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# In search of the 'beggar-priest'

This paper examines the characterisation of itinerant ritual practitioners in both Greek and Roman cultures. It starts from the Greek term *agurtes*, tracing its development in Greek texts and looking for equivalent terms in Latin texts. Using selected material that describes similar persons and their activities it examines which qualities are highlighted for criticism in which contexts and identifies similarities and differences of characterisation between Greek and Roman descriptions.[1] It aims to illuminate the (different) conceptual models of particular social types developed in each culture, exploring what they reveal about both culturally specific conceptions of identity and power and the risks that were perceived to threaten them.

## 1. Introduction[2]

The paper starts with an analysis of the meaning and transmission of the term *agurtes*, from its original, ancient Greek conception to its use in the Roman Imperial period (specifically, the late Severan period). Over that time, the term appears frequently in Greek texts: usually employed to describe non-Roman individuals, it tends to sustain an association with begging, linking ritual activity with the quest for economic support. The sense of the term is usually derogatory. Sometimes it is enough that begging is involved at all: it appears that the need for support is perceived to undermine the authenticity of the ritual activity, since it suggests that the practitioner is motivated by acquisitiveness. It may also be that the ritual activity in question is somehow considered to be undesirable; for example, it may be affiliated to a group that is not recognized or for which there is social disapproval.[3] Over time, as we will see, these characteristics come to the fore, and the term also develops further derogatory nuances, including, for example, intimations of weakness and dependency. In sum, *agurtes* was

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[1] In approaching the material in this way, I follow the example of Macris (2008) who examines evidence for the holy man 'from the East'. To prove the presence of this figure, he notes, one must either scrupulously examine all the evidence for every allusion, however vague, or focus on those texts that specifically discuss 'holy men' associated with 'oriental' cults.

[2] For reasons of space I have limited the number of quotations; unless otherwise stated, translations of ancient texts are taken from the most recent LCL editions, and retain their spelling.

[3] Contra Dickie (2001, 66).

a term of abuse, part of a rhetoric of "othering"; it not only signalled contempt for certain individuals, it also drew a strong distinction between those offering judgement and those being judged.

It is somewhat surprising then that texts in Latin neither yield a single equivalent term, nor appear to use *agurtes* or related terms as loan words. Instead, as this paper shows, a variety of Latin words communicated certain aspects or nuances of the Greek term. In terms of lived reality, the difference in terminology does not mean that there were any fewer such individuals 'on the road'; rather, it draws attention to the different conceptual models of the Romans, and the literary and historical contexts that shaped them. This paper does not argue for a persistent distinction between two cultural models, Greek and Roman, but rather examines how the conception of, and language associated with, the *agurtes* evolved within a different culture, drawing particular attention to evidence for growing concerns expressed in texts regarding the location of itinerant figures, their identity, and their relation to claims to power.

## 2. Greek origins and development

In Greek texts, the earliest uses of the word *agurtes*, and related terms, such as *agurtazo* and *ageiro*, appear in descriptions of those who survive by travelling and gathering the wherewithal to live and/or profit.[4] But although at first sight it is similar, this is not simply 'begging': there seem to be some further nuances of meaning involved in these characterisations. Thus, in *Odyssey* 19.283–284, the emphasis seems to lie on Odysseus' travelling to amass *more* wealth, rather than the need to beg in order to survive: "only it seemed to his mind more profitable (*kerdion*) / to gather wealth (*chremat' agurtazein*) by roaming over the wide earth".[5] Roisman has argued persuasively that the double semantic sphere of *kerd-* ties this term not just to profit, but to skill or craft; its use here suggests that Odysseus' begging activities require that he be guileful.[6] By the

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[4] *Agurtazo:* 'collect by begging' (*Od*. 19.284; s.v. *LSJ*); the verb *ageiro* conveys a similar family of meanings: it can be used to indicate gathering with an emphasis on movement or collection, and, finally with the sense of 'begging', sometimes for the gods (s.v. *LSJ*; Chantraine notes the relationship s.v. *ageiro*). This paper's discussion of *agurtes* develops some ideas in Eidinow (2015, 309–310).

[5] Saïd (2011, 82–83) cites this passage as part of a disquisition on networks of trade.

[6] Roisman (1987, 66 and 1990, 23–25, and 1994). She argues that the term may indicate (1994, 10): "resourcefulness exemplified by an immediate response to a situation at hand with one's own interest uppermost in mind". She observes differences in nuances of meaning between

fifth century BCE, *agurtes* and its cognates are acquiring some more specific associations, some of which could be argued to build on this sense of craftiness: they are more regularly found, with a derogatory sense, in descriptions of itinerant sellers of ritual practices of various kinds.[7]

The earliest extant occurrence of the term and its cognates, which appears to link beggary with ritual practice, is found in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* where Cassandra is describing the slights she has suffered: "I endured having to wander like an itinerant begging priestess (*agurtria*), a wretched, starving pauper".[8] Matthew Dickie suggests that Aeschylus probably wrote this passage thinking of the ravings of the *metragurtes*, that is, the begging priests associated with the followers of Cybele, which cult, he suggests was already known in the Greek world in the sixth century BCE.[9] This is possible, although the text offers no particular reason to make that connection.[10] Further uses of the term and its cognates in Greek drama maintain the association between ritual practice and financial gain. For example, in a fragment of Aeschylus' *Semele or Hydrophoroi*, the related term *ageirousan* is used to describe the activities of Hera, who has been changed into a priestess and is begging on behalf of the Nymphs of the river Inachus in Argos.[11] It may also lie behind the use of the term in the *Rhesus* to de-

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the *Iliad* where its use may be pejorative (1990, 35) and the *Odyssey* where it is a 'valuable asset' (1994, 13).

**7** Flower (2008, 66) calls it "the harshest insult" along with the term *magos*; cf. Giammellaro (2013). Jiménez (2002, 189), who examines the term in the context of Orphic ritual, also notes the link between begging and magical practice; this is cited in discussion by Edmonds (2013, 203), who adds its use as abuse.

**8** Aesch. *Ag.* 1269–1274.

**9** Dickie (2001, 66): Pind. *Dith.* 2.8–10 (fr. 70b Snell).

**10** In this paper, I keep the two terms, *metragurtes* and *menagurtes*, separate from *agurtes*, on the grounds that the first two were used to denote specific cult roles; while in contrast, as here, *agurtes* was a term of abuse. This difference may be played upon at Plut. *Mar.* 17.5 in which the Bataces (probably not himself a *metragurtes* but certainly associated with them) is abused as an *agurtes*. A similar play on words seems to occur at Plut. *Pyth. orac.* 25, 407c: here the *agurtikon kai agoraion [...] genos* that Plutarch describes hanging around the ceremonies of Serapis and Cybele are not immediately to be identified as the *metros agurtai* or *galloi agurtai* (as *Anth. Pal.* 6.218, *Babr.* 141, respectively), but certainly recall them (contra Jiménez 2002, 187–188 and Dickie 2001, 226, who acknowledges that Plutarch and his other sources refer to the *agurtai* and priests of Cybele as if they were separate categories of person, but argues that they should be regarded as the same).

**11** Aesch. frr. 220a–c (Sommerstein) (= fr. 168 Radt) and Pl. *Resp.* 381d4–7; two lines from the fragments (frr. 220a, 16–17) are attributed by Asklepiades to the *Xantriai* (schol. Ar. *Ran.* 1344; followed by Dillon 2002, 96, and Dickie 2001, 80, but Sommerstein 2008, 224–227 argues for the *Semele or Hydrophoroi*). On priestesses and ritual begging particularly connected to contexts of

scribe Odysseus; this character does not explicitly claim mantic powers but is seen to perform a curse (described later in the play, by the chorus, as Odysseus "speaking bad things" against the Atreidae).[12]

A number of further occurrences seem to place rather more emphasis on the way in which the need or greed for support undermines the authenticity of ritual expertise. In tragedy, one of the most famous examples is from Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus*, when Oedipus is insulting the blind seer Teiresias, alleging that Creon has corrupted him: "[...] this wizard hatcher of plots, this crafty beggar (*agurten*), who has sight only when it comes to profit, but in his art is blind!"[13] And this aspect may have been why, in Old Comedy, the concept of the *agurtes* also seems to have been employed to mock politicians: for example, Cratinus is reported to have alluded to it in his abuse of Lampon. Hesychius reports that in his play *Drapetides*, Cratinus called the politician, *agersikubelis*, and notes that he called him "begging priest" and "axe-wielder" (on the grounds that an axe is called a *kubelis*).[14] Hesychius is again the source for the information that Lysippus mocked Lampon as an *agurtes* in his *Bacchae* – where he also abused the politician as a glutton.[15] Turning to a different genre, the writer of the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease* intends to attack the ritual expertise of his opponents when he states that "those who first attributed a sacred character to this malady were like the magicians, purifiers, charlatans (*agurtai*) and quacks of our own day, men who claim great piety and superior knowledge".[16] The writer is trying to distinguish between his own activities and those offered by others who, like him, were itinerant sellers of various services associated with healing. It seems likely that the term acquires its negative power here by associating an individual's need for funds with their exercise of ritual, the one undermining trust in the integrity of the other.[17]

In literature of the fourth century, this pejorative sense of the term continues to associate itinerancy with begging and ritual activities. For example, in the *Republic*, Plato uses *agurtai* of the seers who knock on the doors of the wealthy

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weddings and childbirth see Budin 2016, 110–111: a famous example is the priestess of Athene Polias described in *CPG Suppl.* 1: 65 (no. B177) as *ageirei*.

**12** Eur. *Rhes*. 503–505 and 710–719. Giammellaro (2013, 281) quotes ll. 710–719, but discusses l. 503.

**13** Soph. *OT* 387–389.

**14** Cratinus, *Drapetides* fr. 66 K-A (Hesych. a 461).

**15** As a glutton: Ath. 344e; as an *agurtes*: Hesych. α 461 (frr. 6a and b K-A, respectively).

**16** Hippoc. *Morb. sacr.* 2.

**17** Lloyd (1979, esp. 15–16, 56); Nutton (2013: 113–114) states that the writer is "prepared to allow sacrifice, prayer and supplication to the gods" but attacks those who "wander from place to place claiming a personal, non-institutional relationship with the gods".

with the aim of selling them various ritual services; he makes it clear that, in his opinion, these self-proclaimed experts do not know what they are talking about, although they manage to persuade their clients of their ideas.[18] These associations – of ritual practice, even of travelling – may also be implicit in the description by Clearchus of Soli (4th – 3rd century BCE), quoted by Athenaeus, of the Persian adoption of the *Melophoroi* (the so-called Apple-Bearers, a squad of bodyguards) from the Medes. Having first described how, from love of luxury, the Medes would turn their neighbours into eunuchs, Clearchus describes how the Persians adopted the *Melophoroi* "not just as revenge for what had been done to them, but also as a reminder of the bodyguards' addiction to luxury and of what cowards they had become; because their inopportune and foolish addiction to luxury in the way they lived was, apparently, capable of converting even men armed with spears into *agurtai*".[19] This passage makes implicit associations with ritual practitioners through the earlier reference to eunuchs, which could have brought to mind the begging-priests of eastern cults; if so, this aspect also reinforces the more explicit association made between the greed of *agurtai*, their love of luxury and resulting weakness.

Such an evocative concept as the 'begging priest' had staying power. A brief survey of passages from Greek works from across the Hellenistic and Imperial periods reveals the continued clustering, in different configurations, of these ideas of itinerancy, ritual expertise and low social and/or economic status. Strabo for example offers a succinct overview of categories of wanderer in which the activities of the *agurtes* are linked with practices of divination and religious purification/initiation.[20] The individuals that Plutarch describes with this term are also linked to divinatory practices, and are, invariably, of low social or economic status. They appear in incidental comments on, for example, the effects of Lycurgus' legislation in Sparta; the impact of his poverty on Aristides' descendants; and in a tirade against travelling diviners whose practices have helped to undermine the role of poetry in the phrasing and delivery of oracles.[21] Plutarch makes a similar criticism of those who betray the trust of others in his treatise on superstition, where he describes how those who have suffered a bad dream are likely

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**18** Pl. *Resp*. 364b2 – 365a3.

**19** Ath. 12.9, 514d (= fr. 49 Wehrli); see Hdt. 7.40 – 41 for the 1000 Persian *Melophoroi*. Olson makes the association explicit, translating *agurtai* as 'eunuch priests'.

**20** Strab. 10.3.23, 474C.

**21** Plut. *Lyc*. 9.3; *Arist*. 27.3 (*agurtikous:* of the boards employed for casting fortunes); *De Pyth. or*. 25, 407c.

to "put themselves into the hands of *agurtas* and impostors". [22] The association of the *agurtes* with (false) prophecy is also apparent in the writings of Josephus, who reports that the zealots in Jerusalem, through their extreme actions, mocked prophecies that had been given concerning the fall of that city as impostors' fables (*agurtikas logopoiias*).[23]

As well as these more persistent associations, the link with weakness that emerged in the passage from Clearchus of Soli, also reappears: for example, in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Gods*, where Heracles compares Asclepius' feeble skills to his own mighty deeds, abusing him as merely a root-chopper and an *agurtes*.[24] The same implication of lack of strength is also apparent in Philostratus' account of Dionysus vs. the Tyrrhenian Pirates, where the pirates think Dionysus "effeminate and a vagabond (*agurtes*)".[25] In sum, across these passages from Greek texts, the *agurtes* is a weak and inconsequential figure, usually associated with claims to power through ritual practice (for example, practising *mantike*, *goeteia* or *pharmakeia*) coupled with deceitfulness, often prompted by greed or need.[26] This paper now turns to Latin texts to look for the figure of the 'begging priest': it examines the vocabulary used to evoke such characters, and looks for similarities and differences with the Greek model in the ways they were portrayed, and the concerns expressed about them.

# 3. Latin terminology

## 3.1. Ritual experts

Similar itinerant ritual experts were active throughout the Roman empire, "disseminated amongst all the religious, political and military activities of the Romans" and operating without centralised oversight.[27] Cicero's treatises offer myriad possible terms to describe the individuals involved, including *magoi*, *ha-*

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**22** Plut. *De superst*. 3, 165 f-166a. The link to healing through purification is also found in Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 54, 303c.

**23** Joseph. *BJ* 4.386.

**24** Luc. *Dial. D.* 15(13).1.

**25** Philostr. *Imag.* 1.19.10.

**26** Polyb. 12.8.5, exploring Timaeus' contempt for Aristotle, uses *agurtes* with *propetes* (rash or reckless) to evoke the foolishness of a character willing to make random accusations in a law court.

**27** At home: Cato *Agr.* 5 (discussed further below); armies: App. *Hisp.* 85. Quotation from North (1990, 52–53), discussing diviners and divination, specifically.

*ruspices, augures, harioli, vates, coniectores.*[28] The *De divinatione* provides the kind of value judgement that parallels that so often implied by the Greek term, *agurtes*. This occurs through the voice of Quintus, as a final qualification of his otherwise supportive explanation of divination:

> "I will assert, however, in conclusion, that I do not recognise fortune-tellers (*sortilegos*), or those who prophesy for money, or necromancers, or mediums, (*psychomantia*) whom your friend Appius makes it a practice to consult. 'In fine, I say, I do not care a fig / For Marsian augurs (*Marsum augurem*), village mountebanks (*vicanos haruspices*), / Aastrologers who haunt the circus grounds (*de circo astrologos*), / Or Isis-seers (*Isiacos coniectores*), or dream interpreters (*interpretes sómnium*)—for they are not diviners either by knowledge or skill – / but superstitious bards, soothsaying quacks (*superstitiósi vates ímpudentesque hárioli*), / Averse to work, or mad, or ruled by want, / Directing others how to go, and yet / What road to take they do not know themselves; / From those to whom they promise wealth they beg / a coin. From what they promised let them take / Their coin as toll and pass the balance on.' Such are the words of Ennius who only a few lines further back expresses the view that there are gods and yet says that the gods do not care what human beings do. But for my part, believing as I do that the gods do care for man, and that they advise and often forewarn him, I approve of divination which is not trivial and is free from falsehood and trickery."[29]

Alex Nice has argued that the language and phrasing employed by Cicero in this passage (e. g., *hariolor*) may have been introduced by Cicero in gentle mockery of the belief of his friend, Appius Claudius, in *psychomantia* and the skills of the Marsi.[30] The vocabulary is distinctive; few of these terms occur elsewhere in Cicero's works. However, they are found in the comic plays of Plautus indicating various types of diviner, and often with associations between such a figure, his facility with words and his demands for money (albeit these are seldom as ex-

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**28** See Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.20, and *Leg.* 2.8.20 – 21. On such composite lists, see Nice (2001, 163). The term *magus* in Latin texts has received an initial but thorough analysis by James Rives (2010), which demonstrates that it is not equivalent to the term *agurtes:* its initial usage, down to the second half of the first century CE, (61) "denotes only the Persian religious specialists"; with Pliny it starts to acquire intimations of specific "arcane lore"; (66) in later writers it loses the connection with the Persian tradition, and indicates expertise in divination and necromancy. Tacitus uses it to mean (66) free-lance expert in divination (*Ann.* 2.27.2, 2.32.2 and 12.22.1). The term does not appear to be inherently derogatory.

**29** Cic. *Div.* 1.132. On the structure of the argument see Schofield (1986); on the cultural context, Beard (1986). Nice (2001) provides an overview of the debate concerning how much of this passage is a quotation from Ennius: I have used his conclusions here.

**30** Nice (2001, 158). Lot oracles are explicitly criticised (Cic. *Div.* 2.85) as means of making money or to encourage superstition and error, but, as Nice notes (2001, 154), these could be either local oracles or those of strolling quacks.

plicit as that made by Quintus quoting Ennius).[31] For example, the idea that di-
viners state the obvious is a running joke found in different plays;[32] while in the
*Rudens*, as Gripus and Trichalio argue over the ownership of the trunk (which
contains the crucial proof of identity for the girls Palaestra and Ampelisca),
the fraudulence of soothsaying (*hariola*) creates the joke, but is not overt.[33] In
a number of examples, the target of mockery is as much those who consult as
those who are consulted. Thus, in the *Poenulus*, Lycus is obviously looking for
good news before he rewards his diviner (*haruspex*)[34] while in the *Miles Glorio-
sus*, for example, Periplectomenus lists his wife's need to pay a whole host of di-
vining figures: "the sorceress on the festival of Minerva, to the dream interpreter,
to the clairvoyant, and to the soothsayer (*praecantrici, coniectrici, hariolae atque
haruspicae*); it's a disgrace if nothing is sent to the woman who uses eyebrows to
prophesy."[35]

　　Although these passages offer insights into daily attitudes to divination,
none of these individual terms provides a close parallel to the term *agurtes*:
they are not inherently derogatory.[36] Rather, their use in various contexts, and
with different nuances, suggests other concerns. An example can be made of
the term *haruspex*, which was used to denote diviners who were employed to
serve the interests of the cities of the empire and its legions; we also find
them attached to individual political figures, and apparently working freelance.[37]
In this capacity, it appears that they were perceived to present something of a
risk, which related not to their deceit, but to the power that they might offer:
e. g., when Cato warns his bailiff away from visiting "a fortune-teller, or prophet,
or diviner, or astrologer [*haruspicem, augurem, hariolum, Chaldaeum*]", he is not

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**31** Nice (2001, 155): *Hariolor* also appears in Cic. *Att*. 8.11.3. And in Plaut. *Asin*. 316, 579, 924;
*Cist*. 746; *Mil*. 1256; *Rud*. 347, 1139, 1141; *Truc*. 602 and Ter. *Phorm*. 492; *Adelph*. 202. *Naucum*
(or *naucus*) in Plaut. *Bacch*. 1102; *Mostell*. 1041; *Truc*. 611, 1042; *Par. Pig*. fr. 3.
**32** Plaut. *Rud*. 324–326; *Most*. 572.
**33** Plaut. *Rud*. 1138–1142.
**34** Plaut. *Poen* 456a, b-458.
**35** Plaut. *Poen*. 692–694; Similarly, in Juv. 6, 542–592 the target of the description of the astrol-
ogers and diviners in the Forum is, for the most part, the woman who consults them; the poem
alludes to their methods of creating confidence in these women, but there is almost some sym-
pathy in the mention of the *mathematici* who have been incarcerated (562).
**36** As Phillips (1986, 2729) illustrates in his brief overview of the treatment of the *haruspices*:
"siding with conservative interests throughout the Republic, derided and sanctioned by Cicero,
conjoined with magicians and astrologers by Ulpian, purged and welcomed in the fourth century
and finally summoned to Rome in AD 408." Similarly, (ibid. 2730) "[t]he astrologers were peri-
odically expelled and periodically returned."
**37** Horster (2011, 337–338).

concerned to disparage the practice, but to keep the bailiff from acquiring knowledge that might threaten his master's position.[38] Columella, in turn, warns his bailiff that he must not on his own initiative have any acquaintance with a sooth-sayer or fortune-teller (*haruspices sagasque*), both of which classes of persons "incite ignorant minds through false superstition".[39] We will return to this aspect below.

One way to intimate suspicion about these individuals was to suggest their foreignness. We have seen above Cato's reference to the Chaldaean astrologers. The *De divinatione* also mentions them, offering diverse points of view: while his brother attests to their popularity, Cicero makes a strong case against them.[40] Meanwhile, in Juvenal's *Satire* 6, the only explicit criticism of a diviner is made about a Jewess: "She too gets her hand filled, though with less, because Jews will sell you whatever dreams you like for the tiniest copper coin."[41] The significance of such concerns is reinforced by the historical expulsion of some of these groups from Rome. Thus, Valerius Maximus records the expulsion of the Chaldaeans and Jews in 139 BCE, justified on the grounds that Roman mores must be protected from foreign influences.[42] But these observations, admonitions and expulsions were not necessarily about particular perceptions of race: we can extend them to encompass Quintus/Ennius' references to both the *Isiaci coniectores* and archaic Italian traditions: it appears to be a concern with non-Romanness.[43]

As a parallel, this concern with foreignness/non-Romanness has been productively studied with regard to cult.[44] Where it was used, the label of foreignness/non-Romanness need not create stigma.[45] This was not a concern with maintaining a religion of Empire:[46] as Simon Price has argued about the early Imperial period, "religious identities were [more] fluid and variously defined", and the identities of specific cults should not be regarded as monolithic.[47]

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**38** Cato *Agr.* 5.4.4; as North (1990, 59).

**39** Columella *Rust.* 1.6; 11.22–23.

**40** For: Cic. *Div.* 1.91; against: Cic. *Div.* 2.87–99.

**41** Juv. 6.546–547.

**42** Val. Max 1.3.3 Kempf (only preserved in the epitome by Iulius Paris).

**43** As stated explicitly by Cic. *Div.* 2.70.

**44** Scheid (2005, 226) reminds us that we must be careful about taking sources at face value, remaining aware of the rhetoric of genre, and testing it against other forms of evidence.

**45** See Ando (2008, 106–107), who argues for the importance of the notions of public and private in the regulation of Roman religious practice; but see Bendlin (2000, esp. 131–132) for a deconstruction of these distinctions.

**46** On the history of this idea, see Rüpke (2011).

**47** Price (2011, 272).

Rather, scholarship has shown how the concept of foreignness/non-Romanness seems to have been employed in various contexts, under different historical pressures: the Roman state's association with the Etruscan haruspices offers one illustration; the cult of Cybele/Magna Mater in Rome another.[48] With regard to the latter, Eric Orlin has focused on its simultaneous aspects of inclusion and exclusion: the cult was central to the city and yet simultaneously excluded via regulations that maintained a level of marginalisation of those holding roles in this cult.[49] Dionysius of Halicarnassus reports the ambiguity of identities projected by the rites of the cult—on the one hand, Roman, on the other Phrygian.[50] Orlin argues that there is an aspect of "paraded foreignness" in these phenomena, which is also found elsewhere in Roman religion.[51] Such *peregrina sacra*, Ando notes, "represented in the classical period not so much intrusions by foreign elements *into* Roman religion as privileged sites *within* Roman religion for the negotiation of boundaries between Roman and alien".[52]

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**48** On the *haruspices*, see Potter (1994, 154–157), Orlin (2010, 96–99), Santangelo (2013, 84–114). On the *galli:* Lucr. 2.610–628, Catull. 63, Juv. 6.511–516, Mart. 3.81, Ov. *Fast.* 4.193–244 (not negative); see Orlin (2010, 101), citing Beard (1994, 175) for discussion of their transgression of sexual boundaries. See also A. Klöckner's contribution in this volume (Chapter 13).

**49** Orlin (2010, 102–103, at 104); "Choosing to have the priests remain outside the boundaries of Roman citizenship makes a statement about the style of worship, not the cult itself or the goddess"; see Baslez (2004) on whether "priest" is an appropriate term for the *galli*. Specific to our discussion of the figure of the *agurtai*, it may be that part of what seemed unacceptable about the *galli* was the begging they performed as part of their rite. In evidence dating from the Republican period, the festival descriptions include the *galli* begging for alms from the bystanders (rather than the more usual distribution of food, etc. to them) (see Lucr. 2.610–628 and Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.19 – this dates to the Augustan age, but Orlin (2010, 101) argues that it seems to reflect Republican practice). If so, this was not a new discourse: Clement of Alexandria – admittedly a Christian source and therefore likely to be inimical to most aspects of pagan practice – cites Menander's *Charioteer* (*Heniochus*, 313/2 BCE): "'No god for me is he who walks the streets / With some old dame, and into houses steals / Upon the sacred tray.' – for this is what the priests of Cybele do" (*Protr.* 75.2 = 6.2 fr. 156 K-A).

**50** Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.19.5; see Orlin (2010, 102).

**51** Orlin (2010, 100); he uses this phrase first with reference to the *haruspices*.

**52** Ando (2003, 197; italics in the original).

## 3.2. Show-men

Returning to the vocabulary for 'begging priests', we find *circulator* given as an equivalent to *agurtes* in glossaries of later Latin.[53] From its earliest use, *circulator* seems to mean a person of no fixed abode or employment, who travelled around selling items, perhaps medicines, or putting on shows of various kinds in order to make a living.[54] But despite some obvious similarities to the Greek term, *circulator* does not offer a full correspondence either. This is because it does not usually convey the same inherent association with ritual expertise as *agurtes*; instead, its emphasis is on remarkable public performances.[55] Indeed, when Tertullian employs the term in various polemics to describe those who offer services such as necromancy, I would argue that he employs it precisely because it suggests that those he is abusing are performers, rather than ritual specialists.[56] This is an aspect that may be implicit in some of the Greek texts we have seen (e. g., Plato's mendicant ritual experts or the individuals abused by the writer of *On the Sacred Disease*), but it is a defining characteristic of the Roman *circulator*.[57]

It is also possible to trace some more specific concerns about these performances, in particular, about where they occurred. A number of sources draw attention to the location of these characters, setting them in the heart of the city. We have seen this, for example, in Cicero's (or rather Quintus') reference to the "astrologers who haunt the circus grounds". We also see it in reverse, as it were, in the edicts to expel the astrologers from the city. And, in Livy's account of the Bacchic conspiracy of 186 BCE, the speech attributed to consul Spurius Postumius Albinus recalling previous expulsions of such figures, offers an even more detailed topographical report (discussed further below): "How often, in the times of our fathers and our grandfathers, has the task been assigned to the magistrates of forbidding the introduction of foreign cults, of excluding dab-

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**53** Dickie (2001, 225), who is one of the few scholars to explore this term and on whose work I build here, makes this suggestion drawing on a late Latin glossary (no citation given; but see *CGL* 2: 101 and 217.

**54** In Cic. *Fam*. 10.32.3: C. Asinius Pollio describes the appalling behaviour of Balbus the younger, which includes exposing "Roman citizens to the beasts, among them a certain travelling pedlar (*circulatorem quendam auctionum*)". Gardin du Mesnil (1809 no. 500) gives the meaning of *circulator* as one who goes from town to town "selling medicaments in public places", and there seems to be no reason not to take this as the basis for the term. Medicine sellers: Orig. *CCels*. 5.27.3; Apul. *Met*. 1.4 of a sword-swallower, Plin. *Ep*. 4.7 of a travelling actor declaiming in the market-place; Sen. *Ep*. 29.7 of a philosopher.

**55** cf. Dickie (2001, 226 – 7) who regards the terms as equivalent.

**56** Tert. *Apol*. 23; Idol. 9; *De praescr. haeret*. 43; *De carn. Christ*. 5.

**57** Contra Dickie (2001, 227).

blers in sacrifices and fortune-tellers (*sacrificulos vatesque*) from the Forum, the Circus, and the City, of searching out and burning books of prophecies, and of annulling every system of sacrifice except that performed in the Roman way".[58] Other sources also show the centrality of such gatherings: Horace in a *Satire* refers to the Circus itself as deceiving because it is where the itinerant fortune-tellers assemble; while Juvenal describes the astrologers and diviners gathered in the Forum.[59]

Over time, this concern with place will also start to appear in descriptions of begging priests in Greek texts, specifically in the phrase *en tois kuklois ageirontes*, used by Maximus of Tyre.[60] It has been argued that *circulator* is an attempt to render this phrase into Latin; the Greek being translated as "those collecting money in the centre of a circle of onlookers".[61] This is a persuasive argument, and seems to be supported by the definitions in late Latin glossaries, where *ochlagogos* occurs as a synonym for *circulator* alongside *agurtes*.[62] But closer examination of the Greek phrase reveals concerns not (only) with crowds, but more specifically with location, as suggested above. The idea that *circulator* originally provided a translation of this Greek phrase is less secure if we consider that *circulator* appears to have been used in texts that are dated earlier than those that use *en tois kuklois* with this meaning.[63] It seems more likely to have been connected to a slightly different phrase, *en kukloi*, which does mean "a circle of onlookers", and is in evidence from the fifth-century BC.[64] In contrast, in other

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**58** Livy 39.16.8.

**59** Hor. *Sat*. 1.6.113 Garrod; Juv. 6.542–592.

**60** Max. Tyr. 13.3.

**61** Dickie (2001, 225). *OLD* gives the etymology of circulator as *circulo + tor*; with *circulo* meaning "to form circles or groups around oneself for the purpose of making impromptu speeches" (citing Cic. *Brut*. 200; Caes. *BCiv*. 1.64.2; Sen. *Ep*. 40.3; 52.8; 88.40); cf. however Walde-Hoffmann 1, 220: 'Herumzieher, Gaukler, Hausierer' (Pollio).

**62** Dickie (2001, 225). In *CGL* 2:101, *ochlagogos* is another synonym of *circulator*, alongside *agurtes*. Dickie notes that this term is found in astrological texts (e. g., Vett. Val. 1.3.29; 2.17.57) and cites two Christian texts which associate the *ochlagogos* with ritual experts: first, the *Traditio Apostolorum* (*sic*, presumably a slip for *Traditio Apostolica*), which lists "performers of incantations, astrologers, diviners, interpreters of dreams and makers of amulets"; second, the *Constitutiones apostolorum* (8.32.11; Funk 1905, 1: 536–537) but this does not include the *agurtes* (contra Dickie 2001, 225).

**63** A search of the *TLG* indicates that Maximus of Tyre is the earliest text to use this phrase to describe crowds, rather than, say, the arrangement of heavenly bodies (as, e. g., Arist. *Cael*. 249a6).

**64** *en kuklois* indicating a crowd: e. g., Soph. *Aj*. 723; *Phil*. 356; Xen. *Cyr*. 8.5.8.

texts, we find *en toi kukloi* referring not to people, but to places.[65] It identifies not (only) the people gathered around an individual, but more generally (or in addition) the types of crowded settings—the agora/Forum/Circus—where both crowds and begging performers would congregate.

## 3.3. Cultural characteristics

So far, the exploration of terms has offered no direct parallel for *agurtes*, but it has provided some insights into specifically Roman concerns with such itinerant ritual experts, presented in the sources as the risks created by their foreignness, their central physical location, and their connection to power. These three risks come together in Livy's account of the Bacchic Conspiracy of 186 BCE, which also offers some further possible terms for these figures. In giving his account of the conspiracy, Spurius Postumius Albinus is said to have recalled previous responses to religious offences (see above). His words echo an earlier passage where Livy is describing events during the Second Punic War (215 BCE): the account describes how "superstitious fears, in large part foreign at that, invaded the state to such a degree that either men or else gods suddenly seemed changed", and condemns, as above, the activities of *sacrificuli ac vates*.[66] This phrase is used again in association with these events, to describe the *Graecus ignobilis* or 'nameless Greek' who is rumoured to be "a priest of secret rites performed by night".[67] Finally, in another context, it is placed by Livy in the mouth of the Aetolian ambassador Archidamus as he sneeringly describes the behaviour of T. Quinctius Flamininus on the battlefield of Cynoscephalae: "Taking auspices and sacrificing and performing vows like a poor sacrificing priest (*sacrificuli vatis*)".[68]

    *Sacrificulus* is a phrase that, at least in Livy, captures some aspects of the *agurtes*; the *–ulus* ending seems to suggest some kind of disparagement. And

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[65] *en toi kukloi* indicates a particular location: Cass. Dio 63.22 (the circle of the theatre); 73.19 (the arena); I think that Maximus of Tyre uses it in the plural to indicate a type. The distinction between crowded place and gathered crowd would easily be lost: this accounts for various definitions of related terms in later texts, for example, the gathering of a crowd leads the scholiast on Pl. *Rep.* 364b to see this as the origin of the word *agurtes*, defining it as those who gather (*ageirontes*) a crowd around themselves; while Hesychius (α 868) gives the definition of *agurtes* as *sunathroistas. manteis. hos Apion.*

[66] Livy 25.1.6–9.

[67] Livy 39.8.3; 39.4.1.

[68] Livy 35.48.13.

yet the term *sacrificulus* is also used without an inherent pejorative sense (notably in the phrase *rex sacrificulus* 'king of sacrifices');[69] and Livy uses *vates* without denigration in a number of other passages.[70] Individually, the terms do not seem to carry a negative sense; moreover, the hendiadys that Livy creates here does not seem to be used elsewhere, so apparently it did not have the same widespread use as *agurtes*. As Livy uses it, the term is associated with risks that are different from those linked to the *agurtes*: it is not clear that the services these figures provided were considered 'false' or undermined by greed or need. Rather, as we have seen above, in at least a couple of cases, Livy's speakers emphasise the foreignness, or rather the non-Romanness of their activities.[71] The Bacchanalian episode also suggests another risk that these figures convey: Orlin has argued that this fear of non-Romanness cannot account for the Senate's reaction to the events of 186, emphasising how the Senate's decree did not ban the cult, but instead placed it very closely under the control of the Senate, which was "[...]very much in keeping with traditional Roman practice, where the Senate served as the final arbiter for religious matters."[72] As he and others have suggested, this indicates some fear of a political risk.[73] If this is the case, it recalls the theme of the warnings of Cato and Columella to their bailiffs, (p. 260 above). They were concerned with access to, or encouragement of, power, at the individual level; here, this possibility threatens the state.

Finally, in Livy's alternative explanation for the changes in Dionysian worship, we find a figure who brings together all three elements of risk discussed

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**69** *Sacrificulus:* Livy 2.2.1; and 6.41.9. Suetonius uses *sacrificulus* to describe priests of Isis alongside the phrase *variae superstitionis* (Suet. *Dom.* 1).

**70** *Vates*, e. g., 1.4.6; 5.17.1; 7.6.3; 44.37.9 (among others); Newman (1967) traces the development of *vates* from a term of disparagement in Ennius and Lucretius, to a more exalted sense, related to the idea of the poet as prophet, in Augustan verse.

**71** As Pailler (2005) has noted, the sources offer a very one-sided account of these events, portraying the Senate as protecting the Roman state from a foreign threat.

**72** Orlin (2010, 168); compare Ando (2008, 12), who emphasises how the Senate concentrates on institutionalising the cult, along with financial and legal relationships among its members. The decree does ban male priests: the Senate's concern is "loyalty to other members of the cult, and not loyalty to Bacchus".

**73** North (2003, 215) cautions against distinguishing between "political as against religious action" in this context: "the Senate might be said to be solving a political problem or at least a problem of the control of power". He argues that the role of perception is important: the movement may have been "fundamentally a movement of women and of lower-class men, without an integrated political purpose", but led by a small group of "upper-class men with definite political purposes"—or it could be that this was what the Senate feared it was or could develop into; he argues (217) that the response of the authorities led in the long term to much more significant threats to the state.

so far.[74] Hispala identifies a priestess (*sacerdotes*), one Paculla Annia from Campania, as responsible for the innovations to the cult of Dionysus, which renders it "more dangerous" in the senate's eyes.[75] Other sources give us some idea of the narrative appeal of such a figure: Fontaine has observed that in Plautus' *Truculentus*, dating to 186 BCE, the manipulative and greedy *hetaira* Phrynesium is "a thinly veiled and politically conservative allegory for Paculla and her involvement in the scandal".[76] Moreover, Phrynesium is based on the *hetaira* Phryne, who was famously taken to court for impiety in fourth-century Athens: her crime was to bring together groups of men and women in a *komos* to worship a new god.[77] Thus we can see how Livy's account of Paculla Annia's involvement draws on a shared narrative of long-standing with a recognisable stock character: a foreigner (a woman) who has come to live among us, whose personal charisma, rooted in ritual competence and claims to ritual knowledge, endangers civic security.

## 4. Concluding contrasts

Tracing the figure of the itinerant ritual expert from Greek to Roman culture has not revealed a Roman term directly equivalent to the Greek *agurtes*. In texts written in Greek, use of the term *agurtes* identifies cultural marginality: in a world of religious plurality, in which all claims to supernatural relations were possible, it succeeded in undermining those claims by raising questions about the integrity of those who made them. It did this on the basis of cultural values that looked askance at the individual who continually moved between *poleis* and made a living on the basis, not of a skill or art, but rather on their economic dependence on others. In general, those described as *agurtai* or with its cognates were being abused weak and ineffectual, their claims to power not to be trusted, their information unreliable. Thus, it seems likely that the term could be employed as useful shorthand for criticising, for example, not only ritual practitioners, but also politicians who claimed ritual expertise.

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**74** See also Livy 39.13.8–10, which North (2003, 201, n. 12) describes a "different though not necessarily irreconcilable".

**75** Some scholars overlook the role of this woman, e.g. Orlin (2010, 165).

**76** Fontaine (2010, 187–190); quotation, p. 189.

**77** Charge against Phryne: *Anonymus Seguerianus* 215 (pp. 40–41 Patillon) = Euthias fr. 2, 2 p. 320 [no. LVIII] Baiter-Sauppe (not the actor/comic poet but the opponent of Hypereides in the trial of Phyne; see Eidinow (2010) and (2016).

In contrast, in texts written in Latin, no separate linguistic category develops to describe such a contemptible group. As Phillips observes, in Rome, "the debates did not center on the existence of individuals with special powers—that was granted. The source of the powers mattered far more".[78] Latin sources associate a different set of risks with the itinerant figures who offered ritual expertise, portraying them as potential sources of social and political danger.[79] Tacitus, in describing how the astrologers urged on the ambitions of Otho, offers a succinct but unsparing judgment of the ways in which such people are dangerous, because they encourage those who seek power. They are, "a tribe of men untrustworthy for the powerful, deceitful towards the ambitious, a tribe which in our state will always be both forbidden and retained".[80] We might still expect to find such figures marginalised, as in the Greek evidence; certainly the rhetoric of foreignness could be used in such a way, but that is only half the Roman story. Unlike the original Greek *agurtai,* these characters are also at its heart, both literally – they are in the centre of the city, on the Palatine, in the Forum and Circus – and figuratively, since they are shaping the everyday decisions of its inhabitants. References to these figures offer us insights that go beyond attitudes to divination: as North has described, the role and presence of the diviner, and how it changes over time, is a "marker of the location of power" – and, I would add, of the location of threats to power.[81] Over time, as we have seen, this concern will also become a characteristic of the *agurtes*, as the term loses the nuances of its original meaning, and the itinerant beggar priest becomes a single monolithic figure.

But before that overlap occurs, as Greek and Roman concepts still run, as it were, in parallel, we find the idea of the *agurtes* used to provide a contrast with figures that are in some ways considered, or who claim to be, ritually more powerful. For example, Apollonius defends himself by drawing a distinction between the "learned" and "semi-learned arts", comparing "poetry, music, astronomy, oratory, and public speaking except of the forensic kind", and "painting, sculpture, of statue makers, of pilots, of farmers as long as they follow the seasons",

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**78** Phillips (1986, 2714).

**79** On the importance of *cognitio deorum* ("knowledge of the gods": *Ant. div.* fr. 3 Cardauns) as interpreted by the Senate, and the problems of its regulation within the multiple dimensions of the Empire, see Ando (2008, 104–8).

**80** Tac. *Hist.* 1.22.1; and cf. Tac. *Ann.* 12.52 – the expulsion of astrologers from Italy after the alleged consultation of Chaldeans by Furius Scribonianus, who was looking into the death of the emperor.

**81** In biographical narratives they provide a *topos* for reflecting on the nature of Imperial characters: Suet. *Dom.* 8.3; *Vit.* 7.4–5; *Otho* 7.2.4. *SHA Comm.* 1.5.

with "a kind of sham learning and hucksterism [*pseudosophoi te kai ageirontes*] that you should not equate with prophecy", which he associates with sorcerers, who aim to dupe their audience.[82] The implications of the term *ageirontes* would have been immediately understood by his audience: Apollonius is referring to itinerants, who are selling false services, among them divination.[83] The contrast is also drawn, more explicitly, by other characters in this work: in an earlier passage, set in Egypt, Thespesion—the oldest of the so-called 'Naked Ones' and a great sage—clarifies the difference between Apollonius, who seeks wisdom, and mere wandering *agurtai* who aim simply to "flatter people's eyes and ears, and seem no better than anyone else".[84] In developing this claim, Apollonius goes beyond mere accusations of greed to assert that being an *agurtes* is likely to result in far greater pleasure. This can be seen as a further refinement of the accusation of weakness or even greed for luxury, which we have seen levelled at *agurtai* in earlier narratives.[85]

These examples show how the rhetorical figure of the *agurtes* could be used, as a comparison, by those who wanted to claim they had real power; in turn, as the Roman examples show, such claims to power were taken seriously. The risks of making such a claim are neatly illustrated by a story from among the fragments of book 7 of Strabo's *Geography:* Orpheus, a Ciconian *goes*, lives in the village of Pimpleia (said to be the birthplace of the mythical Orpheus), near the city of Dium at the foot of Mt. Olympus. He is described as starting off *agurteuonta* from various activities including *mantike* and mystic initiatory rites.[86] To begin with, he simply uses his ritual expertise to support himself. But subsequently,

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**82** Philostr. *VA* 8.7.9–10. See North (1990, 68–70).

**83** Macris (2008, 221–222, and 224–226). Such self-proclaimed 'holy men' were, for the most part, of Eastern origin, from Egypt, Libya, Asia Minor and Anatolia, Syria and Palestine. Rejection of payment will become part of the discourse that distinguishes the Christian 'holy man'. Paul does talk about being paid as perfectly justifiable (*1Cor.* 9:12–20; *2Cor.* 11:7–12; and 12:13 ff; and *1Thess* 2:9. But he is rare for not wanting to be paid (Auffarth 2013, 35). The risk posed by money or economic transactions is raised in connection with prophecy in Christian writings. There, we find the idea that an individual may have mortal economic interests characterised as being opposed to Christianity; by implication this is understood to threaten the integrity of the supernatural transaction. Auffarth (2013, 19) notes that this is personified in the person of Simon Magus – who tries to buy from Paul the ability to cure people miraculously (see *Acts* 8:18–24, Sidonius *Letters* 7.9.15). As the *Didache* (11.12) makes clear. the request for silver indicates a false prophet.

**84** Philostr. *VA* 6.10.6.

**85** It is also found in Philo *Cain and Abel* 2.268.32, where it features among the list of adjectives describing what happens to the character of those who yield to Pleasure.

**86** Str. *Geogr.* 7a.18 Meineke = fr. 10 Radt = *OF* 554, 659, 816 Bernabé.

his ambition develops, and he acquires "a crowd (*ochlos*) and power".[87] This passage draws attention (again) to the way in which the drawing of a crowd, the possibility of power, distinguishes the ineffectual *agurtes* from his more threatening brothers-on-the-road. In response, Strabo tells us, some received Orpheus willingly, but among others, suspicions arose that he had plans and meant violence; as a result, he was killed.

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**87** The term for crowd used here, *ochlos*, reminds us of the term *ochlagogos*, discussed as a near-synonym for *circulator* and *agurtes*, see above p. 266.

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