
3.3 Rome and the West

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Gods in the City

Recent research has pointed to the space-sensitivity of action, religious practices and ideas included.¹ This “spatial turn” is highly relevant for the understanding of Ancient Mediterranean polytheisms and their constructions of the divine, too, as the overall argument of this conference highlights. Within that wider framework, this paper addresses the narrower field of religious changes that can be seen as results of and factors in processes of urbanisation. The constellation of many people and a densely built environment leads people to experience a specific atmosphere of cities that is described as “promise” or “security”. The numerous services provided and the communicative and topographical open spaces offered are a contrast to the countryside, the non-urban. The city promises the control of the natural environment.² This starkly contrasts with the specifically religious ascription of agency and even whimsy to divine agents. The gods are construed as an element beyond the controlled environment and targets of control at the same time. This chapter intends to analyse polytheistic practices and ideas regarding the divine against the background of these tensions, thus providing a different framework for observations on seemingly oddities of religion in the ancient city of Rome.

1 Historicizing the Gods

In his forty-one scrolls of the “Antiquities of Human and Divine Things”, Marcus Terentius Varro (110–27 BCE) described the political institutions first, and only afterwards „the divine things“. The rationale is preserved (as are many other quotations from the work, which has survived only in fragments) in the late antique theologian Augustine: “As the painter is rather earlier than the painting, the craftsman rather than the building, so also the civic institutions precede what has been established by the polities” (fr. 5 Cardauns = Aug. *civ.* 6,4). The gods as such precede the humans, but the selection of the deities to be worshipped, the institutions and rules of the cult, the cultic practice itself is based on political decisions that already presuppose the institutionalisation of the polity. Varro himself pursues this consideration in a thought experiment: “If he founded a new *civitas*, he would rather establish the gods and their names according to the prescription of nature.

1 The chapter is part of a cooperation between the ERC project MAP and the Erfurt DFG Research Centre in Humanities (KFG) “Religion and Urbanity: Reciprocal Formations”.

2 For the range of expectations and “aspirations”, Keith 2014; van der Veer 2015b.

But being already among an ancient people, he must hold on to the history of names and epithets preserved by the ancients, as it has been handed down, and for this very purpose he will write down those things and search them out, that the multitude may rather revere than despise these gods" (fr. 12).

Varro's *civitas* is the Roman one and Augustine explicitly locates his birth and education in the city of Rome (Aug. *civ.* 4.1, p. 146). It is Augustine's localisation and identification of Varro's *civitas* with the physical fabric and the geographical space of the city of Rome that is the hermeneutical key for his reading of Varro. It is our reading of his projection and selection that give us the main access to the text lost in its integral form. It was, I presuppose, not Varro's intention to use *civitas* in order to stress a participatory community that inhabited a vast geographical space beyond the boundaries of the city. Instead, it was his reading of the city as a space lived (above all) by Roman citizens without being blind to the fact that the inhabitants of the same space went far beyond persons with Roman citizenship. I do not claim that Varro shared my intention to analyse the history of religion at Rome as an urban history. However, he can be read as a Roman of the first century BCE whose image of the city, whose, as I would like to say, urban imaginary,³ or more simply: whose urbanity entailed the notion of religious institutions and their gods having an urban history. A history even that might be compared with developments and gods in other places.

Varro's fragmentary text is even more valuable as he was not the only one entertaining the opinion that the worship of the gods had a history. Other Romans were aware of this at the latest since the early second century BCE.⁴ Cult foundations and cults were remembered and could often be linked to memories of other, political, epidemic or military, events. These memories were not always reliable in a historical-critical sense. But especially where fictitious history, that is, history constructed later was involved, the importance of the religious framework of historical memory becomes particularly clear: after all, there would have been alternatives to a religious associations of such "events".

In the following I will focus on the history of the stabilization of notions of the divine in contexts of urban settlements with their characteristics of density of living as well as interaction. Thus, I will not only enlarge Varro's perspective, but even more set him into a larger context of city-induced religious change. More precisely, my interest is in the development of polytheism as an urban history.⁵ The term polytheism refers to religious beliefs that assume the existence of several superhuman beings who are conceptualized by the human protagonists as belonging to a class of "gods". Typically, its characteristics are supposed to include an even more complex

³ On the notion used by Castoriadis see Bloomfield 2006.

⁴ See Cancik 2001; Rüpke 2014.

⁵ For polytheism in an inter-urban development, Berthelet, Van Haeperen 2021; see also Bonnet *et al.* 2017. Cf. for a more neo-structuralist approach Pirenne-Delforge 2020.

symbolic arrangement, as sketched by Burkhard Gladigow in his analysis of structural problems of polytheistic religions: “‘Polytheism’ denotes a form of religion that assumes a plurality of person-like gods as acting. This acting is conceptualized as interaction among the gods and as acting upon the ‘world’ and concerning mankind”.⁶ This definition stipulates that these gods are seen not only as objects of cult but subjects and factors of the universe. In polytheistic frameworks the gods’ impact on human life, the fact that their acting could be experienced in human life, cannot be reduced to only one global and ultimate principle: Instead, the model of explanation available for human experience of contingency, is the activity of not totally transparent, not totally fixed divine agents, that – in certain circumstances – could even be in conflict with each other. These assumptions in modern research on polytheism have typically been aligned with the assumption of a naming system which combines a limited range of names with local or occasional cognomens in order to respecify the large divine powers. “Mapping ancient polytheism” has questioned these very assumptions⁷ and I will try to contribute to this enterprise. Before I focus on the specific Roman development, I will briefly sketch the analytical tools for this enterprise. The religious practices and concepts presented by Varro, which have been regarded as an example for the distance of antiquarian systematisation and current religious practices, can serve as an excellent case study for processes that are building blocks for urban histories and their religions across history. Thus, it is a deliberately wide concept of city and of religion that is presented in the following two sections.

2 Terms

Cities are changing religion extensively and in very different ways. In the metropoleis of today, places of traditional religious practices are becoming “cultural heritage”; religious practices are settling in pedestrian zones and backyards; religious organizations are providing urban services and infrastructure from kindergartens to nursing homes, cinemas are becoming spaces for religious experiences.⁸ Religious groups enter into alliances, religious identities enable distancing from the world around them in a way that is otherwise hardly possible. Such changes are not new. This dynamic is a basic feature of urban religion. Religion – as will be shown in the case of ancient Rome – has always been the motor and victim, designer and overcomer of urban settlements. What religion seems to be today – in its different media and organizational forms, its diversity from individual spirituality to utilization by the state – is to a large

⁶ Gladigow 1998, 321 (my translation).

⁷ E.g., Bonnet *et al.* 2019.

⁸ On heritage, Kong 2011; Bosco 2015; Narayanan 2015; Sirisrisak 2015; van de Port/Meyer 2018; cinema, Luckmann 1967.

extent the result of this process. And *vice versa*, these new religious practices and ideas have shaped urban space, urban coexistence and ideas of urbanity within and outside of cities.⁹ As often, insights from the study of antiquity are valuable beyond. “Urban religion”¹⁰ is neither a pre-modern survival nor just a contemporary accident.

Religion and urbanity, living with distant invisible forces and living with oppressively close people, are two of the most successful strategies of the human species. By “religious practices” I mean communication with not unquestionably plausible addressees, with actors beyond the immediate situation, with deceased ancestors or gods.¹¹ From the archaic advanced civilizations to recent and contemporary complex and less complex societies, such practices and ideas that manifest themselves or even become explicit in them are not just somehow attested. Rather, they seem to have played and continue to play a visible, even important or superior role in a multitude of societies, whether in the legitimation of rulers, the construction of public spaces and communication or, to express dissatisfaction and dissent with the ruling administration.¹² Communication with or concerning such “divine” agents might reinforce or reduce human agency, create or modify social relationships and change power relationships.¹³ And such relationships have spatial settings and create spaces.

The phenomenon of urbanisation is much younger. Even though individual monumentalized centres for the gathering of a larger number of people in Asia Minor were already being built in the 9th millennium BCE (Göbekli Tepe¹⁴) and huge circular structures appeared comparatively early in the Northern and Central European Bronze Age,¹⁵ it took further millennia until permanent settlements were established, which are referred to as “cities” due to their size and function in production and exchange. Networks of such large settlements were founded independently of each other in the great river valleys of China and the Indus, of Mesopotamia and Egypt or in the hinterland of the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean, in the fertile crescent and on Crete; only later in Central America and the west coast of South America.¹⁶ But even in the first millennium CE, in the urbanized regions of the Mediterranean, hardly more than ten percent of the population lived in such settlements.¹⁷ Even in the European high medieval period, the percentage is unlikely to have exceeded this dimension. It was probably only around 1500 that Cologne became the first German city to cross the threshold of 40,000 inhabitants and it is only in the very last few

9 On the general state of the art, Rau/Rüpke 2020.

10 On the concept Urciuoli/Rüpke 2018; Rüpke 2020b.

11 See Rüpke 2021.

12 Bellah 2011; Wunn 2005; Rüpke 2016; dissent: Fuchs *et al.* 2019.

13 The following passages are quoted from Rüpke 2020a.

14 Schmidt 2006; Schyle 2016.

15 On temporary centres Smith 2019, 68–75.

16 Overview: Yoffee/Terrenato 2015.

17 For attempts at quantification see Clark 2013.

years that more than half of humanity on a global scale have become city dwellers, and according to United Nation estimates we are rapidly approaching the sixty percent mark.

Of course, one can and must be careful with these figures. Just as one is not yet religious when one dusts off a statue of Buddha or Mary and puts it back on the shelf, so somebody is not a city dweller when she is in a place classified as a city. Critical spatial research in recent decades has taught us to see that spaces are also cultural products, that they become mapped, visitable or even habitable spaces through cultural decisions and practices. From this it follows, as Benno Werlen puts it, that “geographical conditions of human action are to be seen primarily as a social product and only secondarily as a biophysical condition . . . the constitutive processes of geographical realities are fundamental for a multitude of processes of shaping social and cultural realities”, especially also urban realities.¹⁸ Space shapes culture, but it is primarily the culturally shaped space that is capable of doing this.¹⁹

“City” is not simply an objectively measurable quantity – given from so many hectares, from so many inhabitants, from so many population densities, from so many functions. Many high medieval Western European cities enjoying full city rights, the South-Western French *bastides* for instance, had hardly more than a thousand inhabitants and might have even been smaller than some large villages. Many people who stayed in cities were not only no permanent residents, but often no city dwellers either: tourists from rural areas, farmers and traders from the surrounding area or schoolgirls, students, sick people, shoppers from the near or far surroundings. Administrative incorporations of cities in the 20th and 21st centuries did not give millions of inhabitants an urban attitude to life; sometimes this was just giving people headache with now more distant authorities. And *vice versa*, millions of city dwellers have moved to the outskirts, into sub- and peri-urban areas for reasons of cost, in certain phases of life, without giving up their urban identity.²⁰

In short, if we take space as a cultural product seriously, it is not city but urbanity that is relevant:²¹ the perception of being in a city, the will or even pride, desire or burden of it. This can be temporary urbanity, also an urbanity that one seeks to realize outside of a city – and which can at any moment encounter forcibly displaced, forcibly migrated non-urbanites in the same city, who reject precisely this urbanity for themselves or in general and who reject the claim that urbanity is positive as part and parcel of urban ideology. No urban research, if it remains self-reflexive, can escape this problem.

¹⁸ Werlen 2017, 31; 2021.

¹⁹ For a further systematization, Lévy/Lussault 2013 and Lussault 2013 for the mutual constitution of the spatial capacity of the human actor and the space resulting and preceding such action.

²⁰ On suburbanisation, see for example Zimmermann 2015. For the peri-urban: Eckardt 2015.

²¹ Rau 2020.

3 Religion and Urbanity in Mutual Dependence

Part of a widespread urban self-image is to equate urbanisation and modernisation. Yet, already depictions from early cities in Crete from the second millennium BC reveal an unquestionably urban self-perception and self-stylisation in their depiction of a multitude of varying as much as similar houses or multitudes of spectators in fresco scenes. The concept of *urbanitas* as a narrowly defined, even arrogant norm of urban social and educational elites dates back to Roman antiquity, two thousand years ago.²²

For religion and urbanity, the age of the latter concept is telling with regard to the relationship of both. Whenever Modernity determines the self-image of observers, that relationship is often narrated as if the one had replaced the other: urbanization and modernization drove religion out, the cities are the ultimate godless places.²³ My approach replaces such a hypothesis by another one. Both, religion and urbanity, have developed in close interaction. There is no doubt that there was religion before the city, and urbanity was also elaborated for motives other than religious. But in concrete coexistence, in their forms and ideas, the mutual influence is unmistakable. It could hardly be overestimated. The 19th century construction of parish churches and organized pastoral care, revival movements, the Salvation Army and the YMCA, specifically urban forms of assembly rooms and rituals – especially cities prove to be centres of religious dynamics.²⁴ This is true not only in the present, when often only the religion of immigrants has drawn attention to this nexus. Then and now, small shrines and makeshift or mosques are built in the middle of shopping malls or in industrial backyards.²⁵

As a consequence, we cannot simply speak of religion in the city, but need to speak of urban religion. We must ask how religion has changed under certain spatial and social, namely urban conditions, and how such practices and notions of life in the city and as a city, in short: how urbanity has changed under certain religious conditions. Any analytical grid must cover the vastly different processes in the early urban cultures of China, India and the Ancient Orient, in the urban networks of the Mediterranean and Central America, in recent developments in Europe, Asia, and even worldwide, have differed in detail. Only comparison enabled by overarching concepts can capture differences *and* the similarities and the recurring constellations. Only in such a framework the evidence from ancient Rome is of relevance for a wider history of religion.

²² Briefly, Rau 2014; detailed Russo 2016.

²³ Orsi 1999.

²⁴ See for example Day 2014; Lanz 2014, 20; Collins 2009, 60.

²⁵ See the articles in van der Veer 2015a for contemporary Asia, Urciuoli/Maier 2020 for the Mediterranean of the imperial period.

On the basis of the research pursued so far in the research group “Religion and urbanity: reciprocal formations”,²⁶ I suggest a heuristic grid of nine processes that are distinct, even if not fully independent. They are selected due to their importance of the specific medial and spatial aspects of religious practices.²⁷ If religious communication is addressing agents beyond the immediate situation with regard to that situation’s social (human) and spatial limitations, such references to the beyond need to plausibilize the success of the contact by an intensive use and production of short-term and long-term, i.e., structurally plausibilizing media (1–4). The non-territorial, but network-like character²⁸ of such religious communication allows for a corresponding formation of human nodes and networks (5–6) and corresponding, discontinuous take on time (7). Finally, the literally spatial reference to a beyond of the situation is given the form a corresponding discourse on the character of urbanity and urban space itself (8–9). Thus, the processes comprise

- 1) the monumentalization of urban space and the gods,
- 2) the display, the theatricalization of communication with gods, making them tangible even for urban crowds,
- 3) the imaginative and increasingly widespread use of scripture in religious activity and thought, that is, in discourses about divinities,
- 4) the increasing division of labour and professionalisation, which often precedes or surpasses the division of labour in production technology in the religious sphere – not least in the effort to aestheticise it,
- 5) the individualisation of urban actors who do not remain mere descendants of their ancestors,
- 6) the formation of religious groups, on a neighbourly basis or in networks across geographical and family boundaries,
- 7) the religious structuring of time and the temporal structuring of religious ideas and practices,
- 8) the surpassing of world-views centred on one’s own city beyond the city walls, by looking onto other cities, to the underworld and heavenly worlds, and finally
- 9) the imagination of alternatives to the city, the religious exaggeration of the rural and natural environment.

In their sum, such analyses would produce a highly differentiated image of the “gods of the city”, their production and decline, their changing stability and fluidity, their polytheistic interrelation and the changes in the local and translocal networks built by the use of the privileged religious symbols treated as “gods”. What is

²⁶ For a repository of research contributions see “Religion and Urbanity online”, <https://www.degruyter.com/database/urbrel/>.

²⁷ On spatial practices Rau 2019, 115–121.

²⁸ See Lévy 2013a; b.

important to keep in mind is that it is not religious phenomena in urban space that are foregrounded by such an approach. Interest is in the attestation of religious change under urban conditions thus captured and how they have also changed the urban lifestyle and way of life, that is, urbanity, at the city or cities analyzed. In this chapter, it is the first and the third process that provide the focus of my analysis of religious change upon the role of architecture and language in construing, multiplying, and destabilising gods in the city.

4 Temples

Gods and other “special” addressees are made present in acts of religious communication. In many, and in particular in ancient Mediterranean societies, the primary mode of a more permanent presence of these types of religious signs is the setting apart of specific places. In small settlements, typically one such location is marked out and is serving as a religious multi-purpose site, sometimes elaborated by architecture.²⁹ In many instances, the divine recipient is not made obvious; most probably the site allowed for different manners to construct more specific addressees and went hand in hand with their instability, countered maybe by family traditions and other forms of oral communication. Within a type of settlement that is declared as urban by monumental walls and frequently – not always! – characterized by the scarcity of space within, marking out of such places is also made in highly visible and even monumental forms. The multiplicity of divine agents easily assumed in a settlement composed of many and diverse people is reflected in a plurality of sites with much more specific assignments, as can be observed in the city of Rome, to which I now turn. The Greek terms of venerability, *hagnós* and *hierós*, find their equivalents in the Roman proprietary term *sacer*, “property of a deity”. Translating both semantic strategies as “sacred” is common, but blurs the differences. The *consecratio*, the “sanctification”, presupposes clear ownership or even the established absence of private property claims, and allows a permanent placing *and* naming of the divine recipient.³⁰ Making a god is place-making.

It should not go unmentioned that this – as far as sources are reliable – was a very slow process and a process accompanied by a further differentiation. In early Rome, veneration of ancestors, the most or even more important group of other addressees of religious communication, later called the *di manes*, was driven beyond the city walls. Servius’ claim at the end of the fourth century CE that this process led to the differentiation of domestic gods (*penates*) and ancestral spirits (*lares*) might be a good guess of the religious implications of the new urban type of the

²⁹ Short overview for central Italy in Rüpke 2018b, 55–82.

³⁰ For ancient and modern theories of Roman consecration, Rüpke 2019b.

appropriation of space. Space was now increasingly subjected to the demands of a property market and the exchangeability of plots of land, built-up or empty, without any *religionēs* induced by the presence of divine forefathers (and -mothers).³¹

Yet, cities were not only densely populated places, but cities were and are hubs of internal *and* external flows. Within the urban landscape of Rome, there was a mixture of sacred places of “international”, regional, and purely local importance, such as those in neighbourhoods (*vici*).³² Furthermore, the “international” (or at least superregional) level would include monumental buildings like the Capitoline temple of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva (and its multiple re-buildings) as well as probably very tiny structures, as in the case of the sanctuary of Aesculapius on the Tiber island.³³ It was, however, the major sanctuaries that comprised the self-image of urbanity discourses and its display to the members of the wider inter-urban network. They were major assets in inter-urban competition and hierarchical ranking, in terms of visuality as in terms of the services provided, divination, games, entertainment.

All of these sanctuaries were the results of contingent, situational, sometimes individual decisions. An important source for the establishment of temples were – economically speaking – the decisions of victorious generals to allocate parts of their booty to the gods (which they had to share with their soldiers and the public treasury), or – speaking in terms of a new religious innovation of the period – the fulfilment of vows made on the battlefield.³⁴ The differentiation of the divine thus produced went hand in hand with major processes of state formation – and above all accelerated urban growth of what was quickly becoming the capital of Italy.³⁵ Between 302 BC, when a temple to Salus vowed in 311 was dedicated on the Quirinal Hill, and 44 BC, when the legacy of Julius Caesar was acknowledged by the decision to build a temple to Clementia Caesaris, at least 76 temples were erected at Rome. These temples were built on public land, dedicated by ordinary magistrates or specifically appointed magistrates (*duoviri aedibus dedicandis*). Apart from booty, extraordinary public money (e.g., penalties, as in the case of Venus Obsequens) or the decision of the Senate to ward off prodigies (as in the case of Apollo, according to tradition) would form the basis of the decision to build. The alphabetical arrangement demonstrates the systemic result of the irregular and only slightly regulated process.³⁶

31 In more detail Rüpke 2018b, 250 on Serv. *Aen.* 5.64 and 6.152. – The following draws on Rüpke 2018c.

32 Lott 2004; Flower 2017.

33 A courtyard with rooms? See MAR 42.

34 Orlin 1997; Rüpke 2019a. For the invention of the vow, Rüpke 2018a.

35 For the concept of state formation, Terrenato, Haggis 2011. A closer look at the transformation of religious sites in architectural and ritual perspectives is taken by Arnhold 2020.

36 Siehe Ziolkowski 1992, 187–188; Wissowa 1912, 594–596.

In urban terms, these architectural ensembles were an important means of demonstrating a city's piety, power, and wealth, as much to the inhabitants as to visitors. Monumentalization did not only concern single temples, but connected independent but adjacent temples by pavements or porticoes, as in the case of the Largo Argentina. Whole building complexes in the centre of the city and adjacent spaces like the Campus Martius, including porticoes, theatres, and basilicas, were realized by leading figures like Pompey or Caesar. The latter's building project lasted well into the Augustan period.

How did people know about the sanctuaries and the specific powers of a god? We hardly know. Rituals and the staging of a popular festival were certainly important. Integration into processional routes must have been important. And for the rest, spread by word of mouth was probably ubiquitous. Such "urban talk" (Richard Lim) about religious sites and above all events (in expectation as in the aftermaths) must have been a basic feature of the intersection of religion and urbanity.

Private foundations on private grounds accrued. They were regarded as *sacra-ria*, places of individual and family worship that were not binding for the buyer (*emptor*) of the house or garden but should and could be easily transferred.³⁷ Nevertheless, in some cases such sanctuaries might last for generations (although we should not be overconfident as to the continuity of private cults and colleges). In many quarters, open-air shrines of various local or religious groups could be found. Beyond the largesse of the emperor and his patronage and sponsorship, important above all in the very capital, the multitude of such intramural and extramural – funerary – initiatives defined the many, overlapping, and changing religious spaces of action and experience for the wide variety of urban actors.

Religiously, the large variety of memories and gods related to the foundation and probably even more the different atmospheres and opportunities afforded by the sites and institutionalized (and developing) practices catered for biographical needs in contingencies of big decisions, economic or political daring, illnesses, and the insecurities of daily life in neighbourhoods or cross-urban networks. This polytheism is a spatial urban configuration, not a theological system, but an assemblage of overlapping local, social, and associative networks of sites, characterized by growth and decay, intensification, innovation of practices or individual falling into disuse. Ever more often important public events were marked by their indiscriminate use, the so-called *supplicatio ad omnia pulvinaria*, that is in plain English: pray at whatever site with a minimum of religious infrastructure. This was what Roman religion was like in the first century BCE. Augustus boasted of more than 800 of such holidays during his reign.

³⁷ Ulp. *Dig.* 1.8.9.2 with Ando 2008, 112–113.

5 Names

Urbanistic theory was not the only way to come to grips with the urban shape of religion that had not only produced a differentiated “pantheon”, but produced a dissipated monumental form and ritual practices that reached ever larger audiences, the processes numbered 1 and 2. By the 1st century BCE even theatres – given temporary structures for reasons of political security only so far – were built up in monumental form. Competition and role differentiation had produced priestly roles that were professionalised only on the social margins of society but were hardening in terms of institutionalisation of subaltern personnel, to add number 4. Yet, for the last section of this chapter, I will focus on number 3.

As architecture allowed to give permanent shape to conceptions of the divine beyond material gifts and depictions, writing allowed the fixation and elaboration of names beyond and apart from place-making. Again, I would like to stress the urban context of these developments that betray the urban rather than some archaic character of the divinities involved.³⁸

Hermann Usener chose the gods in question here as the starting point for his conceptualisation of *Sondergötter* (“special gods”).³⁹ The Latin keyword is *indigitamenta*. Servius, who provides the corresponding Varronian fragment (87 Cardauns) from the beginning of the fourteenth book,⁴⁰ obviously understands the word as a synonym for priestly books, but the meaning does not go beyond invocations: it seems that here a remark by Varro about the Pontifices in the context of the lists of gods led to a corresponding reception.⁴¹ Objectively, it is about compilations of gods that are assigned to certain areas in a very detailed way. The oldest example of this is provided by one of the earliest writers on religious issues, Fabius Pictor, who probably belongs to the first half of the second century BCE. He “enumerates the gods whom the Flamen invokes when he performs the Ceres sacrifice to Tellus and Ceres: the furrow-breaker, the re-plougher, the furrow-sower, the over-plougher, the harrower, the chopper, the weeder, the reaper, the gatherer, the scourer, the retriever.”⁴²

Varro enriches our knowledge in the middle of the first century BCE with gods “from the conception of man” (the number of which he begins with Ianus) and continued the series until the death of a decayed man (and concludes the gods concerning

³⁸ The following is based on Rüpké 2005.

³⁹ Usener 1948 (1896), 75–79.

⁴⁰ Servius, *Georgica* 1.21.

⁴¹ For the use of language, see Paul. Fest. 101 L: “Indigitamenta are (sung) invocations (*incantamenta*) or symbols (*indicia*)”; cf. Serv. auct. *Aen.* 2.141.

⁴² Fabius Pictor, Pontifical Law 16th Book (fr. 6 Seckel/Kübler): *Fabius Pictor hos deos enumerat quos invocat flamen sacrum Cereale faciens Telluri et Cereri: Vervactorem, Redaratorem, Inporcitem, Insitorem, Obaratorem, Occatorem, Sarritorem, Subruncinatorem, Messorum, Convectorem, Conditorem, Promitorem*. The fragment comes from Serv. *Georg.* 1, 21.

man himself with the goddess Nenia, who sings at the burial of old men); then he began to depict other gods that do not concern man himself, but what belongs to the human realm, as food and clothing and everything else necessary for life.⁴³ The fact that Varro includes these gods in his work as *di certi*, “exactly known deities”, is connected with the declared aim of not only explaining the deities to his fellow citizens in genetic-historical terms, but also of making them useful to the urbanites by finding out in each case the purpose of any successful invocation: “which god we must invoke and summon in each individual case.”⁴⁴

Insofar as the Varronian fragments or the parallel tradition still reveal ritual contexts, the relevant deities are invoked alone or in pairs, at most in groups of three.⁴⁵ This points to an unsurprising separation of cult and speculation and suggests that the Varronian compilations are incomplete; on the other hand, the later interest in precisely these – this is the Christian reception perspective – absurdities ensured a detailed tradition: over forty percent of the fragments of the sixteen-volume work come from the fourteenth book *De dis certis* in Cardauns’ count.

The material should be presented at least in outline. The following deities are named for the process from conception to the care of the newborn: *Ianus* opens the entrance for the semen, *deus Consevius* presides over the insemination, *Saturnus* is responsible for the semen itself, *Liber* frees the man from semen during coitus, *Libera* the woman who, according to Varro, also contributes semen to the act of procreation. *Fluvionia* nourishes the child in the womb; *Dea Mena*, who, according to Augustine’s sequence, “precedes” menstruation, directs the monthly blood flow to the growth of the foetus;⁴⁶ *Alemona* is responsible for intrauterine rearing; *Vitumnus* strengthens the life force, *Sentinus* the sensory force of the foetus. The three goddesses of fate, *Parca*, *Nona* and *Decima*, ensure birth at the right time, namely in the ninth or tenth month. As *Diespater*, Iuppiter leads the foetus to the day, *Lucina* brings it to light – the etymological designations, the consonance of thing and deity become clear even in the translation. Here, methods developed in Greek philosophy and firmly established in Roman antiquarian reasoning are lavishly employed. In addition to the cult of *Lucina* and *Diana* during the birth, a table (with gifts) is set up for *Iuno* in the following week; at the end of the week,⁴⁷ the *dies lustricus* probably, the *fata scribunda*, perhaps the gods of fate who write down names and the like, are invoked. In Cardauns’ not always unproblematic but well-justified sequence of fragments, we return to the birth situation after this digression. For those giving birth for the first time under candlelight, *Candelifera* is important. Two Carmentes, *Postverta* and *Prorsa*, take care of the head or breech position of the child and at the same time announce

⁴³ Aug. civ. 6.9 = Varro ant. rer. div. 88 Cardauns.

⁴⁴ Varro ant. rer. div. 3 Cardauns.

⁴⁵ Pairs: *ibid.*, fr. 101, 103, groups of three: 98, 199.

⁴⁶ See the commentary by Cardauns 1976, 193 AD locum.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

the fate of the newborn. *Fortuna* joins them in an unknown function. *Opis* presents the newborn laid on the earth with a gift. With the *deus Vaticanus* lie the first sounds of the newborn, the “Vas”. *Aius*, *Farinus* and *Locutius* as well as *Fabulinus* (for the first speech) are also responsible for speech.⁴⁸ The *dea Levana* supports the father, who lifts the child from the earth and thus acknowledges it; the role of the *Albana* is unknown. Three deities protect the mother in the following: *Intercidona*, *Pilumnus* and *Deverra* – speaking names in relation to symbolic activities of three men. *Cunina* protects the cradle; *diva Rumina* brings the breast close; *diva Potina* and *diva Educa* provide drink and food.⁴⁹ Deities who look after the standing of children, their departure and return home, their mental health and the like continue the list; *Numeria*, for example, teaches counting.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the jurisdiction of various representatives of the *di nuptiales* or *coniugales*⁵¹ ranges from dowries to details of the sexual act, from position to defloration. Embarrassed, Augustine sometimes refuses precise factual explanations. Even, if we are deep into Varronian idiosyncrasies, he is only part of a wider process of systematisation of religion enabled by the use of writing.

These reflections were part of longer processes of rationalisation in general and systematisation of religion during the two final centuries of the Roman Republic in particular.⁵² Varro himself is to be placed in a broader stream. Varro’s lists reflect the urban development of a systematised polytheistic structure with the help of philosophical theology and the latter’s inherent monotheistic tendency. That Varro saw this theoretical conflict in his elaboration long before any conflict with Jews or Christians is revealed by his frequent attempt to interpret the deities mentioned as appearances of Iuppiter.⁵³ Even more important, however, is that Celsus affirms what the preface to Varro’s fourteenth book only suggests, but which the fragmentary state of the text makes unverifiable: these lists of gods by no means address everything.

Where is the common denominator? It is about human action. In particular, it is about risky human action. Although such risks are also accompanied ritually in individual cases, it is obvious that specific rituals are missing or that the precision of the theological assignment far exceeds the ritual differentiation. Pictor’s Flamen addresses twelve gods in a prayer, in the ritual framework of the *sacrum cereale* – he does not offer twelve sacrifices. If one reads the lists as elements of a theory of action, they do not add up to a unified theory – abstraction is omitted. What is recognisable, however, is a reflection that breaks down complex actions and processes

⁴⁸ On the latter, whose mention is certain for Varro but not for the *Antiquitates*, see *ibid.*, 204.

⁴⁹ The series presented in fr. 90–114.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, fr. 137.

⁵¹ Fr. 144–156.

⁵² See Rüpke 2012.

⁵³ See Aug. *civ.* 4.11 on Varro *ant. rer. div.* 100. 104–107. 112–114 Cardauns.

into minimal parts, atomises them.⁵⁴ Without excluding the pleasure of playing with thoughts in individual cases, the attempt to concentrate the formation of units on risks, on situations in which there are alternatives to action or the course of the process,⁵⁵ becomes clear.

It is important to pay very precise attention to the use of language and to consider possible changes to the text through the fragmentary units of transmission. The assignment of the deity to its domain forms a separate area of reflection. *Praeesse*, “to preside over”, is probably the most common formulation.⁵⁶ Alternatives to this are two substantive formulations, both of which can probably be traced back to Varro: It is about *officia* or *munera*, about offices and duties of the deities.⁵⁷ In the introduction to Varro’s first book, further terms are added: power, ability, authority – *potestas*.⁵⁸

Linguistically, the relationship of the deities to their domains is described according to the pattern of public power relations – an “administration” that might be distinguished from this does not exist in the late Republican Rome. Such an attribution is to be seen against the background of a concept of office that does not positively describe official power as a bundle of precisely described competences, but first of all limits unrestricted power casuistically and through mechanisms such as collegiality, short terms of office and appeal instances. Projecting such notions onto theological concepts and thus developing systematics of urban administration in religious terms, the parallelism of urban administration and religious space of reflection becomes clear:⁵⁹ the multiplicity of gods limits their domain temporally as well as collegially; in individual cases, divine competitions remain side by side in collegial construction, without clear superordination or subordination: Nona and Decima, Prorsa and Postverta offer examples of this.⁶⁰ At the same time, it is precisely the strict thematic

⁵⁴ Cf. Aug. civ. 4.16 p. 165,24 gf.: . . . *cum deos singulos singulis rebus et paene singulis motibus adtribuerunt* . . .

⁵⁵ However, the parallel tradition for Varro, which exists at least sporadically, allows us to consider this factor to be small. It is difficult to prove that he actually invented names’ (Cardauns 1976, 240). Both Wissowa’s fundamental criticism of the value of the names (Wissowa 1904) and Otto’s attempts to save them, for example, as gentile names (Otto 1909), are to be rejected in principle (not in every detail).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, *passim*: Cf. Serv. auct. Aen. 2.141 (= Varro fr. 1 Agahd): . . . *quia et pontifices dicunt singulis actibus proprios deos praeesse*.

⁵⁷ Varro ant. rer. div. 88 as well as (*officia*) Aug. civ. 6.9 p. 262,29 and Serv. Georg. 1.21.

⁵⁸ Varro ant. rer. div. 3 Cardauns: . . . *quam quisque deus vim et facultatem ac potestatem cuiusque rei habeat*.

⁵⁹ The same parallelism is evident in Cicero’s mutual mapping of magistracies and religious institutions in *De legibus*. Against the background in the newer research in the precariousness of power, Graeber/Sahlins 2017, 3, stress the importance of cosmic models and their “metapersons” in regard to the configuration of human power.

⁶⁰ Cf. Gladigow 1990, 246 f. for Greek alternatives in dealing with competition problems.

separation – theologically it is about human individual life, not urban structures – that opens up the space for comprehensive, systematic reflection.

Abbreviation

MAR Haselberger, Lothar (2008). *Mapping Augustan Rome*. Journal of Roman Archaeology suppl. series 50. Portsmouth, RI.

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