Jörg Rüpke | HISTORICIZING
RELIGION: VARRO'S
ANTIQUITATES AND
HISTORY OF RELIGION
IN THE LATE ROMAN
REPUBLIC

QUESTIONS

Varro's *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, a favorite source for the study of Roman religion, has also attracted interest as a philosophical text in recent years.[1] Hubert Cancik has added yet a further aspect by pointing out that part of Varro's systematic account in his first, introductory book is a brief account of the history of Roman religion. His observation was part of a larger interest that inquired into the historicization of culture in antiquity.[2] Cancik stressed

[1] Yves Lehmann, *Varron théologien et philosophe romain*, Collection Latomus 237 (Brussels: Latomus, 1997); Thomas Traver, "Varro and the Antiquarianism of Philosophy," in *Philosophia Togata II: Plato and Aristotle at Rome*, ed. Jonathan Barnes and Miriam Griffin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 130–64; Jörg Rüpke, "Varro's Tria Genera Theologiae: Religious Thinking in the Late Republic," *Ordia Prima* 4 (2005): 107–29; Peter Van Nuffelen, "Varro's Divine Antiquities: Roman Religion as an Image of Truth," *Classical Philology* 105 (2010): 162–88; David Blanc, "Varro and Antiochus," in *The Philosophy of Antiochus*, ed. D. Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 250–89.

[2] For the term, see Glenn W. Most, ed., *Historicization = Historisierung*, Aporemata 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001).

the role of the history of philosophical schools as a model for cultural history and focused on religion shortly afterward:[3] "How can religion, how rituals, how could the divine have a history?"[4] The answer is given in his brief analyses of Varro and Tacitus. Religion is seen by these authors as an *institutum*, something "set up," practices established and traditionalized by humans, even formally regulated in the form of festivals or monumentalized in the form of temples.[5] The transferal of the epistemological basis of cultural history onto religion is related to the same authors' conceptualizing religion as a specific part of their own culture.[6]

The recent view of the intellectual development of the late Roman Republic and early empire could easily accommodate Cancik's observation.[7] At the same time it demands more precision in terms of chronology and function. When and why did such a historiography of religion start? What are its precise forms and contents? What are its purposes? Cancik's broad comparative approach could beg these questions. Historiography has not figured prominently in recent research on ancient religion, despite its being a major topic of debate in studies on narrative and memory.[8] It is against the backdrop of the latter that I will deal with the questions formulated.

RELIGION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE LATE REPUBLIC

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has characterized the "Roman cultural revolution" of the first centuries BC and AD as a complex process, including "a fundamental relocation and redefinition of authority in Roman society" as well as "a revolution in the ways of knowing."[9] It also included an intensive, locally and individually varying process of negotiating identities—Greek and Roman, Italian and Latin, political and cultural, social and economic. For Roman religion, I have tried to analyze these processes by the concepts of

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[3] Hubert Cancik, *Religionsgeschichten: Römer, Juden und Christen im römischen Reich*, ed. Hildegard Cancik-Lindemaier, Gesammelte Aufsätze 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 3–27, esp. 4 (originally published as "The History of Culture, Religion, and Institutions in Ancient Historiography: Philological Observations Concerning Luke's History," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 [1997]: 673–95).

[4] Ibid., 30.

[5] Ibid., 28.

[6] Ibid., 41.

[7] See, e.g., Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. 213–58 (and see 232–33 for Varro).

[8] Compare however, Denis Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History*, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and Jörg Rüpke, *Religiöse Erinnerungskulturen: Formen der Geschichtsschreibung in der römischen Antike* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2012).

[9] Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Mutatio Morum: The Idea of a Cultural Revolution," in *The Roman Cultural Revolution*, ed. Thomas N. Habinek and Alessandro Schiesaro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3–22, at 7, 6.

public, Hellenization, ritualization, scriptualization, self-reflection, profes-
sionalization, and rationalization.[10] By the end of the republic, without doubt,
incipient processes of what I have called "rationalization"[11] can be observed,
employing the instruments of Greek linguistics, philology, and philosophy to
systematize thinking about religion in Cicero's *De legibus* and *De re publica*,
his later theological triptychon *De natura deorum*, *De divinatione*, and *De
fato* or in Varro's *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, placed aside his *Antiquitates
rerum humanarum*.[12] The concentration of texts within a decade (a timespan
that would also easily include Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, a text posthu-
mously edited by Cicero) is significant for the strength of the development as
for its utterly provincial character: we are talking about one of the many intel-
lectual centers of the Ancient Mediterranean—including places like Athens,
Pergamon, Alexandria—to illustrate the participation of three continents. We
are talking about a small intellectual elite engaged as much in written as in
real face-to-face communication in this reflection about religion. This reflec-
tion *on* religion was also a part *of* religion, as we have learned from Mary
Beard, John Scheid, and Denis Feeney.[13] It must be stressed, however, that
"religion" as an embracing concept was still in the making. It is implied by
the range of regulations in Cicero's second book of *De legibus* under the
heading of *leges de religione*,[14] and explicated by some of Cicero's interlocu-
tors in *De natura deorum*,[15] but is not used for the range of topics treated by
them or Cicero, the author, himself. It is also clearly implied by the range of
subjects treated in Varro's *Antiquitates*, dealing with persons, places, times,
and gods.

Historiography, too, was part of the larger process. Memory turned into
history is traceable in written form from the beginning of the third century BC
onward. We have evidence of honorific funerary inscriptions, increasing in

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[10] Jörg Rüpke, *Religion in Republican Rome: Rationalization and Ritual Change* (Philadel-
phia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 207–19.

[11] Ibid., 2–4.

[12] See Elisabeth Begemann, *Schicksal als Argument: Ciceros Rede vom fatum in der späten Re-
publik*, Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 37 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2012).

[13] Mary Beard, "Cicero and Divination: The Formation of a Latin Discourse," *JRS* 76 (1986):
33–46, and "A Complex of Times: No More Sheep on Romulus' Birthday," *Proceedings of the
Cambridge Philological Society* 33 (1987): 1–15; Thomas N. Habinek, "Science and Tradition in
Aeneid VI," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 92 (1989): 223–56; Mary Beard, "Writing
and Religion: Ancient Literacy and the Function of the Written Word in Roman Religion," in *Lit-
eracy in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991), 35–58; John
Scheid, "Myth, Cult and Reality in Ovid's Fasti," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological
Society* 38 (1992): 118–31; Denis Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts,
and Beliefs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[14] Cicero, *De legibus* 2.17.

[15] Jörg Rüpke, "Religious Pluralism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, ed. Alessan-
dro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 748–66.

scale with the sarcophagi and *elogiae* to the Scipiones. The earliest known funerary oration (*laudatio funebris*), which survives in fragmentary form and was presumably a speech recorded in writing, dates from 221 BC; it concerns the twice consul—although this information is absent from the textual fragment —and *pontifex maximus* L. Caecilius Metellus. Religious data were included in historiography, which took shape in different generic forms, following or modifying Greek models.[16] By the middle of the third century BC, the *pontifex maximus* Tiberius Coruncanius began to record pontifical *commentarii*, protocols of changes in memberships, prodigies observed, decisions taken. Ascription of agency to actors, and hence the situating of specific priesthoods within a network of ever more formalized and differentiated authorities, seems to have been the dominant function. Thus we know that in 275 or 274 BC Lucius Postumius Albinus was the priest called the *rex sacrorum*.[17] In that capacity he witnessed the introduction of a new divinatory practice: the *haruspices* started to pay attention to the heart of the sacrificial victim in their scrutiny of entrails.[18] Evidently, reference to the office of the *rex sacrorum* had been used as a form of dating, supplemented by Olympiads, in the underlying source.

From the late third century BC onward, Romans developed a historiography of the rise of their city along the lines of Greek historiography,[19] a tradition that commenced in Greek and which led to the definitive Latin account of Roman history, a product of the late first century BC, that is, the history *Ab urbe condita* of the Augustan writer Titus Livius, a text full of religious data, prodigies, temples, accessions to priesthoods, and large rituals performed by magistrates. As Jason P. Davies has shown in his book *Rome's Religious History: Livy, Tacitus and Ammianus on Their Gods*, religious data are an important element of Roman historiography.[20] But the mere inclusion of data about religion in historical writing does not amount to a historicization of religion,

[16] T. P. Wiseman, "The Origins of Roman Historiography," in *Historiography and Imagination: Eight Essays on Roman Culture* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1994), 1–22, 119–24; Christer Bruun, "'What Every Man in the Street Used to Know': M. Furius Camillus, Italic Legends and Roman Historiography," in *The Roman Middle Republic: Politics, Religion, and Historiography, c. 400–133 B.C.*, ed. Christer Bruun (Rome: Institutum Romanum, 2000), 41–68; Rüpke, *Erinnerungskulturen*, 17–40.

[17] Jörg Rüpke, *Fasti Sacerdotum: A Prosopography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome, 300 BC to AD 499*, trans. David M. B. Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), no. 2818.

[18] Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia* 11.186.

[19] For which, see Jonas Grethlein, *The Greeks and Their Past: Poetry, Oratory and History in the Fifth Century BCE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); for the whole range, see Andrew Feldherr and Ian Hesketh, eds., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to AD 600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[20] Jason P. Davies, *Rome's Religious History: Livy, Tacitus and Ammianus on Their Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

however much those data might lie at the center of Livy's interests. It is religion as a factor in secular history and the role of religion in argument within a secular historiography that form his objects. But those are not my interests. My question is, When and why are the memories and historical dates about religion woven into a history of religion that goes beyond isolated aetiological myths, closely relating a distant past and an ongoing present, or the continuous protocols of Roman priesthoods mentioned before? I do not doubt that the latter imply an awareness of change and the possibility to argue with the past, but they remain partial, limited by the pontiffs' business, even if useful for general historiography by virtue of being ordered year by year.[21] However, what constitutes "history"?

QUALIFYING "HISTORY"

As a starting point, history can be seen as a form of social memory, if we take it in a narrow sense as a discursive, usually narrative reconstruction of the past, thus following Paul Ricoeur.[22] Paul Connerton has been most explicit in describing the manifold forms and processes of social memory.[23] Historical narrative and the discipline of history have thus been made an object of historical research.[24] At the same time, the orientation produced by such a concentration on memory implies a problematic reification of social memory.[25] History comes in a plurality of histories. Such histories offer individual views of the past; they are alternative versions, not the truth about the past.[26] Any historiography would engage with individual and collective memory and gain its plausibility and importance by such memories, but it would critically engage with them as well. Narrating history is a critical enterprise. It is competitive with regard to other accounts or even openly argumentative. This dialectical

[21] For the discussion of the *annales maximi*, see John A North, "The Books of the Pontifices," in *La mémoire perdue: Recherches sur l' administration romaine* (Paris: École française de Rome, 1998), 45–63; Rüpke, *Fasti Sacerdotum*; Ana Rodriguez-Mayorgas, "Annales Maximi: Writing, Memory, and Religious Performance in the Roman Republic," in *Sacred Words: Orality, Literacy and Religion*, ed. André P. M. H. Lardinois, Orality and Literacy in the Ancient World 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 235–54.

[22] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–85).

[23] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[24] See Jacques LeGoff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 102; Marcus Sandl, "Historizität der Erinnerung/Reflexivität des Historischen: Die Herausforderung der Geschichtswissenschaft durch die kulturwissenschaftliche Gedächtnisforschung," in *Erinnerung, Gedächtnis, Wissen: Studien zur kulturwissenschaftlichen Gedächtnisforschung*, ed. Günter Oesterle (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 89–119, esp. 118–19.

[25] Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory*, Historical Approaches (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 18.

[26] Frank R. Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

recourse on memory marks a difference to mythical narrative, which is otherwise, in form and function, and often even in the field covered close to or identical with memory. In the Greek tradition, history invents itself by the attempt to critically—not always plausibly—question mythical narrative.[27]

   History is widespread, even if not universal, in its realization in specific forms of narrative, of organized historiography.[28] While a group's account of its past and its particular recollections of itself are not the only means of achieving orientation and constructing a coherent identity, historical narratives seem to be important. Of course, familial or ethnic groups, social movements or political organizations tell different stories, histories, again, for whatever purpose.[29] The same efforts to interpret and identify oneself as a "city" or "nation" through one's past could be undertaken by or for religious communities. Thus contemporary historical practices (to use a term that does not restrict history to narrative) or later historiography could construe "confessions," as we know them for early modern Europe, or "religions." This implies the creation of boundaries, the stressing of differences or the development of a concept of religion beyond these differences.[30]

   If we try to differentiate history as a practice that not only narrates a past but also applies a temporal or even chronological framework to it, some consequences have to be thought of. By its chronological framework history allows one story to be related to another. For antiquity, this is not an easy task, given the variety of eras in use. An era indicates cotemporality or even responsibility rather than distances in time.[31] Thus, the notion of historical

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[27] Jörg Rüpke and Ulrike Rüpke, *Antike Götter und Mythen* (Munich: Beck, 2010), 23–25.

[28] There are alternatives to textual narrative, even if such narrative is crucial and probably indispensable for the generation of a concept of time and historical consciousness (see Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*). Ritual can be an important way to dramatically act out the past, in a mode of memorizing or re-presentation. Images can focus on constellations and scenes, pointing to and systematizing previous narratives, or even gain narrative powers. On narrative sequences in ancient reliefs, see Mario Torelli, *Typology and Structure of Roman Historical Reliefs* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982); Holger Hussy, *"Die Epiphanie und Erneurung der Macht Gottes" : Szenen des täglichen Kultbildrituals in den ägyptische Tempeln der griechisch-römischen Epoche* (Dettelbach: Röll, 2007).

[29] Compare the concepts of "minority histories" and "subaltern histories" used in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, reissued with a new preface by the author (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), esp. 97–113. In contrast to Chakrabarty, I am more interest in the coexistence and interchanges than in the problem of criticizing one dominating account.

[30] Franziska Metzger (*Religion, Geschichte, Nation: Katholische Geschichtsschreibung in der Schweiz im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert—kommunikationstheoretische Perspektiven*, Religionsforum 6 [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010], 217–79) has analyzed such a process for nineteenth-century Swiss Catholic historiography.

[31] See Astrid Möller and Jörg Rüpke, "Zeitrechnung I. Allgemein. V. Klassische Antike," *Neue Pauly* 12, no. 2 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), 717–19.

time might vary.[32] Exemplarity, for instance, is a quality of the past, which relates the past to the present in a rather intensive way. This way of acknowledging the importance of the past and its continuing normativity (in the selective way chosen by the author, critically or affirming) was popular far into the early modern period.[33] But exemplarity did not exclude temporal markers.[34] By reflecting on causes and motifs contingency is introduced. A contingent history allows one to stress the pastness of the past, to stress its distance. Before modern historicism, this could serve as an argument for the greater value of such a distant past.

This does not exclude critique. Conflicts and contesting claims have very often served as triggers for the production of alternate narratives. History, then, would never come in the singular[35] and tends to be contested and endangered. Like memory it has to be studied as a social and communicative enterprise.[36] Critically, from the start on, history—as opposed to mere memory— introduces contingency in order to question the established truths of others. To introduce competition into the legitimizing repository of the past is a powerful instrument, but risky. Thus, some epochs and some cultural realms are more open to historiography than others. Religion in particular does not seem a very likely candidate for history. To the contrary, metahistorical claims, gods outside time and immune against change, that is, traditional authority in a Weberian sense seem to be the hallmarks of religion. Frequently myths tell stories of a distant past that establish binding norms despite the fact that this past is categorically different from today, but yet binding based on this fact. Without the help of emic narratives, it seems difficult to narrate a history for a system of rituals.[37] Georg Wissowa's famous handbook *Religion und Kultus der Römer* tried to build a description of Roman religion on a purely system-

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[32] It is delineated as a central problem by Alexandra Lianeri in her introduction to *The Western Time of Ancient History: Historiographical Encounters with the Greek and Roman Pasts*, ed. Alexandra Lianeri (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) but is not sufficiently dealt with in the volume as a whole.

[33] See Peter Burke, "Exemplarity and Anti-exemplarity in Early Modern Europe," in Lianeri, *Western Time*, 48–59, in criticism of Francois Hartog, "Time's Authority, " also in *Western Time*, 33–47.

[34] Contra Jonas Grethlein, "Historia Magistra Vitae in Herodotus and Thucydides? The Exemplary Use of the Past and Ancient and Modern Temporalities," in Lianeri, *Western Time*, 261.

[35] Such a plural is, of course, to be differentiated from serial historiography in the forms of serial biographies or hagiographies (see, e.g., Arietta Papaconstantinou, ed., *Writing "True Stories": Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 9 [Turnhout: Brepols, 2010] for Byzantine and Syriac hagiography).

[36] The necessity to study the structures of communication is pointed out by Connerton (*How Societies Remember*, 38) in his criticism of Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (1925; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[37] See Jörg Rüpke, "History," in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London: Routledge, 2011), 285–309.

atic reading of Varro's *Antiquitates*.[38] A polytheist religion, an embedded religion of a city in particular, is an unlikely example for a strategy that seems typical at best for monotheistic, prophetic religion comprising a theology of a history of salvation. Thus, identifying ancient attempts at giving a history to religion would be momentous.

As I said before, particular changes in the field of religion had been recorded as isolated phenomena or as part of a specific historical context before, but I claim that in Varro for the first time religion as a whole—religion as it became to be conceptualized by the very late republic—was made the subject of a historical account. The analysis of the thoroughness of this type of historiography will lead to my second claim. In negotiating different identities, the purpose of Varronian historicization is to establish not a local but a "universal" identity. Being in the midst of visible religious change and under the pressure of intellectuals coming to grips with the formation of an empire is not the least impetus for the Varronian innovation.

VARRONIAN HISTORY AND SYSTEMATICS

Varro's *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, the sixteen books of "Antiquities of things divine," offers a full-blown systematization of religion at the end of the Roman republic. The work was dedicated in 46 BC to Julius Caesar.[39] Its historical component is not to be found in its etiological stories, for instance, the origins of the Sibylline books at Rome (frag. 56). *Etiology* is a very special type of dealing with the past. It concentrates on a moment of origin that is thought to sufficiently explain the presence of an institution or monument, be it fully in use or just a dimly noticed survival. Such narratives, etiological myths, make good stories, but they tend to remain isolated. A dozen etiological myths do not make a history. Varro clearly did more than collect such stories. How far he overstepped the bounds of that lesser ambition is difficult to tell. The work's sixteen volumes survive exclusively in the form of quotations by later, frequently polemical authors, Augustine of Hippo taking pride of

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[38] Jörg Rüpke, "Libri sacerdotum: Forschungs- und unviersitätsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zum Ort von Wissowas Religion und Kultus der Römer," in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 5 (2003): 16–39.

[39] On Varro, see Burckhart Cardauns, *M. Terentius Varro: Einführung in sein Werk* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2001); for the *Antiquitates*, see Burkhart Cardauns, "Varro und die römische Religion: Zur Theologie, Wirkungsgeschichte und Leistung der 'Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum,'" in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, vol. 2.16, pt. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978), 80–103; H. D. Jocelyn, "Varro's Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum and Religious Affairs in the Late Roman Republic," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65 (1982): 148–205; Yves Lehmann, *Varron théologien et philosophe romain*, Collection Latomus 237 (Brussels: Latomus, 1997); Rüpke, "Varro's Tria Genera Theologiae"; for his contemporary reception, see Thomas Baier, *Werk und Wirkung Varros im Spiegel seiner Zeitgenossen: Von Cicero bis Ovid*, Hermes Einzelschriften 73 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997).

place and Tertullian being second.[40] What is more, those quotations are often isolated from each other, and Augustine and Tertullian do not deign to indicate the book from whence they quote. My argument is therefore based on the assumptions that their citations from Varro's work and the ordering of the fragments that they suggest and which modern scholars have reconstructed are reliable. These assumptions are likewise the basis of Burkhard Cardauns's edition, on which I gratefully rely.[41]

The existence of two chronologically ordered passages has been acknowledged since Reinhold Agahd's edition of the first and the last books.[42] Fragments 35–39 of the first book of Varro's *Antiquitates rerum divinarum* list the introductions of deities and cults into the city of Rome by the earliest kings (frags. 35–39 Cardauns = frag. 39a Agahd):

(35) [Romulus] constituit Romanis deos Ianum Iovem Martem Picum Faunum Tiberinum Herculem
(36) Titus Tatius addidit Saturnum Opem Solem Lunam Vulcanum Lucem . . . Cluacinam
(37, sc. addidit) Numa tot deos et tot deas
(38, sc. regnante Numa) nondum tamen aut simulacris aut templis res divina apud Romanos constabat. (13) Frugi religio et pauperes ritus et nulla Capitolia . . . sed temporaria de caespite altaria et vasa adhuc Samia . . . nondum enim tunc ingenia Graecorum atque Tuscorum fingendis simulacris urbem inundaverant.
(39) Hostilius . . . rex deos et ipse novos Pavorem atque Pallorem propitiandos (sc. introduxit)

[(35) Romulus established for the Romans as gods Ianus, Iupiter, Mars, Picus, Faunus, Tiberinus, and Hercules.
(36) Titus Tatius added Saturnus, Ops, Sol, Luna, Vulcanus, Lux . . . Cloacina.
(37) Numa added as many male as female deities.
(38) During the reign of Numa religion did not yet consist of images or temples with the Romans. A parsimonious piety, poor rites, no Capitol-like splenditure, but temporary altars made of turf, and Samian [i.e., terra-cotta] vessels, the city of Rome was not yet flooded by the ingenuity of Greeks and Etruscans to form images.
(39) King Hostilius introduced the new gods Pavor and Pallor as deserving of propitiation.]

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[40] See, e.g., Gerard O'Daly, "Augustine's Critique of Varro on Roman Religion," in *Religion and Superstition in Latin Literature*, ed. Alan H. Sommerstein, Nottingham Classical Literature Studies 3 (Bari: Levante Editori, 1994), 65–75.

[41] Burkhart Cardauns, *M. Terentius Varro: Antiquitates rerum divinarum; Teil 1: Die Fragmente, Teil 2: Kommentar*, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 1 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976).

[42] Reinhold Agahd, "M. Terenti Varronis Antiquitates rerum diuinarum: Libri I, XIV, XV, XVI; Praemissae sunt quaestiones varronianae," *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie, Suppl. 24* (1898): 1–220.

This sequence was longer, as I will show shortly. The second chronological sequence occurs in book 15.[43] Fragments 214–21 in the reconstruction of Cardauns add further cults, enlarging the chronological realm even back to Hercules's visit to Rome.

(219) Sancus propter hospitalitatem a rege T. Tatio fanum consecutus

(220b) Laren[tin]a . . . scortum meritorium fuit, sive dum Romuli nutrix [et id]eo lupa quia scortum, sive dum Herculis amica est, et iam . . . [the fragment is much longer].

[(219) Sancus received a sanctuary from the king Titus Tatius for [honoring] hospitality.

(220b) Larentina was a prostitute with merits, either while she was the nurse of Romulus (and for that one talks of "she-wolf"), or because (that is the name given to a) prostitute, or while she was the girl-friend of Hercules and . . .]

The few historical data roughly conform to the narratives found in general historiographic literature of the time. In his listing of sacred places in *On Latin Language*, Varro himself refers to the introduction of Sabine deities by Titus Tatius and attributes his data to the "annals" (*De lingua latina* 5.74). The impulse to record such information and to organize historical reflection around it is clearly in harmony with the combining of lists of consuls and temple foundations in the *fasti* of the temple of Hercules Musarum, chronologically relating objects and actors and hence suggesting causation and responsibility. In prominence, namely in the form of lengthy visible lists, using such data in books 1 and 15 Varro places himself in the fields of historiographic genres. But there is more evidence for a historiographic strand at least in the framing books than just the two lists. The narratives named so far are embedded in a historically sensitive framework. The loss of knowledge about gods, the loss of memory forms the starting point of the whole enterprise (frag. 2a):

se timere ne pereant (sc. dei), non incursu hostili, sed civium neglegentia, de qua illos velut ruina liberari a se (dicit) et in memoria bonorum per eius modi libros recondi atque servari utiliore cura, quam Metellus de incendio sacra Vestalia et Aeneas de Troiano excidio penates liberasse praedicatur.

[He was afraid that the gods might perish, not by attack by enemies, but by the citizens' negligence. He says that they are liberated from the latter like from a ruin by him, and the gods would be stored and preserved in the memory of the good men by books of this kind. This was a more useful care than the fact that Metellus was praised

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[43] This sequence is not accounted for by Cancik.

to have rescued from fire the sacred things of Vesta, Aeneas the Penates from the destruction of Troy.]

It is significant that Varro here recalls two layers of disasters, which might have, but ultimately did not, interrupt memory: the destruction of Troy in the middle of the twelfth century BC (by his own dating) and the destruction of the temple of Vesta at the end of the third century BC.[44] The passage has an exemplary ring but stresses the change of conditions, of problems and solutions, in a very forceful opposition of negligence and the composing of books against war and fire. What is threatened by *ignobilitas* (obscurity—thus the wording in the parallel tradition of frag. 2b) is not a specific set of deities, the Penates, but *philosophia perennis*.[45] Varro is more radical. Religion is chronologically and logically secondary to the foundation of society. Religious institutions, thus, are historical data, even if contingency does not rob them of their obligatory character for all those posterior to the founders' decisions (frag. 12):

non se illa iudicio suo sequi, quae civitatem Romanam instituisse ... si eam civitatem novam constitueret, ex naturae potius formula deos nominaque eorum se fuisse dedicaturum.... Sed iam quoniam in vetere populo esset, acceptam ab antiquis nominum et cognominum historiam tenere, ut tradita est, debere se ... et ad eum finem illa scribere ac perscrutari, ut potius eos magis colere quam despicere vulgus velit.

[He is not to follow his own judgment concerning the institutions of the Roman polity. ... If he would found a new polity, he will have been dedicating gods and their names according to nature. ... But as he is living among an old people, he has to cling to the accepted history of names and surnames, as it has been transmitted ... and he has written and researched all this to the purpose that the simple people would venerate these gods rather than despise them.]

History does not stop at the end of the founding phase. Events of political and art history also mark major steps in the history of religion. The introduction of divine images is such a step, chronologically related to the building of the large Capitoline temples. It is a major step in itself, marking the transition

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[44] For the political significance of Rome's Trojan ancestors, see Andrew Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome: Local Tradition and Imperial Rome* (Oxford: University Press, 2001); and Filippo Battistoni, *Parenti dei Raomani: Mito troiano e diplomazia*, Pragmateiai 20 (Bari: Edipuglia, 2010).

[45] Varro's historical interest is not as restricted as "Van Nuffelen ("Varro's Divine Antiquities") suggests by his thesis that the link between the deities of Samothrace, the Penates, and the Capitoline triad served as Varro's cornerstone for the claim that Roman religion contained the truth of Greek philosophy.

from the regal into the early republican period. Again, such contingent steps are consequential. Images are nice to see, but introduce harmful change (frag. 18):[46]

antiquos Romanos plus annos centum et septuaginta deos sine simulacro coluisse. Quod si adhuc . . . mansisset, castius dii observarentur . . . qui primi simulacra deorum populis posuerunt, eos civitatibus suis et metum dempsisse et errorem addidisse.

[The ancient Romans have venerated the gods for more than 170 years without an image. If they would have kept this practice until today, the gods would be observed in a purer manner. . . . Those who first put images of the gods in front of peoples have robbed their polities of fear and added error.]

The cult addressed to images is a vain activity (frag. 22):

dii veri neque desiderant ea (sc. sacra) neque deposcunt, ex aere autem facti, testa, gypso vel marmore multo minus haec curant; carent enim sensu; neque ulla contrahitur, si ea non feceris, culpa, neque ulla, si feceris, gratia.

[True gods neither need cult nor demand it, those made of bronze, terracotta, plaster or marble care even less. For, they have no senses, and you incur no blame, if you offer no cult, nor thanks, if you do.]

Varro concentrates on language and names and hence does not systematically consider that images are necessary in order to stabilize a complex polytheistic pantheon.[47] But he does apply historical reasoning to such processes: Jupiter and Summanus, were originally deities of equal power, the one responsible for lightning at daytime, the other at night. Due to the contingent factor of the building of the Capitoline temple Summanus fell into near oblivion (frag. 42):

Romani veteres . . . Summanum, cui nocturna fulmina tribuebant, coluerunt magis quam Iovem, ad quem diurna fulmina pertinerent. Sed postquam Iovi templum insigne ac sublime constructum est, propter aedis dignitatem sic ad eum multitudo confluxit, ut vix inveniatur qui Summani nomen, quod audire iam non potest, se saltem legisse meminerit.

[The old Romans venerated Summanus, to whom they attributed nocturnal lightning, more than Jupiter, to whom the lightning at daytime belong. But after a famous and

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[46] See ibid., 182, on implications of the dating.

[47] Compare Jörg Rüpke, "Representation or Presence? Picturing the Divine in Ancient Rome," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 12 (2010): 183–96.

fine temple had been built for Jupiter, such a multitude flocked to him because of the dignity of the building that hardly anybody can be found who remembered to even had read a name that he could not any longer hear being pronounced.]

To an extent unknown to us, Varro might have noticed the foundation of temples down to his own time. Two fragments survive that are related to foundations of the latter half of the second century BC (43–44):

(43) (sc. Felicitati) Lucullus aedem constituit.
(44) censuerant, ne qui imperator fanum, quod in [bell]o vovisset, prius dedicasset quem senatus probasset; ut contigit [M. Aem]ilio, qui voverat Alburno deo.

[Lucullus built a temple for Luck (Felicitas).
They ruled that no general should dedicate a sanctuary which he had vowed during a war before the assent by the senate; as it happened to Marcus Aemilius, who had performed a vote for the god Alburnus.]

Varro was aware of opposite decisions, too. He acknowledged the driving out of Liber Pater (or Dionysios) from all of Italy in 186 BC (frag. 45).

saepe censores inconsulto populo <aedes> adsolaverunt. Certe Liberum [patre]m cum sacro suo consules auctoritate non urbe sol[u]mmodo, verum tota Italia eliminaverunt.

[Frequently the censors leveled temples without asking the people. Surely the consuls drove out Liber Pater and his cult not only from the city, but from the whole of Italy on their own authority.]

For the time immediately preceding the publication of the books he notes the fight between the senate and the general populace about the banning of Egyptian cults from the Capitoline hill (frag. 46a):

Serapem et Isidem et Arpocratem et Anubem prohibitos Capitolio (Varro commemorat) eorumque <aras> a senatu deiectas nonnisi per vim popularium restructas. Sed tamen et Gabinius consul Kalendis Ianuariis, cum vix hostias probaret prae popularium coetu, quia nihil de Serape et Iside constituisset, potiorem habuit senatus censuram quam impetum vulgi et aras institui prohibuit.

[Varro told that Serapis and Isis and Harpocrates and Anubis were excluded from the Capitoline hill and that their altars were thrown out by the senate and only rebuilt by popular pressure. Nevertheless on the first of January the consul Gabinius, who could hardly approve of the animal victims for reasons of the crowd of *populares*, because he had caused no legislation on Serapis and Isis, had a mightier control by the senate as support of the common people and forbid to build altars.]

As before, I rely on the sequence of the fragments as Tertullian provides them, even if I cannot absolutely preclude the possibility that the ordering originated with the Christian author toward the end of the second century AD. However, such a deep change of the original sequence was very unusual in an age of papyrus or parchment scrolls.

The introduction of cults need not take the form of the erection of temples. Varro was also interested in the exact dating of the introduction of festivals. Pliny the Elder, around a century later, refers, on the authority of Varro, to the foundation of the Robigalia in the eleventh year of the reign of Numa and of the Floralia in the year 516 of the city.[48] In both cases, Varro apparently reflected on the differences between seasonal dates and the civic calendar. The introduction of scenic games was of equal interest for him: he discussed it in book 10 of the *Antiquities* and again at length in a work of at least two volumes specifically dedicated to the problem, *Origins of the Scenic Games*.[49] Evidently, it was the creation of new cult sites and rituals—or stopping those same rituals—that constituted the "events" of the history of religion, the knots which give faces, dates, and circumstances to religious action. Such a history is dateable. Varro is interested in agency, dating by reigns or consulships are performed in the disguise of statements about actions of the office holders. Fragment 45 clearly differentiates between censors and consuls even in a general statement.

Admittedly, these observations are built on a small, fragmentary basis. It is hard to enlarge it. A substantial (even if likewise fragmentary) corroboration comes from the first of the four books of Varro's *De vita populi Romani*. Observations on changes and innovations in religious architecture, statues, and rituals are frequent. A place, where or on which Tullus Hostilius acted, is "now" the place of the *aedis deum Penatium* (frag. 290 Salvadore); the wavy form of the toga (*undulatis togis*) used on Virgo Fortuna (by Servius Tullius) (frag. 291); the larger rebuilding of a temple (*aedis*) after the small sanctuaries (*delubra parva*) of the regal period (frag. 293); the poverty-stricken (*paupertina*) dress of women in past rituals (frag. 294) and the *paupertates* of early images of the gods (frag. 295); the primitive dress in early games (frag. 302). This is contextualized by other changes in general culture: the use of the toga as night gown (not specified for ritual circumstances, frag. 306), the new usage of a double tunica ("outer" and "under" tunic, frag. 327), the introduction of new words (*passum* in the production of wine, frag. 319) and occupations (*pistor*, frag. 340). Against such a backdrop, it is possible for Varro to detect archaisms like the use of earthenware or bronze for a certain type of cups (*lepistae*) in Sabine temples (frag. 325).

[48] Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia* 18.285–86; Varro, *De re rustica* 1.1.6.
[49] Censorinus, *De die natale* 17.8.

So far, two motifs for Varro's historicizing seem to lurk between his compositional decisions and wordings. On the one hand, historicizing religion allows Varro to reconcile postulated rather than known origins, which are thought to be in accordance with philosophical reasoning, with the brute facts of contemporary religion. On the other hand, Varro is accounting for actual and observable change.[50] The first motif points to the overall philosophical character of the work and it points to Varro's striving at coherence in these sixteen books. The other motif fits very well into the context, which has been reconstructed for antiquarian writings in the century before the *Antiquitates*, that is, the perception of accelerated change leading to attempts to document and systematize (and thereby frequently modify or even invent) tradition.[51]

There is, however, a third motif. Above I assumed that conflicting claims might be most intensively triggering historical narratives, be it to criticize other claims or to fortify one's own. This could now be turned into a heuristic device. Why did Varro write his history—in addition or rather as a frame for his systematic, antiquarian handbook and his philosophical interpretations of religion? In a period in which "religion" had only started to be established as a clearly differentiated concept, we cannot expect specific ritual or theological controversies to be the driving force behind the composition of histories of religion.

Antiquarian accounts of Roman institutions, specific rituals or bodies of norms (e.g., augural law) written by Romans about their own past and present competed with accounts and interpretations of Roman history and culture by Greek authors. This would clearly imply a "we" of Latin-speaking Romans against the "them" backdrop of literature by Greek authors, maybe even of Greek literature in general. The focus in all these texts is an urban one.[52]

In Varro, things are much more complicated. I have always read the *Antiquitates rerum divinarum* as relating to Roman religion, but closer reading shows this interpretation to be partial at best. Augustine discusses the sequence of the treatment of human and divine affairs in the *Antiquitates*:

Rerum quippe humanarum libros, non quantum ad orbem terrarum, sed quantum ad solam Romam pertinet, scripsit, quos *tamen* rerum divinarum libris se dixit scribendi ordine merito praetulisse.[53]

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[50] I am grateful to one of the journal's readers for this observation; see also Rüpke, *Religion in Republican Rome*, 172–85.

[51] Ibid., 144–51.

[52] See the collections of P. Regell, "Fragmenta auguralia," *[Schulprogramm] Königliches Gymnasium zu Hirschberg: Ostern 1882* (1882): 3–19; K. G. Bruns, *Fontes Iuris Romani Antiqui*, ed. O. Gradenwitz, 7th ed. (Tübingen, 1909).

[53] Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 6.4, 251.13–16.

[[Varro] wrote the books on human things, which do not concern the whole world, but just Rome, which he nevertheless, as he said, positioned in the order of writing fully justified before the books on divine things.]

The opposition or paradox implied by Augustine's *tamen* works only if a larger than urban, probably a universal orientation of the latter part of the oeuvre is to be assumed. To talk of the "universal" in regard to antiquity always needs an additional note. The standards of universality were set by Greek thinking, based on the experience of the *oikoumene* of the Mediterranean world, Greek colonization, international trade, and the Hellenistic empires. Beyond that, the *barbaroi* remained, peoples only occasionally acknowledged to have human culture.

Varro's universalistic stance is beyond doubt. The philosophical foundation of his arguments is universalistic. He is at pains to define his three types of theology as a Greek, hence universal classification.[54] Only on such a basis is Varro's statement understandable that the god who governs everything and is venerated on the Capitoline hill as Jupiter is called by the Jews, literally, by monotheistic and venerators obliged to aniconic cult, by another name (frags. 13–15). Read in this perspective, an astonishing number of fragments do not necessarily imply an urban Roman context.

Varro frequently used the plural *civitates* or *urbes*.[55] It should not be forgotten that Roman citizenship was extended to most of Italy by the time of Varro's writing. He does not only acknowledge the introduction of Italian deities to Rome by the early kings, but deals with a wealth of middle Italian local deities, belittled (and preserved) by Tertullian as *deos decuriones cuiusque municipii*, "town council deities" (frag. 33b):[56]

Casiniensium Delventinus, Narniensium Visidianus, Asculanorum Ancharia, Volsiniensium Nortia, Ocriculanorum Valentia, Sutrinorum Hostia, Faliscorum in honorem patris Curris et accepit cognomen Iuno.

[The Delventinus of the Casinienses, the Visidanus of the Narnienses, the Ancharia of the Asculani, the Nortia of the Volsinienses, the Valentia of the Ocriculani, the Hostia of the Sutrini, the Juno of the Falisci accepted a surname (Curritis) in honor of pater Curres.]

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[54] Frags. 6–9, on which, see Rüpke, "Varro's Tria Genera Theologiae."

[55] See, e.g., frags. 5, 9, 18, 20, 68, 69.

[56] Frag. 33a = Tertullian, *Ad nationes* 2.8.6; in a variant 33b = Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 24.8; see Jörg Rüpke, *Von Jupiter und Christus: Religionsgeschichte in römischer Zeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2011), 187–88; this Rüpke volume will be published in an English-language translation by Oxford University Press.

Despite Tertullian's derision, Varro should be taken here as serious as he was in naming Nona and Decima as goddesses of timely birth.[57]

That is not to say that Varro does not speak about Rome. Clearly, he is Roman and includes his readership in a Roman "We" already at the start of his work (e.g., frags. 3, 12). As a Roman he marks differences to Jews (frag. 16), Chaldaeans (frag. 17), to Greek peoples like Spartans (frag. 32) or the Eleusinians (frag. 271) or the Greek in general (frag. 200). In fragment 12 Varro speaks about his *civitas* and the *historia* of divine names in the singular. Varro's *theologia civilis*, his "theory of practice,"[58] dignifying traditional Roman religious practices in the framework of universalistic Greek philosophy,[59] has been shown by Clifford Ando to parallel the juridical notion of *ius civile*, the set of norms belonging to a specific people.[60] Consequently, a plurality of local regulations have to be seen within a wider framework. Would "history" fall into the same structure? Indeed, dated events are given only for Rome. Is this a mere coincidence?

There is a clear difference between philosophy and history, and it is epistemological. In his last book, dedicated to "special and selected deities," Varro dealt with those gods who were defined by Roman places of worship and statues but had also to admit the limits of his interpretations:

de diis . . . populi Romani publicis, quibus aedes dedicaverunt eosque pluribus signis ornatos notaverunt, in hoc libro scribam, sed ut Xenophanes Colophonios scribit, quid putem, non quid contendam, ponam. hominis est enim haec opinari, dei scire.[61]

[I will write in this book about the public deities of the Roman people, to whom they have dedicated temples and whom they have marked out by many images, but, as Xenophanes from Colophon wrote, I say what I believe, not what I claim. A human can only surmise these things, only a god knows them for sure.]

The history of an old people, as indicated in fragment 12, had a more binding authority (*quoniam in vetere populo esset, acceptam ab antiquis nominum et cognominum historiam tenere, ut tradita est, debere se*). But history's authority did not imply intellectual consent. The very special, and nevertheless binding, history of the urban territory and the society built in that place contained

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[57] On frag. 98, see Jörg Rüpke, "Gottesvorstellungen als anthropologische Reflexionen in der römischen Gesellschaft," in *Grenzen des Menschseins: Probleme einer Definition des Menschlichen*, ed. Justin Stagl and Wolfgang Reinhard, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Historische Anthropologie 8 (Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), 435–68.

[58] Rüpke, "Varro's Tria Genera Theologiae," 118.

[59] Ibid., 124.

[60] Clifford Ando, "The Ontology of Religious Institutions," *History of Religion* 49 (2010): 54–70, at 78.

[61] Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 7.17, p. 295.22 introducing frag. 228.

wrong decisions by the old Romans—and maybe by contemporaries. Varro does refer to contemporaneous conflicts, as the Egyptian cults and the "leveling of temples" demonstrate. Narrating such events in such a manner offers the possibility of distancing. Varro supports Roman religious tradition despite crucial historical mistakes by its agents, right at the start as well as later on in the introducing of images. Such a traditional religion might even be embarrassing, for example, in their use of images as in the old Romans' invention of divine genealogies, that is, mythical narratives of sexual relationships among gods (frag. 19). Romans would share such a feeling with the Lavinians and their public cult of male genitals (frag. 262):

in Italiae compitis quaedam (dicit) sacra Liberi celebrata . . . ut in eius honorem pudenda virilia colerentur, . . . hoc . . . membrum per Liberi dies festos cum honore magno plostellis inpositum prius rure in compitis et usque in urbem postea vectabatur. In oppido autem Lavinio unus Libero totus mensis tribuebatur, cuius diebus omnes verbis flagitiosissimis uterentur, donec illud membrum per forum transvectum esset atque in loco suo quiesceret. Cui membro (inhonesto) matrem familias honestissimam palam coronam necesse erat inponere. Sic videlicet Liber deus placandus fuerat pro eventibus seminum, sic ab agris fascinatio repellenda.

[He says that in crossroads of Italy some Bacchic cults are celebrated . . . such as to venerate male genitals in his honor . . . this genital member was carried along during the festivals of Bacchus with much honor erected on carts, first on crossroads in the countryside, and later even into the city. In the town of Lavinium a whole month is dedicated to Bacchus. On its days all use the most shocking words until this member is driven through the central market place and put to rest in its proper place. The most dignified female head of a family had to publicly crown this undignified member. In this way evidently the god Bacchus was to be made benevolent for the issue of the seeds, in this way the bewitching was to be warded off.]

The whimsy of contingent history—that could have taken other directions, could have produced alternative outcomes—produced institutions that could not only be compared to other peoples' institutions but are connected, in the transfer of Penates, in the spread of images or Bacchic cults. In the second paragraph I pointed to the use of history for strengthening groups and boundary-creation. Varro does not use the histories of religions in order to mark boundaries. He seems to be interested in the bridges offered by a history shared by different peoples rather than in the implicit exclusion produced by the history of one group only. I propose to call this a focused universalism.[62]

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[62] The concept of "focalised universality," as developed by Liv Mariah Yarrow ("Focalised Universality: Contextualising the Genre," in *Historiae Mundi: Studies in Universal History*, ed. Peter Liddel and Andrew Fear [London: Duckworth, 2010], 131–47), does acknowledge such a perspec-

Bridging holds true on different levels. Within a universalistic framework, religious traditions of different peoples offer a heritage that might be shared. Fragment 31 names heroes from Africa and of Boetia. As already shown, the same god could be venerated under different names. Even a negative trait like images of the divine could be shared by many polities (frag. 18). Roman precepts for ritual action as well as Greek precepts for ritual abstinence were resources for the solution of human problems (frags. 49–50):[63]

(50) et religiones et castus id possunt, ut ex periculo eripiant nostro.
(49) nostro ritu sunt facienda quam †his civilibus Graeco castu.

[Religious observances and ascetic practices are able to rescue from the danger imminent to us.
For these civic matters (?) cult is to be performed according to our rite as with Greek standards of purity.]

I have already pointed to the stress placed on the import of Italian deities into Rome by the first kings as well as on documenting the contemporary local deities of middle-Italian townships. Varro, born 116 BC, had witnessed the start of the Italian civil war as a military tribune and was much aware of the problem of the unification of Italy. But in a book published late in 47 or in 46 he was aware of internal cleavages in Roman society, too. If Caesar, the murderer, is the dedicatee of the *Antiquitates*, his victim, Pompey, is at the same time the subject of a laudatory oeuvre. Varro's program of three types of theology does not aim at deepening dividing lines, but at holding divergent developments together. Poetry and its invention of embarrassing stories about the gods serve the theater, they entertainment and still offer something to civic cult (frag. 11, quoted above). Philosophy, producing physical interpretations of religion, should be confined to smaller circles, but offers something to civic theology, too (ibid.). Both are universal phenomena and hence shared reservoirs for the many local civic variants of religion (see frag. 9).

In such a bridging use of history, Varro was no exception. Despite the production of much partisan narrative, there was a strong current in Roman histo-

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tivisation of a universal outlook but is easily conflated (ibid., 133) with a centrist perspective that does not treat a peripheral development as important in its own right and peripheral agents as on equal footing in certain respects. This must imply an evident interest in treating peripheral events. As Peter Van Nuffelen ("Theology versus Genre? The Universalism of Christian Historiography in Late Antiquity," in Liddel and Fear, *Historiae Mundi*, 162–75) rightly stresses, Christian historiography does frequently not meet the criteria of universal history despite an implicit universalistic theology of history. For Varro as a Greek scholar, see, e.g., J. G. F. Powell, "Response [to T. Tarver, "Varro, Caesar, and the Roman Calendar: A Study in Late Republican Religion"]," in Sommerstein, *Religion and Superstition*, 59–64, at 63.

[63] Here I prefer to follow the sequence given in Nonius197 L.

riography that aimed at creating a history common to the Roman families from all over Italy and different layers of society. Annalistic history, narrating Roman history year by year with ever changing protagonists, and the projection of a long line of military victories into the calendar by means of founding dates, offered the possibility to level out differences in individual or gentilician contributions, to write a history without hierarchy. Cato attempted a history without naming individuals. This option, however, was not followed by history of religion as attempted in Varro's *Antiquitates*.

HISTORY OF RELIGION

Just a few years before Varro's *Antiquitates*, Caesar, in his books on the war in Gaul, had described Celtic and Germanic religions. Without problems, he could speak about the Gallic cult of Mercury.[64] Surely, this was a translation, an *interpretatio Romana*. But it was a translation that presupposed the principal universality of the phenomenon of religion and of the gods, even if it did not reflect it.[65] Differences could be acknowledged, indeed, were easily acknowledged. Being subjected to ethnographic *topoi* or historical explanation, the differences' importance was diminished—diversity is natural and contingent and does no harm. After all, the Romans were to build an empire. Management of diversity must have been the demand of the day.

Thus, the hypothesis at the start of this paragraph has been confirmed. Varro wrote historical accounts of religion within a universalistic framework. His intended readers were Roman and his focus was Roman, but his interest was in religion as a universal phenomenon, enabling Italian and imperial communication rather than strengthening mutually exclusive ethnic or urban identities. Intellectually, Varro is to be assigned to contemporaries like Diodorus Siculus or Pompeius Trogus, writers of universal histories.[66] This was, of course, a minority position in the late republican practice of historiography, which was undoubtedly dominated by the highly individualized and "national" genre of historical epic. Within this context, Varro's text may be understood as a polemical stance, of that sort that I postulated earlier for any historiography when I claimed that history is never written in the singular, but organizes memories in alternative form.

[64] Julius Caesar, *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* 6.17.1.

[65] See Greg Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians: Ethnography and Empire in the Roman West* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 58.

[66] On Trogus: Bernard R. Widevoort Crommelin, *Die Universalgeschichte des Pompeius Trogus: Herculea Audacia Orbem Terrarum Adgressus*, Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur 7 (Hagen: Rottmann, 1993); on the rise of universal history, J. M. Alonso-Núñez, "The Emergence of Universal Historiography from the 4th to the 2nd Centuries B.C.," in *Purposes of History: Studies in Greek Historiography from the 4th to the 2nd Centuries B.C.*, ed. Herman Verdin, Guido Schepens, and Els de Keyser (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 253–66.

About eighty years later, the Tiberian writer Valerius Maximus followed Varro by dedicating a full book to religion within his collection of famous deeds and sayings. Clearly, Valerius Maximus's *Facta et dicta* is a not continuous historiography. The arrangement of the short narratives is not chronological, but topical. But we cannot stop at Friedrich Mueller's apodictic "Valerius did not write history."[67] Historical accounts could include systematic treatment. Velleius Paterculus' short universal history of the very early 30s also frequently interrupted chronological sequence by topical arrangement.[68] Valerius Maximus used past tense for his examples and wrote against the background and openly used a rich tradition of historiography. Presupposing a chronological framework consisting of famous wars and magistrates, Valerius frequently locates his less well known protagonists in the very beginning of such a narrative as elegantly as contemporaries, colleagues, and participants in an expedition and the like. Sometimes, the hint is given only at the end, even more clearly indicating his interest in the date.[69] The range of topics, including priesthoods, rituals, the building of and behavior in temples, and the veneration of different deities, betrays his notion of religion.

Varro was even more radical. *Religio* is defined not as a tradition, but as an institution, an *institutum*, something "set up" by humans. Surely, Romans had known about earlier religious traditions before, had had memories of temples being set up, games being dedicated and continued. Thus, Roman religion could accommodate a lot of Roman history. Varro, now, goes one step further. The whole differentiation of the divine into endless lists of names, he claims, has been contingent, historical—it was not simply an artificial instantiation of cultic practice. Contingency distances: one could reflect about such decisions, one might even criticize them. But in a contingent world, decisions are necessary, including negative ones, for example, the driving out of cults. Before the age of historicism, such decisions, invested with proper, legitimate authority, would be binding despite a possible critical perspective onto them. This is the basis for Varro, the systematizing thinker. Within the historical framework a recipe book on religion is offered. In his *De natura deorum*, written in the year following the publication of Varro's work, Cicero would accept Varro's concept of religion as the contingent human reaction to a conviction that the divine existed. What is more, in Cicero's formulation, it is only this latter transcendent truth that is legitimately the object of philosophical inquiry; religious

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[67] Hans-Friedrich Mueller, *Roman Religion in Valerius Maximus* (London: Routledge, 2002), 6.

[68] John Rich, "Velleius' History: Genre and Purpose," in *Velleius Paterculus: Making History*, ed. Eleanor Cowan (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2011), 73–92, at 82. The history must have been written before the end of Seianus: Dieter Hennig, *L. Aelius Seianus: Untersuchungen zur Regierung des Tiberius*, Vestigia 21 (Munich: Beck, 1975), 133.

[69] See, e.g., Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta* 1.6.5.

practice, the contingent reaction of humans to that truth, merely needs control.[70] This is not exactly what Varro wrote, but leads back to a rather narrow, "civic" definition of religion.

The fully fledged Varronian history of religion, dimly visible through the scattered two-hundred sixty fragments of the *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, tries to construct not a Roman, but a universal history of religion, apt for a Roman polity extended all over Italy, certainly into Greece and beyond, an incipient *Imperium Romanum*. Varro and his dedicatee, Caesar, share a perspective in this regard. This was no unilinear development. New gods were to arrive, who demanded stories about the shrinking of diversity, about resistance to unity and about differentiation judged secondary. In such narratives, conspirators like Sextus Tarquinius and Judas replaced Numa and Fulvius Nobilior.[71] Ultimately, histories of "religions" instead of "religion" were written. The concept of the "church of the martyrs," construing the survivors as legitimate successors to those killed, is put forward by religious historiographers.[72] These sharply defined identities are proffered in contradiction to the ambiguity and ambivalences, which obtain in the field of religion. The production of boundaries by historiographers and group leaders must not be allowed to completely obscure the existence and historical significance of the vast array of shared practices in daily life. In areas of the world where multiple (or indistinct) religious identities were the norm, many functions and forms of religious practices and beliefs occurred on a shared field between and above the boundaries invoked by distinct groups.

The concept of "religions" itself is one important and problematic consequence of the historical approach sketched above. The units of description might be self-evident from an emic point of view, the internal discourse of a group, frequently adopted by political commentators and journalists, who all might share an interest in clear-cut boundaries, in exclusion of heretics or the inclusion of wavering allies. Varro's history of religion as embedded in his systematic account of religious practices and beliefs at Rome, in Italy, and in the wider Mediterranean invites one to develop alternative concepts. "Roman religion," as I hope to have shown, is not without alternatives. The direct coupling of religious identity and historiography of religion (familiar from a tradition of "national history") in what we might term "confessional historiography" can be countered through the development of alternative and more

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[70] Rüpke, *Religious Pluralism*, 750.

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

[72] Most famously the fourth-century church historian Eusebius: see Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book—Origen, Eusebius, and the Librara of Caesarea* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006).

complex histories of religion.[73] Of course, every group is entitled to construe itself as the legitimate keeper of a tradition, but it should be the task of scientific history of religion to highlight the selections and exclusions of positions and people implied in such emic histories. Reflecting on the biases and concealments of traditional narratives and historiography of religions and on the history of its analytical and descriptive terms is vital for any history of religion in the twenty-first century.

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[73] See the analysis of Metzger (*Religion, Geschichte, Nation*). For the modern spread of the paradigm, see Leigh E. Schmidt, "A History of All Religions," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24 (2004): 327–34.