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Narratives as Factor and Indicator of Religious Change in the Roman Empire (1st and 2nd Centuries)

Jörg RÜPKE, Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, University of Erfurt, Germany

ABSTRACT

Religious change is difficult to measure if neither contemporary observations (or more precisely: impressions and narratives) of change nor serial data about size, frequency or budgets of religious practices exist. The article proposes to identify change in narratives that do not narrate, but reflect otherwise attested political and discursive changes. Crucial elements, identified on the basis of narratological theories, are frames like empire and narrative and strategies like diversification and authorship. While a wide array of authors is taken into account, special emphasis is given to religious entrepreneurs like Valerius Maximus, Plutarch, and Marcion.

1. Introduction: Religious change and literary practices

The post-Augustan Principate witnessed the appearance of a large amount of literary texts dealing with gods or persons and practices related to the gods.[1] I consciously avoid the term religious texts or 'texts dealing with religion'. Religion as a set of practices and ideas, which informed individual agency, communication, and collective identity,[2] is at least partly a result of such textual practices rather than simply the object of them. Only slowly a feeling on the part of individuals developed on a larger scale that they belong to a religiously defined group even beyond certain ritual occasions. It started to be a characteristic of the concretization called 'religion' that such a collective identity of individuals was matched by religious organizations and religious specialists who demanded that this collective identity be unique and all-pervading – an ideal

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[2] See Jörg Rüpke, 'Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflecting on History and Theory of Religion', *Religion* 45/3 (2015), 344-66.

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only very rarely achieved and usually temporarily at best.[3] To conceptualize certain literary practices as part of religious practices at large is adequate for earlier texts at Rome[4] as well as other parts of the Mediterranean (for instance Greece and Judea), too, and produces a more nuanced image of ancient religion.

Given the scarcity of serial data for Antiquity, we need to state changes by e.g. relying on epigraphic habits that we infer on the basis of a million ancient inscriptions,[5] yet it is far more difficult to corroborate the scholarly intuition that during the first two centuries of the imperial age more elaborate literary practices played a bigger role than earlier on. The exceptional success of Marcion from the mid-second century onwards is part of this phenomenon. However, I will not focus on his texts. Our long-term image of imperial developments is already heavily tinted by post-70 Jewish and Judeo-Christian literature. The scope of any analysis must be broadened. I assume that the quick proliferation of many symbols and practices throughout the Roman Empire is hardly imaginable without allotting a role to literary communication, even if these texts are lost almost in their entirety. This development, however, is a presupposition of my article rather than the aim of my argument.

As Greg Woolf and more recently Clifford Ando have stressed, the rise of the Roman Empire imposed a superstructure on local authority, which led to a restructuring of authority and political identities.[6] A trans-local level was always, or at least easily, present, inviting to question local authority or even avoid and emigrate from it and thus giving prominence to the individual.[7]

[3] See Eric Rébillard, 'Material culture and religious identity in late antiquity', in Rubina Raja and Jörg Rüpke (eds), *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World* (Boston, 2015), 427-36.

[4] See e.g. Dennis Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts, and Beliefs* (Cambridge, 1998); Andreas Bendlin and Jörg Rüpke (eds), *Römische Religion im historischen Wandel. Diskursentwicklung von Plautus bis Ovid*, Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 17 (Stuttgart, 2009).

[5] On the rise of using Latin inscriptions from the Augustan to the Severan period see Ramsay MacMullen, 'The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire', *AJPh* 103 (1982), 233-46.

[6] Greg Woolf, 'Polis-Religion and its alternatives in the Roman Provinces', in Hubert Cancik and Jörg Rüpke (eds), *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion* (Tübingen, 1997), 71-84; Clifford Ando, *Imperial ideology and provincial loyalty in the Roman Empire*, Classics and contemporary thought 6 (Berkeley, 2000); Clifford Ando, 'A religion for the empire', in Anthony J. Boyle and William J. Dominik (eds), *Flavian Culture: Culture, image, text* (Leiden, 2003), 323-44; Greg Woolf, 'Local cult in imperial context: the *Matronae* revisited', in Peter Noelke (ed.), *Romanisation und Resistenz in Plastik, Architektur und Inschriften der Provinzen des Imperium Romanum. Neue Funde und Forschungen: Akten des VII. Internationalen Colloquiums über Probleme des Provinzialrömischen Kunstschaffen* (Mainz, 2003), 131-8; Greg Woolf, 'Found in Translation: The Religion of the Roman Diaspora', in Olivier Hekster, Sebastian Schmidt-Hofner and Christian Witschel (eds), *Ritual dynamics and religious change in the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Eighth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Heidelberg, July 5-7, 2007)*, Impact of Empire 9 (Leiden, 2009), 239-52.

[7] The heightened role of individuals in the imperial period, in particular from the 2nd century AD onwards, is argued in Jörg Rüpke and Greg Woolf (eds), *Religious Dimensions of the Self in the Second Century CE*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 76 (Tübingen, 2013).

If empire was the economic and political form of this trans-local level, religion became a major form to locally relate to the trans-local and 'trans-imperial'.[8] The very sub-ject of empire developed from a member of a local polity into an individual, dependent on an (even if only mediated or imagined) individual, the emperor; religious practices focusing on the individual and addressing powers even beyond the emperor could strengthen such a process or even compete with it.[9]

The remnants of religious communication in literary form point to a social dimension not yet adequately captured in this model. Religious practices and reflections related more and more to an actual or imagined social network as stated in the beginning. Networks were users, even if not the only users of texts; the audience of a text might have been much more diverse and dispersed than the participants in a common network. If the new importance of the framework of empire, the heightened role of the individual, and the importance of the capital, of Rome as a hub of intellectual communication, were the primary ingredients of religion in the imperial age, which must have found reflection in literary religious communication, new social formations and collective identities are a result of these developments and the very condition for the intensification of such literary communication.

Networks or even closely organized groups, however, usually were not the actual producers of texts. Michel de Certeau's analysis of historiography has shed light on different, even opposite processes and has given prominence to the writer of history and his or her appropriation and shaping of history in the three perspectives of the (social and topographical) place of the writer, the practices of writing, and the ways to represent history.[10] This critique informs the choice of my approach likewise and demands to take a closer look at authorship.

Against this background I wish to argue that some characteristics of texts related to religious practices are not fortuitous, but were related to this process of religious change. Media history and religious transformation were interconnected. My focus, however, will be much smaller than media *tout court*. I will focus on narratives, thus leaving aside important texts like hymn and prayer, drama or philosophical argument. Narration is story-telling, and narratives are the results. Unlike deductive argument or deictic description, narratives sequence past events, thus giving account of one's own or others' (not necessarily only humans') lives.

[8] See Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, 'Landscape, transformation, and divine epiphany', in Simon Swain, Stephen Harrison and Jaś Elsner (eds), *Severan culture* (Cambridge, 2007), 252 for the importance of such elements as part of religious worldviews.

[9] See Clifford Ando, 'Subjects, Gods, and Empire, or Monarchism as a Theological Problem', in Jörg Rüpke (ed.), *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2013), 85-111 laying stress on the congeniality of Christian monotheism and the character necessary for a subject of the *Imperium Romanum*.

[10] Michel de Certeau, *The writing of history*, trans. Tom Conley (New York, 1988).

For the period under consideration, my choice is based on the potential of such narratives. First and foremost, narrative is a transformation of religious practices into religious knowledge. Narrative is an attempt at and an indicator of communication, engaging in network formation beyond ritual.[11] The uniqueness of the transmitted text is often misleading. It is in itself already a retelling of a story and furthermore an invitation for future re-retellings. Likewise, a letter is not only the telling of a story to a distant addressee, but in many cases may also be an invitation for re-oralizations.[12] Thus it is involved in the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of narrative patterns as much as it cares for old and establishes new types of knowledge.

Secondly, narrative offers a lens onto the relationship of producer and consumer of a story. How could the credibility of a narrative be raised within such a horizon apart from e.g. its monumentalized or precious material form and presence? Awkward, that is, minimally counterintuitive elements raise the memorability, even if not the credibility of a narrative.[13] For authors the possibilities to authenticate their stories are restricted. Their texts are part of an ongoing argument in a culture about what could be accepted as knowledge or a shared past and what could be admitted as a possible, even if not proven variant as part of that.[14] The notion of culture presupposed here does not include a fixed system of norms and knowledge, against which a narrative could be judged. Instead, the single narratives engage with a preceding discourse on norms and knowledge, reproducing, modifying or shattering previous consensual,

[11] On the usefulness of the concept of network for the history of ancient religion see Esther Eidinow, 'Networks and Narratives: A Model for Ancient Greek Religion', *Kernos* 24 (2011), 9-38 and Anna Collar, 'Network Theory and Religious Innovation', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 22, No. 1 (2007), 149-62; Jörg Rüpke, 'Individuals and Networks', in Laurent Bricault and Corinne Bonnet (eds), *Panthée: Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 177 (Leiden, 2013), 261-77.

[12] See Eve-Marie Becker, 'Literarisierung und Kanonisierung im frühen Christentum: Einführende Überlegungen zur Entstehung und Bedeutung des neutestamentlichen Kanons', in Eve-Marie Becker and Stefan Scholz (eds), *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion: Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch* (Berlin, 2012), 392 on 1*Thess.* 5:27. Evidently, to thematize the public reading points to an anticipated problem. One can read 1 and 2*Thess.* as a diptychon addressing intra and inter-group religious communication (cf. Eve-Marie Becker, 'Von Paulus zu "Paulus": paulinische Pseudepigraphie-Forschung als literaturgeschichtliche Aufgabe', in Jörg Frey and Jens Herzer (eds), *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen, Pseudepigraphie and author fiction in early Christian letters* (Tübingen, 2009), 384 who tries to plot the complex relationship of 1 and 2*Thess.* differently).

[13] See e.g. Thomas E. Lawson, *Rethinking religion: connecting cognition and culture* (Cambridge, 1990); Robert N. McCauley, *Bringing ritual to mind: psychological foundations of cultural forms* (Cambridge, 2002); Robert N. McCauley, *Why religion is natural and science is not* (New York, 2012) on the concept of "minimal counterintuitive".

[14] See Albrecht Koschorke, *Wahrheit und Erfindung: Grundzüge einer Allgemeinen Erzähltheorie* (Frankfurt a.M., 2012), 84 who argues that the determination of the coherence of a text participates in the processes of negotiating the coherence of culture at the same moment.

hegemonic or conflicting positions.[15] Thus, strategies of authentication can be observed but hardly judged as to their efficacy. Extra-textual references strengthen the verifiability and probability of a narrative, but plausibility of a narrative claiming to be historical is achieved by internal coherence of the story told as much as by external coherence with general knowledge and grand narratives.[16] Thus, indicating an author's correct name, the orthonym, is neither a necessary nor a necessarily successful strategy. Attributing the text to another or even a fictitious author, pseudepigraphy and pseudonym, are important mimetic strategies, claiming authority to the narrative's form and content rather than its author's personal authority.[17] Images of authorship and norms governing authorship are related to changing networks and periods, too.[18] For a history of the period, the focus on narrative helps to keep this dynamic and fluid character of religious practices in addition to structural matches in mind.

Finally, the role of narrative in the formation of a network depends as much on the consensus produced by the shared acceptance of the stories and the outlines of the sequence as on the delineations of relevant contexts for the 'We' and 'Our past' of the text. Such a We is not simply given, but maintained by and created through constant communication. The degree of explicitness and exclusivity may vary widely, depending on the choice of subject, the self-definition of the implicit or explicit narrator, the choice of literary convention (genre being itself a way of talking that is related to a specific social context) or the evaluations offered by the narrator. The implicit reader of fables is less narrowly defined than the implicit reader of a historical narrative. The long history and broad diffusion of fables is testimony for that[19] and illustrates the generic difference of narrative.

Recent narratological research has given much more daring answers to justify the choice of narrative for an analysis of the entanglement of changes in literary and religious practices. Albrecht Koschorke, literary critique and historian of culture, has formulated a general theory of narrative, which intends to understand the enormous success of narrative in different periods and cultures.[20] His interest in the functioning of narrative within a cultural context

[15] This dynamic concept of culture is built on the arguments of Stanley J. Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 1985); Margaret S. Archer, *Culture and Agency: The place of culture in social theory* (Cambridge, 1996); Claude Calame, 'Interprétation et traduction des cultures: Les catégories de la pensée et du discours anthropologiques', *L'Homme* 163 (2002), 51-78 and Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005).

[16] Marie Verdoner, *Narrated Reality: The Historia ecclesiastica of Eusebius of Caesarea*, Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity (Frankfurt a.M., 2011), 19.

[17] As shown by Eve-Marie Becker, 'Von Paulus zu "Paulus"' (2009), 377-8.

[18] See e.g. Derek Krueger, *Writing and holiness: The practice of authorship in the early Christian East*, Divinations (Philadelphia, 2004) for late antiquity.

[19] See in general Reinhard Dithmar, *Fabeln, Parabeln und Gleichnisse* (Paderborn, 1995).

[20] See Albrecht Koschorke, *Wahrheit und Erfindung* (2012), 27-110 for the following.

that is characterized by its complexity, hybridity, and fluidity, addresses many features that are not prominent in classical narratological theory or widely dispersed.[21] Unlike the tools of narratological analysis developed by scholars like Gérard Genette,[22] Koschorke's 'elementary operations' of narrative do not aim at offering a tool-box for the analysis of concrete texts, but explore the relationship of texts and their audience. Despite the fact that Koschorke is not particularly interested in religion,[23] his general considerations could be a useful starting point for an inquiry into the place of narrative in a history of religion in the imperial period.

2. Framed by empire

Giving a beginning and an end to a narrative's sequence, which in principle could always start *ab ovo* and end in the presence, is one of the most powerful tools not only to create or simply define a place and time for a plot, but also to construe conflicts, to point to justice achieved or deferred. Ovid's narrative of the expulsion of the last Roman king, Tarquinius Superbus, offers a good example. It is not by narrating the Tarquinii's plans of the megalomaniac Capitoline temple or some disputed decision to wage war and thus pointing to the *superbia* of the king or the deficits of a monarchy that Ovid begins his narrative in the *Libri fastorum*.[24] Instead, it is the departure from the battlefield in order to rape Lucretia, which starts off the narrative. Careful framing isolated the underlying conflict or moral deficiency and the perspective offered by the deed.[25] Such a sequence of rape, suicide of the victim, and vengeance taken – and *thus* ending monarchy – implied ethic norms and contains exhortations to imitate the protagonists. Gospels, martyrological, and many a hagiographic text offered sequences that were easy to follow. The interplay of the order of the dramaturgical setting and the complication and resolution of conflicts given by the narrative sequence, of scenes and peripeteias, produce the entertaining effect of narratives, asking

[21] Cf. Michael Scheffel, 'Im Dickicht von Kultur und Narration: Albrecht Koschorke versucht Kulturtheorie und Erzählforschung zu vereinen', *Diegesis* 2/1 (2013), 160-6. For a good overview see Matías Martínez and Michael Scheffel, *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie* (München, 2012).

[22] Gérard Genette, *Die Erzählung*, trans. Andreas Knop (München, 1994).

[23] For an explicit and comparative interest in religious (and in particular Islamic) narrative see e.g. Stephan Conermann, 'Mythen, Geschichte(n), Identitäten: eine Einführung', in *id.* (ed.), *Mythen, Geschichte(n), Identitäten: der Kampf um die Vergangenheit (Asien und Afrika)* (Hamburg, 1999), 1-32; Stephan Conermann, *Modi des Erzählens in nicht-abendländischen Texten*, Narratio Aliena?: Studien des Bonner Zentrums für Transkulturelle Narratologie (Berlin, 2009).

[24] Ovid, *Fasti* 2.721 ff.

[25] See Jörg Rüpke, ''Königsflucht' und Tyrannenvertreibung: Zur Historisierung des Regifugium in augusteischer Zeit', in Rolf Gröschner and Wolfgang Reinhard (eds), *Tage der Revolution – Feste der Nation*, Politika 3 (Tübingen, 2010), 29-41.

for their prolongation and repetition.[26] In an elaborate literary text, multiple frames might complicate the start of a narrative sequence. Here, the look at beginnings and endings has to pay attention to oddities like the tensions between contents and frame. Such tensions might be observed in the first group of texts, which are selected, because they aimed in very different ways at religious innovation.

Writing under Tiberius, Valerius Maximus collected *facta et dicta memorabilia* and started by a book on religion. A preface to such a collection is not unusual, but his prayer-like invocation of the emperor (*te ... certissima salus patriae, Caesar, invoco* – 'I call onto you, Caesar, ... the most certain [source of] salvation of our native land') in a place where occasionally the invocation of a Muse or some inspiring god might be found, but is far from standard, is surprising. This opening is matched by references to *Caesariana aequitas* and *inexpugnabilem Caesaris constantiam,* 'Imperial justice' and 'invincible steadfastness of the Emperor', at the very end of book 9.[27] Thus, the very contents of the whole oeuvre that offers a non-chronological sequence of short narratives that demonstrate recommendable values and repeatable models, is given a place within a new order. It is the new condition of the Principate that gives rise to the idea of an ordered reflection on the values of the Republic and the past in general and that offers the guarantee that these values remain valid and should orientate individual action.[28]

A similar and equally surprising framing (if judged from the bird eye's view rather than linear reading) can be found in a text from the early second century, written at Rome, that is the first letter of Clemens to the Corinthians. The ascription of the letter to Clemens (maybe the secretary of a Roman church mentioned in the *Shepherd of Hermas*) is not reflected in the text itself, which claims to be based on collective authority: 'The church of God that temporarily resides in Rome, to the church of God that temporarily resides in Corinth, to those who have been called and made holy by the will of God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (pr., trans. B. Ehrmann).[29] The long final prayer concludes with a plea for security and protection, directly leading to a reflection on the *archousin kai hêgoumenois hêmôn epi tês gês,* 'the present rulers and governors of the earth' (60.4). Their rule is lengthily theologically justified, a passage directly leading into the final doxology (61). The general considerations about

[26] Albrecht Koschorke, *Wahrheit und Erfindung* (2012), 61-74.

[27] Val. Max. 9.15.5 and 9.15.ext. 1.

[28] David Wardle, 'Valerius Maximus on the domus Augusta, Augustus and Tiberius', *Classical Quarterly* 50 (2000), 479-93; David Wardle, 'The Heroism and heroicisation of Tiberius: Valerius Maximus and his Emperor', *Prose et linguistique, médecine* 2 (2002), 433-40; Ute Lucarelli, *Exemplarische Vergangenheit: Valerius Maximus und die Konstruktion des sozialen Raumes in der frühen Kaiserzeit,* Hypomnemata 172 (Göttingen, 2007).

[29] Bart D. Ehrman (ed. and trans.), *The Apostolic Fathers 1: I Clement, II Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Didache* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003).

framing orientate the analysis to the beginning. The just quoted passage and the final references to revolt and peace (63.1, 3) invite to understand the opening passage on misery and *stasis* (1.1) within the same political framework. Thus, the whole narration of the biblical past (which justify to include the text into my analysis) and the systematic reflections on a fitting way of life is contextualized by the same imperial rule at Rome and Corinth, even if the characterization of author and addressee tries to explicitly deny the importance of that context (*hê paroikousa Rômê* ..., pr.).

A few decades later Marcion's Gospel, narrating the story of Jesus' preaching, execution, and re-appearance in a geographical and narrative frame of "going down to Capernaum" and "returning to Jerusalem", was opened by an elaborate synchronism bringing together the 15th year of Tiberius' reign and Pontius Pilate's governorship in Judea,[30] did not only offer a date but firmly places the provincial events in the framework of the Empire.

What are the consequences of the findings for a history of religious change? It was not the necessity of the frequently invoked imperial cult that was lying at the basis of these decisions about framing. What we witness are the individual attempts at interpreting religion and bringing religious innovation into a framework explicitly imperial.[31] It goes far beyond lip-service or loyalty, beyond the availability of the imperial divinity[32] and the presence of proper cult of the emperors.[33] Such organized worship was disturbingly late, that is to say, absent for long periods, in many places. The texts were not only a result of a political and religious context, but had effects themselves. It was the frequent and varying individual literary appropriation, even if not fully integrated into the story of the narrative, which accounts for the ubiquity of the figure of the

[30] 1:2 Klinghardt = *Luke* 3:1.

[31] See already Glen W. Bowersock, 'Greek Intellectuals and the Imperial Cult in the Second Century A.D.', in *id.* (ed.), *Studies on the Eastern Roman Empire: Social, Economic and Administrative History, Religion, Historiography* (Goldbach, 1994), 293-326; Tim Whitmarsh (ed.), *Local Knowledge and Microidentities in the Imperial Greek World*, Greek culture in the Roman world (Cambridge, 2010); Greg Woolf, 'Afterworld: The Local and the Global in the Graeco-Roman East', in Tim Whitmarsh (ed.), *Local Knowledge and Microidentities in the Imperial Greek World*, Greek culture in the Roman world (Cambridge, 2010), 189-200.

[32] See Clifford Ando, 'A religion for the empire', in Anthony J. Boyle and William J. Dominik (eds), *Flavian Culture: Culture, image, text* (Leiden, 2003), 323-44. See also Clifford Ando, *Imperial ideology and provincial loyalty in the Roman Empire*, Classics and contemporary thought 6 (Berkeley, 2000) on loyalty.

[33] Important insights were reached by Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, 1984); see also Manfred Clauss, *Kaiser und Gott: Herrscherkult im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart, 1999) and the contributions in Hubert Cancik and Konrad Hitzl (eds), *Die Praxis der Herrscherverehrung in Rom und seinen Provinzen* (Tübingen, 2003) as well as Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed (eds), *Rome and religion: a cross-disciplinary dialogue on the imperial cult*, Writings from the Greco-Roman world supplement 5 (Atlanta, 2011) all concentrating on the practices and everyday realities of the cult of the reigning or previously consecrated emperors.

emperor, which could hardly be achieved by other means. 'Religion' as a distinguishable practice is reflected within an explicitly imperial framework, thus constituting empire *and* religion. If empire and religion operate on a similar trans-local level, as I have shown in the beginning, the avoidance of competition demands a careful reflection on their relationship. The epithet *augusta/us* (relating many divine figures or abstract concepts to the emperor and vice versa), solar attributes of the emperor (relating the political pivotal figure to the natural and frequently theological centre), and a Christology that is compatible with the divine status of the living emperor, thus bringing two competing figures at least in parallel, were different solutions to this problem.

3. Schematizing by biography

Narrative reduction produces schemata. By dropping details, by simplifying complex events, and finally by giving names and applying the latters' stereotyped properties to the actual object of the narration, narrative schemes are developed, which could be identified on a more general level than the single stories. Such schemata help to follow and to memorize stories; terms like "expedition" or "battle", "gospel" or "passion" point to such narrative structures. They raise the degree of connectivity of the concrete story, that is, the possibility to relate it to other stories.[34] The transposition of the much reduced narrative schemata of *Ilias* and *Odyssee* into Vergil's *Aeneid*[35] allowed integrating local Italian traditions. Jesus' passion could serve as a model for martyrdom in Ignatius of Antiochia or Polycarp of Smyrna.[36]

One of the most successful overarching schemes employed in the period under analysis was the biographical. The brief narration of a life was an element in narratives of the past in many circum-Mediterranean traditions. During the Hellenistic period it became as important as to provoke independent texts, *bioi*, of politicians and authors, of prophets and heads of philosophical schools.[37]

[34] Albrecht Koschorke, *Wahrheit und Erfindung* (2012), 29-38.

[35] Georg Nicolaus Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer: Studien zur poetischen Technik Vergils mit Listen der Homerzitate in der Aeneis*, Hypomnemata 7 (Göttingen, 1964).

[36] E.g. Jan Bremmer, ''Christianus sum': The Early Christian Martyrs and Christ', in Gerard J. Barteling, Anton Hilhorst and Corneille H. Kneepkens (eds), *Eulogia: Mélanges offerts à Antoon A. R. Bastiaensen à l'occasion de son soixante-cinquième anniversaire* (Den Haag, 1991), 11-20; Nicole Hartmann, *Martyrium: Variationen und Potenziale eines Diskurses im Zweiten Jahrhundert*, Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 14 (Frankfurt a.M., 2013).

[37] Ancient biography has been dealt with in a number of studies, of which Bruno Gentili and Giovanni Cerri, *History and Biography in Ancient Thought*, London Studies in Classical Philology 20 (Amsterdam, 1988); Christina Shuttleworth Kraus, 'Historiography and Biography', in Stephen J. Harrison (ed.), *A Companion to Latin Literature*, Blackwell companions to the ancient world: Literature and culture (Malden, Mass., 2007), 241-56; Gyburg Radke-Uhlmann, 'Aitiologien des Selbst: Moderne Konzepte und ihre Alternativen in antiken autobiographischen Texten', in

The importance given to the genealogy of the latter provoked serial texts as known from Suetonian imperial lives or lives of poets.[38] Structures and evaluations were as varied as the fields touched upon and the encomiastic or vituperating contexts in funerals, accession ceremonies or lawsuits, which rivaled in establishing criteria.

Biographies particularly exemplify a general trait of narrative and one of its reasons of success. As far as the actual sequence of events and their interdependency is concerned, schematization leads to either weak motivation or causal over-determination. Narrative is knowing, but narration is communication.[39] The lack of sufficient motivation as well as the surplus of causes engage the hearer in active participation to either fill in or sort out explanations. In that manner they further the appropriation of a narrative by quite different individuals. Typically for narrative, motivation takes the form of attributing agency, either to human or to superhuman actors, thus producing 'over-coherence' of the not any longer contingent course of events.

Alexander Arweiler and Melanie Möller (eds), *Vom Selbst-Verständnis in Antike und Neuzeit, Notions of the Self in Antiquity and Beyond*, Transformationen der Antike 8 (Berlin, 2008), 107-29; Tomas Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2012) and also Brian McGing and Judith Mossman, *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea, 2006) offer the most fruitful perspectives. For religious biography of the period see Charles H. Talbert, 'Biographies of Philosophers and Rulers as Instruments of Religious Propaganda in Mediterranean Antiquity', *ANRW* II.16,2 (1978), 1619-51; Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 5 (Berkeley, 1983); Arnoldo Momigliano, 'Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion in the Roman Empire', in *id.* (ed.), *Ottavo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome, 1987), 193-210; Albrecht Dihle, 'Antike Grundlagen', in Walter Berschin (ed.), *Biographie zwischen Renaissance und Barock* (Heidelberg, 1993), 1-22; John Dillon, 'Holy and not so Holy: On the Interpretation of Late Antique Biography', in Brian McGing and Judith Mossman (eds), *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea, 2006), 155-67; Jason König, 'The Cynic and Christian Lives of Lucian's Peregrinus', in Brian McGing and Judith Mossman (eds), *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea, 2006), 227-54; Muriel Debié, 'Writing history as "histories": the biographical dimension of East Syriac historiography', in Arietta Papaconstantinou (ed.), *Writing "True Stories": Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East* (Turnhout, 2010), 43-75; briefly Alan O'Gorman, 'Imperial History and Biography at Rome', in Andrew Feldherr, Grant Hardy and Ian Hesketh (eds), *The Oxford history of historical writing 1: Beginnings to AD 600* (Oxford, 2011), 291-315. Biography is not limited to the Greco-Roman literary traditions, cf. for Buddha and Muhammad: Gordon Darnell Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia, 1989); Marco Schöller, 'Biographical Essentialism and the Life of Muhammad in Islam', in Andreas Schüle (ed.), *Biographie als religiöser und kultureller Text, Biography as a religious and cultural text*, Literatur – Medien – Religion (Münster, 2002), 153-72; Claudine Bautze-Picron, 'The biography of the Buddha in Indian art: how and when?', in Andreas Schüle (ed.), *Biographie als religöser und kultureller Text, Biography as a religious and cultural text* (Münster, 2002), 197-239.

[38] Cf. John Kieschnick, 'Buddhism: Biographies of Buddhist Monks', in Andrew Feldherr, Grant Hardy and Ian Hesketh (eds), *The Oxford history of historical writing 1: Beginnings to AD 600* (Oxford, 2011), 535-52 for Buddhist serial biographies.

[39] Barbara Czarniawska, *Narratives in Social Science Research* (London, 2004), 6.

What is important for the history of religion of the period is the general fact that what is regarded as a successful (or subversive) explanation varies widely from epoch to epoch, from context to context, but even between individuals. For antiquity, the whole range of aitiological narrative must be recalled. Plausibility of a strange combination of elements in present-day ritual or topography is 'explained' by emplotment, by rendering these elements as results of the not too complex actions of some agents. Prodigies or *omina* in general offer a powerful tool to overdetermine narratives without stressing historicity in each instance. Even Tacitus' analytical or Caesar's matter-of-factly historical narratives in the 'Annals' respectively in the 'Commentaries' include such elements.[40] Narrative economy is given more importance than historical certainty. As cognitive studies have shown, it is in particular the irritation produced by minimally counter-intuitive connections, which make the story more memorable.[41]

Apart from such miraculous and easily memorisable elements as topics of biographical descriptions, religious practices and beliefs enter the field of biography only slowly. I select two early examples from quite divergent backgrounds. Innovative in regard to earlier historiographic treatments of the same figure, Plutarch opted for a full-fledged biography for Rome's second king, Numa, written after the death of Domitian, *i.e.* after AD 96.[42] Assembling many a traditional feature within this framework, Plutarch is practicing diversification (on which see below) in attributing to Numa the role of *pontifex*.[43] This is an irritating element, as Numa had previously been characterized as a founding figure on a level above all the institutions which were taken as characteristic of public religious practices at Rome.[44] Plutarch's move was probably referring to the contemporary ascendency of this priestly role within the moral characterization

[40] Frank Brunell Krauss, *An Interpretation of the Omens, Portents, and Prodigies Recorded by Livy, Tacitus, and Suetonius* (Philadelphia, 1930); Hans Kröger, *Die Prodigien bei Tacitus* (Münster, 1940); Jörg Rüpke, *Religiöse Erinnerungskulturen: Formen der Geschichtsschreibung in der römischen Antike* (Darmstadt, 2012), 74.

[41] Albrecht Koschorke, *Wahrheit und Erfindung* (2012), 77; Harvey Whitehouse and Robert McCauley (eds), *Mind and religion: psychological and cognitive foundations of religiosity*, Cognitive science of religion series (Walnut Creek, Calif., 2005).

[42] The latter's death is alluded to in 19.7.

[43] Plutarch, *Numa* 9.1.

[44] On earlier images of Numa see Wilhelm Buchmann, *De Numae regis Romanorum fabula* (Leipzig, 1912); Edna M. Hooker, 'The Significance of Numa's Religious Reforms', *Numen* 10 (1963), 87-132; J.D. Cloud, 'Numa's Calendar in Livy and Plutarch', *LCM* 4 (1979), 65-71; Emilio Gabba, 'The collegia of Numa: Problems of Method and Political Ideas', *JRS* 74 (1984), 81-6; Peter Panitschek, 'Numa Pompilius als Schüler des Pythagoras', *Grazer Beiträge* 17 (1990), 49-66; Luciana Japella Contardi, *I systemata di Numa: un aspetto della formazione della città antica* (Torino, 1991); Vinzenz Buchheit, 'Numa-Pythagoras in der Deutung Ovids', *Hermes* 121 (1993), 77-99; Alain Deremetz, 'Numa in Augustan Poetry', in Joseph Farrell and Damien P. Nelis (eds), *Augustan Poetry and the Roman Republic* (Oxford, 2013). For Numa in late antiquity see Hartwin Brandt, 'König Numa in der Spätantike: Zur Bedeutung eines frührömischen exemplum in der spätrömischen Literatur', *MH* 45 (1998), 98-110.

of the Roman emperor, which could be detected in several contemporary texts.[45] As a Pythagorean philosopher and king Numa offered the ideal of a philosophical ruler[46] now also including an expressly ritualistic element.

The biographical super-scheme with its different narrative sub-schemes was attractive far beyond Plutarch's and Suetonius' biographies. The autobiography of Flavius Josephus is a case in point. Like Plutarch's *Numa* he was also displaying concerns of the period and opted for an 'imperial' framing. He started by pointing to his priestly and royal origins (1) and finished his narrative by stating that 'Domitia, Caesar's wife, never ceased conferring favours upon me' (429).[47] Greater impact was made, however, by the numerous acts and gospels coming into being in particular during the second and the third centuries.[48] Such a biographical interest is not only attested by Marcion's Gospel, but also by his selection of Pauline letters, which allow to follow the apostle from Jerusalem to Rome. The extension of these interests is demonstrated beyond the Jewish tradition by Pythagorean and other 'lives'.[49] Stories of exemplary

[45] Jörg Rüpke, 'Starting sacrifice in the beyond: Flavian innovations in the concept of priesthood and their repercussions in the treatise "To the Hebrews"', *Revue d'histoire des religions* 229 (2012), 5-30.

[46] Noemi Lombardi, '[Plutarco, Vite parallele: Numa] Introduzione', in Barbara Scardigli (ed.), *Plutarco, Licurgo e Numa* (Milano, 2012), 391.

[47] For Josephus cf. Mireille Hadas-Lebel, 'Le double récit autobiographique chez Flavius Josèphe', in Marie-Françoise Baslez, Philippe Hoffmann and Laurent Pernot (eds), *L'invention de l'autobiographie d'Hésiode à Saint Augustin: Actes du deuxième colloque de l'Équipe de recherche sur l'hellénisme post-classique (Paris, École normale supérieure, 14-16 juin 1990)* (Paris, 1993), 125-32. On autobiography see Johannes Engels, 'Die Ὑπομνήματα-Schriften und die Anfänge der politischen Biographie und Autobiographie in der griechischen Literatur', *ZPE* 96 (1993), 19-3; Christopher Pelling, 'Was there an ancient genre of "autobiography"? or, did Augustus know what he was doing?', in Christopher Smith (ed.), *The lost memoirs of Augustus and the development of Roman autobiography* (Swansea, 2009), 41-123; Christopher Smith (ed.), *The lost memoirs of Augustus and the development of Roman autobiography* (Swansea, 2009).

[48] For the discussion about the biographical character of some gospels see Hubert Cancik, 'Die Gattung Evangelium: Das Evangelium des Markus im Rahmen der antiken Historiographie', in *id.* (ed.), *Markus-Philologie: Historische, literargeschichtliche und stilistische Untersuchungen zum zweiten Evangelium* (Tübingen, 1984), 85-113; Hubert Cancik, 'Bios und Logos: Formengeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Lukians "Leben des Demonax"', in *ibid.*, 115-30; Detlev Dormeyer and Hubert Frankemölle, 'Evangelium als literarische Gattung und als theologischer Begriff: Tendenzen und Aufgaben der Evangelienforschung im 20. Jahrhundert, mit einer Untersuchung des Markusevangeliums in seinem Verhältnis zur antiken Biographie', *ANRW* II.25.2 (1984), 1543-704; sceptical Eve-Marie Becker, *Das Markus-Evangelium im Rahmen antiker Historiographie*, WUNT 194 (Tübingen, 2006); differentiated Armin D. Baum, 'Biographien im alttestamentlich-rabbinischen Stil: Zur Gattung der neutestamentlichen Evangelien', *Biblica* 94 (2013), 534-64.

[49] See e.g. Blossom Stefaniw, 'Gregory Taught, Gregory Written: The effacement and definition of individualization in the Address to Origen and the Life of Gregory the Wonderworker', in Jörg Rüpke and Wolfgang Spickermann (eds), *Reflections on Religious Individuality: Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian Texts and Practices*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 62 (Berlin, 2012), 119-43; Sarah Iles Johnston, 'Sosipatra and the Theurgic Life: Eunapius Vitae Sophistorum 6.6.5-6.9.24', in *ibid.*, 99-117.

lives, already known from previous periods are supplemented by stories of conversion.[50] The importance of these competitive narratives in all their diversity can hardly be exaggerated. The condensed, but inflatable and flexible form enabled authors to generate or to reformulate religious knowledge in a manner that allowed for emotionally relating to the lives narrated as well as appropriation of claims and values raised in the text in vastly differing degrees. As has been stressed recently, the growing interest in the individual religious self and the textualization of religion go hand in hand.[51] Biography was perhaps the most important literary form to communicate about individualisation.

4. Diversification as network-building

Relating to common friends, ancestors, or biographical models by narration could easily be imagined as a strategy to strengthen existing groups. Could narrative also form part of the project of extending such nuclei or ancestor groups into larger networks? Narratological theory offers several observations which might contribute to explaining such processes.

Biographical narrative is not just the presentation of interesting personalities. As narrative it is the combination of redundancy and variation, which produces consensus respectively attention. The reduction into schemata initiates processes of generalization and hence the enlargement of the audience, to whom the story might be relevant. De-differentiation creates consensus beyond borderlines of groups and interests. At the same time, opportunities to articulate oneself within a society's communicative space are depending on one's own will and ability to distance oneself from such narrative generalizations.[52] Experts question general narratives, even if their potential to change collective knowledge is rather small. For ancient literature, bold summaries, whether within larger narratives or as a genre of its own (*epitome, periochae*), secure and create consensus, up to the point where (in a dialectical movement) confessional 'creeds' demand exact wording in order to include and exclude. In his commentary on the Roman calendar, Ovid mixes close to tautological

[50] Barbara Diana Lipsett, *Desiring conversion: Hermas, Thecla, Aseneth* (New York, 2011) on Hermas, the Acts of Paul and Thecla and the romance of Joseph and Aseneth.

[51] See Jörg Rüpke, 'Religiöse Individualität in der Antike', in Bernd Janowski (ed.), *Der ganze Mensch: Zur Anthropologie der Antike und ihrer europäischen Nachgeschichte* (Berlin, 2012), 199-219; and contributions in Jörg Rüpke and Wolfgang Spickermann (eds), *Reflections on Religious Individuality* (2012); Jörg Rüpke, 'Introduction: Individualisation and individuation as concepts for historical research', in *id.* (ed.), *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2013), 3-28; Jörg Rüpke and Greg Woolf, 'Introduction', in *iid.* (eds), *Religious Dimensions of the Self in the Second Century CE*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 76 (Tübingen, 2013), vii-xi.

[52] Albrecht Koschorke, *Wahrheit und Erfindung* (2012), 38-51, in particular 41.

explanations and the presentation of everyday knowledge with stark personal claims on other issues, basing his authority at times on quotations from deities (even if the fictional character of such claims would have been obvious to his readers).[53]

Usually, diversification is not simply producing variants at will. Due to their history and their participation in different schemes, narratives are characterized by repertoires of details, which could be brought to bear on a concrete story; there is a 'curious tendency to preserve the apparently odd, trivial, disconnected and novel element'.[54] From the late republic onwards, Numa could not be thought without his books, invented in the early second century BC to legitimise Pythagorean philosophy at Rome. The role of the odd and novel holds in particular true for those narratives that had gained canonical status in antiquity, be it the *tenakh* or some epics. For the former, the hallakhic *midrashim* with their interest in even tiny details of a Pentateuchic story might be named.[55] Likewise late ancient commentaries on Vergil, Servius as well as Macrobius, demonstrate the interpretive potentials of a temporally distant and complex text.[56] What might have been forgotten in the constant flow of retelling a story, was preserved in written texts. Writing, if not already a means of production, accommodates needs for details and enables their transmission.

Historically, diversification within the established framework motivates ongoing participation in telling and re-telling, in offering diverse perspectives and thus stressing the legitimacy of diverse perspectives. For the second century the extension of religious networks cannot be reconstructed on the basis of contemporary or later interests in determining canonical accounts. As one could expect, normative discourses about orthodox and heretic, closer or more distant to a canon, employed much tighter criteria than the widely shared norms attested by actual usage of texts in different networks. In such a perspective, the phenomenon of 'rewritten bible' and 'rewritten gospel' could be better understood[57]

[53] Jörg Rüpke, 'The 'Connected Reader' as a Window into Lived Ancient Religion: A Case Study of Ovid's Libri fastorum', *Religion in the Roman Empire* 1/1 (2015), 95-113.

[54] Albrecht Koschorke, *Wahrheit und Erfindung* (2012), 51-60, here 53, quoting Frederic Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge, 1964), 273.

[55] Eyal Ben-Eliyahu, Yehudah Cohn and Fergus Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature from Late Antiquity, 135-700 CE* (Oxford, 2012), 62.

[56] See even for the 19th cent. Laurenz Lersch, *Antiquitates Vergilianae ad vitam populi Romani descripta* (Bonn, 1843).

[57] See Timothy P. Henderson, *The Gospel of Peter and Early Christian Apologetics: Rewriting the Story of Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection*, WUNT 2.301 (Tübingen, 2011), 224 for the extension of the concept onto some of the narratives named in the following. For the concept see already Lawrence H. Schiffman, 'The sacrificial system of the Temple Scroll and the Book of Jubilees', *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* No. 24 (1985), 217-33 and Louis H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' rewritten bible*, Supplements to the Journal for the study of Judaism 58 (Leiden, 1998); for an application to modern re-telling see Adele Reinhartz, ''Rewritten Gospel': The Case of Caiaphas the High Priest', *New Testament Studies* 55/2 (2009), 160-78.

and freed from its perspective of mere reproduction. Several examples from Judaeo-Christian texts demonstrate the wide range of religious ideas being integrated in such narratives: In the text called 'Epistle of the Apostles', in a dialogue with the resurrected, the interlocutors, some apostolic We, learned from Jesus: 'I appeared in the form of the archangel Gabriel to the virgin Mary and spoke with her, and her heart received (me); she believed and laughed; and I, the Word, went into her and became flesh; and I myself was servant for myself; and in the likeness of an angel, like him will I do, and after it I will go to my Father' (14, trans. B. Ehrmann).[58] Markus Vinzent has pointed to comparable narrative innovations to be found in the Ascension of Isaiah: 'It came to pass that when they were alone that Mary straightway looked with her eyes and saw a small babe, and she was astonished. And after she had been astonished, her womb was found as formerly before she had conceived' (11.8-9).[59] The second century 'Gospel of the Saviour' does not shrink from having Jesus announce to 'go down to Hades' (7, trans. B. Ehrmann). Again, it should be pointed out that somebody like Philo in his theoretical dealings with the Septuagint concentrated on re-narrating without paying too much importance to detailed textual problems.[60]

These examples illustrate that narrative is a strategy to stimulate affects and to engage with the social dynamics of a group. It is not its ability to rehearse a shared creed, which is important here, but the possibility to come to grips with the diversity of a polycentric culture, allowing for play and transcending the limitations of a given situation. As Koschorke remarks, it is the very possibility to only partially participate in a narrative, which enables the formation of large groups.[61] For the formation of larger blocks of 'Hellenists' and 'Christians' in the fourth century or Marcionites and Circumcised in the second century this flexibility offered by the differing *canones* was of high importance.

The repeated production and re-use of passion narratives or other biographical sequences from the second century onwards demonstrate the range and the degree of openness and closure regarding the inclusion and exclusion of recipients. For a history of religion that is not confined to a history of ideas, it is the web of variants and retellings, which makes narratives so relevant for religious transformations. From the perspective developed above, the coherence of the communication thus achieved rather than details in diversification

[58] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford, 2003), 75.

[59] Markus Vinzent, 'Give and Take amongst Second Century Authors: The Ascension of Isaiah, the Epistle of the Apostles and Marcion of Sinope', *Studia Patristica* 50 (2011), 119-22.

[60] Maren Niehoff, 'Philons Beitrag zur Kanonisierung der griechischen Bibel', in Eve-Marie Becker and Stefan Scholz (eds), *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion: Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch* (Berlin, 2012), 329-44.

[61] Albrecht Koschorke, *Wahrheit und Erfindung* (2012), 161.

should be stressed. Identifying different 'heresies' by paying attention to minute differences is a strategy of competitors, it should not be the strategy of historians.

Inclusion or exclusion of potential recipients is seen along ethnic lines of Romans and Jews in the 'Gospel of Peter', which replaces agents within the same plot and opens a new agenda in its anti-Jewish polemics.[62] Dividing lines need not be ethnic. Jan Bremmer has pointed to the prominent role of women in the *Acts of John*, a feature, which neither attests a female author nor a primarily female audience, but could help to include women into the networks created by such narrative.[63] Despite the fact that individual female writers and copyists[64] were existent and made an impression on the shape of the text transmitted, it is a new concept of authorship, tinged by asceticism, which changed the role of women and female virtue within the hierarchies of the stories.[65]

This is not to say that the stories varied the repertoire of details strategically. Framing was important, even if frequently not known due to the fragmentary status of texts and the loss of beginnings and ends by damage incurred by book roles or codices. With regard to such framings, the opening synchronisms of the *Gospel of Luke* or the genealogy of *Matthew* share their inclusiveness with the beginning of the *Gospel of the Ebionites* from the first half of the second century: 'And so in the days of Herod, King of Judea, John came baptizing a baptism of repentance in the Jordan River. He was said to have come from the tribe of Aaron, the priest, and was the child of Zacharias and Elizabeth.'[66] Such a framing enabled a much broader circle of recipients to relate to these narratives than in the case of the sudden start of the narrative about John the Baptist in *Mark*.

5. Authorship

Let me address a final analytical perspective onto history of religion opened by narratology. Not necessarily present in the narrated story (that would be intra-diegetical) or not even explicitly present in the narrative (that would at

[62] E.g. 1, 25, 49; see Timothy P. Henderson, *The Gospel of Peter* (2011).

[63] Jan Bremmer, 'Women in the Apocryphal Acts of John', in *id.* (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of John* (Kampen, 1995), 37-56.

[64] For this phenomenon see Kim Haines-Eitzen, *The gendered palimpsest: Women, writing, and representation in early Christianity* (Oxford, 2012).

[65] Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness* (2004), 191; see for the later period *id.*, 'Early Byzantine historiography and hagiography as different modes of Christian practice', in Arietta Papaconstantinou (ed.), *Writing "True Stories": Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East* (Turnhout, 2010), 13-30.

[66] *Ev. Ebion.* 1 = Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.13.6, trans. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* (2003), 15.

least be extra-diegetical), the storyteller or more precisely, the position of the narrator, is of high importance for the reception of the narrated text. A first-person narrator seems to guarantee for authenticity, but could be attacked as a (merely) particular point of view. In contrast, the omniscient, impersonal narrator seems to produce unfiltered truth, without age and origin, in particular if narrating scenes that by no means any human narrator could have witnessed. By restricting themselves to only minimal variations of plots already established in those preceding texts that were judged relevant by the readership, might be part of a strategy of auto-canonization by a subsequent writer.[67] Her or his point of view and way of narrative would engage in inclusion or exclusion of recipients, would determine 'we' and 'good'. Asymmetrical oppositions like Hellenes and Barbarians do not allow to opt for the other, who is described as homogeneous and clearly delimited, thus producing the mirror image of an internal homogeneity within the we-group and suppressing internal differences.[68] Marcion's strategy to clearly oppose a we from 'the *Ioudaioi*' is not uncontested. Even in the beginning of the third century, the Roman author Hippolytos is still very careful to introduce his usage of *Ioudaioi* as a term for contemporaries by determining them as those of the circumcision.[69]

Obviously, these are very different consequences of the positioning of the narrator. The range of the narrator's presence is enormous and is part of a second-century process of turning more and more narratives into 'religious' texts. Again, I can only hint at instances within the framework chosen here. The way Aelius Aristides forces himself onto his readers is quite different from the self-conscious observer Lucian in dealing with the Dea Syria or the fully implicit gospel narrator in *Mark*, restricting himself to summaries and occasional explanations.[70] Flavius Josephus explicitly leaves it to the reader to evaluate the miracle at the crossing of the sea.[71] Other strategies were available.

[67] Cf. Eve-Marie Becker, 'Antike Textsammlungen in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion: Eine Darstellung aus neutestamentlicher Sicht', in Eve-Marie Becker and Stefan Scholz (eds), *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion: Kanonisierungsprozesse religiöser Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch* (Berlin, 2012), 7.

[68] Albrecht Koschorke, *Wahrheit und Erfindung* (2012), 84-101, in particular 98.

[69] See Hipp. *Comm. in Dan.* 1.16; 1.30. Cf. the clearly hostile usage in contemporary contexts in 4.49, 40 and 57.

[70] Petsalis-Diomidis, 'Sacred Writing, Sacred Reading: The Function of Aelius Aristides' Self-Presentation as Author in the Sacred Tales', in Brian McGing and Judith Mossman (eds), *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea, 2006), 193-211; Brooke Holmes, 'Aelius Aristides' illegible Body', in William V. Harris and *id.* (eds), *Aelius Aristides between Greece, Rome, and the Gods* (Leiden, 2008), 81-113; Wolfgang Spickermann, 'Lukian von Samosata und die fremden Götter', *ARG* 11 (2009), 229-61; Reinhold Zwick, *Montage im Markusevangelium: Studien zur narrativen Organisation der ältesten Jesuserzählung*, Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge 18 (Stuttgart, 1989).

[71] René S. Bloch, *Moses und der Mythos: Die Auseinandersetzung mit der griechischen Mythologie bei jüdisch-hellenistischen Autoren*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden, 2011), 237.

The author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* opted for a rigorous auto-biographical approach up to the point of self-denigration.[72] Thus, the numerous succeeding visions do also serve legitimization, but above all they are tools to produce relevancy[73] and command attention. The same might be said of the *Acts of John*, whether it is the raising of Lycomedes or the destruction of the temple at Ephesus.[74] Most importantly, such narratives do use these motivations in order to defer agency, thus producing religious communication. God(s) – in whatever form – are relevant actors. As the examples of Aelius Aristides and Lucian have already shown, this is not restricted to Jewish authors. It is the Greco-Roman historian Dio Cassius who motivates his writing of a comprehensive Roman history by a dream vision at the beginning of the third century.[75]

6. Conclusion

The brief review of some texts from (above all) the second century AD cannot prove the intuition of a growing number and importance of texts for the change in religion and the development of religious networks in this period. However, the narratological view onto some aspects of some (now I dare to say) religious texts helps to fill in some details of this process and to develop questions for more detailed studies. A rise in reflective individuality[76] as demonstrated in the growing importance of the biographical scheme was correlated with a repositioning within the wider framework of the empire and the imagined direct relevancy of the emperor, probably far beyond any actual experiences. The formation of explicitly religious networks by way of communication was an option selected ever more frequently. Re-narrating of traditional stories and legitimizing the continuity of narration by introducing ever new details, both practices went hand in hand. Within emerging networks, individual identification and biographical authentication were not necessary, but possible. This was part of an ongoing debate about agency, which found its expression in a large variety of visionary narratives. The diffusion of successful texts as facilitated

[72] Jörg Rüpke, 'Two cities and one self: Transformations of Jerusalem and reflexive individualiy in the Shepherd of Hermas', in *id.* and Greg Woolf (eds), *Religious Dimensions of the Self* (2013), 49-65.

[73] See Dan Sperber and Deirde Wilson, 'Outline of Relevance Theory', *Links & Letters* 1 (1994), 85-106.

[74] János Bolyki, 'Miracle Stories in the Acts of John', in Jan N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of John* (Kampen, 1995), 15-35; Katja Wedekind, *Religiöse Experten im lokalen Kontext: Kommunikationsmodelle in christlichen Quellen des 1.–3. Jh. n. Chr.* (Gutenberg, 2012), 47-55.

[75] Dio 73.23.1-2.

[76] Jörg Rüpke, 'Religiöse Individualität in der Antike' (2012), 199-219; Jörg Rüpke, 'Introduction: Individualisation and individuation as concepts for historical research', in Jörg Rüpke (ed.), *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2013), 3-28.

by the degree of exchange and mobility throughout the Roman Empire was accompanied by a relentless local production of new texts. Production, diffusion, and above all consumption of these texts did not only spread certain religious ideas, but also the idea of religion as something to be known, to influence not only isolated action, but a whole life. The large role played by narratives and their particular shapes suggests that the developments were dominated by the establishment and enlargement of networks rather than exclusivist tendencies. That is to say, in an even longer perspective, Augustan post-civil war classicism with its clearly defined systems of symbols and meanings and their anti-individualist implications had been laid to rest,[77] the claims of a bishop Epiphanius to establish a new field of knowledge with himself as the foremost expert in heresiology,[78] the age of division and institutional confrontation was yet to come. Change is hard to measure, but recognizable.

[77] Cf. Glenn W. Most, 'Principate and System', in Thomas A. Schmitz and Nicolas Wiater (eds), *The struggle for identity: Greeks and their Past in the First Century BCE* (Stuttgart, 2011), 178 f.

[78] Thus Richard Flower, 'Genealogies of unbelief: Epiphanius of Salamis and heresiological authority', in Christopher Kelly (ed.), *Unclassical traditions, Vol. 2: Perspectives from East and West in late antiquity*, Cambridge classical journal: Supplementary volume (Cambridge, 2011), 87.