigandage stretched across the entire Roman empire.⁶ Lucian specifically mentions that *his* Alexander's brigandage took place not in the mountains or other rural settings but rather in cities (emphasis below mine):

μὴ ἐν ὕλαις καὶ ἐν ὄρεσιν, ἀλλ' ἐν πόλεσιν οὗτος ἐλήστευεν, οὐ Μυσίαν μόνην οὐδὲ τὴν Ἰδὴν κατατρέχων οὐδὲ ὀλίγα τῆς Ἀσίας μέρη τὰ ἐρημότερα λεηλατῶν, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαν ὡς εἰπεῖν τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ἐμπλήσας τῆς ληστείας τῆς αὐτοῦ. (*Alex.* 2).

3 For Lucian's dialects and his choices in this work, see Bentley 2009 who argues that Lucian used his choice of Greek dialect in the *Alexander* to include echoes of Herodotus, other neo-Ionic authors, Attic Greek, and contemporary Greek. At the same time, he appeals to scholarly circles and also alludes to Thucydides.

4 To this extent, the authorial voice in *Alexander* is not very different when compared to that in *Nigrinus*, a puzzling text which also presents the theme of religious conversion. For *Nigrinus*, Whitmarsh (2001, 274) has argued that 'For the reader, the pleasures of this text lie in testing the simultaneous embodiment and evanescence of the author's ego'.

5 As Gunderson 2007 argues, Lucian builds a counter-cult in honour of learning and culture as he satirises Alexander becoming the prophet of truth and paideia.

6 For a discussion of Alexander and his psychological profile as a typical malignant narcissist who was interested in attracting attention and using his charm for personal profit only, see Kent 2008.

He was plundering not in forests and mountains, but *in cities*, and didn't just ravage Mysia and Ida, nor only a few of the more deserted districts of Asia, but instead he filled the whole Roman Empire, I may say, with his brigandage.⁷

Lucian's characters are part of an urban ecology of different ways of acting. What is seen and experienced, and what is perceived as real, is part of an ongoing exchange between 'subject' and 'other' throughout Lucian's theatrical world. And this world cannot exist without its urban frame.⁸

The narrative initially follows the norms of the biographical tradition, with Alexander coming of age and also learning the tricks of his masters. Lucian's description of his central character points towards literary genres of the past. The story of his mature adulthood alludes to Homeric descriptions (he is 'truly godlike, radiant eyes that look inspired by the divine', *Alex.* 3). As a boy he was handsome and was the lover of a professional sorcerer (γόης in Greek), a term that points towards platonic references: this sorcerer, a man known as Cocconas, student of Apollonius of Tyana, knew how to perform magic (μαγείας), miraculous incantations, love charms, curses against enemies, and knew how to find hidden treasures and inheritances (which implies criminal activity). While twisting the platonic world of lovers and charmers, Lucian presents his Alexander as his teacher's best student, a sophist-like figure who learns diligently while his teacher fervently dedicates all his 'expertise' and knowledge to him. Alexander learns the performance of 'healing' from his teacher, who was purported to be a healer who knew how to 'mix good and bad drugs', marking another Homeric touch that alludes to Helen's presence, the φάρμακα λυγρά, and the female witches of Homer while also inverting heroic paradigms. As Alexander and Cocconas invent the new god, Glycon, a performance of healing rituals and the language of divine epiphany are employed to mark the new divinity and his dedicated practitioners.⁹

When Lucian describes Alexander, he pays particular attention to his *prosopon*, presenting it as if it were a mask composed of hair, eyes, and voice. His voice is described as φώνημα ἡδιστόν τε ἄμα καὶ λαμπρότατον (*Alex.* 3), both positive qualities. Alexander is an actor, and the voice was perhaps one of the most critical components of ancient theatrical performance. He is also placed in a time when rhetorical education was of central

7 All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

8 On this, see Andrade 2013, 274–284.

9 For the employment of the theme of divine epiphany, see Dickie 2004. A series of audience-related responses are the focus of Lucian's work: astonishment, followed by adoration, prayers, and sacrifices. Lucian portrays the response of the people of Abonouteichos to the emergence before their eyes of the god Asclepius (*Alex.* 5–14).

importance, so there is nothing surprising in this praise. But the theme of voice is a steering theme. A religious shift is based on communication and on what people are saying and how others receive them. If we apply speech act theory, then the message becomes a reality, as is the case with Alexander's persuasive rhetoric.

During his apprenticeship with Cocconas, a composer of choral songs from the area of Byzantium who was 'abominable' (κοινωνήσας Βυζαντίῳ τινὶ χορογράφῳ ... πολὺ καταρατοτέρῳ τὴν φύσιν, *Alex.* 6), the pair travelled around and made use of what was perceived as the conventional 'magicians' voice' (τῇ πατρίῳ τῶν μάγων φωνῇ, *Alex.* 6). The text gives us a glimpse into the acoustic repertoire of types of voices associated with particular professions. One would today expect those in certain positions, such as priestly figures, to have a specific tone and style of speaking. Alexander's bodily movements build from sound and tone expectations that magnify their authority.

With Alexander's development from an apprentice into the leader of a cult, the text moves in time and space, from one to many, from groups of people to the entire city, as the new cult becomes the leading religious presence in the city, and then spreads first to neighbouring regions and then, ultimately, to Rome. Certain individuals played a vital role in this spread from the beginning. Particularly notable is a Macedonian woman, wealthy enough to provide funding to the pair of pseudo-prophets, who made it possible for them to travel from Bithynia to Macedonia, and to Pella in particular. Again, in a twisting of Alexander the Great's journey, Lucian's Alexander travels from Asia into Macedonia, the cradle of both Macedonian kings and mystery snake cults. Here he buys what he deems to be the most beautiful of snakes, which will become Glycon. As we know from coins, this is a historically attested cult and Glycon was supposedly born under Antoninus Pius (reigned 138–161 CE), so the reference to Pella as a humble village is essential. A place that flourished during the time of Alexander the Great is now seen to be nothing more than a small, insignificant area. In a world in which change is the norm, the portrayal of the decayed city has a further resonance, representing the full circle of growth and decline: a village can become an illustrious city and, in time, fall back into insignificance. Lucian's map extends historically as well as geographically from Abonouteichos to the Pella of Alexander the Great's time. The cities are linked to one another, with the reference to Pella, a place that expanded and flourished but then shrank into insignificance, serving as a fitting parallel for Glycon's cult and the city from which it began. Alexander (in Lucian's narrative) developed mysteries for Glycon from which he banned Christians (his primary target) and

Epicureans.¹⁰ Lucian pays forceful attention to the formation of networks of people and their evolution into networks of cities and cults, while also highlighting conflicts among different groups (Christians, Epicureans, etc.). He painstakingly draws the difference between the followers of religious cults and followers of philosophical systems.¹¹

Alexander begins his career under the postulated patronage of Asclepius, presenting himself as the interpreter of Asclepius' prophecies as embodied in the 'semi-humanoid' snake Glycon.¹² Establishing this cult is a conscious decision modelled upon the oracles of Delphi, Delos, Claros, and Bracchidae (*Alex.* 8) which were both renowned and financially lucrative. The next question Alexander faces is where to establish the oracle. While Cocconas proposes Chalcedon as a place that is close to Asia, Galatia, Thrace, and Bithynia, Alexander counters in purely practical terms that they want a home-base filled with rich and stupid people, such as the Paphlagonians of Abonouteichos, playing on old jokes concerning the intelligence of Paphlagonians.

The first thing the pair aims to do in Abonouteichos is to erect a temple. This attempt is not unlike a colonising practice transferred to an urban setting, as when settlers try to mark out their boundaries by setting the foundation of their temple. Shortly afterwards, Cocconas dies, fittingly, of a snake bite, an event that takes place after he and Alexander deposited special bronze tablets in the temple of Apollo at Chalcedon, supposedly received from Asclepius himself. This death is redolent of notions of sympathetic magic, with the purported healer/founder of a snake-god religion dying from the bite of a viper. The text refers to bronze tablets from 'the Bronze city' (Chalcedon, ἐν τῷ Ἀπόλλωνος ἱερῷ, ὅπερ ἀρχαιότατόν ἐστι τοῖς Χαλκηδονίοις, κατορύττουσι δέλτους χαλκᾶς, *Alex.* 10), emphasising further the sympathetic element responsible for Cocconas' death.

The references to different oracles create a network of cities and prophets which is then made even clearer by an explicit reference to the Sibyl (*Alex.* 11).

Εὐρητο δὲ χρησμὸς ἤδη, ὡς Σιβύλλης προμαντευσαμένης· Εὐξείνου Πόντοιο παρ' ἡσίν ἄγχι Σινώπης ἔσται τις κατὰ Τύρσιν ὑπ' Αὐσονίοισι προφήτης ...

An oracle by now had turned up who purported to be a previous prediction by the Sibyl: 'On the shores of the Euxine sea, in the neighbourhood of Sinope, there shall be born, by a Tower, in the days of the Romans, a prophet ...'

10 See Whitmarsh 2015, 173–185.

11 See Martin 2000 for a discussion of different cults and philosophical traditions that exist together, including the Glycon cult.

12 Ogden 2002, 72.

The fabrication of oracles on bronze tablets brings with it questions concerning orality and literacy. The oracles had to be written down and (presumably) uttered loudly if they were to pronounce the birth of a prophet and a cult. By referring to these bronze tablets, Lucian's text makes a critical contribution to our understanding of the onset and spread of this cult, showing us just how much materiality matters. The snake itself and its corresponding image is nothing but an accompaniment and testament that is necessary for the cult to move on. Words alone are not enough to achieve this end, nor is a performance that lacks specific tangible markers. It is the bronze prophetic tablets associated with the Sibyl, as well as the snake itself and, even more so, the images of the snake that circulated further abroad, that anchor the cult around known associations and references. Both prior to the cult's expansion and afterward, the sense of a material ground is important in making its presence more concrete. As mentioned above, the archaeological evidence attests to the circulation of statuettes of this creature, portraying him as a snake with human hair, and this material evidence is entirely in line with what Lucian describes.

If the central protagonist of Lucian's narrative is a false prophet, so the miracles that cause collective amazement are teratological fakes.¹³ For Lucian, it is not enough to describe occurrences that could, in response to the aesthetics of his time, create a contagious sense of amazement. Rather, he carefully and consciously places these events in an urban setting, delineating the development of the movement within the framework of the city. The new religion begins like an edifice or a town: it has to start at a place that has water at the heart of the foundation (νύκτωρ γὰρ ἐλθὼν ἐπὶ τοὺς θεμελίους τοῦ νεῶ τοὺς ἄρτι ὀρυττομένους – συνειστήκει δὲ ἐν αὐτοῖς ὕδωρ ἢ αὐτόθεν ποθὲν συλλειβόμενον ἢ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ πεσόν, *Alex.* 13). Alexander, we read, devised a deceptive plot to create a pseudo-epiphany, opening up a goose egg and inserting the snake within before using wax to cover the crack. Having prepared his prop and situated it appropriately, he immediately moved from the temple to the market (ἔωθεν δὲ γυμνὸς εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν προπηδήσας, *Alex.* 13). Movement again bridges time and space, from night to early dawn, and from the foundations of the temple to the market.

The final touch is added when Alexander moves to speak from an altar in the manner of a rhetor, with almost the entire city present as his audience.

ἐδημηγόρει ἐπὶ βωμόν τινα ὑψηλὸν ἀναβὰς καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἐμακάριζεν αὐτίκα μάλα δεξιόμην ἑναργῇ τὸν θεόν. οἱ παρόντες δέ – συνδεδραμήκει γὰρ σχεδὸν ἅπανα ἡ

13 On the aesthetics of teratological fakes, see Ní Mheallaigh 2014.

πόλις ἅμα γυναιξὶ καὶ γέρονσι καὶ παιδίοις – ἐτεθήπεσαν καὶ εὐχόντο καὶ προσεκύουν.
(*Alex.* 13)

He was addressing the crowds, having mounted upon a high altar, and was praising the city which would receive the god appearing to them. Those present, for almost the entire town had come with women and old men and children, were stupefied and were praying and worshipping.

The teratological element here is reinforced by the way in which Alexander speaks to the crowd, inserting words that could not be understood by his audience, as if they were in a language that was foreign to them. His movement is carefully choreographed as he leaves the altar and follows the road back to the site of the temple to be (δρόμῳ ἐπὶ τὸν ἐσόμενον νεών, *Alex.* 14). Here he then performs his pseudo-miracle, breaking open the egg to reveal the snake within and proclaiming it to be Asclepius.

How did the founder of the cult behave in relation to the place he selected as the heart of his new religion? As Scott (2011, 116–17) mentions, once Alexander had assumed the role of healer/prophet in the city of Abonouteichos, he no longer travelled. This sets him apart from wandering figures such as Apollonius of Tyana. Travel, as Scott (2011) notes, is not an essential component for establishing a person's status as a divine man. In fact, for Lucian's Alexander, this status was demonstrated instead by the fact that others came to him. Alexander projected as important not only himself but also the town he chose as the birthplace of his cult.

Lucian's presentation of conversion is a full inversion of earlier paradigms. While a comprehensive network of cities is mentioned in the text in order to demonstrate the spread of the cult, the founder himself is not depicted as a travelling, preaching figure but rather remains at the heart of his city. Lucian thus deconstructs paradigms of conversion literature.¹⁴ The pattern that the text creates is built around Alexander as the focal point, the founder and the protagonist who serves, in Lucian's writing, as something like the sun in a heliocentric system, with everything else revolving around him. The references to Delphi, Claros, and Delos emphasise the pattern of a central oracle (and its priests and prophets) to which others flock. According to Lucian, people from as far away as Bithynia, Galatia, and Thrace (18), Ionia, Cilicia, Paphlagonia, and Italy (30) travel to Abonouteichos. When Alexander wants to increase his business, he sends others to mobilise the network, while he remains in the city. Depicting Alexander as something

14 Lucian's works are complex and can be read from multiple angles but the focus on conversion is a theme to which he returns. For the complexity in Lucian's *Nigrinus*, in which he also deconstructs the notion of conversion, see Grethlein 2016. Similar trends can be argued for in the case of Lucian's *Alexander*.

like a chorus leader who is the centre of attention, Lucian's narrative discusses various illustrious participants and agents of conversion. The many, however, the *hoi polloi* who made the whole operation possible, remain in the shadows. The religious entrepreneur and charlatan-in-chief is Alexander himself and Lucian's full focus remains on him and his chosen location. More importantly, in this idiosyncratic text the narrative emphasises the temple, theatre, and agora as the core of the town. This urban setting is reduced to those elements that epitomise the classical polis: not the many houses but the one temple and theatre, not the many shops but the one agora. The leading personality and the associated city, Alexander and Abonouteichos, take over and carry through the conversion narrative almost entirely alone. The person and place are the absolute centre around which all the other towns and people circulate. The city, and even more, the city's centre, marked by foundations of the new temple, is the place to which everyone comes and from which all cult matters are controlled. Only an urban setting, as Lucian emphatically repeats, can facilitate communication and conversion.¹⁵

Materiality once again plays an important role. As the cult expands, so too do the number and variety of icons and statuettes associated with the cult, some made from bronze, others from silver with the name of the god inscribed on them.¹⁶ People who talked about the new god did so by referring to how they saw and touched him. The faculties of sight and touch create a sense of reality, truth, and accuracy that lends gravity to the oral account. Without these material references, the oral accounts of the many people who fled from places such as Bithynia, Galatia, or Thrace would not be sufficiently convincing. The circulation of words is thus anchored around the flow of the iconic representations in different forms and different values (either bronze or silver) in ways that also make the divine a kind of currency that people can use.

Κατ' ὀλίγον οὖν καὶ ἡ Βιθυνία καὶ ἡ Γαλατία καὶ ἡ Θράκη συνέρρει, ἐκάστου τῶν ἀπαγγελλόντων κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς λέγοντος ὡς καὶ γεννώμενον ἴδιοι τὸν θεὸν καὶ ὕστερον ἄψαιτο μετ' ὀλίγον παμμεγέθους αὐτοῦ γεγεννημένου καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπῳ ἐοικότες. γραφαὶ τε ἐπὶ τούτῳ καὶ εἰκόνες καὶ ξόανα, τὰ μὲν ἐκ χαλκοῦ, τὰ δὲ ἐξ ἀργύρου εἰκασμένα, καὶ ὄνομά γε τῷ θεῷ ἐπιτεθέν· (*Alex.* 18)

Little by little, Bithynia, Galatia, and Thrace came pouring in, for everyone who carried the news very likely said that he not only had seen the god born but had subsequently touched him after he had grown to a very significant size in a short time and that he had

15 On the representation of the conversion ethos, and on Lucian more specifically, see Athanassiadi 2017, 25–28.

16 On issues of materiality and religious conversion, see Bremmer 2015.

a face that looked human. Next came paintings and statues and cult-images, some made of bronze, some of silver, and naturally a name was bestowed on the god.

3 Glycon cult, performance, and ritual networks in practice

Different groups of people, and their languages and soundscapes, are prominent in Lucian's *Alexander*. Lucian converts those who read or hear his work into spectators of a cult performance with a theatrical element.¹⁷ As Diskin Clay has convincingly argued, Alexander's operation is a 'solemn farce', a tragoidia, 'very much at home in ... the theatrical culture [of the second sophistic]. They are always on stage and histrionic; their success hung on their ability to convince their audience' (Clay 1992, 3418). Already when describing the grand opening of the oracle and the temple, Lucian presents Alexander's manipulation of the stage in theatrical terms and with attention to language as part of a performance.¹⁸ The references to theatre, but also deception, and dishonesty augment the sense of the duplicity and falsity of the religion as it spreads. But when approaching Lucian's text from the Urban Religion perspective, what matters is that the theatre is a marked point in urban space and a registered reference as the centre of a town, as the physical place that attracts a collective audience. Alexander is an acting agent and, as such, he mobilises the network of people and communities as he consciously spreads his cult. The theatrical space endows the text with a physicality of performance in which audience/performer encounters are possible, while the language of stagecraft and acting evokes a particular sense of materiality.

More than this, Lucian also creates a transactional exchange that imitates an urban setting. Money is a registered reference throughout Lucian's *Alexander*, from the pseudo-prophet's initial targeting of an affluent clientele onwards. Alexander is not interested so much in becoming rich as in expanding the range of services available to him.

λαμβάνων δὲ οὐκ αὐτὸς ἐχρήτο μόνος οὐδ' εἰς πλοῦτον ἀπεθησαύριζεν, ἀλλὰ πολλοὺς ἤδη περὶ αὐτὸν ἔχων συνεργοὺς καὶ ὑπηρέτας καὶ πευθῆνας καὶ χρησιμοποιοὺς καὶ χρησιμοφύλακας καὶ ὑπογραφέας καὶ ἐπισφραγιστὰς καὶ ἐξηγητὰς, ἅπασιν ἔνεμεν ἐκάστω τὸ κατ' ἄξιον. (*Alex.* 23)

What he received he did not use for himself alone nor horde away to make himself rich, but since he had many men about him by this time as assistants, servants, collectors of

¹⁷ For readers as spectators, see Gunderson 2007, 506.

¹⁸ See Lefebvre 2016, 205–206, for the use of the term *tragoidia* and *katastrophe* in *Alex.* 60.

information, writers of oracles, custodians of oracles, clerks, sealers, and expounders, he divided with all, giving each one what was proportionate to his worth.

Lucian maps the religious spread onto the urban economy of different professions that Alexander creates around the newly founded cult. At the same time, he depicts Alexander as establishing mechanisms for addressing certain oracles only to the rich. He produces a tiered value-system that privileges the wealthy but without excluding others.

... Ἐκαλοῦντο δὲ οἱ χρησμοὶ οὗτοι αὐτόφωνοι, καὶ οὐ πᾶσιν ἐδίδοντο οὐδὲ ἀνέδην, ἀλλὰ τοῖς εὐπαράφοις καὶ πλουσίοις καὶ μεγαλοδώροις (*Alex.* 26)

These oracles were called autophones, and were not given to everybody promiscuously, but only to those who were noble, rich, and free-handed.

The theme of voice is inserted again carefully here. Voice and language are agents of conversion and tools of communication which enable transformation. The so-called autophonous oracle, from Glycon himself, brings the serpentine voice into the material nexus of wealthy oracle seekers and is an important factor contributing to the spread of the new cult and its reputation. Voice and rumours go hand in hand. The new cult moves quickly, extending across Ionia, Cilicia, Paphlagonia, and Galatia before moving westward to Rome (*Alex.* 30). Again, in Rome, it is the targeting of wealthy and high-ranking officials that facilitates the spread of the cult. A cult is a transaction, moving like money from one place to the next, from one hand to another. The Roman expansion was made possible by a certain Rutilianus, an official whom Alexander not only befriended but targeted for a deeper cultivation by arranging for him to marry into the prophet's family. Rutilianus became Alexander's son-in-law, marrying his daughter, who he claimed he had from Selene (the Moon). The cult takes on a cosmic dimension through this supposed link to the Moon as the imaginary mother-in-law of the rich and powerful Rutilianus.

Religious movements move with varying degrees of success from place to place. Despite his satirical tone, Lucian provides clues for understanding how religious diffusion takes place and, even more, for grasping the representations and perceptions of how this happens. Recent historical work has drawn on network theory for understanding processes of religious diffusion. 'Actors' are formed and a collective 'agency' is produced that causes movements to move further in space and time.¹⁹

19 For network theory in religious diffusion and its applications in antiquity, see Collar 2013, 5–26. For the use of the earliest cult practices and the degree of Alexander's innovation in Abonouteichos, see Chaniotis 2002, who reads it as a case study of a 'successful' religion that blended adoption of earlier practices with some innovation.

Many of the passages highlighted above support the idea that the processes of network formation depicted by Lucian are broadly in line with actual historical processes. Clusters of people are created, as local agents operate in order to increase their gains. Long-distance links become stronger. As we can see, processes of this sort are reflected in Lucian's text: agents such as the Pellaian woman or Rutilianus become leading 'actors' both in transgressing the boundaries of local clusters and also in confirming and enhancing them. Similarly, the wealth and status of these dominant 'actors' are essential factors in religious diffusion.

Viewed from the perspective of the cognitive sciences, rituals are transmitted more easily when there is already a known and materially constrained spectrum of mental register. In other words, doctrinal instruction in a completely unfamiliar set of rituals is less likely to work, whereas cross-references to already existing ritual elements are agents of religious diffusion.²⁰ Human cognition works on the basis of certain regularities that mobilise further processes of selection, processes which assimilate new elements that do not depart too far from existing aspects of ritual behaviour. When reading Lucian's text from this cognitive perspective, we see that Lucian highlights how Alexander's cult moves within already cognitively known parameters that facilitate diffusion among different local, and then more distant, agents.²¹ Lucian clearly has a deep understanding of how 'lived religion' operates. Religion, in the form it takes in the ancient polytheistic system and as Lucian demarcates it, is not belief but action. As Jörg Rüpke put it, 'In the case of polytheistic religions, action, not belief, is primary.'²² The Glycon cult is not born *ex nihilo* but instead builds on existing healing rituals that were popular and known, such as those of the Asclepius cult. It offers a relatively small amount of innovation and deploys common material registers found both diachronically, within similar sects, as well as synchronically, in the ritual action of other, sometimes competing, groups. To give one example, the bronze tablets which Alexander had deposited in Chalcedon, as discussed earlier, prophesied that Asclepius and Apollo would move to the Black Sea and would reside in Abonouteichos. Once these bronze tablets were discovered, the people of Abonouteichos started working on erecting a temple.

20 For a cognitive perspective on religious transmission and the way in which religious behaviour is shaped and motivated, see Whitehouse 2004, 16–24 and Boyer 2001 *passim*.

21 For some, Lucian is less satirical and more historical, as this is not just a satirical work but an attempt to represent historical realities of his time following the style he has championed in his *How to Write History*. For Lucian's *Alexander* as a historical representation, see Ulrich 2015, first published in 1997.

22 See Rüpke 2007, 87. For an extensive theoretical analysis of action as an integral aspect in defining religion in the ancient world, see Rüpke 2018, 30–47.

Alexander then took a goose's egg, and emptying it put a snake inside and sealed with white wax and lead and hid it at the foundations of the temple in a muddy place. The next morning Alexander took a bowl with which, as Ogden puts it, he was able to 'dredge up Asclepius/Glycon's egg' and when the snake came out, he amazed the bystanders who welcomed the new god while Alexander presented himself as a lecanomancy performer with the water in the temple foundations.²³ Synchronically, this type of performance also shows similarities to the ritual actions of other groups against which Alexander was competing, for example early Christian baptismal rituals or other rituals that involved the use of water for divination or purification. Cults that are familiar and already registered in the consciousness of groups and individuals provide a basis for authority but can also serve as models for the foundation of newly constructed religious systems.²⁴

The material register is also critical. The snake is an element associated with oracles and other well-known rituals, especially healing practices. Alexander employs diverse tactics which, from a cognitive perspective, re-route well-known practices and place them in a new setting that attracts new clusters of agents. The Glycon cult makes use of new images that build on existing registers. The cult can thus be seen as making use of minimally counter-intuitive concepts that tends to be more memorable and more easily transferrable than intuitive concepts or concepts that are just odd and deeply counterintuitive. While there is deviation here from existing practices, that deviation does not go so far as to render the new practice completely counter-intuitive, since completely counterintuitive concepts are less sustainable from a cognitive perspective. The text further marks the success of the cult by not only considering its expansion across different regions (including Italy) but also, more importantly, within the city of Abonouteichos itself, which was flooded by visitors coming to see the prophet:

Ἦδη δὲ πολλῶν ἐπὶ πολλοῖς ἐπεισερόντων καὶ τῆς πόλεως αὐτῶν θλιβομένης ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν ἐπὶ τὸ χρηστήριον ἀφικνουμένων καὶ τὰ ἐπιτήδεια διαρκῆ μὴ ἔχουσης, ἐπινοεῖ τοὺς νυκτερινοὺς καλουμένους χρησμούς. (*Alex.* 49)

Already since many were flowing into the city which was being pressed by the crowds of those coming to the oracle and did not have the necessary things all the time, he invents the so-called night oracles.

Alexander's invention here extends the boundaries of the city through the temporal dimension, with night-time activity supplementing the activity of the day.

²³ Ogden 2002, 72. See also Ogden 2013, 327.

²⁴ Gordon 2013, 159–160.

This cognitive perspective further explains the ease with which the cult could transfer across different linguistic groups. Language and voice are salient themes in Lucian's *Alexander*, with Lucian noting that interpreters were employed by the cult to overcome linguistic barriers and to give the emerging religion a more universal character.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ βαρβάροις πολλάκις ἔχρησεν, εἴ τις τῇ πατρίῳ ἔροιτο φωνῇ, Συριστὶ ἢ Κελτιστί, ῥαδίως ἐξευρίσκων τινὰς ἐπιδημοῦντας ὁμοεθνεῖς τοῖς δεδωκόσιν. διὰ τοῦτο καὶ πολὺς ὁ ἐν μέσῳ χρόνος ἦν τῆς τε δόσεως τῶν βιβλίων καὶ τῆς χρησμοφείας, ὥς ἐν τοσοῦτῳ κατὰ σχολὴν λύοιντό τε οἱ χρησμοὶ ἀσφαλῶς καὶ εὐρίσκοιντο οἱ ἐρμηνεύσαι δυνάμενοι ἕκαστα. οἷος καὶ ὁ τῷ Σκύθῃ δοθεὶς χρησμός ἦν·

Μορφήν εὐβάργουλis εἰς σκιὰν χνεχικραγηλείψει φάος. *Alex.* 51

I may say too that he often gave oracles to non-Greek speakers when anyone put a question in their native language, in Syrian or in Celtic, since he readily found strangers in the city who belonged to the same nation. That is why the time between the presentation of the scrolls and the delivery of the oracle was long, so that in the interval the questions might be unsealed at leisure without risk and men might be found who would be able to translate them fully. Of this sort was the response given to the Scythian:

‘Morphen eubargoulis eis skian chnechikrageipsei phaos.’

Difference in language is, thus, no barrier to religious diffusion. On the contrary, by making use of the material aspect of the medium of scrolls and the extended time period needed to find interpreters, linguistic barriers could easily be crossed and turned into an advantage for the creation of further networks. As Whitehouse (2004, 29) notes, diverse groups of people appear to carry similar notions about supernatural agents, rituals, and myths, with these notions clustering around a cognitive reference, which then becomes a universal attractor. Also of note here is that the semantic difference is compressed into a single city rather than being identified as a feature of a broader inter-urban environment (ἐξευρίσκων τινὰς ἐπιδημοῦντας ὁμοεθνεῖς). This assumes a situation in which the city is the centre of attraction to which others come, just as Alexander himself is the one who stays there, mobilising his network beyond the urban boundaries.

Lucian's *Alexander* begins with the city of Abonouteichos as its focus and ends with its focus on the same place, which is now renamed Ionopolis, just as a new religious landscape is created. Lucian's references to the renamed city need a consistent material stamp and symbol to anchor them, and no better such symbol can be found than the minting of a new coin that marks the religious shift the city has undergone while also portraying the divinity and the founder of the cult with the inscription of the new name. A coin is a new currency, a measure of transaction, but also a tangible cultural locus

that can circulate in different hands. It promotes further networks at the same time as celebrating the founding city, the beginning and end of the space inscribed in Lucian's work.

Ἐκεῖνο δὲ πῶς οὐ μέγα ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις τὸ τόλμημα τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου, τὸ αἰτῆσαι παρὰ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος μετονομασθῆναι τὸ τοῦ Ἀβώνου τεῖχος καὶ Ἰωνόπολιν κληθῆναι, καὶ νόμισμα καινὸν κόψαι ἐγκεχαραγμένον τῇ μὲν τοῦ Γλύκωνος, κατὰ θάτερα δὲ Ἀλεξάνδρου, στέμματά τε τοῦ πάππου Ἀσκληπιοῦ καὶ τὴν ἄρπην ἐκείνην τοῦ πατρομήτορος Περσέως ἔχοντος; (*Alex.* 58)

Was it not also a great piece of impudence on the part of Alexander that he should petition the Emperor to change the name of Abonouteichos and call it Ionopolis, and to strike a new coin bearing on one side the likeness of Glycon and on the other that of Alexander, wearing the fillets of his grandfather Asclepius and holding the falchion of his maternal ancestor Perseus?

The coin depicts the divinity on one side and the founder on the other. Lucian brings together the synchronic elements of founder and divinity while engaging diachronically with the cult of Asclepius also alluding to myths about Perseus. Heroic, divine, and mortal elements are all presented in the symbolic material summation of a coin which can circulate widely. Religion and currencies are thus mapped onto each other. Coin depictions are often a marker of resettlement or religious shifts, as Lucian suggests here. Although the text does not dwell on the possible circulation of the coin or on matters of value, the coin clearly underscores both the religious shift and also the new polis this shift creates. The change of name is simply a testament to this.

4 Conclusion

One might further suggest that *Alexander* is also a twisted hagiography, inverting the kind of narratives about holy men or prophets that abounded from this period onwards. Space is similarly important in such narratives. As David Frankfurter writes, 'The allure of the new center, with its new, expansive divinity, mediated dramatically through a prophet and promising concrete benefits, would have drawn people regardless of their allegiance to the divinity's ideological demands.'²⁵ Religion in Lucian's work is a currency that can change. As such, it is created through a polis frame which it defines, from which it originates, and which it transforms. While Lucian's *Alexander* is not a historical text per se, and it would be a mistake to take it fully at face

²⁵ Frankfurter 2018, 75.

value, it does give us unique insights into perceptions and representations of a religious diffusion that begins from a *polis* setting and mobilises further networks in different places, crossing ethnic and linguistic barriers to do so. The urban frame is paramount as both a start- and an endpoint. Abonouteichos is a city chosen by a false prophet who can manipulate different people and make them work for his cult, yet Lucian's narrative still shows that deep ties run between emergent religions and specific cities as birthplaces of new divinities and their cults. As such, Lucian provides his reader with nuances that help us theorise about religious shifts. The physical elements of the urban environments, the theatre, and the temple, with special reference to its foundation, run as threads through the narrative. Lucian employs diachronic and synchronic connections at many different levels as he presents the diffusion of the cult of Glycon and traces its birth as an offshoot of the broader cult of Asclepius.²⁶ He gives nuanced suggestions about what makes the spectacle of the new religion a successful one over time and across space.

Contemporary theoretical approaches that discuss religious shifts or the diffusion of religions note the cognitive elements that enable and facilitate those phenomena. While the new religion takes over the centre of the city with its main temple, people from different parts of the town and from other towns are the ones who help to bring about the religious transformation. It is quite characteristic that the threat that appears to the emerging religion, when Lucian's encounter with Alexander is narrated at the end of this work, arises outside the city's boundaries, on the seashore (*Alex.* 55). Lucian presents these processes and shows how different groups of people can become agents as they encounter the material of new ritual practices that are not entirely alien but that are different enough, building on earlier and concurrent practices and combining familiarity with novelty. In the end, despite Lucian's satirical tone, the final reference to the newly minted coin of the city (also historically attested) highlights an approach that emphasises the importance of material currency created through the cult and subtly offers Lucian's views of religious transformations and the central role of leading figures. Materiality and symbolism are integrally related to the shifts that the individual can direct. Lucian gives us a more in-depth understanding of how such shifts are both possible and implementable.²⁷

²⁶ See Flinterman 1997; Friese 2015; Mastrocinque 1999.

²⁷ I am very grateful to Jan N. Bremmer, Asuman Lätzer-Lasar, Jörg Rüpke, Emiliano Urcioli, and the audience at a conference in Eisenach in July 2018, for discussing earlier versions of this paper with me. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for all their insightful comments and very constructive criticism. I am also indebted to Elisa-

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Grasping Urbanity: Propertius' Book 4 and Urban Religion of the Augustan Period

Abstract

Propertius' last book of elegies (publ. c. 16 BCE) has been read as a staged conflict between antiquarianism and love elegy. This article argues that the book as a whole is above all a reflection on the spatial and temporal boundaries of the city and the internal impact of the permanent crossing and breaking down of these boundaries. Then and now, imperial expedition and internal treason, permanent and temporary absence, burying outside and loving inside, admission to and exclusion from sacralised and gendered space and finally the vertical dimension of life's above and death's below explore these limits and transfers and constitute the urbanity of the city as well as the urbanity of religion.

Keywords: urban religion, urban growth, religious literature, border crossing, urbanity

1 Religion in the age of urban growth

Religion in the Augustan semi-century has been described in different, but not widely different ways.¹ According to Georg Wissowa, Augustus focused on re-establishing religious order, giving priority to the reconstruction ('Wiederherstellung') of priesthoods and temples.² The explicit claims of Augustus' own *Res gestae* were Wissowa's crown witness, filled in with details

1 I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful critique and constructive remarks. Likewise I would like to thank Elisabeth Begemann for her correction of the English text. Research for this text has been done in the framework of the Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe 'Religion and Urbanity: Mutual Formations', funded by the German Science Foundation (FOR 2779). Cecilia Ames, Córdoba, has been helpful in shaping the argument in discussions during her fellowship at Erfurt; I am also grateful to the audience at the FIEC at London in July 2019. Richard Gordon has taken a last look at the text, I am again grateful to him for his many improvements of the text. Johannes Benjamin Vonderschmidt provided help in providing research literature, Maria Pätzold corrected it thoroughly.

2 Wissowa 1912, 73.

from Cassius Dio. Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price in their 1998 handbook set the Augustan decades in the wider context of ‘the preoccupation of the imperial age with *place*’, pointing to the particular interest of Augustan texts to the ‘physical and symbolic setting of *the city of Rome*.’³ They view Augustus himself through the historiography and poetry of his time, as a ruler dealing with the previous neglect of religion and a model for the future.⁴ He is a refounder and reorganiser of the city, its principal priest, binding members of the elite to him by allotting them positions in various priestly colleges, and establishing his own house on the Palatine as the most important (even if not unique) place for the cult of Vesta and of Apollo – an element of the shift of private and public already highlighted by Wissowa. Urban temple building is intensified and monopolised by the emperors for the ensuing period.⁵ Augustus’ widespread presence in ritual contexts established norms that held for at least two centuries to come.⁶ In his succinct article on the period, Karl Galinsky basically confirmed that image, broadening however the perspective of the visual presence by stressing the possibilities of participation by non-elite agents newly created. If ‘restoration’ is a keyword used by contemporaries, it is also a claim that must be understood as implying innovation as much as continuity.⁷ In my own account of the history of Roman religion I have tried to decentre Augustus, to point to his appropriation of objects as well as processes and the appropriation of his figure by others for their own agenda. Networking, built environment, and the establishment of a translocal space of communication by various media – texts, coins, inscriptions – are some of those activities that started before and continued after Augustus and were not restricted to Rome nor to Roman culture and actors.⁸

In all of these accounts the urban environments – and I would like to stress that we need to keep an eye on contemporary developments in, for example, Jerusalem and Alexandria as well,⁹ hence my plural – and in particular the city of Rome, are objects rather than subjects, places rather than factors in the development. Without doubt, it is the former that we see in our sources, but reflections on spatiality in general and urban religion in particular invite us to conceptualise our findings within the urbanity framework.¹⁰

³ Beard, North and Price 1998, 168.

⁴ Beard, North and Price 1998, 182.

⁵ See now Arnhold 2020.

⁶ Beard, North and Price 1998, 182–210. Palatine: 189–191. Cf. Wissowa 1912, 75. 77.

⁷ Galinsky 2007, 71.

⁸ Rüpke 2018, 183–210.

⁹ Recently stressed by Rubina Raja, Aarhus.

¹⁰ For ancient religion see Urciuoli and Rüpke 2018.

Even before the full impact of spatial theory in Classics, Catharine Edwards' *Writing Rome* framed this as a resonance. She claimed that 'Romans writing about Rome responded to the literary and historical associations of their city as much as to the city's material presence', combining perspectives of appropriation with the notion of construction.¹¹ In this article I propose to move a step further, employing the conceptual tools of religion and urbanity for a more nuanced analysis of Augustan religion as 'urban religion'.¹² This implies examining urban life and the imaginary of urban life, taken together as urbanity,¹³ as well as religion as used and shaped in such practices and imaginaries.

The rationale for combining religion and urbanity is that religion and urbanity are two extremely successful strategies of humans that have co-evolved – successfully, despite the fact of frequent empirical falsification of religious claims about the agency of non-human powers and the medical and epidemiological falsification of cities as places of security.¹⁴ Both terms need a brief explanation. The concept of urbanity goes beyond a phenomenological definition of city. A city can be seen 'as a condensed spatial configuration that is in constant transformation and at the same time a socially condensed configuration: without human actors who build, use and perceive this space, there is no city ... cities are to be understood even more precisely as the juxtaposition, overlapping, and densification of a multitude of spaces that interact through their spatial connectedness or overlapping and form interlaced spaces. These individual spaces can be real spaces within the city (houses in neighbourhoods), but also outside the city (cemeteries, villas), interacting with networks such as aristocratic alliances, dealer networks, or schools of philosophy; they can be imagined, unconnected, or hierarchized through power relations'.¹⁵

Even if we take the cultural constitution of spaces into account, this definition might still be misunderstood as defining density as a measurable and sufficient criterion for calling a place a city. Yet, what is decisive for the approach employed here is a focus on the cultural construction of such spaces not by an academic observer but by the historical actors. It is their practices and imaginations with regard to a specific type of space contrasted

11 Edwards 1996, xi.

12 See Rüpke 2020 for the usage of this concept as a tool in historical research.

13 For the concept see Rau 2013, for the history of the concept Noack 2012.

14 See Rau and Rüpke 2020 for the basic assumptions and arguments for the mutual inter-dependency; the 'urban graveyard theory' continues to be debated; evidence for ancient Rome has been brought together by Scheidel 2003.

15 Rau and Rüpke 2020, 656, drawing on Lévy 2008.

with non-urban (rural, wild, etc.) places, that transform a settlement of whatever size into an urban entity or 'city'. Drawing on the Latin concept of *urbanitas* and some forms of its transformation in later European history,¹⁶ the term 'urbanity' is proposed here to denote such cultural constitutions of space as urban. We do not need to adopt the arrogant undertone of much of the ancient contrast between *urbanitas* and *rusticitas* in order to work with this term.¹⁷ Urbane-ness need not be restricted to the cultural properties of educated elites and the 'commonweal' defined by them,¹⁸ and even 'urbane' is a concept too narrow to grasp the range of images and imaginations associated with being or longing to be in a city – or even of being afraid to be or get there. It is the whole range of such imaginations and practices that constitute urbanity in the sense employed here, or better: the different urbanities entertained by the permanent and the many temporary inhabitants, occasional visitors and observers and very importantly by the actual or future immigrants, whose 'urban aspirations' move them into cities.¹⁹

Religion, we have theorised, is as much part of urban ways of life as it is a resource in the appropriation, the learning *and* modification of urbanities found in the different social and spatial locations.²⁰ Why should that be the case? I use the term religion to denote forms of human action and experience that are set apart from other cultural forms by consisting of or building on communication with special agents (sometimes including objects) with properties different from the everyday human, agents such as dead ancestors or gods, sometimes following from human dead persons. But it is not the properties these addressees have, but the way in which they are addressed, that makes this communication different. The fact that they are accorded agency is not unquestionably plausible. This relates as much to the ascribed quality of the addressees as to the situation of this ascription and hence its relevance. Religious communication, thus, is a risky form of communication.²¹

Like any other cultural practice, such religious communication is a spatio-temporal practice, it is located in space and time and it engages with space and time. But even more, there is a specific spatial character of religious communication, a conceptual relationship not likewise valid for other cultural practices. 'Religion' as used here is *defined* as action transcending (in

¹⁶ Rau 2011.

¹⁷ E.g., Ramage 1973; Tzounakas 2006 on Tibullus; Rüpke 2020, 62–76 on Cicero.

¹⁸ Thus Purcell 2019, 22.

¹⁹ For the concept of 'urban aspirations' see van der Veer 2015.

²⁰ Rau and Rüpke 2020, 658–659.

²¹ Rüpke 2015b.

a very simple sense) the immediate and unquestionably given situation. If urbanisation is about densification and differentiation of space, about inclusion (or even trapping) and exclusion on a larger scale, religion is uniquely conducive and uniquely in conflict with urbanisation. From this perspective, religious places produce a specific form of co-spatiality.²² They are both places in a super-empirical sense, connected to a translocal network of divine power, and places topographically nesting in the urban fabric, 'trapping' additional meaning and affective qualities of religious communication within it. Thus, they also signal and focus specific urban identities.

Why is it promising to approach religious practices of the Augustan period from such an angle? The Rome of the first century BCE after the Social War must have been the largest construction site on earth of the period, probably unparalleled even by meso-American new cities or the Great Wall of the Han dynasty with regard to work per time unit. Upgrading, replacing, building on marginal and peripheral sites must have been an impressive and oppressive reality in many parts of the city and its former boundaries. For centuries, and in particular during the third and second centuries BCE, religious practices, temple building, and temple usage more permanently, large-scale rituals more ephemerally, had shaped the cityscape. This was, however, slowly coming to an end as far as the senatorial families were concerned. The few temples built during the first century were foci rather than the defining shape of the urbanistic projects of the period, crowning a theatre or giving focus to a new forum. The new genre of monumental altars were landmarks, but not visually dominating the cityscape. Against this general development, the temple of Divus Iulius on the forum was surely an exception. Projects below that level continued to be carried out, despite the opposition they faced. We may think of the Isis sanctuary on the Capitoline hill, for example, or Publius Clodius' temple of Libertas on the edge of Cicero's confiscated Palatine villa.²³ Augustus' Palatine Apollo was as much part of this group as an exception to it.

In this perspective, the chaotic city produced self-reflexive and ordering activities and institutions, calendar reforms and temple restorations, legal codes and new offices. Religious practices and institutionalisations were central to this.²⁴ Shortly before 43 BCE Varro dedicated a book of his quickly written *De lingua latina* to concepts and names of places,²⁵ Vitruvius wrote

22 On the concept, Lévy 2013.

23 See Varro, *ant. rer. div.* 46; Cic. *domo* 108–112.

24 See Rüpke 2012, for the long process of rationalisation, in particular 82–219 and the table 207. For architecture: MacDonald 2016, 200.

25 On Varro, see Spencer 2011 and Rüpke 2017.

probably most of his *De architectura* (dedicated to Augustus after 27 BCE) during the 30s²⁶ and reflected about the systematic placing of religion, both evidently reacting to the explosion of the metropolis.²⁷ Dealing with bustling urban space employed and changed religious practices and ideas. It is the agenda of current research to extend this perspective to further texts, to look into the urban and religious agenda of Horace,²⁸ Vergil,²⁹ Tibullus,³⁰ Propertius (as done here) and Ovid³¹ beyond questions of political identity, which have dominated and narrowed down the analysis of urban as well as of religious change in much of the research on the Augustan period.

Propertius and his last book of elegiac poetry, probably finished around 16 BCE, forms the direct object of the present inquiry. Rome is its very starting point (4.1) and an important theme throughout the book, as are religious practices. To study the one through the lens of the other promises to lead to new insights on Augustan religion as much as on Propertius' poetry. Therefore, the questions I tackle are: How did Propertius characterise life in the city, how did he grasp urbanity, the distinctive features and implications of being in a city, as lived in Rome? And secondly, what is the role ascribed to the gods and the religious practices in this construction of urbanity? I will start with a brief introduction to the text (2) before I offer a more detailed analysis of Propertius' take on the city, which follows scenes and motifs foregrounded by him, but systematised with a view to a recent definition of 'city' (3) that will turn out to be very much in tune with Propertius' perspectives by focusing on the dynamics of urban life: 'Cities are distinguished from other human settlements by two key features: they constitute dense and large clusters of people living and working together, and they are the focus of myriad internal and external flows. This is what makes cities uniquely active and vibrant places that are always more cosmopolitan than culturally uniform.'³² Against this background the conclusion will turn to the question of the role given to religious practices and above all the gods in these constructions (4).

26 Höcker 2002, 267.

27 Rüpke 2017.

28 See the contribution of Egelhaaf-Gaiser, this issue.

29 As presented by Cecilia Ames, Córdoba, in her presentation at the FIEC congress at London, 'Religion, Antiquarianism and Roman Urban Development: An approach from Book VIII of the *Aeneid*'.

30 See Knox 2005 for an early dating.

31 As presented by Catharine Edwards, Birkbeck, London, 'The Great Mother and the Mutilated Body'.

32 Robinson, Scott and Taylor 2016, 5.

2 Propertius' fourth book of elegies

Propertius' fourth book of elegies does not need any further introduction here.³³ His poetry is intentionally highly artificial and personal, inviting a poetological reading of the author's product as much as a view deep into the experiences, phantasies, and emotions of the narrator.³⁴ Without doubt, the density and intertextuality is meant for a highly educated audience and – with regard to the book compositions – readership.³⁵ This does, however, not remove the text's agenda and setting from the lived urban space of Rome in the Augustan period.³⁶ And this includes also, as just stated, an urban and a religious agenda. The first elegy opens with a sort of guided tour in Rome that makes the guided visitor aware of the many dimensions of the cityscape, above all contrasting a pre-urban or proto-urban³⁷ past with the present. It ends with a programmatic statement about religious contents of the speaker's future poetic production: 'I will sing of religion, time, and the names of places' (4.1.68).³⁸ The book is highly organised, as any reader is made aware of when the speaker opening the second elegy demands a different poetic programme from Propertius than the one embodied by the first elegy (4.1B). Book 4 must be read as an artificial composition rather than merely an arrangement of earlier published poems, a composition to a higher degree than every other *Gedichtbuch* of the period.³⁹ Thus, the whole book rather than individual poems form the corpus of my argument.

Recent research on the book has made clear that the ordering principles of the book cannot be conceptualised as an alternation of 'national and erotic' or 'aitiological and elegiac' poems.⁴⁰ My own approach is to read the book as an attempt to come to grips with the many faces of the actual

33 I will in the following quote Propertius according to my own constitution of the text, in which I tend to stick to the text of the archetype, not as a matter of principle, but as a methodological precaution, as any ideas of what Propertius might have written, can only be argued for on the basis of what is attributed to him in our earliest witnesses.

34 See the analyses in Scioli 2015 and the general remarks 24–54.

35 As the poet himself, this elite is as traditional as innovative in including new (often Greek) cultural skills and learning in their fields of competition (Itgenshorst 2013, 392–393).

36 Cf. Itgenshorst 2013, 384, drawing on Husserl's *Lebenswelt*, and Rüpke 2015a, starting from 'lived religion'.

37 For a critique of the concept see Smith 2005.

38 The conjecture *deos* for *dies*, suggested by Wellesley and followed by Heyworth 2007, 424, is problematic in the triad, where it would be just a synonym for *sacra*. It neither explains the Propertian reuse of *sacra* and *dies* as the framing words of 4.6 nor the Ovidian reception (on which Rüpke 2009).

39 Building on Hutchinson 1984.

40 Thus, however, still Günther 2006, 353.

city of Rome, not just as a multi-layered memory-scape,⁴¹ but also a multi-layered space in other respects. Some years ago, Elaine Fantham suggested a broader analysis of the urban elements in the fourth book, including the author's contemporary reality. 'The genre of elegy permits him both a realistic evocation of city scenes and activities',⁴² she states and argues that 'the whole book was designed to reflect the shape and the life of the city'.⁴³ This project was already hinted at in the *recusatio* of 3.9.49–51.⁴⁴ Fantham's careful reading mainly invokes very explicit topographical references in all the poems, basically covering the old centre of Rome.⁴⁵ In the end, however, this promising approach boils down to a focus on Propertius' confrontation between the old and the new, and the relation of the resulting image to the complex attitudes of other contemporary poets to the modern Rome. Propertius yearns for a pastoral world, full of trees and brooks, leading to the paradoxical claim that he privileges 'the lost ... natural innocence of the unpopulated [sic!] pre-urban community'. The loss the poet mourns is the pastoral world, not that of the actual late Republican Rome replaced by Augustan construction work.⁴⁶

Just a year before, Kenneth S. Rothwell had arrived at a somewhat bleaker conclusion. According to him Propertius' 'distaste for landscape outside the city is sometimes explicit: the woods and countryside are at best boring, at worst a place for grief, isolation or fear'.⁴⁷ The start of the city-tour in 4.1 is not just seen as a bucolic idyll. 'If there is a constant reality to this Rome it is not of pastoral peace but of *labor* and *negotium*. The shepherd is joined by the plough-man, the shepherd's pipe in other poets' text replaced by the 'horn (...) calling citizens to assembly', 'an orderly society, with religious and political institutions (the senate, 11–14), and a busy citizenry who anonymously perform their public duty'.⁴⁸ It is hard labour over many generations that has transformed the bare hills into the Rome of today. The result, however, is ambiguous, as moral decay resides in the new luxuries.⁴⁹ Likewise, progress is associated with sacrificial as well as military violence, and this is confirmed by the later poems on Tarpeia (4.4) and Hercules

41 See Smith 2015, 372–373, for a critical remark on the limits of the approach.

42 Fantham 1997, 122.

43 Fantham 1997, 124.

44 Fantham 1997, 126, the verses are read in an inverted sequence.

45 Fantham 1997, 129–132.

46 Fantham 1997, 134–135.

47 Rothwell 1996, 835 with reference to 1.1.9–14; 1.18; 2.19; 3.16; and the fourth book in general.

48 Rothwell 1996, 836.

49 Rothwell 1996, 836–837.

(4.9).⁵⁰ Nature offers neither a rustic idyll in the past nor a golden age in the present, but ‘generally conspires against human progress.’⁵¹ What seem to be *loci amoeni* in those poems are in fact places for treachery and violence.⁵²

Rothwell stresses that this negative image is not monolithic and is undercut by ‘ambiguity and Callimachean wit.’⁵³ Part of this instability in evaluating the topographical and urban space is the deep rupture brought about by labour as much as the course of time. As Carolyn Macdonald has pointed out, the contrast between past and present is not just one of moral evaluation but also one of discontinuity even within the physical landscape. The monuments remain silent. Accordingly, they are left in the background even in 4.9 and 10⁵⁴ – and one might also add 4.6, which is *not* explicitly about the Palatine temple of Apollo. I follow Macdonald in her assumption that the turn to names and etymology – following Varronian precedent – is a reaction to the ‘changed and changing topography ... in an age of accelerated urban transformation.’⁵⁵ And I also agree that this type of etymological approach results in multiple histories, digging up ‘multiple, even conflicting, memories of the city’s former lives ... vestiges of a plurality of peoples, who do not coalesce into a single narrative of Rome or the “Roman.”’⁵⁶ This is, as I would like to add, part of the ironically overstated programmatic phrase *Umbria Romani patria Callimachi* (4.1.64) in the introductory elegy, which combines three ethnically different references with the concept of *patria* and of the programmatic *cognomina locorum* rather than just *loca*. It is, however, not just terms, but speaking, creating a discourse about them, which offers illumination. The whole book provides a guide to understanding and living Rome, a *prontuario*, a guidebook to urbanity,⁵⁷ written by an insider. Certainly, it is only after the praise of Umbrian towns in 4.1.65–6⁵⁸ that Propertius turns towards Rome (4.1.67) and asks for her and her citizens’ favour. The wording suggests that he is thereby defining his technical relationship towards Rome, too. The first line of the quatrain finishes on *ciues* (4.1.67) and there can be no doubt that Propertius was a *ciuis Romanus*. If this relationship between

50 Rothwell 1996, 838–845.

51 Rothwell 1996, 848.

52 Rothwell 1996, 852.

53 Rothwell 1996, 854.

54 MacDonald 2016.

55 MacDonald 2016, 208.

56 MacDonald 2016, 209.

57 I am grateful to Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli for the term.

58 Given the fragmentary status of Roman walls by the time, I follow Camps 1965 *ad loc.* in reading a reference to Umbria, subject of the preceding sentence, rather than supposing an unmarked switch to Rome as upheld by Heyworth 2007, 423.

text and social reality holds, the end of the last line of the quatrain could help to solve an old problem of Propertius' biography: the *equus* – additionally stressed by *meus ... equus* – points to Propertius being a member of the *ordo equestris*. There is no other evidence, but Propertius' obvious wealth, the possibility of a political career (rejected, 4.1.134), and membership in the circle of Maecenas all point in the same direction.⁵⁹

3 Living the lived city

3.1 Topographical complexity

The first aspect of city life the reader or listener must be aware of, is size and complexity. This is made clear in the very first sentence:

Hoc quodcumque uides, hospes, qua maxima Roma est (4.1).

'All what you can see here, my dear guest, where the megacity Rome is ...'

In the intensive intertextuality of the fourth book, readers would be reminded of Aeneas being led around by Euander in Vergil's *Aeneid*, just published by the time of writing.⁶⁰ Formally addressed is an anonymous guest of the anonymous speaker. The addressee is from outside the city. And this is the first point of the book, reinforced by the following verses. It is a book about Rome that allows an outsider to see the inside. The gaze of the visitor is far-ranging, a raised position is presupposed. Possibly – but I will not go deeper into this problem – the place of observation is on the South-western edge of the Palatine. This location would command a close view of the temple of Apollo, the *casa Romuli*, the Tiber as well as the Curia to the Southeast and Northeast, the Capitoline temple of Iuppiter and the built-up area of the Tarpeian rock. The Lupercal would be at one's feet and even a look onto the complex of Vesta might have been possible, if a few steps further up are taken. The *aurea templa* would then primarily refer to the lavishly decorated and recently completely rebuilt Augustan temple for what is today called Apollo Sosianus.⁶¹ Sosianus' wooden cult image from Judaea had certainly joined or replaced a terracotta image, thus making the guide's remarks about 'fictile gods' (5) much more pointed. Likewise the theatre

⁵⁹ See Commager 1974, 38, and Cairns 2006, 1–35, in particular 31 with his comparison to other Augustan poets' equestrian status in their respective *municipia*. For Horace's equestrian status see Schmitzer 1994b, 40–49, and Schmitzer 1994a.

⁶⁰ I am grateful to the reviewer for pointing me to the parallel, see Verg. *Aen.* 8.183–301.

⁶¹ See La Rocca 1988; Haselberger 2008, 45–46.

would refer to the rebuilding of Caesar's directly adjacent theatre, the view aiming at its semi-circle.

The multi-layered character and the successive and overlapping histories and spaces of this small area stand *pars pro toto* at the beginning of a book that will continue into other parts of the city,⁶² each a complex space, full of movement. The *vicus Tuscus* of 4.2, the Tarpeian rock and the Capitoline hill of 4.4 are nearby, 4.3 leads to the Porta Capena (71), 4.5 to the Porta Collina. 4.6 refers (without a geographical adjective, however) to Apollo on the Palatine hill. 4.7 is situated in the Subura, north of the Forum (15), 4.8 on the Esquiline (1). 4.9 is situated at the Aventine and Forum Boarium. 4.10 starts from the Capitoline hill, 4.11 is spoken by a Roman woman and tombstone, somewhere in or around Rome. The reference to her ancestors points to the tombs on the via Appia.

Evidently, Rome is not only conceptualised in terms of temples, theatres, and quarters. Below the larger regions, neighbourhoods come into view (4.8.29, 58–60). Gates have already been mentioned, streets are now added. The via Appia is even directly addressed in 4.8.17. Even beyond the Tiber, 'urban waterways' are mentioned, even if these particular ones have disappeared in the meantime (4.9.6). Living in the city is about movement, as enjoyed by Vertumnus:

*Sed facias, diuum sator, ut Romana per aeuum (55)
transeat ante meos turba togata pedes.*

But father of the gods, may you ensure that the toga'd Roman throng
passes before my feet for all time.

Arethusa in 4.3 is trying to map the movements of her beloved Lycota (35–40), Cynthia is led to her tomb (4.7) or noisily moving through the city in 4.8. Cornelia moves into the netherworld (4.11). Streets are arteries and scenes of urban life,⁶³ as are enclosed spots like the *secreta herba* (4.8.35), the enclosed garden, contrasting with the open *Collinas herbas* of 4.5.11, the meadow at the Porta Collina.

Such complexity is occasionally contrasted with the unity of the city. Rome is directly addressed in the opening elegy (67) or imagined as a *dos*, a dowry, by Tarpeia in 4.4.56. *Murus* or *moenia* also designate such a unity (e.g., 4.4.13, 74). The city is something that can be contemplated in its totality, even Rome is a limited place, a city that can be compared with others, such as Assisi. The urban discourse of Propertius is self-reflexive. It is a discourse about Rome and an indication of his orientation towards Rome.

⁶² Cf. Fantham 1997, 131–132 for the following.

⁶³ See in general Holleran 2011; Poehler, Flohr and Cole 2011.

But above all, it is a discourse about and an indication of the cultural construction of that conglomerate of spaces as urban.

3.2 Diversity and density

The diversity construed in book 4 of the elegies by Propertius is not only an ethnic one, as has been briefly pointed out above. Roman and Umbrian, Latin and Etruscan territories and origins are just one dimension of identities. In addition, social diversity comes into play. The opposition between the shared hearth and the undecorated hut of the founders (4.1.6, 10) and (implicitly) present housing cannot overlook that present housing conditions include the possibility of being reduced to a ‘bent shack’ (4.5.70, *pergula curva*) at the lower end of the social ladder. The ‘secluded lawn’ fitted with ‘summer glasware’ (*uitrique aestiva supellex*, 4.8.37) points to a higher social group, but still below the senatorial order. On his flight, the ‘first shop on a dark pathway’ (*obscurae prima taberna uiae*, 4.8.62) offers refuge.

Most obviously, elegy 4.8 is a repertoire of contemporary city life.⁶⁴ The poem is opened by a scene of night-time noise:

Disce quid Esquilias hac nocte fugarit aquosas (1)
cum uicina novis turba cucurrit agris.

Learn what put the watery Esquiline to flight last night,
 when a local crowd ran in the new park.

Turba, ‘crowd’, is a term that we encounter frequently in Propertius, and in the fourth book in particular. This is not just a number of people, but a sort of disordered unity, variously interacting, even if in overall friendly confusion. Where it is not used as a description of the turmoil of natural forces like the sea, it is above all an urban phenomenon. The deserted Gabii, an example of a dead city right in the first elegy, now lacks such a *turba* (4.1.34). Vertumnus, as we have seen it, enjoys it in a central place of the city (4.12.5, 56). A drunken crowd celebrates the Parilia, unaware of Tarpeia’s treachery (4.4.78), a crowd of the like of Propertius will follow him in writing poetry once he has ended his career as a lawyer or even politician – the complexity of interaction on the Forum is just insane (4.1B.134–6). Across the generations, Cornelia’s family on her mother’s side, the Libones, add up to a crowd of heroes (4.11.31).

While these masses are never really dangerous (unless they pursue you), lack of order and inconsideration (if not ruthlessness) may result in bodily

⁶⁴ Cf. Williams 2018.

harm. In an always misunderstood passage, dead Cynthia bemoans the fact that a tile thrown down onto the street in the course of some building activity had hurt her head while she was being transported to her funeral:

*Nec crepuit fissa me propter harundine custos, (4.7.25)
laesit et obiectum tegula curta caput.*

Nor did a guard sound a split cane near me,
and a broken tile thrown towards me damaged the head (modified trsl.).

It is the very lack of a herald warning the people passing that caused the damage, as the people handling the tiles were not warned off.

3.3 Beyond the city

The amount of traffic across the borders of the city was what attracted me in the first place to analyse the fourth book as a piece on contemporary urban life in the first place. Sustainable urban settlements across history are characterised not only by the density of their internal flows, but likewise by the density of the external flows, their accessibility, their exchange of goods, ideas, and persons with their rural hinterlands as well as (and perhaps even in particular) with other cities. The term *hospes* in the very first line already suggests the author's sensitivity in this regard. This goes far beyond the movement of people into the city, which is suggested by the term *profugos ... Penates* in 4.1A.39, Propertius' own biography in 4.1A and B, or Vertumnus' narrative about his Etruscan origins in 4.2. Again, I restrict myself to some telling examples.

In Arethusa's movement of thought far beyond the city walls to her beloved, but campaigning consort, she makes use of media that represent the world inside the city and thus enable her to move outside in her thoughts (35–38):

*et disco qua parte fluat uincendus Araxes,
quot sine aqua Parthus milia currat equus;
cogor et e tabula pictos ediscere mundos,
qualis et haec docti dispositura dei.*

And I learn where flows the Araxes that must be conquered,
how many miles the Parthian horse [i. e., camel] can run without water,
and I am compelled to learn painted worlds by heart from a map
and what sort of arrangement by a learned god this is.

Disregarding the discussion about the position of these couplets within the original text, the perspective from the city and urban technological achievements is clear; it seems to be the astonishment about the latter which

is expressed in the last verse as given by the manuscript tradition but subjected to many conjectures since.

Crossing the urban boundaries is also Cynthia's excursion to Lavinium in 4.8. The first reason given is unmasked by the 'more likely' (*mage*) reason added, love, that is, a lover (4.8.16). Thus, the relevance of the intention to see an ancient and famous ritual, attracting visitors, is even higher. But even in this constellation no automatism is claimed, no obligation seemed to be hinted at. The ground for the visit is laid by an individual decision, using the provided infrastructure, the via Appia, and services in form of a *carpentum*, a car, part of the book's interest in highlighting movement.⁶⁵

I have already pointed to the funerals that necessarily cross the borderline of the city in 4.7. The same movement is implied in 4.5. However, here a further, long distance movement is spoken of by the procuress in 4.5 even on her way to her grave (4.5.21–26):

*si te Eoa lecta lapis iuuat aurea ripa
et quae sub Tyria concha superbit aqua,
Eurypylisue placet Coae textura Mineruae
sectaque ab Attalidis putria signa toris,
seu quae palmiferae mittunt uenalia Thebae
murreaque in Partis pocula cocta focis
sperne fidem ...*

If the golden gemstone picked on the Eastern shore delights you,
and the shell that lives proudly beneath the Tyrian wave,
or if the Eurypylean weave of Coan cloth pleases,
and crumbling figures cut from Attalus's golden bed-covers,
or the goods sent by palm-growing Thebes,
and fluorspar goblets fired in Parthian kilns,
despise fidelity ...

It is luxury imports from all over the world that are invoked here.⁶⁶ It is the urban capacity, and above all the power of the imperial capital, that allows to dispose of goods taken from afar.

4 Gods and urbanity

Religion is so prominent in the book of poems that Sextus Propertius published in 16 BCE or shortly afterwards that it seems to be strangely lacking

⁶⁵ Prop. 4.8.15, 17–18. See Macaulay-Lewis 2011, without references to Propertius. This is paralleled by the reference to the horses, *equis*, that we must read instead of the manuscripts' *aquis*, at the end of Cornelia's speech in 4.11.102.

⁶⁶ Syndikus 2010, 329.

in my analysis so far. Does Propertius already prefigure the late ancient as well as early modern topic of the godless city? Most certainly not. It is true that some of the elegies, in which gods and religious practices figure most prominently, are located and dated in a spatial and temporary context lacking the urban noise. This holds true for the Actium poem 4.6, celebrating the Augustan achievements of the battle of Actium, somehow looking at the temple of Apollo (4.6.11), but describing actions in an unspecified, neutral place of ritual and celebration, certainly an idyllic grove (4.6.71) as the final scenery. Likewise, the poems about Hercules of the Ara Maxima and Iuppiter Feretrius, 4.9 and 4.10, which present themselves as the most aetiological ones, have a clear spatial reference. Nevertheless, they are somehow removed from the here and now and any urban crowd.

And yet this very distance is of service for the poet's construction of urbanity. Poetic production itself is presented as a ritual activity, communication with the gods, starting from the Muses but including major gods like Apollo and Jupiter. This is a traditional practice, but used here not only to give historical and narrative depth to urban spaces. The poet, thus, creates a space for himself. Such space is contingent on divine agency, that is Apollo's, Hercules' or Jupiter's divine interventions in human affairs at Rome, but it could be appropriated by the speaker and profiled as a space that points beyond the present urban space, spatially as well as temporally. A space of dancing and singing (4.6.70–86), for composing books (4.9.72) and for aetiological reflection (4.10.1–4). These spaces are taken out of the ordinary urban space by intensive ritual action (4.6), time-traveling into a very different waterscape (*urbanas ... aquis*, 4.9.6) or ascending an exhaustingly steep hill in the very centre of the city (4.10.3–4). Some brief observations must suffice.

In contrast to the ideologically and spatially central Palatine temple of Apollo in the spatial centre of the fourth book, the last three poems deal with a surprising selection or presentation of spaces. *Amphitryoniades*, the opening word of elegy 4.9, which denotes Hercules, the descendant of Amphitryon as protagonist, is the longest word of the fourth book – indeed there is no longer word in the whole of Propertius.⁶⁷ Thus, length and content point towards aetiological poetry, and the reader will not be disappointed by this venture into the past. The train of thought is quite forward, although very much different from the Vergilian account in the Aeneid and the

67 The usually printed *Thermodontiacis* in 3.14.14 is not the transmitted form of the adjective. The only other 15-letter-word could be found in the same poem: *puluerulentaque* (3.14.7).

expectations raised by the epic sound of the opening word:⁶⁸ According to Propertius, Hercules' first visit to Rome – evoked by the *ara maxima* – is not primarily marked by his killing of Cacus, but by his destruction of a sacred grove exclusively used by women (4.9.61–2). If Propertius picks up Euander's 'tour' for his *hospes* by recounting the story of Hercules (Verg. *Aen.* 8.184–301), it is a very different, a peaceful place, a green and humid enclosed park, attractive also in terms of sounds (35), a *nemus* and *lucus*.⁶⁹ This tone is preserved despite the radical change of gender rules.

The following poem is in a way strange, too. It is the shortest of the whole book and perhaps the least appealing.⁷⁰ The opening line directly forms a connection to the preceding prayer to Hercules (1–2):⁷¹

*Nunc Iouis incipiam causas aperire Feretri
armaque de ducibus trina recepta tribus.*

Now I'll begin to reveal the origins of Feretrian Jupiter
and the triple trophies won from three chieftains (trsl. A. S. Kline).

Nunc refers to the position of the poem in the order of the book,⁷² *causas* immediately classifies the poem as aitiological. The translation does not reproduce the long hyperbaton that carries the surprise: Of Jupiter the speaker starts to elaborate – but of the hardly known Iuppiter Feretrius and his military accomplishments. The walk to the Capitoline sanctuary below the mighty temple of the Capitoline triad⁷³ is ridiculously exaggerated as a challenging mountain expedition (3–4):

*Magnum iter ascendo, sed dat mihi gloria uires:
non iuuat e facili lecta corona iugo.*

I climb a steep path, but the glory of it gives me strength:
I never delight in wreaths plucked on easy slopes (trsl. A. S. Kline).

Evidently, this distich continues the poetological discourse of the book. The metaphor is however ambivalent with regard to earlier claims and warnings. The steep way and the high hill do not equal a broad stream, but

68 Verg. *Aen.* 8.185–275. See Richardson 1977, 471 and Anderson 1964 for the expectations frustrated by the erotic turn.

69 4.9.24; the positions of these words at the beginning and end of the line illustrate the 'circle' (*orbe*) thus made.

70 For the subject matter, the *spolia opima* and possible contemporary allusions see Rampelberg 1978 and Rüpke 2019, 224–229.

71 Following Helm, the last but one distich should be put at the end of the poem, giving the voice and prayer to the narrator, not Hercules.

72 Becker 1971, 465–466.

73 On the Propertian treatment of architecture, Albrecht 2012.

neither *magnum* nor *non facili* could represent Callimachean (or Neoteric or elegiac) values. Compare the programmatic elegy 3.1 (17–20):

*Sed, quod pace legas, opus hoc de monte Sororum
detulit intacta pagina nostra uia.
molliā, Pegasides, date uestro sarta poetae:
non faciet capiti dura corona meo.*

But what you can read in peace, that work has been carried down from the sisters' mountain,
on a path that has not been trodden before by our page.
You from Pegasus' (source Hippokrene), grant your poet soft garlands;
a hard (i.e., military) crown would not suit my head.

Here, it is not Propertius, who has to *climb* the mountain, but the work is *brought down*; whereas for Ennius, the epic poet, in 4.1.61, a shaggy crown (laurel?) is adequate, this type of poetry demands a softer version. The brevity of the poem contradicts its aspirations, too, despite the historical line leading from Romulus via Cornelius Cossus and Claudius Marcellus to Augustus.⁷⁴ With regard to the spatiality mapped within the poem, however, the metaphor makes sense. The aitiological explanation is about imperial expansion, full of spatial indications of long distances (*ultima praeda*, 4.1.25) and distant geographical locations (the rivers Rhône and Rhine, 4.10.39, 41). Urban refinement as reflected in the poetological programme offers a clear contrast.

The final poem (4.11) continues the play of spatial presence and distance, spoken from and beyond a tomb, a *sepulcrum* (in final position and thus again surprising in the first line of the poem, 4.11.1), again with the voice of a dead woman, Cornelia, who brings together many of the motifs of the book. Her self-praise and apology contextualises ethical standards within the social and religious topography of her city and reflects these in terms of her own space outside the city and yet not confined to that funerary place (4.11.100–102). But these final decisions about her tomb are not left to her.⁷⁵

As by Cornelia, gods are invoked for support in Propertius' endeavour. But for the most part, it is not the authorial voice that speaks in the elegies, but some divine figures: An already fully inspired poet at the beginning, a god in 4.2, dead people, *di manes* technically, in others, the last one included. The divine point of view seems to be important for Propertius' poetic study in what I have defined as urbanity in the beginning.

⁷⁴ See Cristofoli 2016.

⁷⁵ On the potentially subversive tone of this ending, see Johnson 1997.

In sum, religion offers a privileged position of observation in the Propertian text – yet always from a distance, from on high or from below, or from beyond the city, onto and into the city. The divine perspective and religious architecture as well as religious institutions allow for both temporal and spatial focalisation. Temporally it allows for diachronic comparison, then and now, before and after (death). Spatially, the gods on high and the abodes of the dead are no-places that introduce complexity without implying impartiality. Through close observation, through poetic comment on the meta-observation of these transitory places and their human instantiations in the forms of temples or tombs, a focus is produced. It lies on urban morals and urban ways of life, on how to live in a city full of life and constant change.

Urbanity, as construed and performed by Propertius and his narrators, is about sudden and long-term change, situational and biographical instability – even if it is permanence and changelessness that the speakers repeatedly long for. The ‘city’ projected here has boundaries, which are, however, constantly crossed and questioned. Roman-ness is just an elusive perspective, a part of urbane-ness, but it does not define urbanity, the cultural construction of space as urban, in its entirety. It is just a perspective that Propertius needs to engage with, without succumbing to it.

With regard to religion in Augustan Rome, the analysis of Propertius’ fourth book of elegies adds important facets. Religious symbols, whether gods or temples, were employed by other agents, too, and in no less intensive ways. They served as focalisers, as a means of bringing people together or making a point; they test loyalties and identities or explore differences and overlaps. Both traditionalist claims about continuity and constructivist innovations are needed here and repeatedly brought into play. Gods were given more space and accorded more distance. My reconstruction of Propertius’ construction of urbanity suggests that this variable deployment of religious practices, ideas, and institutions is neither fortuitous nor simply normal, something that could be seen in all places and periods. The experience of urban growth and social complexity without a quantitative expansion of traditional religious institutions – just more gods and temples for more people and more space – seems to have required such conceptualisations of contingency and a thrust towards generalisation. These processes were not just reflexive of urban change but started to be driving forces by the second half of the first century BCE, when monumental architectural complexes, marble calendars and mass rituals changed urban space. And when divine speakers took over in a book of poetry.

Appendix on 4.11.102

The last word is transmitted by N, F, L, P¹ as *aquis*, by (lost) A, the model of Petrararch's codex, probably as *equis* (given by D, V, Vo and P2). *Aquis* does not make much sense; it is not one's bones that are driven on the waters of the netherworld, also 'honourable waters' does not fit with the known topography of this region.⁷⁶ *Equis*, however, is most appropriate. *Equo publico honoratus* (or similar) is a standard expression of epitaphs to denote transfer to the *ordo* of the *equites*.⁷⁷ For women, the concession to use a *carpentum* within the city would explain the connection of *equus* and *honoratus* with an active meaning: horses that confer honour. As the right to a *carpentum* was restricted to the female members of the *domus Augusta* and close relatives,⁷⁸ this would have been a real honour for Cornelia and thus worth mentioning in the last line of an epitaph as kind of substitute of a male *curtus honorum*. Alternatively, it might indicate transport of the corpse.⁷⁹ This interpretation is at least a culturally⁸⁰ and paleographically plausible solution to a long-standing problem.

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76 Contrary to, e.g., Camps 1965, 167; Richardson 1977, 489, or Helm in his edition. Therefore, some editors choose the *aquis*, a conjecture by Heinsius (accepted, e.g., by Fedeli 1984) without any weighty argument.

77 See, e.g., CIL 6.1838: *D(is) M(anibus) / A. Atinio A. f. Pal(atina) / Paterno / scrib(ae) aedil(icio) cur(atori) / hon(ore) usus, ab Imp(eratore) / equo publ(ico) honor(atus) . . . Ornato or exornato* in CIL 6.1617 and 1614. Often just *eq(uo) publ(ico)* is used, e.g., CIL 6.1622.

78 See Jucker 1980.

79 See Schrupf 2006, 55 n. 140 (I am grateful to Richard Gordon for the reference).

80 No extensive description or figural representation of the funeral of a noble female exists. Thus, it is only an assumption that the corpse of a female who had the right to the *carpentum* would have been drawn by it during the funerary rites. Yet, as the *funus* is one of the most important occasions to present all one's status symbols (*imagines, toga praetexta, insignia triumphalia*), it is highly plausible to extend this to analogous female rights.

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Helpful Gods, Preaching Stoics, and Gossip from the Crossroads: Urban Religion in Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles*

Abstract

Scholars generally hold that urban religion plays only a subordinate role in Horace's *Satires* and *Letters*. This article revises this verdict: it is precisely the many casual comments contained in both works which make clear how profoundly everyday religion is integrated into both works and into the topography of the city Rome as Horace portrays it. The small shrines (*compita*) on street corners in urban districts serve as ideal focal points for the conversation (*sermo*) typical of the genre and for personal religious engagement. As the paths of city dwellers of the most varied classes and ranks cross here, the *compita* can be characterised as ideal 'ports of transshipment' for urban gossip and are closely connected to the colourful street life surrounding the Saturnalia. This typically satiric mixture is analysed using *Satire* 2.3 as a prime example.

Keywords: street preacher, individual religion, religious market, *compitum*, Tiber island, Saturnalia

1 Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles* as 'poetry of the big city'¹

Rome plays a central role in Horace's *Satires* as well as in his *Epistles* as setting, motif and idea. The opposition of city and country serves as an ever-present point of reference, one which at the same time connects and separates these two genres of literary *sermo*.²

- 1 This article was translated by Christopher Callanan (Göttingen). My sincere thanks go to Nils Jäger (University of Osnabrück) for his collection of materials and intensive discussion of possible investigative approaches. Thanks also to Kostas Stamatopoulos (Braunschweig) for final proofs before publication.
- 2 This opposition is thematically developed in *Sat.* 1.1.8–11; 2.7.28–32 and of course in the famous *Sat.* 2.6. *Ep.* 1.7; 1.10; 1.14 and 2.2.65–86 also construct a corresponding polarity. Cf. the useful overview of pertinent texts from all the works of Horace (including his lyrics) found in Harrison 2007b.

Hence the first book of *Satires* in particular is localised in the city.³ Scholars have consistently found the explanation for this fact in the chosen genre and its ideal settings.⁴ For it is on city streets and in the marketplaces, at major crossings and central locations that the paths of the inhabitants inevitably and continuously cross, and this occurs across the lines of class and between different social levels. For Juvenal, therefore, it is programmatically motivated that in his first *Satire* he positions his satiric observer on a city street corner, the very place to fill a 'thick notebook' with the follies of mankind.⁵ The bustling metropolis Rome, with its masses of humanity,⁶ colourfully intermingled and densely packed, functions then as a kind of magnifying glass through which the satirically outraged speaker can observe, at very close range, every possible curious, indeed crazy mode of behaviour among his contemporaries. For a literary genre which views as its central task the critique (with or without naming names) of human foibles and vices (*notare vitia*, Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.6), the city then, and all the more The City, the imperial capital Rome, offers an ideal and seemingly inexhaustible source of nourishment.⁷

The focus in Horace's second book of *satires* changes, as the satiric first person narrator spends part of his time in the city and part on his Sabine country estate, to which localities he attributes a contrasting semantic content. In opposition to the restless daily life in the city, dictated by multiple

3 *Sat.* 1.5 constitutes the lone exception: there, the so-called *iter Brundisium* portrays the various stops along the way – country towns, suburban villas and guesthouses – as pearls on a satiric chain. These colourful vignettes of rural-provincial Italy already anticipate the second book of *Satires*, which is localised partly in the city, partly in the country.

4 Representative of this view are Braund 1989, 23; Bond 2001, 80–84; Welch 2001, esp. 179–181; Harrison 2007b, 235.

5 Juv. *Sat.* 1.1.63–68: *nonne libet medio ceras inplere capaces / quadriuiro, cum iam sexta ceruice feratur / hinc atque inde patens ac nuda paene cathedra / et multum referens de Maecenate supino / signator falsi, qui se lautum atque beatum / exiguis tabulis et gemma fecerit uda?* On the self-understanding of the satirist as 'poet of the big city' *par excellence* which is thereby proclaimed, see Braund 1989, 23–26; Tschäpe 2015, 203–215.

6 For a foundational discussion of the central connotations of the construct 'big city' in Roman literature see Tschäpe 2015, 81–179. On mobility and tempo, Tschäpe 2015, 101–105; on noise in the city Tschäpe 2015, 142–147; on how heavily and densely built-up the city was and on the feeling of being crowded in and constricted, Tschäpe 2015, 152–160.

7 One need only think of the windbag 'Mr. X' (*quidam*), who in the middle of the *via sacra* crosses paths with the first-person narrator of *Satire* 1.9, himself entirely lost in thought, and from then on stubbornly refuses to leave his side: it is not the satirist who is here seeking material; on the contrary it imposes itself upon him *against* his will and practically *forces* him to take up his pen and work it up into a *satire*. The statement of the satiric speaker in Juv. *Sat.* 1.1.30–33 points in a comparable direction: *difficile est saturam non scribere. nam quis iniquae / tam patiens urbis, tam ferreus, ut teneat se, / causidici noua cum ueniat lectica Mathonis / plena ipso ...*

distractions and social duties, the option of a simple, unpretentious and peaceful life in the countryside presents itself. The *Sabinum* becomes an ideal place of refuge, one which permits the satirist concentration on his poetry and above all an independent lifestyle. Even highly placed friends and patrons, such as Maecenas, to whom the young poet feels himself obliged⁸ with respect to his time and location – i. e., in the course of his daily passages through the city – are kept at a distance thanks to this independent personal space. On the other hand, the satirist, precisely as lover of the countryside, sees himself trapped in a classic dilemma: if his poetry has its origin primarily and foremost in the milieu of the big city, can he then write satires in the countryside for any extended period of time, or even at all?⁹ And even if he succeeds in this, where will his work find its readers, if not among the friends of Maecenas and in other highly cultured circles of elite city dwellers?¹⁰ As a consequence of this profound contradiction the satirist is himself caught in the literary space of his genre: it is ironic that Horace's comments upon the 'theatre of fools' in the big city attain universal validity precisely due to the fact that they inevitably wind up applying to the *persona* of their author. Even in passages apparently devoted to idealising an old Roman, morally 'pure' life in the countryside, the long shadow of Rome obtrudes at least momentarily.¹¹

8 See *Sat.* 2.6.20–58; 2.7.288–39; Welch 2001 discusses in detail the status-dependent semantics of Horace's portrayal of the city and the resulting distinction he makes between the prestigious venues of the upper class (e.g., the townhouse of Maecenas on the Esquiline Hill) and the 'lower' quotidian world of the working *plebs* (Forum, markets and shops) from which the satirist poet draws his material. Passages in other satires (e.g., *Sat.* 1.6.111–12; 1.9.1–4) draw an idealised self-portrait of the independent poet who is master of his own time and so strolls as he wishes along the streets and piazzas of Rome with no set goal in mind (as Tschäpe 2015, 239–244 correctly emphasises); yet even in these texts the satiric first person is not rid of social duties nor of the – at times long – paths which are necessary to fulfil them (*Sat.* 1.6.45–71; 1.9.16–19).

9 This is valid even for the self-referential statement in *Sat.* 2.6.70–71 according to which the ethically valuable *sermo* of the Satires can be the product only of a dinner party in the countryside. The *fabula* of the city mouse and the country mouse, which his neighbour Cervius goes on to serve up by way of an example, can produce its full effect only when the two environments are viewed in contrastive juxtaposition and in their complex interconnections; in the process, aspects of cultivated urbanity reflect in diverse ways upon the supposedly so rustic and unsophisticated ambience of the countryside.

10 On the circle of Maecenas as the ideal and exclusive target audience of the Satires see *Sat.* 1.10.72–91.

11 E.g., in *Sat.* 2.2 where the farmer philosopher Ofellus is praising humble country life: Ofellus proclaims his teaching to an urban Roman audience, since he has lost his own property to land confiscations (*Sat.* 2.2.107–136). The famous *Sat.* 2.6 (with its tale of the city mouse and the country mouse) is also for a time entirely preoccupied with a detailed portrayal of urban daily life (*Sat.* 2.6.20–59).

The polarity of city and countryside is also quite literally implicit in Horace's letters: as Harrison correctly notes,¹² the genre of Epistles presumes *per se* communication from afar. In contrast to the earlier work, the *Satires*, the majority of the letters presume that the older poet has voluntarily retreated to the philosophically tinged *angulus* of his Sabine country estate; hence they offer in most cases a (more or less) serene distant view of the urban bustle of Rome.¹³ This general impression of distance from Rome is, however, counterbalanced in a few letters, not only in ones written from the city to the countryside (as are *Ep.* 1.4 und 1.14), but occasionally in others tinged by an urban ambience and attitude (e. g., *Ep.* 1.5; 2.1 und 2.2). In Horace's Epistles in total, neither the spatial nor the thematic fixation upon the city is even approximately as strong as in the *Satires*. And yet they too depend upon being circulated and discussed in the capital – this fact is reflected in the contemplative closing letter 1.20 as well as in letters 2.1 and 2.2 – and thus shape a new variety of urban poetry:¹⁴ were it not for the flourishing book trade in the *Forum Romanum* and *vicus Tuscus*¹⁵ and Augustus' new library on the Palatine,¹⁶ the letters would find no readers no matter how great the personal fame of their author might be.

2 Where are the gods? Preliminary consideration of the current state of research

As central as big city Rome is for Horace's *Satires* and his book of Epistles, the gods, divine cult and religion – in this scholarship has heretofore been of one mind – appear to play little or at best a marginal role in the restless daily routine of the urban inhabitants.¹⁷ The transmission of moral values and modes of behaviour is, as a matter of fact, not the task of religion, but rather of (popular) philosophy. It seems then only logical that it is not priests in the service of the state who preach the word of the gods in urban places, markets and streets in the poetry of *sermones*. Instead street preachers and (pseudo-)

¹² Harrison 2007b, 241.

¹³ Ferri 1993, 59–66; Ferri 2007, 123–124 and 128.

¹⁴ This is confirmed by Tschäpe 2015, 231–238, too, in a vivid analysis of *Ep.* 2.2.

¹⁵ *Ep.* 1.20.1–10.

¹⁶ *Ep.* 2.1.214–270.

¹⁷ Griffin 2007, 186 is representative of this view: he notes on the *Satires* that 'gods are remarkable for their absence,' and similarly (187) on the *Epistles*: 'Again, the personal gods appear seldom and have no serious role. ... They are not, it seems, a natural resource to invoke, when the poet is talking seriously about morality, whether in the early *Satires* or in the late *Epistles*.'

philosophers compete with all the rhetorical means at their disposal for the largest possible audience, which they can then seek to convert to the salutary teachings of their respective schools.¹⁸ As a general rule, Horace shows himself strikingly reticent – particularly in direct comparison with other Augustan literary figures – when it comes to the actual names of well-known monuments in the city, be they sacred or profane.¹⁹ The etiological construction of a sacred landscape, so familiar to us from Propertius, Virgil, Ovid and Livy, is for this reason (almost) entirely absent.²⁰ Specifically identifiable statues of the gods and buildings devoted to their cult do not serve their primary purpose, i.e., as the objects or venue of religious worship;²¹ they stand instead in the centre of business and judicial life²² – this at least is suggested by the situational contexts found in the *Satires* and *Epistles*.

Furthermore, the Augustan state gods of the Roman Odes (Jupiter, Apollo), and likewise the personal guardian deities to whom the lyric poet turns (Mercury, Bacchus, the Muses, Faunus) do not appear in the *Sermones* and *Epistles*. Accordingly, Horace does not lay claim in his works in hexameter to being an inspired singer and poet (*vates*), his typical role in his lyrics.²³ It seems reasonable to deduce that the way of dealing with gods, divine cult and religion differs depending on the genre to which the respective works belong;²⁴ whereas lyrics, despite their brevity, figure relatively close to the top

18 We should think in this context of the farmer philosopher Ofellus (*Sat.* 2.2), the Stoic Damasippus and his teacher Stertinius (*Sat.* 2.3), and also of the anonymous culinary sophist of *Satire* 2.4. The multifaceted presentation of these *doctores inepti* as foil and mirror image of the satiric *persona* 'Horace' has been a frequent subject of research: see Harrison 2013, with references to earlier scholarship.

19 This was already noted by Dyson and Prior 1995, 255–256, in comparison with Martial, whose epigrams draw a significantly more concrete and three-dimensional picture of the city's topography and monuments. Tschäpe 2015, 7 points to a difference in concept between Martial and Horace: whereas the former by his frequent naming of localities suggests factuality, a greater degree of fictionalising can be detected in Horace: he is less concerned with calling to mind the concrete image of Augustan Rome than he is with the general impression of a typical big city.

20 *Sat.* 1.8 alone closes with an etiological point – refracted through the comic prism of satire – to explain why the back of the carved Priapus in the gardens of Maecenas is now cracked. In general, however, the goal of *Satires* and *Epistles* is not the construction of a mythical past, but rather a snapshot of a scene from present everyday life.

21 Dyson and Prior 1995, 257 conclude in general for Horace that 'religious activity also receives limited attention.' The two examples they then adduce are both from the *Odes*.

22 For the multiple functions of urban sanctuaries as public meeting points, libraries, market places, deposits et sim. see the helpful overview of Stambaugh 1978.

23 Hor. *Carm.* 1.31.1–2; 3.1.1–4; 4.6.41–44.

24 Griffin 2007, 189: 'The presence of the poetic gods was a great part of what distinguished Horace's more ambitious poems.' See his continued discussion of this point Griffin 2007, 189–214.

of the scale of the common genres, satires and letters are regularly characterised as a lower, pedestrian Muse (*Sat.* 2.6.17: *Musa pedestris*).

As plausible as might at first glance seem the conclusion that the form and content of *Satires* and *Epistles* have *per se* no connection with Roman gods and divine cults, it cannot be maintained, at least not so one-dimensionally. There would seem in my view to be in fact *two* systematic mistakes in such an exegetical approach. The first one involves the tacit assumption that religion is one of the great and weighty themes, and must, therefore, at least primarily deal with the established state gods, such as Jupiter or Vesta, and with the typically Augustan gods (Apollo, Mars, Venus), public festivals and cult observances (like the *ludi maximi*, victory festivals and triumphs) and the prestigious sacred spaces (Capitolium, the Palatine Temple of Apollo). Daily individual activities involving little or no expense but possessing religious character (e.g., oaths and curses, oracles and magic, prayer) run the risk of being overlooked under this assumption.

Secondly, Horatian scholarship appears to consider only those texts relevant which are largely or even entirely preoccupied with gods, myths and cultic observances. Herein lies the explanation for the fact that such great attention has been devoted to the lyric hymns to the gods, because these make clear and evident use of a (poetically enhanced) language of prayer to 'personally' call upon and address the gods and to lavish praise upon their mythical accomplishments. Admittedly such direct communication between poet and divinity has no parallel at all neither in the *Satires* nor in the letters, since in these texts religious spaces, agents and momentary situations are in general mentioned only incidentally, if not merely by way of name dropping. This fundamentally different mode of presentation gives the impression that religion is nowhere the central point, but rather at most 'extra baggage' accompanying social criticism based on moral philosophy. Religious elements sprinkled into the quotidian milieu of the *Satires* and *Epistles* are evidently perceived by scholars as being not even 'actually religious' and are hence immediately and totally removed from consideration.

The approach in question, however, appears motivated not by the ancient state of affairs, but rather by our own expectations, according to which religion occupies a particular, weighty and clearly defined space. But the perspective of the study of religion shows such an assumption to be not only off target, but virtually paradoxical. For here it has long been recognised that religious markers (rituals as well as cult sites) cannot be strictly separated from its social, cultural, political and, not least, urban environment.²⁵

25 *Embedded religion* has become a catchphrase, used by many scholars, see, e.g., Rüpke

It would, therefore, seem appropriate to undertake a new study of the Horatian Satires and Epistles to see what they may potentially reveal about religious markers in the cityscape of Rome. The central question will be where, how and to what purpose religious agents, rites, spaces and periods of time are integrated into everyday city life and thus into the topography of the capital. My procedure is based on the following thesis: it is precisely their usually *incidental* allusions to forms of religious expression which make the Satires and Epistles particular attractive witnesses for the analysis of the shaping and perception of cult practices in their urban frame of reference. It is important to emphasise that the texts we will make use of are not intended to serve as historical sources for the reconstruction of religion as practiced in Augustan Rome. The goal is rather to clarify the literary picture Horace in his Satires and Epistles sketches of a city in which religious and profane areas constantly cross paths and are closely interwoven.

In order to verify my thesis, I will combine an extensive overview of both bodies of text with an in-depth case study. In the next chapter, therefore, I will first formulate general observations on Augustan 'urban religion' as it appears upon analysis of the Satires and Epistles as a whole. The resulting tentative insights will then be tested by an in-depth discussion of Satire 2.3 since this text presents us with a particularly broad spectrum of religious daily practices which are generally, although not exclusively, localised in an urban setting. These momentary sacred situations, however, always appear as flashes in a couple of verses or even words as illustrative case studies. As a result, the Satire can be regarded in both content and form as a highly representative sample case of the style of presentation in the Satires and Epistles.

3 'Urban religion' in the *Sermones*: pervasive themes

How then does urban religion present itself in the Satires and Epistles? I would like to bring my considerations to a point in five observations:

1. *Religious spaces are only in rare and exceptional cases clearly distinguished from the busy city and explicitly marked as sacred.*²⁶ Urban shrines

2001, 11–18; Beard, North and Price 1998 vol. I, 43; with Greece as the example Eidinow 2015. But the accuracy of this 'scholarly trope' has also been strongly questioned, especially by Nongbri 2008; because of this powerful critique I prefer to avoid that term.

26 The carved Priapus watching over a one-time cemetery in the gardens of Maecenas (*Sat.* 1.8) is just such a special case. The cemetery, in which two witches are performing nocturnal magic rituals, is constructed as an isolated opposite pole to the city (s. Welch

or statues of the gods standing in the open are incomparably more often part of the bustle of daily life, in which religious and profane activities transition seamlessly and mingle to form a complex unity.²⁷ The Arch of Janus in the Forum offers a good example of this: in the Epistle to Augustus on the one hand it is drawn – in a manner geared to the noble addressee – into the centre of religious *and* political action, as its open or closed gates signify a state of war or peace.²⁸ Far more frequently, however, this monument, very closely tied symbolically to the *pax Augusta*, is evoked as a well-known centre of financial life, surrounded by financial exchanges and money lenders who have set up business there.²⁹ Usury and financial speculation, so at least the texts suggest, motivate business-savvy city dwellers to offer monthly prayers for the greatest profit possible. The imperial god of peace Janus is hereby humorously degraded to the rank of a dodgy street preacher who teaches young and old that wealth should take precedence over virtue – and who promptly attracts credulous adherents.³⁰ Like the statue of Vertumnus, which stood out of doors near the Forum in the *vicus Tuscus*,³¹ so too does Janus point to the book stores nearby, which now enable the sale of the com-

2001, 184–185, with a different focus); and it is **back to the city** that these disturbers of the peace are then successfully driven by the ‘farting’ Priapus (*Sat.* 1.8.46–47: *nam diplosa sonat quantum vesica, pepedi / diffisa nate ficus; at illae currere in urbem.*). The epitaph on a gravestone near Priapus, which defines an area of 1000 by 300 feet as *locus religiosus* and forbids heirs access to this space (*Sat.* 1.8.12–13: *mille pedes in fronte, trecentos cippus in agrum / hic dabat, heredes monumentum ne sequeretur*), is also imprinting religious legal boundaries on the ground. We do not find such clearly drawn lines, yet nevertheless the Augustan double library at the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine is celebrated in *Ep.* 2.1.214–218, at least semantically, as a quasi-sacred space, in that it is removed from the urban hubbub and reserved solely for leisure and literature (cf. *Ep.* 1.3.16–17).

27 Thus *Sat.* 1.10.37–39 has various poets engage in a literary competition in a temple before a lay judge; *Ep.* 2.1.214–218 celebrates *Apollo Palatinus* as the guardian patron of the library; in *Ep.* 1.5.9–10. Torquatus, the addressee, is invited to a private home for a dinner party on the occasion of the emperor’s birthday (on the importance and sacred nature of the holidays – birthdays, days of accession et sim. – newly introduced in the Augustan calendar for the *princeps* and members of the imperial family see Rüpke 1995, 400–403).

28 *Ep.* 2.1.250–257.

29 *Sat.* 2.3.18–19: on this see section 4.1 below.

30 *Ep.* 1.1.53–56: ‘o cives, cives, quaerenda pecunia primum est; / virtus post nummos’; *haec Ianus summus ab imo / prodocet, haec recinunt iuvenes dictata senesque / laevo suspensi loculos tabulamque lacerto.*

31 The *vicus Tuscus*, known for its numerous shops and businesses, was one of the most frequented districts in the city (for the archaeological remains in that region in general, see Papi 1999). On the greater approachability of a ‘street god’ such as Vertumnus, whose bronze statue stood not in a closed off temple area, but rather in the midst of the throng of passers-by, see Schrader 2017, 166–167.

pleted book of Epistles.³² 'Religion' then, in the Satires as well as in the Epistles, is presented as an integrative component of daily life.

2. *Sacred spaces and agents must bid for attention, if they wish to be noticed at all as being 'religious' and 'distinct' in the heterogeneous hubbub of the city.*³³ Various, and possibly even closely related cults on the one hand enter into competition with one another, and on the other hand the routes determined by religious considerations – for processions, for example, through public spaces – intersect with spaces in which activities take place as necessitated by business, trade and other obligations of the urban populace. Satires and Epistles suggest a typical case: at the intersection where a large cart encounters a funeral procession conflict inevitably ensues as to who should cross first.³⁴

Competitive strategies are also deployed between different cult practices and religions.³⁵ Primarily we see in these cases contrasts being played off against one another: Roman-Italic cult versus Jews³⁶ or Egyptian gods;³⁷ orthodox fulfilment of religious duties toward the gods (*religio*) versus perverse superstition (*superstitio*) or dubious methods of foretelling the

32 *Ep.* 1.20.1–2.

33 For the visibility of cult places, festivals and rituals in the Roman cityscape see the general discussion in Beard, North and Price 1998, vol. I, 260–278.

34 *Sat.* 1.6.42–44: *at hic, si plostra ducenta / concurrantque foro tria funera magna, sonabit / cornua quod vincatque tubas: saltem tenet hoc nos; Ep.* 2.2.72–75: *festinat calidus mulis gerulisque redemptor; / torquet nunc lapidem, nunc ingens machina tignum, / tristia robustis luctantur funera plaustris, / hac rabiosa fugit canis hac lutulenta ruit sus.* The emphatically warlike verbs (*concurrant, sonabit, vicat* bzw. *luctantur, fugit, ruit*) awaken associations connected with a pseudo-epic 'street battle,' in which the goal is not territorial conquest, but rather the right of way. This satiric miniature of a setting typical of epic should put us on our guard before we understand either of these passages as an authentic picture of the reality of everyday Rome. They are rather to be understood as satiric constructions of a 'teeming city:' situations lofty and banal, urban and rural, as well as artisans and soldiers, people and machines blend together in very narrow confines, to create the impression of a densely packed mass of humanity, a minimum of space and turbulent activity everywhere: on this literary portrait of the city, see Braund 1989, 23–24 and Tschäpe 2015, 235–236.

35 Beard, North and Price 1998, 149–156 propose the term 'religious differentiation' as a way of understanding and describing the new social and religious complexity in the late Republic.

36 Thus the satiric narrator, encountering a rural shrine to the water-nymphs, pokes fun at the credulity of Jews (*Sat.* 1.5.97–103); in *Sat.* 1.9.60–71 Aristius Fuscus claims that he cannot rescue his friend from a tight spot, because he must respect the sabbath; the narrator in distress on the other hand is not troubled by any such religious scruples (*'nulla mihi inquam 'religio est'*).

37 *Ep.* 1.1.58–62, for example, closes with the example of a roadside beggar who swears by Osiris to the truth of his words and reaps thereby nothing but harsh ridicule from his Roman listeners.

future;³⁸ public religious expression versus secretive magic,³⁹ obscure vagabond priests or informally cast horoscopes.⁴⁰

The *Satires* in particular derive a humorous point from such a contrast, as *Satire* 1.9 can demonstrate. As the poet strolls along the *via sacra*, a nameless windbag attaches himself to him. During his vain attempt to rid himself of 'Mr. X' (*quidam*), the narrator is reminded of a 'gloomy prophecy' (*Sat.* 1.9.29: *fatum triste*) he once received from an elderly fortune teller, one which he then even quotes verbatim.⁴¹ By this time the narrator has reached the temple of Vesta. This sequence of dark and dubious fortune telling followed immediately by illustrious state cult invites a comparison between the two forms of religious expression. The result is as unexpected as it is comic. For clearly not even the guardian of the sacred fire, which has after all preserved Rome in so many times of crisis, can save the narrator from his current state of embarrassment. The fortune teller seems clearly at an advantage through the mere fact that her rather suspect prophecy takes up all of four verses, whereas Vesta is reduced to the mere mention of her name. Some nameless biddy from the remote Sabellian backwoods has with her 'cheap' prophecy successfully stolen the show from the venerable goddess whose temple shines splendidly in the heart of the city!⁴²

3. The funeral processions mentioned above *bring the mobility of cults and their agents to our attention. Despite what temples and shrines might suggest, urban religion is in no way bound to such fixed points, nor does it depend upon monumental cult structures.* The *Satires*, in particular, document the omnipresence of an unregulated 'religious marketplace' on the

38 The Stoic Damasippus (or his teacher Stertinius) formulates a charge of *superstitio* twice, *Sat.* 2.3.79–80 and 281–295. The poet appeals to 'true dreams after midnight' in *Sat.* 1.1.31–35: Quirinus himself has used such dreams to forbid him, with divine authority, the composition of Greek poetry. In contrast, the mythical seer Tiresias plays the role of a *doctor ineptus* in *Sat.* 2.5.

39 See especially *Sat.* 1.8, in which Priapus, functioning as cemetery guard, drives off two witches; on contempt for all forms of superstition see also *Ep.* 2.2.208–209, where we find a list including dreams, necromancy, miraculous signs, witches, nocturnal spirits and Thesalian magic.

40 As in *Sat.* 1.2.1–2; 1.6.114.

41 *Sat.* 1.9.29–35: *namque instat fatum mihi triste, Sabella / quod pueros cecinit divina mota anus urna; / 'hunc neque dira venena nec hosticus auferet ensis / nec laterum dolor aut tussis nec tarda podagra: / garrulus hunc quando consumet cumque: loquaces, si sapiat, vitet, simul atque adoleverit aetas.' / ventum erat ad Vestae ...*

42 Schmitzer 1994, 16 points to a further religious and narrative nexus, according to which the elderly Sabellian woman (*Sabella anus*) is meant, by the very similarity in sound of the two words, to remind us of the equally prophetic and aged *Sibylla*, who stands in the service of Apollo. The ominous Sabellian would thus hint, through a form of – albeit satirically inverted – *foreshadowing*, at the poet's ultimate rescue by Apollo.

streets and plazas of the city.⁴³ For a modest fee its representatives offer the general public their services as fortune tellers, street preachers or augurs. Naturally, these individuals tend to concentrate at major junctions which attract a great deal of foot traffic, like the Circus and the Forum,⁴⁴ but they can also, much like street vendors, move randomly throughout the city space. Religious daily life in the Epistles and Satires often presents itself then as a highly dynamic supply of cult services.⁴⁵

The poet who strolls through the city in Satire 1.9 makes clear on the other hand that *many cult structures of the city serve as topographical landmarks* and can be associated with a specific semantic content. As in the case of Vesta, so the mere naming of Janus or Apollo suffices to enable the knowledgeable reader to call up before his inner eye the entire backdrop of the Forum and the activities which take place there.⁴⁶

Vesta in Satire 1.9 is moreover merely one stop on a route which becomes apparent to the reader in the course of the poem.⁴⁷ We first meet the poet on the *via sacra*; a few verses later he has reached Vesta. It is there that the wind-bag requests his support in court, be this in the open space of the Forum or in one of the basilicas which border it. The reader then has walked together with the narrator and his unwelcome companion from the Velabrum down to the Forum in the lower part of the city. The narrator has slowly passed the temple area of Vesta, but is now torn from his leisure when he realises how late it has become.⁴⁸ In this way the cult centre of Vesta is located inside the

43 On the unregulated religious marketplace, esp. in the areas of divination and augury, Rüpke 2001, 220–222.

44 Sat. 1.6.113–114: *fallacem circum vespertinumque pererro / saepe forum, adsisto divinis*. Cf. Cic. *div.* 1.132 in relation to the *Circus maximus*.

45 The mobility of religion also shows itself, in addition to the funeral processions already mentioned, in cult processions and triumphs: see Sat. 1.3.10–11 on a priest bearing in solemn procession sacred implements of Juno; Sat. 1.6.23–24 on the splendid triumphal carriage in the urban landscape; Ep. 1.17.33–35 on the triumphal parading of captives before *Jupiter Capitolinus*.

46 In Sat. 2.6.34–35. The *puteal Libonis* serves as a venue for a court summoned to meet there. Provincial and rural shrines also serve as landmarks, as in Sat. 1.5.24–26 the nymph Feronia and the lofty shrine of *Jupiter Anxur* enthroned upon resplendent crags; Ep. 1.10.49 closes with the location: ‘dictated behind the derelict shrine of *Vacuna*.’

47 Scholars have attempted to reconstruct the path taken by the figures in the poem in detail and with the greatest possible precision, in line with the state of construction of the Forum at the time: see Schmitzer 1994, 22–29. It seems more important to me, however, to reflect upon the literary techniques with which such movement through space is constructed and made to serve the needs of the narrative: for in depth discussion of this, see Tschäpe 2015, 68–80.

48 Sat. 1.9.35–36: *ventum erat ad Vestae, quarta iam parte diei / praeterita, et casu tum respondere vadato / debebat*.

Satire on *two* levels: topographically, both by its location near the Forum *and* by means of the time occupied in reading, which – at least roughly – corresponds to the real distance covered by the two literary figures, and also temporally with respect to the daily routine of the inhabitants of the city and, very concretely, the public courts, which meet only during the morning hours. The temple then forms a fixed point of orientation within the action of the poem.⁴⁹

4. *The choice of gods who find more frequent mention in the Satires and Epistles is determined by their function in everyday city life.* In a manner analogous to the lower literary level of both genres it is – at first glance – primarily ‘popular’ and ‘approachable’ gods who decide the course of events as ‘personal guardians and supporters’ of the ‘man on the street.’ In addition to a carved Priapus⁵⁰ and Janus, who was mentioned above, gods who play an important role include the *Lares* and *Penates* of the household,⁵¹ as well as Mercury as the god of luck of dealers and tradesmen,⁵² but also of the parvenu ‘Horace.’⁵³ Upon closer inspection, however, the pantheon of the *Satires* and *Epistles* is more varied than one might first think. The high Olympian gods for one, and also the ‘Augustan’ divinities cannot be banned from the world of the *Satires* and *Epistles*. Apollo, in particular, is mentioned a number of times;⁵⁴ the same is true of Jupiter as the highest of all Roman gods.⁵⁵

How do we explain this juxtaposition of ‘great’ and ‘minor’ gods? The function of Apollo for one at the end of *Satire* 1.9 is instructive here. For it is to his active intervention that the satiric poet attributes his salvation from the clutches of the bothersome parasite. Great Apollo then has been hauled down from his Olympian heights to make himself useful as personal saviour in an everyday situation which is as banal as they come.⁵⁶ Jupiter too is invoked in

49 According to Schmitzer 1994, 17, the Temple of Vesta constitutes a literary marker as well, in that it closes the first section of the poem; thus urban topography is influencing the structure of the text as well.

50 *Sat.* 1.8.

51 *Sat.* 2.3.164–165; *Ep.* 1.7.94–95.

52 *Sat.* 2.3.24–26 und 2.3.68; 2.5.12–14.

53 *Sat.* 2.6.4–15.

54 *Sat.* 1.9.78; 2.5.60; *Ep.* 1.3.15–17; *Ep.* 1.16.57–62 (in alliance with Janus); *Ep.* 2.1.216–218.

55 *Sat.* 1.20–22; *Ep.* 1.1.106.

56 Schmitzer 1994, 26–27 lists Homer and Lucilius as literary models for such divine saviours. This is a primarily epic motif which Horace then reactivates in his *Odes*: there Mercury whisks him – like a hero in epic – away from the midst of the battle of Philippi (c. 2.7.9–14; see Harrison 2007a, 25 on this passage). Hence the sudden rescue by divine hand is accompanied by a crossing of genres; within this framework the high pathos of epic and lyric convention is dragged down into the depths of satire and consciously trivialised.

the first instance and above all in the context of personal desires and oaths;⁵⁷ only secondarily does he manifest his status in his function as the highest god of the Roman state.⁵⁸ It is precisely to the great gods of the state then that the poet can attribute a complex personality: notwithstanding their lofty position they are present and approachable in eminently everyday situations.⁵⁹

5. *The Satires as well as the Epistles reveal then a manifest primacy of individual religion in the city context.* They are only marginally concerned with the political, and hence also with the 'Augustan' dimension of the gods and their cult. Roman imperial state worship is almost entirely side-lined by the everyday services which the 'religious market' provides at little cost for the 'man on the street.' Mention is made in this context of independent experts in divination, i. e., of religious agents who tailor their services to the demands of the general public and the personal wishes of individual clients (such as the Sabellian fortune teller in Satire 1.9).⁶⁰ Festivals too are occasionally imagined as spectacles for the masses;⁶¹ more frequently, however, the influence of the festival calendar upon the milieu of individual city dwellers is highlighted in exemplary instances.⁶² In addition to the cult of the dead and funeral rites, which are mentioned extensively,⁶³ oaths and prayers, vows and curses expressed in concrete situations are omnipresent.⁶⁴ Cults and rites of healing are repeatedly encountered in the *Sermones* as typical situations appertaining to the religion of the individual.⁶⁵

57 *Ep.* 1.18.111–112: *sed satis est orare Iovem, qui ponit et aufert, / det vitam, det opes: aequum mi nimum ipse parabo.* Cf. *Sat.* 1.1.15–22; 1.2.17–18; 2.3.288–291.

58 E. g., *Ep.* 1.17.33–34: *res gerere et captos ostendere civibus hostis / attingit solium Iovis et celestia temptat.*

59 On the approachability of lower grade divinities in particular and the greater accessibility of cult statues standing out of doors and on freely accessible plazas, Schrader 2017, 60–61.

60 *Sat.* 1.6.113–114: *fallacem circum vespertinumque pererro / saepe forum, adsisto divinis.*

61 For a funeral envisioned in *Sat.* 2.3.84–87 the will mandates that the heirs put on elaborate gladiatorial contests, arrange an elaborate funeral feast and make a massive public donation of grain. But this is merely a threat, one which the heirs can avoid by erecting a tomb with an inscription. *Ep.* 2.1.139–155 tells of the joint celebration of a rural harvest festival, and *Ep.* 2.1.103–138 of the hymn of prayer sung by a festival chorus during the Secular Games of Augustus.

62 An occasion to indulge in wine of better quality (*Sat.* 2.3.142–144) and for festival attire (*Sat.* 2.2.59–62), leisure time, an occasion for a dinner party with a circle of family and friends and also a chance to sleep late on the following day (*Ep.* 1.5.9–11). The focus on the individual holds good even for the celebrations of the Saturnalia mentioned in *Satires* 2.3 and 2.7, both of which take place in a domestic setting (v. section 4.2 below).

63 *Sat.* 1.4.126–127; 1.6.15–17; 1.6.422–444; 1.8.8–13; 2.3.84–99; 2.5.84–88; *Ep.* 1.14.6–8; 2.2.74.

64 *Sat.* 2.3.179–181; 2.5.84–86 and 104–106; *Ep.* 1.1.34–35; 1.7.92–95; 1.16.57–62; 1.17.58–62; 1.18.106–112; 2.1.16–17.

65 They are central concerns in *Satire* 2.3, for which see section 4.1 below. Cf. also *Ep.* 1.1.28–37; 1.16.12–16.

A difficulty does, however, arise for our stated goal of precisely describing 'religion in the city:' the texts which serve as witness for individual cult practices invoke rites and rituals, but do not follow up with an explicit attribution to a specific context. At best, the rite itself enables at least a plausible conclusion as to a concrete location (in the cases for example of cult practice touching upon the home and the *Lares* or of funeral rites), but occasionally even the general outlines of a localisation are unclear; one cannot then even say whether an *urban* context is envisioned at all.

A specific kind of shrine, for this reason, comes all the more into focus, one closely bound not only to urban surroundings, but at the same time to a satiric context: I mean the numberless altars and chapels which can be found on nearly every street corner,⁶⁶ and which serve as small subordinate centres for individual districts of the city.⁶⁷ These *compita* are relevant for our purposes in two ways: firstly, they constitute meeting places which are easily reached and freely available,⁶⁸ which enable anyone in the neighbourhood to pray or sacrifice along public roads without great expense or formality. For this reason, the greater part of an individual's cult practice took place probably not before the imposing temples located far off in the Forum or on the Capitoline or Palatine hills, but rather at household altars and *compita*. And secondly, thanks to their omnipresence and central locations, *compita* can in literature easily constitute multipliers for rumours and gossip. It is from there but a short step to assign to *compita* and *triviae* a semantic which accords practically ideally with the (supposedly) lower literary level of Horace's 'chats' (*sermones*), their urban setting and the close connection of their content to everyday concerns: these inconspicuous, but doubtless

66 See Flower 2017, 118: 'Rome itself was, therefore, imagined as consisting of an officially recognized network of such nodes that had been characteristic of the city from early times.' Rüpke 2001, 178 speaks of an 'Auspunktieren der Stadtfläche' (filling in the dots of the urban space) undertaken systematically under Augustus. On the architectural form of such *compita* see Flower 2017, 137–159.

67 Only in 7 CE, and so more than 20 years after the publication of the first book of *Satires*, did Augustus of course first prompt the redistricting of Rome into 14 regions and 265 *vici* and, in close association with this, the systematic expansion of the *compitum* cult (in combination with local worship of the *Genius Augusti*); the *compita*, however, and the cult rites practiced at them, were of course present long before.

68 Fundamental on the Latin term *compitum* and the cult practiced there Scullard 1985, 86–90; Scholz 1997; Flower 2017, 116–117. Flower emphasises as the core characteristic and primary function of the (originally rural) *compitum* the meeting of ways, properties and the people who dwell on them: 'The term *compitum*, from *competo*, meaning to "come together," therefore, refers both to the crossroads itself as a physical space and by extension to the shrine for the *lares* set up to mark this spot. These crossroads, as described by most ancient sources and commentators, are the meeting points of several roads, whether three or four or more.'

much frequented shrines can easily be made into *the* religious and social central meeting places of a broad urban population (above all those from the lower classes); for in contrast to the elite represented in the Senate, the daily life and work of these people played out largely within the narrow confines of their district.⁶⁹ It is then only logical that Horace⁷⁰ presents the newest urban gossip as well as his own satirical comments upon the ‘human world of fools in general’ as being especially closely tied to precisely these crowded meeting-places.⁷¹

A first result of our survey of these works can therefore be established: the Satires and Epistles of Horace serve in remarkable fashion as a control of and check upon the view of urban religion in the Augustan period which is predominant in literary studies as well as in archaeological research. The two works do not focus on the great centres of Augustan religious politics, the *Ara Pacis* for example, or the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine but, on the contrary, paint a picture in which religious agents and spaces are understood as integrative components of everyday life in the city. The spaces in which sacred and profane activities occur overlap in the bustle of the metropolis and in the restless movement of its inhabitants. The various products of the ‘religious marketplace’ compete in part amongst themselves and in part complement one another to form a complex unity. This diverse mixture of cult practices has, however, the significant potential to overstep boundaries, overturn values and loosen established rules of order. As a close look at Satire 2.3 will demonstrate, the satiric world of fools of the big city knows no restraint when it comes to religion.

69 The Festival of the *Compitalia* is explained then by Scholz 1997, 112 as a ‘kollektive Feier der Menschen eines Gemeinwesens ..., gebunden an den Ort des täglichen Lebens und Arbeitens’ (the people’s collective celebration of a community ..., bound to their place of work and daily life). Flower 2017, 171 emphasises that the *Compitalia* have the character of a street festival. ‘Most of the festivities at Compitalia seem to have taken place in the streets and at their crossroads themselves. ... At Compitalia, as well as on other exceptional occasions, the streets of Rome were themselves said to celebrate.’ On the proximity of *Compitalia* and *Saturnalia* (in the calendar and in their organisation and atmosphere) see section 4.2 below.

70 As did Juvenal later: cf. note 7 above.

71 Pertinent references for this are offered *Sat.* 2.3.25–26; 281–287 and 2.6.47–50; cf. section 4.1 below. The small case study of *Ep.* 1.17.58–62 evokes core associations with the *trivium* (much frequented, people watching and earthy humour, familiar space for a tightly knit community).

4 'Urban religion' and satiric carnival: a case study of Satire 2.3

This satire is a typical example for the tenor of the second book of *Satires*. Its length alone confirms the poet's new strategy 'to exaggerate, in the mouth of other speakers, the dogmatic, homiletic element of diatribe',⁷² which stood in the foreground of the first book of *Satires*. Most of the satire is by far dedicated to a lecture on human folly. Responsible for the lecture's content, however, is not the satiric speaker, but instead the Stoic Damasippus, who directs his words at the poet 'Horace' as auditor. Damasippus is portrayed as a very recent convert to philosophy, who passes judgment upon human folly, spurred on by the missionary zeal of a newcomer to the fold. In an over the top tirade he describes the capital Rome as a world of fools, all infected with a clinical case of insanity (*insania*).

The criticism of human vices (*vitia*) and the focus upon the city Rome, the comic figure of a *doctor ineptus* as speaker and the dialogue-like frame are representative of the second book of satires.⁷³ Satire 2.3 is particularly closely related to Satire 2.7 in its motifs, situation and genre. Similar to 2.7 it places its pseudo-philosophical lesson under the protective sign of the 'free speech' allowed during the festival.⁷⁴ The topsy-turvy world of the Saturnalia makes it permissible for the Stoic philosopher, as an outsider, and for the slave Davus, who is even socially inferior, to lay bare the inconsistencies between the teaching and the actual way of life of the satirist Horace. As a result of the spacing between them, the one being in the first, the other in the final third of the book, they comprise a carnival frame,⁷⁵ within the confines of which the diverse world of the *Sermones* displays itself. The two texts relate to one another geographically too: Satire 2.3 views far-away Rome from the perspective of Horace's villa, whereas the house slave Davus in Satire 2.7 reflects upon his master's life in the city and is finally forced into silence by the threat of being transferred to the *Sabinum* by way of punishment.⁷⁶

⁷² Muecke 2007, 112.

⁷³ On the constellation of speakers in the second book Harrison 2013; for the particular characteristics of the second book and what distinguishes it from the first see the concise compilation in Muecke 2007; see also Gowers 2005, 58–61 on the 'two new frameworks for the poems of book 2', the *convivium* and the *Saturnalia*.

⁷⁴ Compare the explicit exhortation in *Sat.* 2.7.4–5: *age libertate Decembri, quando ita maiores voluerunt, utere: narra*.

⁷⁵ See Gowers 2005, 60.

⁷⁶ *Sat.* 2.7.117–118: *ocius hinc te / ni rapis, accedes opera agro nona Sabino*. See also the criticism expressed by Davus in *Sat.* 2.7.28–29: *Romae rus optas; absentem rusticus urbem / tollis ad astra levis*.

As a result of its setting in time and space, Satire 2.3 is additionally pertinent in a number of ways to our question regarding the relationship between ‘religion and city.’ For the view of the vibrant capital is delivered here from afar, specifically from the Sabine country estate to which the poet has retreated to work without distraction on his Satires.⁷⁷ In addition, the Stoic delivers his moral sermon on a specific religious occasion, namely the Saturnalia.⁷⁸ Hence it bears the stamp of carnival culture in which social rules and regulations are temporarily suspended.

It is the city of Rome which furnishes the Stoic Damasippus in this Satire with occasion and backdrop, people and material suited to a moral sermon. He utilises, so at least is my thesis, urban topography as a tool to delimit individual phases in his autobiography by means of changes in location and the differing semantic attached to each of the settings. To test this claim, we will in a first section follow hard on the heels of Damasippus and traverse his route through the city.

In a second step we will then investigate the extent to which the Saturnalia festival affects Damasippus’ portrayal of ‘urban religion.’ The carnival world leads to a complex constellation of different speakers and invites them to exchange roles temporarily – a number of scholars have already noted and discussed this.⁷⁹ There has *not*, however, been a study of the way in which the framework of the festival colours urban religious spaces with a carnival tint.

4.1 From the Gates of Janus to the Tiber Island: an urban biography as religious path

Damasippus presents himself to the reader as a failure in life. As an art merchant, he had at first made a great deal of money and was promptly hailed on the streets as the ‘luck-child of Mercury.’⁸⁰ Hence the first phase of his life

⁷⁷ Sat. 2.3.11–18.

⁷⁸ Sat. 2.3.4–5: *ipsis / Saturnalibus huc fugisti sobrius*. On the programmatic significance of the Saturnalia for the entire second book of Satires, see Sharland 2010, 163–196.

⁷⁹ The contributions of Sharland 2009 and Sharland 2010, 225–260 are especially pertinent: in the motif of carnival she sees an exegetical key for a Bakhtinian reading of the Satire and emphasises in particular the function of *role reversals* in the second book of Satires and their influence on the authority of the speaker. Sharland understands the monologue of Damasippus as a carnival opposite pole to the mode of dialogue employed in Horatian Satire; Harrison 2013, 159 on the contrary interprets the Stoic as an *alter Horatius* and emphasises the close relationship between them, indeed their *interchangeability*. Bond 1987 and Bond 1998 illuminates the role of the Stoic Damasippus and his relationship to his teacher Stertinius, whose lecture he is presenting.

⁸⁰ Sat. 2.3.25: *Mercuriale / inposuere mihi cognomen*. Cf. Sat. 2.3.64–68. In this sobriquet the Satire makes use of the similar sound of Mercury and *merx/mercari* for a humorous

(*Sat.* 2.3.18–26) passed under the spell of capital and the financial exchanges of the Forum Romanum. Having received the call of Stoicism late in life, Damasippus in retrospect views his erstwhile business life in a religious light: his career, so successful at first, was monopolised by Mercury and Janus – that is to say by gods closely tied to the Roman business world.

His meteoric rise gave way to a precipitous fall. For Damasippus' speculations in money lending, undertaken 'at the Arch of Janus',⁸¹ go awry, driving him into financial ruin. In deep despair he intends to throw himself from the Bridge of Fabricius into the Tiber, his head ritually covered.⁸² But at the very moment Damasippus wishes to take his own life, he experiences something miraculous: a street preacher named Stertinius appears out of nowhere and prevents his suicide.⁸³ This sudden entrance of Stertinius makes us think of the epiphany of a quasi-divine saviour⁸⁴ – similar to the helpful Apollo who unexpectedly saves the poet from the windbag in *Satire* 1.9.

Urban topography once more matches the action of the plot exactly. For the Bridge of Fabricius not only constitutes a biographical turning point in the narrative of Damasippus, it also replaces the Roman Forum, which had been the setting, with the district containing the Tiber Island. This new location is inseparable from the entrance of the 'divine helper' Stertinius. He attempts to clarify the saving grace of his Stoic teaching to the surrounding crowd with a telling metaphor: he describes man's insanity using the symptoms of a disease.

etymology, which it then attributes to the voice of the urban populace: see de Vecchi 2013, 316; Harrison 2019, 169–170. Harrison points out that both the philosopher Damasippus and Horace's speaker have a close connection to Mercury: the course of both their lives corresponds with amazing accuracy to 'the god's association with windfalls and good luck, and his link with business and trading.'

81 *Sat.* 2.3.18–19: *postquam omnes res mea Ianum / ad medium fracta est, aliena negotia curo*. That the banks are located near the Arch of Janus is also confirmed by Cic. *off.* 2.25.90. For the topography of *Ianus imus, medius, summus* and the unsure identity with the *aedes* of *Ianus Geminus* see Tortorici 1996.

82 According to Liv. 4.12 the *pons Fabricius* was known as a spot typically selected by members of the *plebs* who in despair took their own life. Hence 'death by drowning' is characterised as a practice of the lower classes: see Sharland 2009, 120: 'the method by which he [Damasippus] was planning to commit suicide (jumping off a bridge) was one usually associated with the lower classes.'

83 That Damasippus interprets the Stoic Stertinius as a 'propitious sign from heaven' is shown by the word *dexter*: in ritual divination (augury from birds, lightning, thunder) 'right' is considered to be a non-verbal affirmation of the gods: cf. Virg. *Aen.* 8.302.

84 Muecke 1993, 137: 'like a divine saviour'; Courtney 2013, 136: 'Stertinius appeared like a *deus ex machina*.'

One might at first tend to explain this medical imagery as a mere topos of the diatribe⁸⁵ and be satisfied. But the insistent nature of Stertinius' constant references⁸⁶ to the semantic field of 'sickness and healing' is truly unusual.⁸⁷ For this reason I wish to suggest that the location has motivated and inspired the contents of the lecture. Stertinius launches into his sermon immediately after the rescue of Damasippus on the Bridge of Fabricius, and so he and his audience have the backdrop of the Tiber Island together with all its sacred sites constantly before their eyes.⁸⁸ The divine 'Master of the house' and the primary authority on this island is of course the God of Healing Aesculapius.⁸⁹ His name is never mentioned in the Horatian Satire, and yet this healing god, a favourite of the people, appears to me to figure behind the scenes in Damasippus' report of his rescue as well as in the sermon of Stertinius. For the cult of Aesculapius is founded upon dream visions in the night:⁹⁰ some inscriptions from the Tiber Island document cases of cures *ex visu*.⁹¹ And so when Damasippus claims that Stertinius appears before his eyes in the manner of a *numen*, he is hereby attributing to his personal rescuer an effective power analogous to that of the divine doctor on the Tiber. When he then goes on to have Stertinius in his sermon emphasise so

85 Muecke 1993, 130–131.

86 Mentioned for the first time *Sat.* 2.3.77–81: *audire atque togam iubeo componere, quisquis / ambitione mala aut argenti pallet amore, / quisquis luxuria tristive superstitione / aut alio mentis morbo calet: huc propius me, / dum doceo insanire omnes, vos ordine adite!* Kiessling 1895, 162; Muecke 1993, 141 and De Vecchi 2013, 322 already pointed out the programmatic character of these verses, which simultaneously offer a disposition of the following speech and reveal that Stertinius is not just speaking to Damasippus, but rather in the typical manner of a street preacher is attempting to gather about himself the widest audience possible. The semantic field 'illness and medicine' returns then as leitmotiv, e.g., *Sat.* 2.3.120–121; 147–148; 157–158; 161–167; 254–255; 288–295.

87 Scholars have repeatedly registered this leitmotiv, but have consistently understood it to be a mere rhetorical strategy (Bond 1998, 88–89 is a good example of this; Muecke 1993, 136: 'Horace deftly introduces one of the *leitmotifs* of the satire, the disease metaphor. Talking about vices as "mental illnesses" was an approach especially associated with the Stoics, though not confined to them'). The topographical connection of this *leitmotiv* to the Tiber Island has hitherto remained unnoticed.

88 The strong connection between the *pons Fabricius* and the Tiber Island is supported by the fact that the sacred buildings on the island were splendidly restored in the same period as the *pons Fabricius* and the *pons Cestius* were erected, namely in the first half of the first century BCE: see Degraffi 1996a, 100.

89 Suet. *Claud.* 25.2 speaks of the *insula Aesculapi*, similar already Dion. Hal. 5.13.4. in Augustan times. See also Degraffi 1996a, 99 with further testimonies.

90 On miraculous cures and nocturnal dream visions in the Greek cult of Asclepius, see Krug 1985, 134–141.

91 *CIL* 6.8; 14; 30844; compare *IGUR* 148, containing a list of *sanationes*. For the sanctuary and cult of Aesculapius on the Tiber Island and the archeological remains, see Degraffi 1993.

dramatically that none but the Stoic sage can heal mankind from *insania*,⁹² he is placing his Stoic teacher in direct competition with his neighbour Aesculapius.

The Tiber Island then, so closely tied to the semantics of healing, is kept alive and present throughout the sermon by means of Stertinius' constant references to human illnesses. This religious setting is in addition populated step by step with further cult monuments to enrich the leitmotif of human folly with further cases in point.

To illustrate man's desire for fame, Stertinius accordingly uses a priest of Bellona who was driven mad.⁹³ In this way a goddess is surreptitiously slipped into the sermon whose cult just happens to be represented by not one but two monuments on or adjacent to the Tiber Island.⁹⁴ Then in his final example Stertinius again references the Tiber explicitly in portraying the foolish behaviour of a mother who implores Jupiter to cure her son's chronic fever. Should he recover, she vows, she will order him to display his gratitude on the god's day of fasting by standing naked in the frigid waters of the river. It is then precisely resorting to the gods as refuge which costs the young man, who only recently recovered from his illness, his life.⁹⁵

Whence is this final example of false devotion to the gods (*superstitio*) derived? The worship of the Roman Jupiter after all does not, to our knowledge, involve days of fasting or any cleansing ritual in the river,⁹⁶ and so a number of commentators have taken the position that Jupiter should be understood here as a corruption of the Jewish Yahweh. Yet so cryptic a reference to Jewish religion seems to me entirely far-fetched. For whenever Horace's *Satires* elsewhere poke fun at the Jews or their superstition, it is unambiguously noted that this 'false' cult is Jewish.⁹⁷

92 *Sat.* 2.3.41–48, esp. 45–46: *haec populos, haec magnos formula reges, / excepto sapiente, tenet.*

93 *Sat.* 2.3.222–223: *quem cepit vitrea fama, / hunc circumtonit gaudens Bellona cruentis.*

94 For the sanctuary and cult of Bellona Insulensis, see Chioffi 1993. A connection between Bellona and the cult of Aesculapius seems to be supported by numerous *sacra* from the first half of the first century BCE. At least according to Chioffi it would appear that donations could indicate a therapeutic use of the Tiber water.

95 *Sat.* 2.3.288–295: *'Iuppiter, ingentis qui das adimisque dolores,' / mater ait pueri mensis iam quinque cubantis, / 'frigida si puerum quartana reliquerit, illo / mane die, quo tu indicis ieiunia, nudus / in Tiberi stabit.' casus medicusve levarit / aegrum ex praecipiti: mater delira necabit / in gelida fixum ripa febrimque reducet, / quone malo mentem concussa? Timore deorum.*

96 Kiessling 1895, 184 for verse 289; Muecke 1993, 163 for verse 288; De Vecchi 2013, 337 for verses 288–295.

97 *Sat.* 1.4.142–143: *ac veluti te Iudaei cogemus in hanc concedere turbam*; 1.5.100–101: *credat Iudaeus Apella, / non ego*; *Sat.* 1.9.69–70: *hodie tricensima sabbata: vin tu / curtis Iudaeis oppedere?*

There is in my opinion a more plausible explanation for the mention of Jupiter: An inscription found *in situ* attests to there having been a shrine of *Jupiter Iurarius* on the Tiber Island, which may well have been connected to other nearby temples.⁹⁸ In referring to this, the Horatian Satire would then constitute a literary echo of the factual existence of a variety of cult sites next to or connected with one another and located in the vicinity of Aesculapius. Cleansing baths in the river and periods of fasting are attested to for the cult of healing;⁹⁹ the domains and cult practices of two gods could then be merged in the mother's vow. This amalgamation is all the more likely as the cult sites are not only close neighbours, but each primarily serves the individual and private needs of the worshipper: Aesculapius cares for the sick and Jupiter on the Tiber Island lends a ready ear to people's private *vota*.

As a result, Stertinius' criticism of *superstitio* would not be merely a satiric repetition of a Stoic topos. By ending his sermon with the mother's vow he can once again remind us of the particular background of his lecture and utilise the façade of the temple of Aesculapius to advertise for his own alternative Stoic 'path of healing and salvation.'

The confusing mingling of rites and cults contained in Stertinius' (or Damasippus') categorical attack on superstition might at the same time be suspected to reflect a 'carnival effect.' The various rites which are illuminated in Stertinius' palette of human follies and which in the end rise to the level of a worthy point of criticism in their own right, ought therefore now to be viewed through the 'lens' of the Saturnalia, with an eye toward revision and fresh evaluation.

4.2 How to become the satiric talk of the town: or Saturnalia at the *compitum*

Stertinius has already been taking swipes at religious practices long before he arrives at his last major point, *superstitio*. No other Satire of Horace offers so rich an assortment of examples taken from the realm of everyday (and almost always private) practice of religion. All of these have in common the intent to illustrate human faults in general. Whereas in the final section the anecdotal *exempla* are in harmony with the overarching theme of *superstitio*,

⁹⁸ *CIL* 6.379; for the sanctuary (documented since the middle of the second century BCE) and the cult see Degraffi 1996b.

⁹⁹ Aelius Aristides portrays in his *Sacred Tales* at length his own bouts of dieting and baths in cold rivers, which he undertook against the advice of doctors but in accord with instructions sent to him personally in dreams by Asclepius: see 2.18–22; 22.24; 2.50–53; 2.80–82.

the previous snapshots of Roman cult practice are notably *not* branded as 'typically religious.'¹⁰⁰

One might at first think this picture completely validates the general observation that such individual cult acts are omnipresent and therefore treated as a normal part of Roman daily life (cf. Section 2). This view, however, takes no account of the carnival background: due to the Saturnalia the authority of Damasippus is undermined and the intended effect of his lecture is reduced to absurdity. Naturally, the principle of ritual topsy-turvy overturning of order is only one element of the festival culture;¹⁰¹ for such a mechanism of overturning to be at all possible, the rules which are otherwise in force must first be lifted. The establishment of a topsy-turvy world cannot therefore be separated from a temporary suspension of the established order.¹⁰² The festival days permit a temporary diverse mingling of the population, which as a marker of egalitarian liberty wears the felt cap, the sign of manumission (*pilleus*).

Against this background the world imagined by Damasippus and Stertinius bears the marks of a carnival street festival which levels all boundaries. In his lecture the philosopher imagines himself as being *above* these follies, but he too suffers from a typical *insania*, namely his foolish garrulousness.¹⁰³ His grotesquely over the top monologue¹⁰⁴ gets entirely out of hand and seems to know no end.¹⁰⁵ To make matters worse, he presents not a system-

100 As examples of greed, we find the terms of inheritance contained in a grave inscription (*Sat.* 2.3.82–99) and the consumption of cheap wine on holidays (*Sat.* 2.3.142–147). Illustrative of perverted ambition is a man who sacrifices a piglet to the *lares* as thanks for his freedom from the fault of parsimony – only to then embark on a trip to a luxurious spa (*Sat.* 2.3.161–167); there follows a father who upon his deathbed has his sons swear calling curses down upon themselves should they break their oath (*Sat.* 2.3.168–186). For the vice of gluttonous luxury, Stertinius adduces a pair of foolish brothers, whose habit of dining in exquisite and expensive fashion he invites his listeners to evaluate using white chalk or black coal, as they might mark days of good and ill omen on the calendar (*Sat.* 2.3.243–246). And finally, a young man's feverish love offers opportunity to reference an *omen*, one easily discovered by picking pips from Picenian apples (*Sat.* 2.3.250–273).

101 The features characteristic of the *Saturnalia* are concisely summarised by Distelrath 2001.

102 Versnel 1993, 14–163.

103 As Sharland 2009, 114 correctly determines, 'in *Sat.* 2.3 Horace is the victim of *the* most talkative of the *doctores inepti*, the longwinded and overly zealous new Stoic convert Damasippus.'

104 Sharland 2009, 117 speaks of a 'monster satire.'

105 Sharland 2010, 247–253, especially 252: 'Damasippus' moralising is simply too much of a good thing. However, there is no sign of recognition from the intensive Stoic speaker that he may be going on for far too long, as story is heaped upon story.'

atic doctrine but rather a diverse conglomeration which strings examples together in random and poorly connected fashion.

The effect of this diversified world of the Saturnalia on the satiric portrayal of Roman cult sites can be demonstrated especially well in the case of the *compita*. Damasippus refers in fact twice, in prominent passages, to these street shrines. His first mention of a *compitum* is connected by him to the prior, successful phase of his autobiography; in the case of the second shrine on the other hand he is dealing with a typical instance of *superstitio*, and this occurs shortly before his speech finally closes. Hence the street carnival unfolds in the field of tension between these two street crossings. Making the *compita* function in this way as symbolic boundaries for the urban world of fools is made easier by the fact that the Saturnalia and the Festival of the *Compita* share a series of common elements:¹⁰⁶ The connection between the festive transcendence of *topographical* limits in the case of the *Compitalia*¹⁰⁷ and the *temporally* delimited suspension of the rules of social order during the *Saturnalia* seems to me to be particularly worthy of note in this context.¹⁰⁸

In Satire 2.3, however, only the second *compitum* is stage managed as a typical example of ‘urban religion’ (or perhaps *superstitio*): Damasippus tells here of a freedman who every morning ‘upon an empty stomach and with purified hands’ runs to all the *compita* in the vicinity to beg there of the gods that they please snatch him, and him alone, from death.¹⁰⁹ The

106 Scullard 1985, 89: in the Roman calendar the two festivals mark the time before and after the turn of the year. *Saturnalia* and *Compitalia* are both popular festivals of the people; slaves were in each case treated as fully fledged members of the festival community and enjoyed freedoms which were otherwise rare. Much like the *Saturnalia*, the *Compitalia* too were noted for a lax atmosphere and excessive indulgence in wine. It is, however, possible that Dionysius of Halicarnassus, whom scholarship is fond of citing as crown witness for the *Compitalia*, mistakenly transferred elements of the *Saturnalia* (in particular the freedom of slaves, which he so strongly emphasises) to the *Compitalia* (this is suspected by Flower 2017, 121–122 and 162–163). Yet even without the questionable common feature of *role reversal*, the two festivals are in many respects similar: see Flower 2017, 162–174.

107 Flower 2017, 171 on the *Compitalia*: ‘The point of the festival was to share a sacrifice and a merry feast with the “neighbors,” those on the “other side” of whatever property line or corner was being marked. ... What made the *Compitalia* special ... was the fact that everyone in the city (or on the farm) was involved and encouraged to participate together, reaching out beyond their household and street. ... all came together to celebrate *at the boundaries*, thus observing, crossing, and thereby reinforcing these lines that defined the very shape of the familiar, daily world everyone lived in.’

108 See the famous dictum in Seneca *Apocol. 12*: *non semper erunt Saturnalia!*

109 *Sat. 2.3.282–286*: *libertinus erat, qui circum compita siccus / lautis mane senex manibus currebat et ‘unum’, / – ‘quid tam magnum?’ – addens –, ‘unum me surpite morti! / dis*

whimsically bizarre nature of such a prayer is comically further enhanced in that the twice emphasised 'me, me alone' is contrasted with the supposed ease with which this wish could be granted. From the high vantage point of a Stoic sage, Damasippus is neither subtle nor has he any compunction in making the praying freedman the object of mockery and ridicule throughout the city.

The superiority, however, of the Stoic critic stands on feet of clay, as one clearly sees in looking back at the prior mention of the *compita*. There it was Damasippus *himself* who during his string of financial coups was, as 'Mercury's darling,' the talk of the town. However, these halcyon days came to an abrupt end when Damasippus went bankrupt: he then plunged into the lowly class of the impoverished *plebs*¹¹⁰ and viewed suicide as the only way out.

A comparison of the pseudo-religious freedman with the art dealer Damasippus reveals in fact surprising parallels. Whereas Damasippus in his desperation seeks death, this is precisely what the *libertinus* wishes by all means to escape – in this respect the two figures stand in a relationship of contrast to one another. In another respect they seem virtually interchangeable: both come from lower social surroundings.¹¹¹ This makes them both products not only of the urban masses but also of the *compita*; for it is at these crossroads of urban life that their successes as well as their (financial or ethical) failures are ceaselessly observed and commented upon. For this reason the street shrines constitute as well an ideal location for a carnival *reversal of roles*: in the Sabine villa, Horace's uninvited guest Damasippus had at first supplanted the poet in his authority as satiric narrator and had himself laid claim to being the official speaker of the festival.¹¹² In Rome the anonymous *libertinus* then supplants Damasippus; for due to his senseless prayers at neighbourhood *compita* the mockery and derision of the public is now directed at *him*.

In the carnival jester's speech of Damasippus there is then at the *compitum* an overlapping of the voices of the *libertinus* as he prays, of Stertinius as he denounces this very behaviour and of the gossipy crowds as they in turn wag

etenim facile est' orabat, sanus utrisque / auribus atque oculis; mentem, nisi litigiosus, / exciperet dominus, cum venderet.

110 Cf. Sharland 2009, 120: 'After Fortune turned against him, Damasippus slid even lower down the slopes of society.'

111 In the case of the anonymous *libertinus* this is surely beyond dispute; on Damasippus, see Bond 1987, 10: 'we perceive Damasippus to be a new-come Stoic, but also we perceive him to be a product of the rough and tumble world of the marketplace.' Similarly Sharland 2009, 120.

112 On the switching of roles here, see Sharland 2010, 234–235.

their sharp tongues at the fortunes (and failures) of Damasippus. The noise level thereby produced forms a satiric 'background music' characteristic of the literary portrayal and perception of the big city 'Rome.'¹¹³

5 Conclusion

All cult sites and forms of religion to which the figures in Satire 2.3 in their words and actions refer, are integrative components of urban daily life. At their centre we do not find the political dimension of Augustan state divinities. Instead, and to a far greater degree various facets of personal religious experience are predominant in the events satirically described. The religious 'marketplace' which the city of Rome provides shows itself to be manifold and very diverse. The alternative possibilities to seek healing provided on and near the Tiber Island already offer an exemplary manifestation of this diversity: the cult sites of this section of the city form a fine network which permits both a competitive market for adherents as well as a variegated mingling of the clientele. This locally fixed selection of cults is complemented by mobile agents such as the street preacher Stertinius, who advertises his Stoic doctrine as the only true path to 'salvation' and who on the Tiber Bridge attempts to intercept visitors from the nearby Aesculapius.

The *compita* are set before our eyes in Satire 2.3 as a further focal point allowing an especially vivid portrayal of the 'urban religious scene:' being both numerous and spread throughout the city, these humble shrines are ideally suited to become multipliers of gossip about individual city inhabitants as well as of commentary regarding their religious behaviour. Since day for day people of all sorts and of every social class pass these street corners or stream from all directions to them to catch up on the latest gossip and rumours, the *compita* rise in Horace's Satires and Epistles to become communication centres and privileged viewing areas for urban life. The image of a tightly packed crowd pushing and shoving at the crossroads suggests furthermore a satiric connection of the *compita* to the colourful hubbub on the streets during the Saturnalia. Therefore, it is not at all surprising if the urban world of fools which the carnival speaker Damasippus expounds upon by means of a diverse profusion of *exempla* both religious and profane, exists between two *compita* and is symbolically delimited by them.

¹¹³ On the 'soundscape big city,' with Martial as example, see Tschäpe 2015, 147–152.

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