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Subordinated religious specialism and individuation in the Graeco-Roman world

At any rate on a naive view, the roles of subordinated religious specialists seem an obvious candidate for consideration in an account of the relation between religion and individuation, perhaps even of individualisation, in the Graeco-Roman world.[1] The claim to special ability to control communication with the divine world, the performance of wonders, the notorious moral ambiguity, or rather moral indifference, of the subordinated specialist – the diviner, the thaumaturge, the *pharmakeus/~tris*, the 'herb-cutter' – 'petits entrepreneurs indépendants' (Bourdieu 1971, 326) – and the claim to special or extraordinary powers typical of such practice – all these mark such small-time specialists as paradigmatic individualists in the religious sphere (cf. Dickie 2001; Piñero 2001; Wendt 2016, 40–73). In this contribution, I focus mainly on the role of different kinds of religious capital in the process of individuation.

I start from Bradford Verter's refinement of Bourdieu's concept of religious capital, which distinguishes between embodied, objectified, and institutionalised religious capital (Verter 2003, 159f.).[2] Institutionalised or dominant religious capital of different degrees was available in the Graeco-Roman world to a wide range of officiants in the religious sphere, whether or not they held priestly offices (Várhelyi 2010, 2–19; Rüpke 2013b, 214–23), not excluding heads of families, responsible for the conduct of lived religion in private households and neighbourhoods (Bodel 2008; van Andringa 2009, 217–69; Rüpke 2016b, 218–69; Flower 2017). But the existence of many different types of petty religious entrepreneurs

1 I use the word 'individuality' as a cover-term for analytically distinguishable types of development that contribute to differential processes of individuation, i.e. the notion of individual performative identity, in complex historical societies (Rüpke 2013a, 7; see also Rüpke 2012 and 2016a, and two other edited volumes on individuation and individualisation in antiquity, mainly in the Roman imperial period: Rüpke and Spickermann 2012; Rüpke and Woolf 2013). On the difficulty of maintaining distinctions here, and on the diversity of meanings that have been plausibly attached to the notions of 'religious individuation' and ' ~ individualisation', see recently Otto 2017, 31-7.

2 These are all types of cultural capital in Bourdieu's scheme. Verter himself prefers the expression 'spiritual capital'. Although I accept his objections to Bourdieu's tendency to view religious capital as exclusively institutional, I prefer to retain the term 'religious capital' in this context, since 'spiritual' seems to me to have misleading connotations in the context of non-Christian religious practice; cf. Grusendorf 2016, 4-7.

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claiming their own kind of religious competence (i.e. competence not socially recognised as meaningful religious capital) resulted in a major tension within the religious field, perceptible already in the Classical Greek period (e.g. Stratton 2015, 90–7; Eidinow 2017, 256–60; Pisano 2017) but especially marked in the multidimensional field that emerged in the world of increasingly large and diversified ancient agrarian empires of the Mediterranean basin. Sociologically, however, it is useful to view the knowledge-practices of these petty entrepreneurs as forming claims to a limited, unstable yet exploitable form of religious capital we can term 'embodied'. The insistent depreciation by the possessors of, or spokesmen for, institutionalised or dominant religious capital, especially in its public forms, justifies use of the term 'subordinated' for these practitioners.[3]

As claimants to embodied religious capital trading under the name of 'competence', such subordinate specialists were routinely decried as 'bad individualists', justifiably subject to obloquy, ridicule and even criminalisation (Stout 2001, 302f.). If we do allow a degree of individuation to such practitioners, within the context of the more general processes in antiquity leading to increased social differentiation, greater specialisation of roles (including religious-entrepreneurial roles), and increased monetarisation and market-orientation, how are we to classify it? What were the modalities of this embodied, provisional, contested religious capital? Can we trace efforts to stabilise it, to lay claim to a more substantial type of religious capital, namely 'objectified'? And if such roles were so open to obloquy and even criminalisation, why was the risk worth running?

In the light of a recent demand for a more thorough-going historicisation of the term 'magic' as applied to the Graeco-Roman world (Otto 2013), a demand that is, however, difficult to satisfy given the extremely partial character of the sources, I concentrate on 'subordinated religious specialists', ignoring the images of 'magicians' and 'witches' conjured up in ancient literature (cf. Stratton 2007, 39–105; Gordon 2009; Spaeth 2014), which usually monopolise the discussion. The category of 'magicians' and 'witches' is best understood as just one, albeit extremely negative, expression of the enduring competition between institutionalised, i.e. public and formal, religious capital and the embodied form typical of subordinated practitioners (Gordon 1999, 210–43; Frankfurter 2002). Most general discussions of 'ancient magic' are of no sociological value, since they tend to take such literary images as in some sense representations of social reality, throwing together a whole variety of distinguishable practices as though they had

3 Bourdieu generally uses the expression 'spécialiste dominé' (e.g. 1971, 326). Verter (2003, 155) translates this as 'subordinated', which I find more suitable for my purpose. In particular it emphasises the role of social judgement in the articulation of such attributions.

a common essence we can agree to call 'magic', or, trapped in the 'religion vs. magic' paradigm, focusing solely upon the stereotyped discourse of exclusion. My focus is on practitioners of a wide range of ritual specialisms (here, for space reasons, excluding astrologers, in some ways the most interesting group), not on clients or the socio-political discourse about 'magic' in antiquity, though both of these inevitably surface. The notional time-scale is the later Hellenistic and Roman periods up to the early fourth century CE, with very occasional reference to the Greek Classical period.

In what follows, I piece together some remarks on the role of knowledge declared legitimate in justifying depreciation of subordinated religious specialists in Graeco-Roman antiquity (see § 1). I then go on to discuss the claims by such specialists to (contested) religious capital and its modalities, and give an abbreviated account of attempts to construct an 'objectified' form of religious capital by establishing a claim to higher-status knowledge (see § 2 and § 3). In the final section I try briefly to identify some of the social factors that played into such apparently risky professional choices, returning at the end to consider the issue of individuation versus religious capital as methodological yard-sticks (see § 4).

1 Legitimate versus prescriptively illegitimate religious knowledge

Every social formation, we might say, develops the religious Others it can best instrumentalise (for Greece, see esp. Parry 1992). The more complex and geographically extensive the social order, above all in the case of culturally-plural large agrarian empires, such as the Hellenistic kingdoms and the Roman Empire (which, at its largest extent in the early second, and then early third century CE, controlled 5 Megametres^2 = 50^{10} km^2, cf. Taagepera 1978, 118; 125 table 2), the more ends the images of 'disorderly' religious power will serve. In the Graeco-Roman world, for example, we can find subordinated religious specialism, under the rubric of 'magic', represented as the social other, as the political other, as affront to the natural order, as absurdity, as fraud, folly or vanity, as prestidigitation, as the power inherent in nature, as the promise of unlimited command, as true religion; as heresy, the demonic, the nightmare. But if we stand back from these imagined personae and try to grasp the agents and their claimed skills and services, to say nothing of their possible individuation, we need some account of the construction of the category of subordinated religious specialism itself.

The justifications alleged by the possessors of institutionalised religious capital for their depreciation of marginal religious specialists mainly focused

on the claims of the latter to possess authority based on effective religious knowledge – that is, in Weberian terms, their religious competence. Religious knowledge is here understood in Bourdieusian spirit as a positional good in a competitive symbolic economy. It goes without saying that the Graeco-Roman gods were not simply 'there' (though every medial means was employed to make it appear as though they were natural givens): they, and the means of relating to them, were objects of knowledge, knowledge that was distributed within society in a highly differential manner (Rüpke 2014; 2016b, 182–92). It is not just that claims to possess more than trivial knowledge of the Other World and of its effective ritual management had to be negotiated if they were to become 'objective', that is, achieve the status of shared and legitimate knowledge. At a deeper level, the objectivity of legitimate religious knowledge was underpinned by the schemes of perceptions and thoughts which not merely generated appropriate insights and relevant questions but also excluded the kinds of questions that could not be asked and the answers that could not be given (cf. Bourdieu 1971, 310f.; 2003, 139–47). Such schemes are naturally vulnerable to the impact of real-world changes, intended or unintended, upon individuals and groups.

Legitimate religious knowledge in antiquity can be roughly defined in terms of its politico-social location and its 'investment-index'. We can lay this out as a notional continuum, between the positive, and of course dominant, pole on the one hand, and representations of fully illegitimate, and *ipso facto* subaltern or dominated, religious knowledge on the other (Bourdieu 2003, 148–53). The precise form of the continuum shifted very considerably over the *longue durée* of 1200 years between the early Archaic period in Greece and the complex 'inherited conglomerate' of the late-antique Empire. Prior to the advent of Christianities and the invention of 'heresies' (Marjanen and Luomanen 2005), representations of fully illegitimate religious knowledge took two quite different forms: denial of the very possibility of religious knowledge itself, that is 'atheism', which is neatly defined by Plutarch as 'imperviousness to the divine' (*De superst*. 6, 167e7f.) (cf. Whitmarsh 2016, 193–241; also Jan Bremmer's contribution to this publication), and the (quite imaginary) total inversion of the norms encapsulated in legitimate knowledge, i.e. the spectres of malign sorcery and witchcraft. By definition such knowledge had negative prestige – it was deemed not only to be 'purely' individual but also entirely maleficient. A less extreme form of negativity was provided by the studiously baggy category of 'superstition' (Gordon 2008; Sfameni Gasparro 2009; Rüpke 2011), which might well be collective but was always notionally defective, if not quite 'empty'. The dominant forms of religious knowledge, on the other hand, were conceptually 'full' and 'effective', and were the object of a massive effort of resource-investment, being encoded or inscribed in an enormous variety of forms and media.

The pivot of dominant religious knowledge however was sacrifice, above all blood-sacrifice, whose 'communicative contract' stood for all the (shifting) sets of norms governing perceptions and judgements of civilised versus savage life, social order and disorder, membership and exclusion (Detienne and Vernant 1979; Knust and Várhelyi 2011).[4] The purest model of sacrifice was that performed by magistrates and public priests (in Hellenistic kingdoms and the Roman Empire, by the king or the emperor) on grand state occasions. 'The "great" are those who can least afford to take liberties with the official norms' (Bourdieu 1977, 193). This was the ideal form reproduced in *necessarily* imperfect form by every individual act of sacrifice performed elsewhere in that social formation, linking households to larger social units.[5] This reproduction had both a temporal and a topographical significance: the grand state occasions were fixtures in the calendar of public and private festivals (themselves the meeting-point of formal laws or rules of organisation and of aetiological narratives), but also were celebrated at symbolically-charged points in the imagined map of the sacred topography (i.e. the innumerable sacred sites scattered about individual cities, their dependent villages, outlying caves, water-courses, and 'numinous places' in mountainous or hilly areas). In all this, philosophical claims to religious knowledge, which generally dismissed sacrifice and sustained a thoroughly moralised representation of divinity, were invariably bracketed as quite irrelevant.

From the Hellenistic period, the notion of political community came to be inflected increasingly by considerations of status and wealth and by command of literacy. The ideal locus of legitimate religious knowledge thus tended to shift away from a community politically defined to one defined in terms of a status-inflected centre-periphery model. This model had two facets. On the one hand, the city came to be contrasted with the country as the unique locus of civilised life. On the other, literacy became a key emblem of full cultural membership or inclusion, its absence correspondingly a token of cultural marginality (Johnson 2000; 2009). On this reading, the social location of subordinated practice shifted to the notional periphery, and could be stylised as current solely among an illiterate country-population – and of these, women and children are particularly credulous: belief in magical powers and effects is more or less confined to such people, and their political analogues, the barbarians. Appealing to subordinated religious practice thus became either a psychologically interesting matter, as in Theocritus' Second *Idyll* (say 270s BCE), in which the speaker, a woman who has

4 Although of course many sacrificial offerings were vegetal, they were conceptually of much less importance than blood-sacrifice.

5 On imperfect reproductions of social institutions, in this case marriage, see Bourdieu 1977, 34-5; 52-8.

allowed herself to be seduced by a dashing Lothario, attempts to compel him to return to her by means of 'incantation and substances' (ἐπῳδαὶ καὶ φάρμακα, the standard Greek expression for our term 'magic'); or, as often in Latin erotic poetry, a foil for the power of true passion, which is stereotypically stronger than any erotic magic (Gordon 2009, 226).

Subordinated practice could thus be represented as so completely dispersed that it had no effective significance as a threat to dominant meanings, and could thus be dismissed. An alternative spatial model, which emerged already in the late Archaic and early Classical periods, before and after the Persian Wars (490–479 BCE), represented the magician as a literal Outsider, as analogous to the priestly caste of the Persian Empire, the *magoi* (Carastro 2006). Greek claimants to the exercise of symbolic power unrecognised by, or subversive of, dominant or vocal groups were literally foreigners. The legitimacy of the transfer was guaranteed by the Persian priests' interpretation of dreams and portents, mastery of water and the winds (Otto 2011, 149–56). But whereas the Persian magi represented the dominant symbolic power of the Achaemenid Empire, their Greek analogues kept more doubtful company (Graf 1996, 29–36; Dickie 2001, 27–43; Otto 2011, 156–78). Yet, foreign and 'empty' as it might be, this 'Persian' magic could, like a virus, worm its way into the Graeco-Roman world, as Pliny the Elder's potted history of magic claims (*Historia naturalis* 30.1–18), by taking on the outward appearance of legitimate knowledge-practices, namely religion, medicine, and divination. The image of a surreptitious, insidiously intrusive, invader perfectly represents the problem of contested religious capital – shadowy, disturbing, threatening, absurd, 'empty' – but…? However, the most common Greek term for practitioners of such ambivalent ritual knowledge – vain indeed but still somehow threatening – was not μάγος (*magos*) but γόης (*goês*), a much older term, never taken over into Latin, which could be used in a wide range of contexts to express anxious contempt for such claims. The late-antique distinction made by the Byzantine lexicon known as the Suda (*s.v.* μαγεία) between μαγεία (*mageia*), the invocation of beneficent spirits for healing, and γοητεία (*goêteia*), the conjuration of evil spirits at tombs, is quite foreign to the Roman period.

Rather than deal with this threat, whereby subordinated claims to ritual knowledge might turn out to be effective indeed, it was far easier to fall back onto a polarised cosmology, whose negative dynamic took the form of a fantastic image of deviant ritual mastery, familiar in African ethnography as the 'night witch', and known to us in the Graeco-Roman world mainly through literary re-presentation:

> [Dipsas] knows magic arts and Colchian incantations, and by her art causes rivers to reverse their flow; she knows precisely (*scit bene*) what a herb can do, or the humming iunx, the

> power of the slime from a lubricious mare. When she wills, dense clouds cover the sky, when she wills, the sun shines bright. Believe it or no, I have beheld the stars dripping blood – the Moon's orb was red with blood. I believe she flies at night as an owl, her decrepit body covered in feathers – I believe it, and so rumour has it (*suspicor et fama est*). "Double pupils" flash from her eyes – a light is emitted from her twofold iris [...]
>
> Ovid, *Amores* 1.8.5–16 (late first century BCE)

We can read such a text in several ways. Here I just want to use it 'ethnographically' to suggest the type of anxieties provoked by the image of the night-witch: she disposes of an 'art', i.e. a knowledge-practice, that aims to undermine or undercut the (implicitly beneficent) order of nature, which is also that of the self-representation of the dominant social order. And this in three areas: by maliciously or at whim controlling natural phenomena (water flows uphill; freak weather conditions); by falsifying the divine sign-system that 'accurately' informs humans of symbolic danger (the moon turns blood-red); and by interfering with the '(arbitrary) cultural necessity' of sexual relations (erotic magic). The witch, emblematised by her nightly transformation into a were-owl (Gk.: βρύας, *bryas*; Latin: *strix*), is thus the agent of a 'sacrilegious violence' that threatens the naturalised norms of agrarian production ('beneficent nature'), divine-human communication, and stable social life. As such, she is a structurally necessary element, sustained by the circulation of rumour (*et fama est*...), gossip and accusation (Stewart and Strathern 2004), of a folk-cosmology that viewed the world as unsteadily poised between opposed orders, the one beneficent, the other negative and destructive. As such, the figure could never be quite done away with, but remained available to be adapted to new fault-lines revealed by periods of marked historical change, notably in the civil wars of the late Republic, the establishment of autocracy in the early Principate, the crises of imperial authority after 235 CE, and the long, slow imposition of Christianity as the public religion of the Empire (Grodzynski 1974; Fögen 1993; Clerc 1995; Lotz 2005).

2 Establishing competence/embodied religious capital

One of the main difficulties in providing a general account of this process is the sheer range of different levels of skill and knowledge, relative professionalism and self-consciousness within the class of subordinated practitioners. Given the sources at our disposal and the impossibility of finding a personal informant, we must make do with the heuristic device of distinguishing between four ideal types: the village wise woman, the full-time or semi-professional usually male

rhizotomist ('root-cutter'), typically urban ritual specialists – 'prophets', 'diviners', 'purifiers', 'healers', 'thaumaturges' – and, finally, literate advocates of the power of the marvellous, who viewed themselves, or at any rate claimed to view themselves, as working in ancient traditions derived from the Near-Eastern high cultures.

What is certain, however, is that such a scheme is a radical simplification, for the range of roles and styles was in fact extremely large, varying from individual to individual in relation both to levels of competence and to consciousness of working within a tradition. 'Beggar priests' (Gk.: ἀγύρται, *agyrtai*), who in some ways fit perfectly into the general category of subordinated religious specialists, can hardly be classed as a 'group', since they included people who disposed of different kinds of knowledge and exercised many different kinds of skills, and are united solely by the claim that they were itinerant, moving from place to place; since this claim was intended pejoratively and almost invariably linked to the idea of demanding payment for services rendered, we have no idea whether in any given case it was true (Eidinow 2017). Moreover, *topoi* such as '(wise) women know about magical herbs' could be used as narrative material in all kinds of contexts: for example, the mythic history of the early years of the city of Erythrai, on the west coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), told of a Thessalian priestess of Hekate named Chrysamê, who was an expert in herbal lore and by a ruse doped the entire Erythraean army, thus enabling the Ionian Knôpos to seize power and become king (Polyaenus, *Strat*. 8.43). In the early second century CE, the historian Arrian of Bithynia reported a similar story about a famous Thracian 'witch', Krokodikê, who 'knew all about incantations and herbs, and how to cure illnesses and to bring them about' (ap. Jacoby 1926, 864 frgs. 61a-c). In novels, figures such as the 'trusted old attendant' provided endlessly productive narrative material: in Heliodorus' *Ethiopian Story*, for example, the unscrupulous Kybelê, who knows about (love-)potions, tries to poison the heroine, Charikleia, but drinks the stuff herself by mistake, leading to Charikleia's being accused of murder, and condemned to the stake, from which she is miraculously saved by [...] (Heliodorus, *Aith*. 8.6–10). Much the same applies to female diviners: for a discussion of the ideal ruler, Dio of Prusa (40/50–110/120 CE) created a frame-narrative whereby he happened to lose his way on a walk near Olympia and came across a rather tall old lady near a tumble-down shrine of Herakles, who told him the Mother of the Gods had given her the power of prophecy – and instead of whirling about and rolling her eyes, gave him a mythographic lecture about Herakles as a good king (Dio *Or*. 1.52–6).

Here there is no space to do more than offer thumbnail sketches of each of these groups, which I have arranged roughly in order of their assumed self-consciousness, the value of the claim to restricted knowledge, and the

topographical and social range of their active interventions. To repeat: in each case, in the absence of ethnographic evidence, we have to do with ideal-types, that is, my own selective modelling of the ancient evidence for such activities, partly on the basis of comparative evidence (e.g. Lieban 1967; Tambiah 1970; Peek 1991; Kirkland 1992; Kapferer 1997; Ankarloo and Clark 1999–2002; Wilson 2000, 333–71, 395–420; Skemer 2006; Petropoulos 2008; Harari 2017) and partly by simply ignoring the insistent negative stereotyping that is so characteristic of the ancient representations (e.g. Pliny, *Hist. nat*. 18.4).

– Wise women. The type of the wise woman is the mythical Agamêdê (also Perimêdê) of Elis, grand-daughter of Helios, the Sun, who is mentioned by Homer as 'knowing all the herbs that the wide earth sustains' (*Iliad* 11.740f.). Her name, sometimes coupled with that of Medea or Circe, continued to evoke the ambivalence of this type of knowledge, of herbal lore, which could be used for healing, and for the making of 'potions' (the association between female gender and poisoning is immemorial), well into the Roman period (e.g. in the passage of Arrian just cited) and the Byzantine scholarly tradition. We should also remember that some knowledge of this kind, as well as of simple divinatory methods, such as knuckle-bones, was widespread among ordinary folk (e.g. Dasen and Schädler 2017).

  The most neutral word in Greek for such women, about whose claims and abilities we only possess literary evidence, inevitably tendentious, is μήτηρ, 'mother' – a respectful form of address to an older woman of some authority, but which makes no specific reference to such skills (e.g. Heliodorus, *Aith*. 7.10, in the familiar diminutive μητέριον, *mêterion*); more specific is φαρμακίς, 'a woman who knows about *pharmaka*, herbs', which however is often found in a negative sense, 'witch'. Although a stock of charms (Gk.: ἐπῳδή, *epôdê*; Lat.: *cantamen, cantio, cantus, carmen, incantamentum, incantatio*) and skill in their performance (*murmur, susurramen*) was indispensable to their practice, there was no common Greek name for wise women that emphasised this aspect of their knowledge, whereas in Latin we find at least *cantatrix* (Apuleius, *Met*. 2.20, late second century CE) and *incantatrix* (Scholiast on Horace, *Carm*. 1.27.21). *Mater* is also found in Latin (e.g. Nemesianus, *Eclog*. 4.62, late third century CE), but the most neutral Latin word for a wise woman is the rare (*mulier*) *pluscia*, precisely 'wise (woman)' (Petron. *Satyr*. 63); more negatively, *saga* and *nocturna* ('active by night'). The word *saga* (from *sagax*, 'sharp-witted') might be glossed as meaning an 'old woman who claims to know many things' (Cicero, *De div*. 1.65).

  Such women were consulted on all manner of issues: illness (diagnosis and cure), male impotence, infertility in women, interpersonal relations, especially erotic (e.g. Horace, *carm*. 1.27.21f.; Lucian, *Dial. meretr*. 1.2), protec-

tion against attack by witchcraft (e.g. Ovid, *Fasti* 6.105–68), provision of protective amulets e.g. against the evil eye, forecasting future events, warding off storms, hail and frosts (Pliny, *HN* 28.29), protection against malicious gossip (Ovid, *Fasti* 571–84), identifying thieves, and many other problems of ordinary village life, including attacking clients' enemies by witchcraft or by knowing the right ritual to cause them to be generally hated. Thanks to the inherent moral ambiguity of at least some of these undertakings, and the anxiety attending any consultation of a person who claims such powers, a version of this role served as the basis for the 'night witch' figure in antiquity, of which the ghastly Erictho is the literary paradigm, who blights the harvest with her tread, plucks out the eyeballs of the dead in their sarcophagi, tears the flesh from criminals exposed on the gibbet, and kisses corpses so she can bite off the tongue (Lucan, *Bell. civ.* 6.507–68, mid-first century CE). In the night-witch fantasy the theme of restricted knowledge is intensified exclusively in the direction of world-reversal.

– Full-time or semi-professional, usually male, rhizotomists ('root-cutters'). Although women are the stereotypical folk-practitioners in literary texts, spreading out from the village-context into urban households, it seems likely that most professional or semi-professional herbalists/folk healers were actually male (though we do know the names of one or two female specialists in gynaecology and obstetrics, one of whom even wrote a manual). At any rate, the coinage of masculine agentives such as ῥιζοτόμος (rhizotomos, root-cutter) in Greek and *herbarius* and *medicamentarius* in Latin suggests as much, as do the numerous references to such practitioners in Theophrastus' *Historia plantarum* 9 (late fourth century BCE) and throughout the sixteen books of Pliny's *Historia naturalis* devoted to the properties of plants of all kinds, animal-parts and minerals (17–32), both for direct application and for the manufacture of amulets. Theophrastus (*Hist. pl.* 9.8.5) links root-cutters to φαρμακοπώλαι (pharmakopôlai, herb-mongers); 'marketing' implies movement of such items from the point of collection to village, urban or temple-markets or shops of one kind or another, and no doubt sometimes a network of suppliers, as in the modern developing-world. Moreover a few such experts were literate and wrote books about their materials, sometimes with illustrations (*rhizotomika*: Pfister 1938); Pliny derives most of his information from such compilations. Some at least specialised in doctoring farm- and work-animals, others operated in towns and cities. Since in the ancient world many adults, especially in rural areas, where anyway the great majority of the population lived, knew a variety of herbal remedies, we must assume that the reputation of professional or semi-professional root-cutters lay in their possession of more extensive knowledge of such matters, as well

as in their ritual expertise. Pliny states as a fact that if root-cutters considered their work had not been adequately remunerated, they would replant part of the herb in question at the very place where they had collected it, so undoing the healing process (*HN* 21.144, 25.174, 26.24).

Once again, we must imagine a wide range of claims to authority, all the way from those typical of wise-folk (e.g. *incantatores*) to individuals who defined themselves exclusively as *medici*, 'doctors', just as their remedies were taken up both by temple-medicine, e.g. on the island of Kos, and by school medicine. The implied readership of Pliny's *Naturalis historia* must have been assumed to be prepared to use at least some of the information ultimately derived from the knowledge of such men – but only insofar as it had been purged of its 'magical trappings' and rendered legitimate by being admitted into literate compilations: Pliny misses few opportunities of dismissing 'root-cutters' as a group. On the other hand, school doctors such as Galen were prepared to allow that amulets, especially those made of semi-precious stones – items by no means cheap – might be of medical value. Nothing whatever is known about analogous practices outside Greece and Italy (except for Egypt); but already Theophrastus knew a wide variety of plants from the eastern Mediterranean, and some manuscript traditions of Dioscorides' medicinal herbal (originally first century CE) contain lists of plant-names in a variety of languages, including 'Marsian', 'Celtic', 'Hispanic', 'Germanic', 'Dacian', 'Syrian', 'Egyptian', and 'African', which perhaps derive from the voluminous late first-century CE work *On herbs* by Pamphilos of Alexandria and might be based (ultimately) upon reports by local root-cutters.

Many, if not most, rhizotomists and wise-folk practised divination of one kind or other – the standard handbooks list nearly one hundred named types of 'inductive' divination (i.e. based on the principle of combining a matrix of given meanings with a device for generating chance) known from antiquity, quite apart from many others that had no common name (Gordon 2011; 2017, 123–31). One of the very rare literary accounts of such low-level divination by a *saga* using a lot-oracle deftly evokes a series of questions posed by the enquirer, each of which can be answered positively or negatively. 'Will he die by poison?', 'No'; 'Will he die by violence?', 'No'; 'Will he die of internal pains?', 'No' [...]; and so on (Horace, *Sat.* 1.9.29–32). Here the engagement of the client in the process of finding a solution under the guidance of the specialist – precisely one of 'problems' elite commentators had with such methods, as insufficiently 'divine' – is neatly intimated in a mere four lines of verse.

– Typically urban ritual specialists. Divination however was a central element in the practice of many of our third category, ritual specialists who mainly

practised in urban contexts and operated under market conditions. The heavily-adulterated Greek thesaurus of Iulius Pollux (late second century CE) lists over 20 words for such practitioners, covering 'begging priests', 'prophets', 'diviners', 'interpreters of dreams', 'purifiers', 'sacrificers', 'healers', 'initiators', 'thaumaturges' (*Onom*. 7.188f.). Such terms, while hardly indicating 'professions',[6] are the socially-admitted correlates of innumerable individually-constructed roles that aimed at personal ritual mastery in urban contexts. These were partly inspired by copying others (teachers or models), partly by repeated ritualised practice that gives rise to 'the knowing body', and partly by the resonance of patients and clients, which insensibly guided and improved the effectivity of performances. Although a few such individuals, such as the Lycian Aristander and the Spartan Kleomantis, the diviners of Alexander the Great (Plutarch, *Vit. Alex*. 50), attained a certain prominence, it is precisely this dynamic relation between subordinated specialist and client, based on intuition, sympathy and ritual competence, that evoked the resentment and hostility of the representatives of other, more heavily institutionalised, 'mainstream' providers of services we can broadly term religious. These in turn fuelled the almost univocal denigration and depreciation of these specialists – 'money-grubbing', 'vain', 'worthless', 'mountebanks', 'charlatans' – that we find in our sources, caricatures that sophisticated authors such Lucian readily embellish, and which served as ammunition for the proponents of the so-called 'Great Church' in denigrating their opponents (Sfameni Gasparro 2002; Denzey Lewis 2017). Some such specialists in the provinces, such as druids (or 'druids') and prophetesses in the north-west provinces, were even considered enemies of state. Although exorcism was unknown in the (narrowly-defined) Graeco-Roman world until the establishment of Christianity, the rivalry staged in early Christian (and Rabbinic) sources between 'our' miraculous cures and 'their' magic reproduces the same conflict in a different idiom (Piñero 2001; Frenschkowski 2016, 223–73).

– Literate advocates of the power of the marvellous. Rather than continue the enumeration of different groups of specialists here, it makes more sense to discuss the fourth group, practitioners who used high-status techniques, above all textuality, under the separate heading of objectified religious capital.

6 'The *mau song* only diagnoses; in that role he does not cure, either through medicine or supernatural action. His role is *conceptually* distinct. [...] When [he] performs other roles he is called by the appropriate name' (Tambiah 1970, 272).

3 Striving for objectified religious capital

We can distinguish three major means whereby subordinated practitioners attempted to raise the status of their religious capital from embodied to objectified.[7] These are 'thaumatisation' (i.e. appeal to the marvellous), literate discursification, and *Verfremdung* (strategic alienation). Since there are in fact no pure examples of any of these, inasmuch as such strategies are invariably used in combination, I offer here a few instructive examples.

In themselves marvellous events are of little significance in this context, since this was a world in which marvels were a major means of sustaining the religious field *tout court*. It is rather narratives, rumours and reports of marvels performed by specific individuals, whether in the village, in the city, in the palace, that generated the requisite distinction, generated by the demonstration of one's ability successfully to appropriate the power inherent in nature, special objects, rarified texts. Those who claimed special powers for themselves relied upon such narratives in establishing their claim: the practitioner's rôle was as much a function of shared marvellous narratives as of secret, sometimes family, tradition. It is precisely this complicity that makes a sharp distinction between practitioners' views and outsiders' views unconvincing. On the one hand, in any given situation the practitioner profits from the uncertainty, the indeterminacy of the limits of the here-and-now possible produced by knowledge of marvellous narratives. On the other, the local stock of such narratives models the image of the transformation of the real that practitioners aimed to realise, within the horizon of expectations set by their own self-image and the micro-tradition they exemplified. Lucian's comic dialogue *Lover of lies* (late second century CE) seeks to ridicule precisely this type of claim, for example by introducing a famous Egyptian magician Pancrates ('Mr. Allcan'), who, by a magical utterance or two, would turn door-bars and broom-sticks into magical servants to run errands for him (*Pseud*. 35).

In the literate tradition, however, the ability to achieve marvellous effects tends to be represented as a property of ritual texts – the mastery lies in possession of or access to the relevant knowledge. Thus the Graeco-Egyptian 'magical papyri' (Preisendanz 1928–41), which can be taken to exemplify the quantities of receptaries (*grimoires*) that circulated, albeit in very restricted fashion, via personal communication, in the Roman Empire under the Principate, above

7 I use 'objectified' here to denote recourse to special objects and texts as well as claims to special powers, mostly derived from non-Greek and Roman sources of knowledge.

all in Egypt, constantly asseverate the extraordinary power of their contents: 'a marvellous "driver"'; 'a really marvellous philtre'; 'Hermes' marvellous "crusher"'; 'you will be amazed'; 'has a marvellous power to induce prophetic dreams'; 'everyone present will marvel' (e.g. Gordon 2012, 151f.). This is the typical language of 'high ritual realism', a key claim in the establishment of objectified (and institutionalised) religious capital. Moreover, as we would expect of the drive towards the objectification of such symbolic capital, marvellous power might also be claimed as inherent in natural objects, not simply plants or animal parts but above all precious and semi-precious stones. Already in the Classical period, but more especially in the later Hellenistic period, there developed a tradition of marvellous stones, now referred to generically as *Lithika* ('Stone-books'). Some such lore, while referring to practitioners, say, in Egypt or India, was ascribed to 'Orpheus'. Other material was appropriated from Babylonian lore translated into Greek in the Hellenistic period (cf. Hopfner 1926). Pseudepigraphic texts of limited circulation purporting to have been written by Zoroaster or Ostanes, which Pliny refers to generically as 'the Magi', acclaimed the powers of certain stones, such as the *chelonia* ('tortoise-stone'), which when placed in the mouth at specific times of the day enabled the practitioner to foretell the future. Another type, *chelonis*, which is actually made from tortoise-eyes, enabled him to abate storms by means of incantation; and yet another, with golden speckles, raised storms if one dropped it into hot water together with a scarab (Pliny, *HN* 37.155). The problem with textualisation, however, is that its circulation cannot be controlled: the distinction-value of esoteric goods declines in direct proportion to their availability. Once such texts fell into the hands of someone like Pliny, who was prepared to record all kinds of beliefs and claims quite neutrally, but loses no opportunity to decry what 'the Magi' say, efforts to establish objective ritual capital could easily be made to appear merely vainglorious.

The technique of *Verfremdung* is a familiar device whereby cultures assign the 'most effective' magical knowledge to neighbouring peoples – a Roman example is the representation of two Italic peoples, the Marsi and the Sabelli, who were supposed to be able to cause snakes to split by means of incantations, as 'typical' magicians. Ideologically, the strategy makes it possible both to concede the potentially disruptive power of subordinated knowledge-practices while at the same time trivialising their consumption within the population at large. In antiquity, many of the literary representatives of my first three groups are said to be foreigners: in the Classical Greek world, this meant Thessaly, or Colchis, a mythical land on the east coast of the Black Sea; in the Hellenistic and Roman imperial worlds, Lydia in Asia Minor, say, the homeland of a man who 'knew about magic and drugs that could bring about paralysis and death'

(Polemon, *De physiog*. 1, page 130[14–16] [ed. Förster]), or Africa ('Libya'), or Syria – the historian Tacitus twice mentions a Syrian woman named Martina, 'notorious as a potion-mixer', who was alleged to have been involved in the mysterious death in 19 CE of Germanicus, the emperor Tiberius' nephew and designated successor (*Ann*. 2.74.2; 3.7.2). Arabia too was a likely home of such knowledge – Pheroras, the younger brother of Herod the Great, was said to have been poisoned in 5 BCE by means of a drug supplied by an Arabian woman, 'Arabian women being the witchiest of women (φαρμακιστόταται)' (Josephus, *Ant*. *Jud*. 17.4.1, 62f.); in Lucian's *The Lover of Lies*, it is an Arab who gives the Greek host an iron amulet and teaches him a complicated incantation to protect him from ghosts and revenants (*Pseud*. 17), while another participant in the dialogue tells of a Babylonian with an old book who not only heals a slave who has been bitten by a poisonous snake but by means of a spell drives all the dangerous pests, from horned vipers to toads, into one spot and burns them to cinders – 'quite amazing' (ibid. 11f.).

The Graeco-Egyptian 'magical papyri', which in their extant form are mainly late-antique although the very earliest examples date from the late Hellenistic period, are ritual texts, mostly in Greek, some in Demotic Egyptian, a few in Old Coptic or Coptic, claiming to enable the practitioner to achieve a wide variety of desirable ends. These range from low-grade divination to direct visions of godhead (Suárez de la Torre 2002; García Molinos 2017), from assembling amulets to restraining the wrath of the great and powerful, from removing fishbones stuck in the throat to forcing compliance from objects of erotic desire, from inducing insomnia to obtaining a divine factotum (Gordon 2013; Fraser 2015, 116–23; Pachoumi 2017, 11–33). While the most famous are lengthy compilations of prescriptions ('formularies') for many different procedures, which were found by Egyptian tomb-robbers before 1828, acquired by a Macedonian Greek merchant/dealer named Ioannis Anastasiou (c.1765/70–1860) (Chrysikopoulos 2015, 2148f.), and sold on to European museums in the mid-nineteenth century, the majority are loose-leaf items written (or copied) by individual practitioners working in a tradition loosely associated with the declining fortunes of Egyptian temples. Although the great majority of formulary recipes are anonymous, just like the endorsements that asseverate their efficacy, some are ascribed to pseudo-historical figures such as Pibechis, Pitys, Pnouthis, Astrampsychus, Dardanus, Moses, Pythagoras or Nephôtês, or are stated to have been used by such figures (Suárez de la Torre 2012). More rarely, they might be named after the divinity addressed, such as Egyptian Bes, Serapis, or Selene (the moon), or be claimed to have been copied from *stêlai* ('inscribed slab') in Egyptian temples – indeed the word *stêlê* usually in the formularies means 'an effective *praxis* in this tradition' and has no reference to an actual object made of

stone. The formularies betray no coherent conception of this ritual practice: while a few of the recipes are derived from Greek symposium jokes ('Democritus' tricks'), others are extremely elaborate, display dizzying familiarity with Egyptian theological constructs, myths, and cosmological schemes, incorporate sequences in verse, conventionally called 'hymns', probably taken from Greek sources and edited for their new context (Bortolani 2016), and exhibit a very wide range of phonic and paragraphic devices, as well as drawings and images (Sfameni 2009; Crippa 2010), quite unknown in 'indigenenous' Greek or Roman ritual contexts, which hardly go beyond citations of Homeric verses and simple charms (Heim 1892; Önnerfors 1991, 13–33; 54–61). They also incorporate an enormous variety of exotic divine names, mainly Egyptian but also Judaic and even Babylonian. Further evidence of the drive to objectification are the five thousand surviving amuletic intaglios, mainly ring-stones, with 'esoteric' imagery linked to Egyptian ritual lore, mostly deriving from the eastern Mediterranean area but now in western European or US museums (Michel 2004; Faraone 2018).

As will already be clear, the use of written texts was a major strategy in the attempt to develop objective religious capital, especially in the area of divination. Literacy made possible quite new forms of routinisation on the basis of written matrices, such as Homer-oracles or the far more sophisticated 'esoteric' divinatory system ascribed to Astrampsychos (Naether 2010). Use of astrological knowledge, itself unthinkable in the absence of literacy, made it possible to extend and elaborate many other methods of forecasting by specifying stellar or planetary conditions (Gundel 1968). Many divinatory procedures that enjoyed little or no status as mere practices could obtain respectability once reduced to order under separate headings and given specific textual or diagrammatic form. We need only to think of numerous books on oneiromancy (the interpretation of dreams) (del Corno 1969), the dialogue by Hermagoras the Stoic on divination from eggs (Suda *s.v.* Ἔκχυτον), or books on physiognomics, chiromancy, and divination by body-scanning (Bonnard et al. 2015; cf. Dasen 2015). The 'magical papyri' contain several schemes, ascribed to 'Democritus' and others, for foretelling a patient's death. Meta-levels of different kinds are represented by books that collected examples of specific kinds of signs, such as that of 'Aristander' on portents connected with trees (Pliny, *HN* 17.241–43), or Hylas' work on signs derived from the behaviour of birds not found in Italy (Pliny, *HN* 10.38), and philosophical or erudite speculation on how 'magic' might work (Graf 2002). In thus eliding distinctions between 'low' and 'honourable' practices, the nexus in the Roman empire between book-culture, intellectual activity and aspiration to social status (Johnson 2000; 2010, 22–31, 200–5) helped affirm practitioners' claims to objectified religious capital.

4 Choosing subordinated religious roles

In social formations in which status and life-chances are very largely ascribed, the field of religion provides, for the suitably talented, a major means of escaping such constraints and achieving at least a modicum of self-determination. Whatever the predisposing factors, such as family-tradition, emotional or mental instability (Crapanzano 1980), social marginality, blindness, or physical deformation, the notions of 'talent' and 'calling' are crucial. On the one hand, the massive investment by the politico-social élites, central and provincial, of the Hellenistic period and the Roman Empire in the maintenance of religious infrastructure and the calendar of festivals, guaranteed the meaningfulness of specialisation in the religious field. On the other, increasing physical mobility and access to new information formed the conditions necessary to the multiplication of small-time specialist roles. The crucial factors however must have been the movement of village practitioners, primarily male 'wise-folk', into urban contexts, and the increased competition to which they were exposed.

The place of the wise woman in a community, though ambivalent, was relatively secure. She, and those who dealt with her, had access to a range of motifs which could if necessary be brought into play: the heritability of special powers, the natural origin of plant and animal remedies, more remotely, figures of local myths and narratives; compensation was voluntary and in kind. One worked on developing an appropriate degree of individuation, balancing experiential knowledge, intuition, and inspiration with a hint of strangeness or 'deviance'. The embodied religious capital that could thus be acquired was correspondingly limited. In Bourdieusian terms, this was a thin sub-field, where there was a high degree of uniformity of evaluation (Gorski 2013, 346). Much the same applies to (male) root-cutters or 'wise-men'. In the absence of widespread disaster, there was little stimulus in the mainly agrarian context to innovate, either as regards claims or practices. Such innovation, which we may call 'de-traditionalisation', was only possible in the presence of a client-driven market for the management of contingency, and therefore of competition between those who offered such services – that is, in towns, and especially in 'open' towns with relatively rapid social change, such as ports, transit- and tourist-towns. Only under these conditions could the habitus of practical mastery be challenged. This pattern is clear in the case of root-cutters who acquired some wealth and social standing, became literate, and actually wrote compendia. Competition brought the subordinated practitioner, along with a sharper social profile, increased opportunities for money, influence and even fame, thus attracting gossip, envy and occasionally fear. Except in extreme situations, however, such as the wave of arrests and executions that followed the trial at Rome of M. Scribonius Libo Drusus in 16 CE, when 45 men and

85 women were put to death (Tacitus, *Ann.* 27; 29–31; Chron. 354 Ann. CCCLIV = Mommsen 1892, 145[26–28]), envy and fear were outweighed by the utility of such specialists for different social groups in the face of perceived contingencies.

All these factors, the requirement to sell services in a market, the increase in usable information, creative experimentation with new techniques, and the ambivalence of the wider community towards such services, encouraged a degree of innovation. Competition brought varying fortunes, pushing some into the direction of professionalism, others into diversification, yet others into marginality. Increased professionalisation and diversification motivated the processes of turning regularities in procedures into systems and then into theories, such as 'sympathy' and 'antipathy', belief in distinguishable 'powers' in the natural world, or astrologically-warranted 'moments', which in turn affected practice. These in turn refined the network of 'secondary elaborations', subordinate beliefs that protect primary beliefs or claims. Professional practitioners drew upon the performances of competitors but also needed to define themselves against them, either by decrying their methods, by claiming to have improved them, or by denouncing them as fraudulent. All these moves induced individuals to break with prior models of action (i.e. their habitus) and develop their own standards, aims and techniques.

Both the scope of the transformation of prior strategies and the degree of self-referentiality increased, perhaps considerably, with the gradual emergence of professionalism in subordinated practice, that is, the extent to which such specialists could live off their practice by moving away from payment in naturalia towards monetary reward: the pace of such changes greatly increased in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. I would argue that such professionalism, and the opportunities for shifting away from embodied to objectified religious capital at the preferred level of practice/engagement, despite being contested elsewhere in the religious system, is the key to the intensification of individuation experienced by urban practitioners, or at any rate the most talented and entrepreneurial among them.

If we feel it necessary to specify, I would class this type of individuality as primarily competitive, based on the sense of self-determination and competence acquired through, and reinforced by, the accumulation of intensified embodied, and, in some cases, objectified religious capital. In general, however, it seems to me preferable to view the struggle of subordinated religious specialists not so much in terms of individuation as of competition for acknowledged religious capital. The subordination of these specialists did not simply result in victimisation: under advantageous circumstances it might offer the stimulus to explore new techniques and claims that could be cashed in as symbolic capital, thus forming the basis for the development of religious individuation.

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