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Introduction

Festivals, secular or religious, their changing history, and their power of persistence as the most vivid expression of communal life have always attracted me. Living on another continent, I have come to realize that growing up in Switzerland had in part shaped this fascination. A remote part of the country still celebrates the *Kalendae Martiae*, or rather, in the local Ladin language, the *Chalanda Marz*; they were made famous to two generations of Swiss children through Alois Carigiet's splendid pictures that illustrate the story of *Schellenursli*, the boy who found the largest cowbell. Modern Chalanda Marz is a festival performed by boys to drive out Winter, as the explanation goes, with the ringing of cowbells, the larger and louder the bell the better: this is far from the Roman Matronalia, the funk they induced in Horace, and the fiery anger they provoked in Tertullian, but it fascinates the historian all the more; Chalanda shares with many other festivals the irrelevance of its aetiology, and the fate of having become a children's entertainment. Stodgy Zurich, my home for two decades, celebrates another expulsion of Winter in its *Sechseläuten*, James Joyce's "Sexaloitez." The rite is a solemn, even sometimes pompous self-presentation of the local bourgeoisie, with a parade of the city elite disguised in historical costumes or wearing their officer's parade uniforms: hence the joke in Joyce's word play. The final, spectacular act, when the bells of Zurich's city church strike ("*läuten*") six, is the burning of a paper snowman, loaded with explosives, atop a high pyre; young men (and nowadays women) on horseback circle the burning and exploding pyre. Its Frazerian paganism only thinly veils its nineteenth-century invention; this taught me the existence and importance of invented traditions long before I came across Hobsbawm and Ranger's celebrated book. Looking back, then, this world made me receptive for the vicissitudes of Lupercalia that were re-invented as a courtly Spring ritual in tenth-century Byzantium, or of the Kalendae Ianuariae that tenaciously survived in many guises in the medieval societies around the Mediterranean Sea, including as a children's game in

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Islamic North Africa, despite the attacks by Jewish rabbis, Christian bishops, and Muslim clerics over many centuries.

This book treats festivals in the eastern half of the Roman empire in the millennium between the reigns of Augustus and Constantine Porphyrogennetos. In past scholarship, Greek and Roman festivals have fared somewhat better than other aspects of the religions of the Imperial age, but neither was at the center of scholarly attention in the way especially sacrifice was in the last half-century, or mysteries were in the age of Cumont. With the exception of the ruler cults treated in several seminal monographs, from Lucien Cerfaux and Jean Louis Tondriau (1957) through Fritz Taeger (1960) and Simon Price (1984) to Duncan Fishwick's many volumes (1987–2005), and the mystery cults whose treatment is slowly evolving from under the shadow of Franz Cumont, the religions in the Imperial period did not fare too well until very recently. By now, the splendid survey of Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price has opened Rome's Imperial religion to a wider group of readers and scholars, successfully moving away from the concentration on Republican (or even pre-Republican) religion that has been the inheritance of Wissowa and Dumézil. On the Greek side, it was mainly epigraphical studies on Asia Minor that brought more information and insight on the religions of the Imperial Age, but with a much smaller impact: epigraphy is still perceived as, and is indeed, a specialist's domain and usually overlooked by the historians of ancient religion, despite the efforts of scholars such as Louis Robert, John Scheid, Michael Wörrle, Kevin Clinton, and Angelos Chaniotis.

Festivals, on the other hand, have mostly been treated as a problem of historical and antiquarian reconstruction, with the books of William Warde Fowler (1899), Martin P. Nilsson (1906), and Ludwig Deubner (1932) setting the pace and several later monographs revisiting the evidence and adding new material, without opening up new perspectives.[1] There are exceptions. The conference volume on *La fête, pratique et discours* that Françoise Dunand edited in 1981 is remarkable for its interest in the contemporary reflection about festivals, and Walter Burkert's 1992 attempt to find an inherent logic in the sequence of festivals during the Athenian year remains the most promising attempt to find over-arching structures in the linear sequence of the festival calendar; it inspired me when I reflected on Rome's festivals in my Teubner Lecture. Only during the past decade, however, have collective volumes on ancient festivals multiplied, all of them the result of seminars and conferences, and some have focused on the

[1] An idiosyncratic attempt with not much resonance outside Italy is Sabbatucci (1988).

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Imperial epoch – most importantly the volumes edited by Christian Landes and Jean-Michel Carrié (2007), and by Jörg Rüpke (2008b). Other editors of such collections are more generally interested in festivals and contests of all ages – such as the volumes of André Motte and Charles Ternes (2003), Sinclair Bell and Glenys Davies (2004) and J. Rasmus Brandt and Jon W. Iddeng (2012).

A few scholars, most recently and explicitly Brandt and Iddeng, were explicitly trying to move away from what they defined as an "empirical-positivist" approach, and they are gaining some new ground, although not all the studies in Brandt and Iddeng's collection live up to the onerous claim; the definition and the classification of festivals in Greece and Rome need more discussion, and the term "empirical-positivist" with its polemical undertones does not always do justice to the subtle precision of earlier studies, or their implicit theoretical models.[2] Nilsson (1906), for one, is more shaped by the patient precision of its data than by its soft Frazerian theorizing, and it is the precision, not the concession to a now defunct theory, that has guaranteed its survival; and the same is true for more recent individual case studies. A monograph such as Michael Wörrle's 1988 presentation of an inscription of Hadrianic times that contains the files of an agonistic foundation in small-town Oinoanda remains a model to follow, even if it can be described (or descried) as "empirical-positivist"; the same is true for most contributions in the collection edited by Peter Wilson (2007), with its programmatic subtitle "Documentary Studies," especially its opening contribution by William Slater, which takes account of the epigraphical evidence.

When they reflect on the function and purpose of ancient festivals, most scholars have followed an implicit or explicit Durkheimian paradigm, expanded towards a Geertzian understanding of festivals as expressing social order and power structures, sometimes with a whiff of Turnernian *communitas* added for additional attraction. This selective methodology was mostly put to a convincing use, given the collective nature of festivals and the irrelevance of "theological" interpretations even in Christian antiquity – especially when they avoided the mysticism that beckoned as a temptation in Turner's approach. Myths and gods did not matter much, as Walter Burkert discovered when he discussed the festival at the terebinths of Mamre, and as became clear when I reflected on the Christian reception of pagan festivals – it was only late antique Christian leaders and late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars whose ideological concerns insisted on the importance of theology

[2] The same is true for the (overused) term "empirico-positivist" in Phillips (2007).

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for festivals.[3] For the present book – at least for the chapters on the Christian transformation of ancient festivals – the most important model was not Durkheim's, Geertz's, or Turner's classical books but Mona Ozouf's splendid and patient *La fête révolutionaire* of 1976, a book that is as much about the need of any articulated human group to celebrate festival as it is about conscious and ideology-driven change of the festival's calendar and character, and that should be compulsory reading for all who work on late antiquity and the transition to the Christian religions.

This book treats a small selection from among the many festivals that either the city on the Tiber or any city of the Roman East celebrated. I treat these festivals because, in the world of ancient festivals, they constitute a double paradox and surprise: they are translocal, and they survive the transformation of the polytheist world into monotheist Christianity (and, in one case, one step further into monotheist Islam). This caught my interest, and raised questions. (This, by the way, is the first and almost last time in this book that I will use the term "polytheist," which I do not use as an overly politically correct way of avoiding "pagan" but as a descriptive term. Otherwise, I will unhesitatingly use "pagan" to describe aspects of the non-Christian, or non-Jewish, traditional religious systems of the ancient world that are far from uniform as to ritual forms or doctrinal contents, not to mention both the obvious facts that monotheism was thought of long before the rise of Christianity, or that the description of Christianity as monotheist contradicts living religious reality.[4])

Handbooks teach us that festivals in the ancient world were radically local, confined to one city and even to one of its subgroups, as expressions of group identity and specificity; the many monographs with a local name in their title, including Rome, bring that point easily home.[5] Translocal festivals such as the tribal Panionia or the panhellenic Olympia conformed to the pattern but enlarged the group beyond one city; festivals in single cities that were related by concern or divinity or both still took specific local forms, such as Thesmophoria or Dionysia, or the festivals of the ruler cult from Hellenistic kings to Roman emperors. Only with the rise of Christianity did some festivals become global, driven by a global religious creed – or, to remain more modest, pan-Mediterranean in the extensive sense the term is used by historians such as Cyprian Broodbank – and even

[3] Burkert (2012), 42: "There seems to be no common religious dogma for the festival, no 'theology' of the event, no authoritative sacred tale."
[4] See the reflections in Cameron (2011), 14–32 and Jones (2012), followed by Cribiore (2013), 7.
[5] On Rome and the export of the festival calendar (or refusal thereof) see Feeney (2007), 209–211; for a list of local studies on Greece see the introduction to the 1995 reprint of Nilsson (1906), ix*.

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then adding some local colors. The spread of a traditional city festival to another city is almost unheard of before the Imperial age, and the spread from the Roman West to the Greek East is even more surprising. But surprise is the mother of curiosity. Of these Western city festivals, I want not only to know how they arrived in the East, where they were celebrated, and how and why they changed their form, and sometimes their name, over the course of the centuries; I also want to know whether and how this changed the very conception of festival.

Some of these festivals survived into a Christian empire – not as a pagan survival that was destined to disappear with "full" Christianization, but as a festival in its own right, albeit sometimes tolerated rather than wholeheartedly embraced by radical bishops.[6] This calls for a set of other questions: What were the forces that kept such a festival alive despite the strong opposition of severe Christian theologians, and how does a festival shed its connection with the pagan gods to become acceptable and accepted in a Christian world? What are the reconceptualizations necessary to do this, and what was their effect on how festivals were understood?

The topic is not entirely new. A few individual festivals have received scholarly attention in the past, most prominently the best-attested case, the Kalendae Ianuariae; but Michel Meslin's 1970 book-long investigation was mainly interested in the Latin West before the rise of Christianity: Christianization is sketched rather cursorily, despite the long-standing and well-documented opposition of local bishops.[7] Two other late festivals were the subject of learned doctoral dissertations. John Crawford treated the Brumalia in his 1916 Harvard thesis, a thorough investigation but written in Latin, which impeded its reception; half a century later, A. W. J. Holleman focused his Amsterdam dissertation more narrowly on pope Gelasius' resistance against the Lupercalia.[8] A few other late antique festivals received some attention as well but do not feature in this book because they are confined to the Latin West, as the Volcanalia, or did not originate in Rome although they were celebrated there, as the Maiouma or the festivals of Isis, or they remained family celebrations, as the Rosalia.[9]

The book has a relatively straightforward plan. Chapter 1 is exclusively Greek and deals with festivals in some Eastern cities of the first centuries of

[6] On such festivals see e.g. Aug. *Epist.* 17.1 or 91.8.
[7] See Kaldellis (2011) on the Byzantine Kalendae. [8] Crawford (1914–1919); Holleman (1974).
[9] Volcanalia: Opelt (1970). Maiouma: Greatrex and Watt (1999); Belayche (2004). Isis: Alföldi (1937) Rosalia: Kokkinia (1999); on the army ritual Hoey (1937).

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the Imperial Age. The chapter cannot be, nor does it want to be, the much-needed supplement to Nilsson's *Griechische Feste*, which concentrates almost entirely on the pre-Roman centuries even when he uses a large amount of later information from inscriptions as well as from Pausanias. Rather, the chapter is a loose series of case studies that aims to understand the specific forms festivals took in the Greek cities of the Imperial age, distinct and different from the polis festivals of Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greece. The evidence is mostly epigraphical, and among the flood of inscriptions from the period I have selected a few cases that allow for broader generalizations and make clear how and why these imperial cities could absorb the insertion of Roman city festivals.

Chapter 2 deals with Roman festivals in the East before Constantine. The most interesting and most detailed evidence comes from the Rabbinic debates about idolatrous festivals in Iudaea Palaestina. These discussions, preserved in the Jerusalem Talmud, mark the earliest moment when such festivals in an Eastern province become visible to scholarship, and the rabbis' attempts to articulate opposition to them sheds invaluable light on the complexities of religion in the Empire. Compared to this coherent body of texts, the rest of the evidence is sketchy and as haphazard as the adoption of Roman festivals outside Rome.

With the third chapter, we move beyond Constantine, his foundation of a second Rome that closely followed its Western sibling, and his tolerance that opened the world to Christianity, with its new festivals. The chapter concentrates on one legal text with vast consequences, the reform of the legal calendar of Rome codified by the first Theodosius in Rome in early August of 389. Given the high walls that surround the study of Roman law, breached by a few pioneers such as John Matthews and Fergus Millar, the text has not yet received the attention it deserves among the historians of ancient religions, including early Christianity. But the law code put together on the order of the second Theodosius has remained a constant source of fascination to me, and I have come to understand how it stands next to *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, the Septuagint and Vulgate as the most influential books from the ancient world.

The chapter on Theodosius' law gave me the occasion not just to look at new Christian festivals, but also to look at the Christian opposition to older pagan festivals, not least the festivals of Rome that became festivals of the Empire. Chapter 4 looks in more detail at these debates. Given the imperial protection of many traditional festivals, the opposition of powerful bishops to them was also an opposition to the imperial government. But this was never explicitly stated, with good reasons. In a world where "even for the

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most courageous, many topics were taboo," in Peter Brown's formulation, indirect criticism was the most that was permitted.[10]

The rest of the book turns to the centuries after Theodosius I, and does not always stay away from the West. Chapter 5 deals with the Lupercalia, the festival that was already in existence when Romulus founded the city, at least according to the Roman historians, and that not only survived impressively long, until at least the time of Constantine Porphyrogennetos, but also underwent several radical and sometimes spectacular transformations in order to accomplish this survival. I look into the resistance to the festival by pope Gelasius and into the radically changed form it took, centuries later, in Byzantium under Constantine Porphyrogennetos.

Chapter 6 looks at the mythical aetiology for late Roman festivals. Even in the Christian centuries, myth still remained important; it survived and flourished because it was still disguised as history. The chapter is devoted to the one historian whose aetiological Roman stories were most influential throughout Byzantine history, John Malalas, the contemporary of Justinian. His narration of Rome's origins between Romulus and Brutus contains the explanation of several festivals. Although these stories are sometimes derided (or plainly ignored) by the historians of ancient religion and mythology, they were important to explain and legitimize customs of Justinian's time to the contemporary world, and to those who came later.

The Brumalia, the topic of Chapter 7, is another Roman festival that survived beyond Constantine Porphyrogennetos. Unlike Kalendae and Lupercalia, it received its name only in Constantine's city; but it had a Western predecessor in the Bruma already vilified by Tertullian. The chapter follows the history of this seasonal celebration, from its modest form as a household festival in the second century CE to its development into the almost month-long festival celebrated by the Byzantine court.

Another festival of *longue durée* is the Kalendae Ianuariae. This festival, already treated in earlier chapters, especially in Chapter 2 in its Palestinian context, will be treated again in Chapter 8 in its Byzantine form. The neglect of its later Greek appearances by Meslin has been somewhat corrected recently: thus, my chapter is both a summary of recent scholarship in the framework of the present book, and an outlook to the festival's survival and transformation in later times.

In many ways, what had started as an investigation into the presence of a few Roman festivals in the cities of the Greek East turned also into a

[10] Brown (2012), 56.

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narration of how paganism disguised itself in a Christian world, to the dismay of many bishops but to the delight of the crowds. Chapter 9 looks at another aspect of the same transformation and analyzes the Jerusalem liturgy, as known especially through the report of Egeria, on the background of the phenomenology of Roman festivals developed in the preceding chapters; the analysis stresses both continuities and radical changes.

The final two chapters follow this thread of Christianization in two topics that might surprise in a book on festivals: incubation and magic. The examination of these rituals of the individual are intended as a contrast to the collective festivals; as often, such a contrast throws the object of research into greater relief.

Incubation (Chapter 10) was an integral part of healing rituals in the pagan world, most impressively in the cult of Asklepios. But incubation in some form made its way also into Christian cult; even today scholars regard this still through the eyes of the Frazerian Ludwig Deubner, as if it were a pagan survival. Through several case studies, the chapter tries to understand what incubation in a Christian ritual context really meant, and whether scholars are really justified to import the pagan term into a new world.

The following chapter on the Christianization of pagan magic (Chapter 11) returns to the intersection of ritual and Roman law. Strictly speaking, Christian bishops rejected magic as fiercely as they rejected the Kalendae or Brumalia. Constantine, however, in his legislation on sorcery, had left a loophole that future generations were to exploit, once again provoking the ire of bishops, even against more pliable popes. Constantine had permitted rites to protect the crops from damage, and later usage extended this to the amulets that protected the individual from harm. Not unlike the festivals, these rites survived under the umbrella of legal protection.

The epilogue does not only pull the threads of a complex argument together. It also attempts a synthesis driven by two questions: Why did festivals survive, despite the onslaught of generations of bishops and their collective outcries? And how does this intersect with the problem recently made prominent in two independent investigations, namely the end of sacrifice, given that in the most pervasive view of pagan festivals sacrifices are at their very core? Earlier scholars sometimes had attempted an answer by resorting to general anthropological needs of *homo ludens*; this does not appeal to me. I will instead try to stay inside the historical specificity of the centuries with which this book is dealing and with people firmly embedded in their time and society.

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PART I

Festivals in the Greek East before Constantine

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