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978-1-107-09052-1 - Religious Deviance in the Roman World: Superstition or Individuality?

Jörg Rüpke

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ROMAN WORLD

Religious individuality is not restricted to modernity. This book offers a new reading of the ancient sources in order to find indications for the spectrum of religious practices and intensified forms of such practices only occasionally denounced as “superstition”. Authors from Cicero in the first century BCE to the law codes of the fourth century CE share the assumption that authentic and binding communication between individuals and gods is possible and widespread, even if problematic in the case of divination or the confrontation with images of the divine. A change in practices and assumptions throughout the imperial period becomes visible. It might be characterized as “individualization” and it informed the Roman law of religions. The basic constellation – to give freedom of religion and to regulate religion at the same time – resonates even into modern bodies of law and is important for juridical conflicts today.

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REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION,

TRANSLATED BY

DAVID M. B. RICHARDSON



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The character of ancient Mediterranean religion of the Hellenistic and Imperial periods has come under debate. Rather than stressing the public, political, and collective character of what is frequently conceptualized as “pre-Christian” (or rather extra-Judaeo-Christian) religion(s), a number of recent studies have highlighted emotional and dynamic aspects, discourse and belief, the individual and the network within which he or she functions. Julia Kindt and Esther Eidinow, for instance, have offered observations and concepts in respect of the religion of Greek cities; members and guests of the Religious Individualization in Historical Perspective and Lived Ancient Religion research groups at Erfurt have done the same for Republican as well as Imperial Roman religion.¹ Evidently, the discussion is not only about adding a feature to the model of *polis* or civic religion, but about replacing that model as the primary mode of description. This brings methodological² and theoretical consequences.³ The debate is far from resolved.⁴ The present book follows just one facet of that debate, but an important one: the problem of individual religious behaviour at or beyond the margins of general approval. As it turns out, the concept of deviance and the evidence of behaviour called deviant offer an important insight both into public religious norms and into the primacy and persistence of individual religious experience and claims built upon it.

¹ Eidinow 2007, 2011, 2013; Kindt 2009, 2012; Rüpke and Spickermann 2012; Cusamano et al. 2013; Kracke, Roux, and Rüpke 2013; Rüpke 2013a, 2013b; Rüpke and Woolf 2013; Rüpke 2014a, 2014b.

² See Raja and Rüpke 2015.

³ As outlined in Rüpke 2015a and more generally *Religion* 45 (2015), issue 1.

⁴ See, in particular, Scheid 2013.

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For intensive discussions during the very much longer development phase, I thank the members of research group FOR 1013 of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) at the Max Weber College for Cultural and Sociological Studies at Erfurt University, in particular Clifford Ando, Martin Fuchs, Richard Gordon, Dietmar Mieth, Wolfgang Spickermann, and Greg Woolf. Can religion be a medium of individualization? Under what conditions does religion achieve this? How can religious activity provide a context for individualization, for the development of individuality? When, and under what conditions, do religious institutions (understood in a broad sense) secure individualization in the long term, or perpetuate it? How do assumptions about the collective character of religion inform academic historical narratives? These questions posed by the Erfurt

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research group Religious Individualization in Historical Perspective, together with the problem of their application to the religions of ancient cities and societies, have formed the basis for the themes discussed in this book. The group has proved to be a productive vehicle of intellectual exchange; it was encouraged and enabled in its pursuit of a variety of topics by generous funding from the DFG, the necessary framework having been created with the support of the University of Erfurt, and in particular Bettina Hollstein and Diana Püschel. I offer my heartfelt thanks to all.

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