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Title: “Urban Selves: Individualization in Roman Cities“

Published in: Self, self-fashioning and individuality in Late Antiquity: New Perspectives
Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck

Year: 2019

Pages: 393 - 418

ISBN: 978-3-16-158990-4

Persistent Identifier: https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-158991-1

Urban Selves

Individualization in Roman Cities

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1. The Concept of the Self

Terms such as "subject," "self," and "subjectivity" all share a common conceptual root. Underpinning this conceptual vocabulary is the idea of discrete individual agents who act based on their lived experiences and with at least some degree of autonomy. A further essential component is that these agents are conscious, to at least a minimal extent, of their individuality and autonomy. It is this inwardly directed awareness that we typically call the "self" and the accompanying consciousness of it that we term "self-reflection."

The concept of the self – *autòs* in Greek and *ipse* in Latin – is a central concern of the ancient philosophical tradition from Plato in the fourth century BCE onwards. Significantly, theorizing about the self is closely connected to theories about the nature of the soul, which is identified as the most important part of the individual, responsible for overseeing and governing the body. In a number of key ancient philosophical traditions, the soul is also responsible for connecting the human with the divine, either by aligning the whole soul with that of God or by bringing the best and leading part into a harmonious relationship with the higher power.[2] The *real* self, stripped of its more base and earthly elements, tends

[1] This chapter presents research done in the "Kolleg-Forschungsgruppen" "Religious Individualisation in Historical Perspective" and "Religion in Urbanity: Reciprocal Formations" financed by the German Science Foundation and a fellowship at the Israel Institute of Advanced Study, Jerusalem. I am grateful to Maren Niehoff and her colleagues for the invitation to her research group and grateful for the feedback at the Centre as well as during the conference. Paul Scade, Liverpool, edited the text; I am grateful for his many suggestions to improve the argument and the language.

[2] The foundational text for this tradition is Plato's *Timaeus*. Here, the physical human soul is constructed as an imperfect copy of the divine world soul. The ethical goal for humans is identified as the 'healing' of their imperfections by modelling themselves on the structure of the divine and, thus, bringing themselves into harmony with the macrocosm. Plato's approach informed not just the views of later Platonists and Neo-Platonists but also the naturalistic ethics and metaphysics of the Stoics, the dominant philosophical school of the Hellenistic period. On the relationship between nature and the soul in Plato, see, e. g., Gill 2004a. For examples of

to be identified with the divine intellect as a microcosm stands to the macrocosm.[3]

The nature of the connection between human and divine was fertile ground for philosophical writers and was analyzed in a wide variety of ways. One major school, the Stoics, placed great emphasis on the importance of self-analysis through their concept of *oikeiosis*, often translated as "appropriation." In its earliest stage, *oikeiosis* is driven by the natural force of self-preservation, which motivates the young individual to appropriate the surrounding environment to the self and, reciprocally, the self to the surrounding environment. As the individual grows and develops, a deeper and deeper enquiry into the nature of the self is necessitated by consciousness of being embedded within an expanding social and physical world to which one must stand in an appropriate relationship. The ideal individual develops step by step until his whole soul is brought into a harmonious relationship with the divinely ordered cosmos, achieving the end of living "a life in agreement with nature." It is this that constitutes a good, and thus happy, life. This same process of self-analysis also leads the individual to identify the "duties" (*officia*) one must fulfil both for one's own sake and for the sake of the society to which one belongs.[4] The appropriate way of living, and one's corresponding duties, thus vary according to one's gender, age, and juridical and social status.[5] As both a part of and a reflection of the divine intellect, the highest aim and capacity of the human soul and/or mind is participating in rational thought and raising one's cognitive standards to the impersonal level of the divine cosmos.[6] Deviations from this perfect rationality are considered to be psychic or physical illnesses, structural disharmonies that mark the individual as being out of tune with the divine. Through the pursuit of philosophical or other healing therapies, the soul can be cured of these defects and brought back into a proportionate relationship with that of God.[7]

Philosophers in the Platonic and Stoic traditions reflected on the precise position of the individual in the world and made both the soul and the self key concepts in their thought. However, it is only in the works of Seneca the Younger, in the first century CE, that we can first discern an explicit and increasing interest in the specifically biographical dimension of the self.[8] The philosophical

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the burgeoning literature on the Platonic background to Stoicism, see Reydams-Schils 1999: Gill 2004b, and the papers collected in Long 2013. See also briefly Setaioli 2007: 350; for the problems faced by Jewish thinkers in adapting the concept and for Philo's creative solutions, see Dillon 2009; van Kooten: ibid. (I am grateful to Paul Scade for these additions and references); Niehoff 2018: 192–208.

[3] Trapp 2007: 99–109.

[4] Ibid.: 109–14.

[5] Ibid.: 115 f.

[6] Ibid.: 109.

[7] Ibid.: 116–22.

[8] Gill 2009: 82. See the contribution by Reydams-Schils to this volume. However, Roll-

schools of the Hellenistic period,[9] rather than the religion of the era,[10] offered what amounted to a training course in self-reflection, but this reflection did not emphasise the notion of the self as an individual. The ultimate goal of Stoic self-examination was to achieve consistency in the conduct of one's own life[11] internal consistency, consistency with the society to which one belongs, and, more broadly, consistency with the cosmos of which the individual is a part.[12] This was far from a form of enhanced individualism. On the contrary, the Roman Stoics emphasized the interdependent nature of all the parts of the cosmic structure and stressed the obligations owed by the individual towards others.[13] Indeed, an important theme underlying much Stoic thought is the limited relevance of apparent individuals: in the coherent Stoic cosmos, the idea that anything is separate from everything else is an illusion grounded in the limitations of the microcosmic perspective.[14] To understand human nature fully is, ultimately, to understand that there are no distinct individuals at all, only differentiated parts of a greater unified whole. Such an integration does, however, not deny individual agency; the notion of "preferred indifferents" – differences that do not matter normatively but are clearly up for individual choice – points to the everyday, even if not cosmic relevance of such variety.[15]

The topography of the inner self, and the figurative language used to describe it, remained complex in all its varied formulations across different genres and philosophical schools.[16] In the various Platonic traditions, in particular, the figure of the demon provided a lens through which to discover the other (or plural others) that delineated the innermost essence of the human. This discovery was achieved by bringing oneself into the proper relationship with the inner, or innermost, aspect of that self, which was held to be responsible for thought and rational action.[17]

Philosophical approaches place a clear emphasis on the essential underlying similarity of human selves, all of which differ only in their deviation from an ideal model and all of which should strive for cosmic uniformity. Individual differences in social and physical situations within the world are noted and accounted for but are not further theorized, since the ultimate goal is precisely the

er convincingly argues that already the Ciceronian technique of situationally shaping and reshaping examples points to a conceptual, even if not terminological interest in such differences.

[9] Sellars 2004.
[10] Fowden 2005: 528.
[11] Gill 2009: 77–78; see Graver in this volume.
[12] This also applies to Plotinus: Kühn 2008: 140.
[13] Richter 2011: 82–85; Reydams-Schils 2005: 53–63, 140–41, 174–76.
[14] On Stoic thought concerning the relationship between parts and wholes, see Scade 2013.
[15] See the contribution of Reydams-Schils in this volume.
[16] See Markschies 1997.
[17] Ildefonse 2008: 233; Aubry ibid. Cf. Song 2009.

transcendence of such variations.[18] The concept of *persona*, for instance, is not brought to bear in discussions of this kind of worldview.[19] This term was important in ancient grammar, as later in Christology, denoting a role in a theatrical production, law court, or administration. However, it was not used either in an elaborated role theory nor in discussions about the attribution of responsibility or about holders of rights, despite its analytical presence for the problem of *oikeiosis* in Cicero. Similarly, arguments from the life and character of a person (*de vita*) did not play a major role in the Roman rhetorical system that trained students for advocacy.[20] In short, the concept of the individualized self is, despite the description of empirical differences, comparatively under-theorized in our ancient sources.

In this article, I would like to offer a different perspective on ancient constructions of the self, one based on sociology and history, and particularly on studies of urbanity. I will employ a term which can help to bring out further nuances of ancient selfhood, namely, "individualization." My concern here is not with any specific historical example of "individualization" but, rather, with the potential the concept has for helping us analyze and map out both the transfer of ideas and changes in the practices and processes of institutionalization of increased selfhood and individuality. Here, "individualization" offers more than a window into our own "individualistic" modern era: the term has now been unbundled from the concept of "modernity" and set free to be applied to our understanding of other periods as well.[21] But its value is not restricted to the study of any specific past society or historical moment. Concepts such as "self," "agency," "subject," "personhood," "individuation," and "personal identity" can all be illuminated and understood in a more fine-grained way by considering them under the umbrella of individualization.[22]

Such an approach allows us to identify institutional structures that prompt and strengthen processes of individualization, even though at first sight individuality may be assumed to be limited or threatened by institutions. I argue, however, that in Antiquity, institutions created significant spaces for shaping individuality. Taking a closer look at processes of individualization in ancient cities, we appreciate the potential plurality of personalities and recognise in a new way the

[18] Cf. e. g., Sorabji 2007: 87 and 97 on Epictetus. The tendencies of an individual's rational decisions, identified by Epictetus as *prohairesis*, could widely differ between individuals. However, every individual is admonished to turn to oneself *(epistrephein)*, in order to search for the 'true innate preconceptions about the good' (Epict. 3.22.38–39, quoted ibid.: 97).

[19] Trapp 2007: 120.

[20] See *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 2.5.

[21] Rüpke 2011a; Vinzent 2011; Rüpke 2012b, 2012c, 2012d; Rüpke and Spickermann 2012; Rüpke 2013a, 2014; Vinzent 2014; Fuchs, Linkenbach, and Reinhard 2015; Fuchs and Rüpke 2015b; Rüpke 2015a, 2015c, 2016c.

[22] See Fuchs and Rüpke 2015a; Rüpke 2012a; Lichterman 2013; Rüpke and Woolf 2013; Rebillard and Rüpke 2015, 2015b, 2016a.

salience of personal as well as collective identities. In the present article, I show that such processes became so deeply ingrained in the fabric of ancient experience that they also shaped the *imaginaire* of religious texts. I study the test-case of the "Shepherd of Hermas," a second-century text from Rome, and point to the role played by two cities that symbolize opposite poles of individuation.

In the Hellenistic and Imperial periods, individualization was furthered by processes of urbanization.[23] These processes increased both social and geographical mobility, made migration more common, and, ultimately, helped develop what I have called "practical individuality" or "being on one's own." Practical individuality (as opposed to moral, competitive, representative, or reflexive individuality) is generated from the need for people to act on their own account instead of simply following the dictates of tradition. It arises from, and points towards, situations of disembeddedness that are a consequence of the temporary rupture of social bonds (as with migrants, travellers, or survivors of natural or man-made disasters) or of a sharp division of labour. Being on one's own is rarely reflected in written or learnt instructions but it could be prepared for by reference to them, for instance by considering the journey of the soul after death.

For the problem at hand, that leads to the question of how practices of self-reflection in the Hellenistic and Imperial periods are related to cities or notions of cities. I will argue that urbanization and urbanity, urban ways of living and thinking, are related to processes of individualization that employ notions of the self in three different ways: (1) cities created a market for such practices; (2) cities offered citizenships, a comprehensive notion of identity, which could be employed to sharpen notions of the self; and (3) cities furthered the formation of urban identities building on notions of belonging to or striving towards such places. This is because cities were as much characterized by internal complexity as they were by their entanglement in networks of other cities and urban thinking referring to places outside of the city (contrasting rural idylls or other cities as points of comparisons for one's own urbanity).

2. An Urban Market for the Shaping of the Self[24]

The self was not an early focus for religious practices, with the exception of certain marginal phenomena such as the "Orphic gold tablets" and their related narratives.[25] While the philosophical schools provided important sources for the systematic acquisition of techniques for self-reflection, the field of religious communication also embraced practices directed at the same end but following a

[23] Rüpke 2018b.
[24] The following text is based on Rüpke 2018a: 289–92.
[25] On these marginal phenomena, see Bremmer 1994, idem 2011.

radically different logic. Important actors in this field were able to work within a widespread institutional framework in the form of the network of sanctuaries dedicated to Asclepius, which spread from Epidaurus to the furthest limits of the Hellenistic world. Those who lived and worked in the context of these places of healing treated illnesses as individualized phenomena that were more than just disruptions of a natural social order or of the procession of generations.[26] In the *Hieroi Logoi*, the invalid rhetorician Aelius Aristides describes his dreams, pilgrimages, and personal encounters with Asclepius. He not only plumbs the depths of his own self in these accounts but also extols its excellence as the most important evidence of the power of his god, despite the frightful illnesses from which he suffers.[27] Even in the wider world beyond the bounds of the healing sanctuaries, deities were regularly asked for assistance in recovering from an illness or maintaining current good health.[28] However, despite the connection between healing and the divine and the individualized relationship between man and god, illness was not generally treated as indicative of a flawed or deviant self.

The kind of dreams recounted by Aristides were an important form of individualized experience, inaccessible to other observers unless narrated but taken seriously at all social levels.[29] Manuals were written and read to assist in the interpretation of the symbols and events that took place in dreams.[30] Unsurprisingly, the divinities who appeared most frequently were also among the most widespread, with Asclepius and Silvanus regularly attending the slumbers of worshippers and, thus, instigating religious activities.[31]

The Imperial period also saw the revival and spread of small, local oracles which were available for individual consultation and were thus accessible on a personal level to a significant portion of the population.[32] Ready-made portions of text were used in divination by lot, making the procedure both straightforward and cheap. This combination of accessibility and affordability meant that the practice became democratized, as it ceased to be restricted primarily to members of the land-owning elites. Even in contexts in which the self did not become the central locus for direct communication with, or manifestations of, the divine, it still became an object of significant interest. The ability to enter into direct religious communication with addressees who could be accessed in spe-

[26] Sfameni Gasparro 2007; Israelowich 2015.

[27] Harris and Holmes 2008; Petridou 2015, ibid.; see also Fields 2008; Petsalis-Diomidis 2010.

[28] Petridou 2016.

[29] See, e. g., Pliny, *Letters* 7.27 (I owe the suggestion to the late Veit Rosenberger).

[30] Athanassiadi 1993; Harris 2009; Renberg 2010; Pizzone 2013. On Artemidorus, see also Weber 1999; Chandezon, and du Bouchet 2012; Brakke; Satlow, and Weitzman 2005; Downie 2015.

[31] Renberg 2015: 257.

[32] Bendlin 2006; Stoneman 2011: 174–89; Kindt 2015. See also Eidinow 2007: 42–55.

cific sanctuaries and sites provided a valuable, individualized complement to the centralized forms of communication.

In order to situate my argument properly (although the point is not germane to the argument itself), it is important to stress that ancient "religion" was no more a unified phenomenon than was ancient philosophy. While certain common ideas were present in specific areas, such as the complementary yet conflicting ideas and practices clustering around kinship and citizenship in the Italian towns,[33] it is not this facet of religion on which I focus in this paper. Rather, my interest is in the practices of instrumental religion, religious practices dealing with specific mundane problems in order to achieve a solution, such as the practices of economic agents set free by Roman law.[34] The economic dimensions of production, consumption, and exchange are vital in this context; healing, oracles, dream interpretation, and philosophical training were not services offered up for free. Group membership involved costs, in the form of fees or payment in kind, just as did the acquisition of religious services sold by individuals. We can, thus, draw no hard distinction between collective religious practice and individual practice on the grounds of economic exchange. The borderlines between the two were evidently permeable.

Cicero's attempt in his *Laws* to regulate the economic dimension of religion by sanctioning separated private cults (*separatim*)[35] was one of a number of failed attempts to conceptualize this area. Religious choices offered to selves were driven by immigration, markets, and the differentiation of growing cities at the same time.

3. Urban Identities

The resultant "urban selves" did not simply identify with their cities. On the contrary, I suggest that there must have been a growing sense of individuality in the civic context of the crowded city described by Georg Simmel[36] and that this, in turn, provoked the institutionalization of alternative options.[37] In the ancient Mediterranean, those who dwelt in cities were always a minority of the total population. Nevertheless, a steady influx of migration brought enough new-

[33] See the chapter by Cliff Ando in this volume on the inalienability of these aspects. Cf. Rüpke 2018a, 250 vs. Flower 2017.

[34] See again the chapter by Ando. Thus, the range of religious entrepreneurs could step outside of traditional definitions of religious competence.

[35] Cic. *Leg.* 2.19.

[36] Simmel 1917.

[37] In this context, we can think of the substantial number of migrants, often young males, for whom any family tradition of ancestor cult was neither locally available nor easily reproducible; see Scheidel 2001; Scheidel 2003 on demography and Tacoma 2016 for Roman migration in general.

comers into the cities not only to keep up with the high mortality rates caused by poor sanitation[38] but also, in a number of regions and across a range of periods, to drive processes of urbanization. Migrants were drawn in by "urban aspirations,"[39] hopes and optimistic ideas shaped by images and representations of life in the cities. At the same time, cities "trapped" their inhabitants, holding them in the cage of a densely organized framework, characteristic not only of Greco-Roman urbanization.[40] Urban identities[41] served both as a pull-factor and as one of a number of forces that acted on residents to persuade them to remain. Despite their power, these notions of collective identity were not all-encompassing and we have no reason to suppose that they created an enduring and exclusive sense of belonging in those who shared them.[42] Rather, collective identities captured the dynamics of the relationship between the individual and the others with whom they were in a real or imaginary relationship. As such, they supplemented self-referential individual identities instead of replacing them.

My general analysis of collective identities here mirrors my understanding, based on recent psychological research, of religious collective identities more particularly. Group membership, I suggest, is defined primarily by self-classification, that is by the individual's personal assessment of his or her group affiliation. This assessment is, itself, influenced by how the individual perceives that he is classified by others; the meaning the individual and others place on group affiliation; emotional connectedness to, and dependence on, the inter-relationship between personal and collective identities, which can, in some cases, completely overlap; the degree to which individual group members are embedded in everyday collective routines and the level of impact this embeddedness has on individual behaviour; and, finally, the cognitive dimension of group membership, or the way in which shared stories and imaginaries reveal the values, characteristics, and history of the group.[43]

When discussing religious groups, or even entire religions, in the Roman Empire,[44] it is important to bear in mind that these terms do not identify strictly demarcated associations of people. Rather, a religious group or a religion consists of a situationally specific group of actors, which may include non-humans, to

[38] This point is based on the urban graveyard theory; see Scobie 1986.

[39] The term has been developed in recent urban studies that have taken up the language of 'aspirations' from studies of social mobility (Appadurai 2004) to describe the driving motifs and attitudes of immigrants as well as inhabitants, that is, the hopes and ideas connected with urban life and the employment of religion for such ends, resulting in 'urban religious aspirations' (van der Veer 2015: 2–12; Goh and van der Veer 2016.

[40] For the concept, see Mann 1986: 211 (pages according to German edition 1994).

[41] Cf. for urban identity in religious terms even in the 4th–6th centuries CE, Caseau 1999; Dey 2014; Dey 2015; Jacobs 2014.

[42] See Rebillard 2012: 2–5, who opts for the term "salient identity."

[43] Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004.

[44] See Rüpke 2010b, Rüpke 2010a, Rüpke 2011c, Rüpke 2011b.

which a rational individual believes him- or herself to belong. A consequence of this is that highly complex collective identities could develop, comprising a multiplicity of affiliations and/or conscious acts of distancing.[45]

In the case of cities and discourses about city, the situation is even more complex. In addition to groups, places also provide the points of reference for the construction of collective identities. As Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis has observed in her study of spatial imaginaries, Judaism, Christianity, and the cult of Mithras all share an important trait in the Severan period, in that each places great significance on a distant, holy landscape (a "sacred landscape") and each does this without giving up its universalist claims.[46] This is neither simple coincidence nor an isolated phenomenon. The Severan architectural programme in Rome and North Africa, as well as the expansion of citizenship through the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, points towards "a re-casting of geographical centers and perspectives, followed by a shift in what constituted local and universal imperial culture."[47] Petsalis-Diomidis draws on travel diaries and epiphany narratives to explain the "sacred landscape" phenomenon, using these texts to introduce new manners of seeing and perceiving difference. She argues that these new modalities of perception go hand in hand with a growing individual desire for a personal relationship with the divine.[48]

Many other examples of this phenomenon can be identified during the second and third centuries.[49] Reimagined and idealized views of Jerusalem may be something of a special case due to the real political crises, as well as the crises of imagination, it faced as a result of its destruction, but we should not think that it is in a category by itself. Throughout the empire, people in one place were looking to other locations to both define and differentiate themselves. As an example, we can note the enactments of episodes from Egyptian mythology by the cult of Isis in the early Imperial Period, or the construction of capitol structures in the provinces with direct reference to comparable buildings at Rome in the first and second centuries CE.[50]

Perhaps the most important factor in motivating this phenomenon was the process of "empire creation" itself. By "empire creation," I mean not the formation of the territorial Roman state but, rather, the systematic co-opting of local and regional political elites in order to make them part of a loosely coordinated administrative structure; the development of a single market system, despite local taxation remaining in place; and centralizing of local military com-

[45] See Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004: 84.
[46] Petsalis-Diomidis 2007: 252.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.: 289.
[49] Rüpke 2017.
[50] See, e. g., Kuhfeldt 1882; Lackner 2013; Lomas 1997. Older interpretations, which claimed that these buildings reflected the status of a city, have been invalidated, as their construction was often only initiated a decade or century after the change in status.

mands. The goal of this process was to establish centralized authority over these key domains across the vast area of the empire.[51] While the fulfilment of these goals opened up new possibilities for action and prestige for the local elites, the creation of the empire nevertheless also diminished their earlier monopolies on local power. Where once local elites could enjoy near complete control in their own areas, now the emperor and his provincial governors became mediating authorities whose influence was strongly manifested at the local level through the minting of coins, the construction of statues and buildings, and the disbursement of charitable funds.

The considerable level of migration to the cities had a further important impact. On the one hand, the variety of immigrants from a range of regions brought with them a new religious plurality that reflected the differences amongst the incomers and which increasingly began to crystallize in personal experience.[52] On the other hand, immigrants who had chosen to leave behind their old homes rarely acted on the basis of nostalgic attachment to childhood cults. Instead they demanded a certain "branding," packages of recognisable symbolic systems with which they had engaged. Iconographic schemes, pattern books, and other widely circulated texts produced to satisfy these demands created the kind of recognizability that tempts some modern scholars to speak of homogenized "cults."[53] In fact, religious practices and their corresponding imaginaries remained, first and foremost, local. Nevertheless, they necessarily laid claim to something translocal, as was implicit in the uniformity they developed and the relevance they maintained in urban centers far from their origins.

In the world of multi-layered and often ambiguous political identities that arose as a result of the imperial project, the idea of the Roman Empire itself became a crucial instrument for the creation of collective identities and networks on the local level. This reflects the fact that the more quickly and thoroughly religious symbols and practices can replace the comprehensive framework for engaging with the world previously provided by local political identities and institutions, the more victorious and successful they emerge. The sooner reflective exercises and community formation can be integrated into these practices and symbols, the more likely they are to survive.

It is in this context that trans-regional linkages – the idea of a site of worship that lies beyond the boundaries of the individual's everyday experience – become significant. Such sites have the power to secure the global (on the imperial scale) presence and importance of a deity that also continues to remain effective on the local level. Whilst such a "global" stature might seem to be a self-evident characteristic for henotheistic or monotheistic deities such as Isis, Mithras, or

[51] Cf. Woolf 2012: 26; Ando 2012: 186–200.
[52] Rüpke 2009, 2001.
[53] See, e. g., Rüpke 2005.

the nameless *ho theos*, it can also be detected in appeals to more localized divinities, such as the Nemesis of Smyrna or the Victoriae of the Balkan provinces.

All these processes for linking the local and the global required both a comprehensive rhetoric and visual didactics. The template for this may have been the emperor himself, whose claim to a unique and universal power was propagated throughout the empire with great intensity, using a variety of media, ranging from coins to the penal code, and taking in such things as busts, calendars, and buildings. The emperor represented the most widely recognized god of the Imperium Romanum, his image identified with the faraway city of almighty Rome.[54] While the Emperor might be seen as a marker of a local identity from outside the borders of the empire, within its boundaries the ruler-deity could no longer serve this role. Within the boundaries of the empire, precisely because he transcended the local and the particular, the figure of the emperor was unable to facilitate the existence of the specific, distinct collective identities that expressed the social and geographical affiliations of particular individuals and groups. Yet, at the same time, this god truly raised the bar: for a deity to be competitive in the religious "market place," it would now have to somehow "outdo," out-perform, or otherwise go beyond the god that occupied the symbolic center of the world. One response to the need to surpass Rome itself was the introduction of cult sites with transcendental locations beyond this world – I am thinking of the epistle to the Hebrews[55] – but other tactics were exploited as well, as we will see below. Ultimately, religious sites that inspire identity formation need not be real cult locations, nor even real locations of any sort. In fact, as the example of the divine emperor demonstrates, human beings can themselves serve as a *locus* or *topus* for this purpose.

Of course, the choice of such sites was never random. From the first century to at least the early third century, the Imperium Romanum had its intellectual and symbolic center at Rome. Every school of thought and every social network sought to be represented in Rome in some way because validation in the center conferred status, indeed reality, at the periphery. Ideas and values travelled to Rome over vast distances and at great speed, moving across boundaries of cultural communication that proved to be as porous as those that we can identify both before and after at Alexandria. It is for just this reason that Rome itself was the subject of polemics and attempts at confinement. The *Oracula Sibyllina*, for instance, a collection of anti-Roman prophecy written in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean world, condemns Rome. Hermetic texts, meanwhile, argue that it is Egypt that stands as the *templum totius mundi*, exploiting Juvenal's framing of Rome's centrality with the image of the Syrian Orontes flowing into the Tiber.[56]

[54] So forcefully argued by Ando 2008: 119.
[55] Rüpke 2012e.
[56] *Asclepius* 24; Juvenal, *Sat*. 3,62.

So, exactly what effect did these sites have on their users? To answer this question, we are forced to fall back on our very limited textual evidence. We can begin by noting that acts of self-classification are simplified and clarified by religious sites, in the sense that participation in activities at these sites allows for a clear-cut procedural division between those who belong to a group and those who do not. Given the rather fuzzy boundaries between the various manifestations of Isis or Sol Invictus, or between the various expressions of Jupiter, *ho theos*, and *theos Hypsistos*, the clear differentiations offered at specific sites will surely have been advantageous. Of course, as the degree of competition increased, and the demands for identifiability and differentiation became stronger, the number of viable alternatives was reduced.

In most cases, we know very little about how people evaluated their own group membership. We might assume that they perceived their affiliations positively, given that they were voluntary. Yet at the same time individual group members would have been aware of positive or negative external evaluations of their group, and these might have had an impact on their own views. There was certainly no uniform desire for high visibility across groups. Even in the case of groups that did seek a highly visible position in some social and geographical contexts, in other places and among other company the focus was on minimizing negative interactions. We can think here of the contrast between the visibility sought by Judaism in Jerusalem, or by the cult of Isis in Egypt, and the comparatively low-key presence of their adherents in the provincial areas of the empire. Visibility was, then, a situational rather than an absolute goal.

The significance accorded by individuals to group membership can hardly be overestimated. Being part of a group involves acceding to a hegemonic, asymmetrical classification, or, to put it more simply, to a black and white depiction of one's position relative to others. Those outside the group are not just different in specific regards but are "others" in a quite general and almost entirely negative sense as well. This kind of identity construction could become particularly acrimonious in contexts involving imperial disdain or colonial resistance.[57] In texts such as the Apocalypse of John ("Revelation"), being a Roman becomes a kind of totalizing identity that carries with it a highly negative moral evaluation. A more complex dynamic comes into play when reading a text such as the early third century *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, one of the earliest Judeo-Christian texts transmitted from the city of Rome.[58] In Daniel, we read of four successive earthly kingdoms that will be followed by the kingdom of God. This succession provides a framework for interpreting history by locating given periods at specific points within the sequence. The identity of the first kingdom, Babylon,

[57] Frankfurter 1998; Momigliano 1992; cf. Chakrabarty 2008; Webster and Cooper 1996.

[58] See Bracht 2014.

is a fixed and negative point of reference determined by the original text, so to describe someone as Babylonian is, once again, to label them with a totalizing identity. However, the commentary identifies the final earthly kingdom with the contemporary Roman Empire, the empire at a specific moment in time. To label someone as a Roman in this context is not to say something timeless about the Roman identity but, rather, to say something about the Roman identity at a given moment in time, a necessary, even if transitional period. This kind of approach to collective identity contrasts with the totalizing approach but, as the commentary makes clear, can happily co-exist with it in the same work.

The idea that the individual's felt emotional connection to, and dependence on, a collective identity could, at times, lead to an almost complete overlap between personal and group identity is impossible to confirm with the sources available to us. Nevertheless, scholars often demand precisely this kind of evidence in support of such claims. While conclusive proof may not be available, the eleventh book of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* does indicate this kind of thoroughgoing overlap in relation to a specific deity. The same is true in the writings of Aelius Aristides, for whom we have strong evidence of an almost complete identification with Asclepius. By contrast, none of our evidence suggests any similar kind of complete identification in relation to a religious site.

Taken together, the preceding points suggest that the degree of embeddedness into everyday activities implied by membership of a group that is tied to a specific place is negligible. The same is probably true for the extent to which an individual's own behaviour was influenced by his or her place-related group membership. In this case, the majority of examples are individuals who would be considered extremists in today's world: authors and readers of apocalyptic texts, and martyrs (albeit not quite in the modern sense of suicide bombers …). Stories such as these were particularly prominent in Christianity in the post-Constantine era.

However, things look rather different when we consider the cognitive dimension of such place-related stories and reflect upon the ideas that shed light on the values, characteristics, and histories of such groups. Even a group without a sharply defined profile could have a wealth of stories tying it to a particular site which is to say that in no way do these groups lack rich mythologies. This richness is perhaps least tied to specific locations in the case of the cult of Mithras, although here we do not have enough textual evidence to allow for a comparison with our body of iconographic evidence.[59] Still, we cannot ignore the fact that location-bound traditions are usually ambivalent in the associations they evoke: Persia can be both source of ancient wisdom and arch-enemy of civilisation; Egypt can be the fount of tradition and authority but also a den of deca-

[59] For information on the iconographic tradition of the Mithras cult, see Clauss 1990; Gordon 2009, 2012.

dence and corruption. We need only consider the defeat at Carrhae or the death of Valerian at Edessa to see how a variety of positive and negative associations can accrete to a place. Even Rome does not appear in an entirely unproblematic light, given its long history of civil wars. Similarly, Jerusalem appears in negative historic-religious traditions from at least the time of the prophet Amos.[60]

Here the city comes into focus again. The idea that one's own city is the center of the world may well be a feature of urban imaginaries but it is a feature that has been significantly overemphasized in some earlier scholarship on the topic.[61] Just as important are the bounds that separate the city from the rest of the world, the limits that define it and mark it off from what lies outside. These limits both identify the city as *this* city and form the basis for comparisons with other cities. Religious communication, in both ritual and verbal forms, seems to have been a central medium for constructing and framing such imaginaries. Religions transcend the boundaries of the local, directing attention to the importance of places beyond and thus shaping identity, both positively and negatively, by forcing individuals to look outwards when considering who they are.[62] Their views of urbanity are formulated in the easily distinguishable form of the names of gods and names of places. These are marks of distinction, no matter whether one looks inside or outside the city.

Specifically, city-based religion adds a further momentum to this direction of travel. My claim is that urban selves not only have access to media – writing, first and foremost – that allow them to identify their self-reflection but that they also have much readier access to other forms of artistic expression than do non-urban selves. The close association of such expressive media with cities seems to have been characteristic of many types of urbanization across a wide range of periods.[63] From this we can conclude that it is the fascination with other, distant cities that is the peculiar feature both of urban imaginaries and of the religiously articulated (or instigated) selves characteristic of the urban context. Urban diversity, and the density of interactions that occur when large numbers of people live in close proximity, sparks grouping processes that produce both homologous and competing forms of institutionalization. However, the same conditions also have other results. The diversity and density of urban encounters lead not just to institutionalization but also, as Simmel pointed out over a hundred years ago, to individualization.[64]

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[60] On the image of Jerusalem, see Häusl 2011; Capes 2011; Jones 2011; Friedheim 2010; Collins 2000; Walker 1990.

[61] E. g., Rykwert 1976.

[62] See Rüpke 2015b.

[63] See the contributions in Yoffee 2015.

[64] Simmel 1917.

4. The *Shepherd of Hermas* as a Test Case: Two Cities as Poles of Religious Individuation

Attempts at stabilizing one's own self need not be individualistic, fully disembedding the agent from its social context. The second-century text *Pastor Hermae,* "Shepherd of Hermas," shows just how fluid the boundaries between individual and group practice could be. It is usually left aside for narratives of the history of religion in a "Roman," "Jewish" or "Christian" perspective, but is in fact highly relevant for the problem of urban selves. On the one hand, its author was an individual producer of religion while, on the other, he produced texts intended for circulation within groups. This is reflected in the metaphors offered for self-reflection.

The *Pastor Hermae*, written in Greek by a Jewish author at Rome shortly before the middle of the second century CE, does not provide a general theory of the soul. Rather, it attempts to locate its author Hermas at the heart of contemporary society and within a process of religious grouping. The autobiographical sketch with which the work opens claims that it was Hermas' everyday style of life that made him a particularly appropriate vehicle for special contact with the divine. But his composition of this dynamic, growing text was not solely directed at the production of a visionary work. The goal of the author was, rather, to provide a means for fashioning the self, primarily through the practice of reading and engaging with the text.[65] The reciting of the text by a range of groups in a variety of distinct types of communal gathering was a practice aimed at the institutionalization of situations that were designed to lead members of the audience to reflect on their own inner moral states. The problem of sins of the mind, with which the earliest layer of the text opens,[66] is a case in point. In order to detect such inner problems, one must be suitably motivated or provoked by an external source, such as the female revelatory figure in the text. The practice of public recitation for which the text was written was later criticized in the Muratorian fragment, which recommends that the text only be used for private reading by individuals, not spoken aloud in Christian liturgy.[67] Nevertheless, whether it was received in a public or a private setting, the goal of the work remained the same: the fashioning of a specific religious self through self-reflective practices. Such practices held out the possibility of changing the individual's position in the *ekklesia* through *metanoia*, the changing of oneself and one's behaviour. As such, this kind of care of the self had the potential to "democratize" the visionary experience.

Hermas' revelation is presented as a sequence of encounters with male and female revelatory figures who lead Hermas on to a further encounter with the

[65] Cf. Inwood 2009 for the Senecan authorial self.
[66] *PH* 1 (*vis* 1,1), 8; cf. 2 (*vis* 1,2), 1.
[67] *Canon Muratori* l. 77–80.

Shepherd and an angel. The book serves as an externalization of the safe imaginative space within which the reader or listener can witness the struggle between angels and spirits. In particular, a pair of opposing angels are the most important protagonists in the text. They are part of a demonology, or rather an angelology, that in other texts provides space for further divine figures, Christ included.[68]

As I have discussed elsewhere, the motif of two contrasting cities – one base and associated with earthly powers, the other truly real and associated with the divine – provides a central technique for reflection on the self. By imagining these two distinct cities and then putting them into motion by carrying out thought experiments concerning behaviour within them, beyond them, and directed towards them, a practitioner creates an instrument for reflecting on his or her own self and its place in relation to others. This reflective individuality, as I call it,[69] treats the individual self not as a free-floating and completely malleable soul but, rather, as a part of the person that is fully integrated within local contemporary society. This motif is most evident in the very first parable of the work[70] but the depiction of the city is developed further by the image of the tower used in parables 8 and 9.

Hermas is not creating something entirely new here. The lines of thought he takes up can ultimately be traced back to the Jewish personifications of the cities of Jerusalem and Babylon following the destruction of the First Temple. However, Hermas' text was both written and read by its audience within a quite different political and social context, that of the Roman Empire, and this context is inseparable from its content. Core concepts, such as the laws or constitution of a city, or the notion of citizenship as including the particular "civic way of life" (*politeuesthai*) of a given city,[71] underpin the way in which the soul is conceived. The discussion of the *patrioi nomoi* of a minority group is as old as the Hellenistic empires and can be found, for instance, at 2 Maccabees 6.[72] The same condition of living under an empire similarly suggested to the Roman citizens of other Italian municipalities the motif of dual fatherlands (*patriae*), as Cicero discusses in his *Laws*.[73] In these cases, the types of citizenship nest within each other, rather than being exclusive. The need to balance such nested identities, and the concomitant legal obligations involved, is discussed in the Letter to Diognetus.[74]

It is clear, then, that the general outlines of Hermas' imagery were common currency. So how exactly does he fit into the broader picture? One hundred and fifty years ago, Theodor Zahn correctly identified Hermas' present, earthly and

[68] See Longenecker 1970: 26–32; Bucur 2009; again, such figures are part of a long tradition of prophetic calls for repentance.
[69] See the typology in Rüpke 2013b: 12–14.
[70] Osiek 1999: 157.
[71] Lieu 2004: 243.
[72] See ibid., and Kippenberg 1986.
[73] Cic. *Leg*. 2.5. Cf. the discussion on Jews in Alexandria in Ios. *c. Apion* 2.6.
[74] Diogn. 5–6.

base, city as Rome;[75] we are now in a position to develop and contextualize his arguments further. The preface to Josephus' *The Jewish War* shows that at least some Jews, and particularly those taken to Rome as slaves, viewed the Flavian destruction of Jerusalem as part of a dual between two cities[76] rather than a clash between two distinct peoples.[77] The idea that there was a degree of symmetry between the two cities may have been reinforced by the contemporaneous rebuilding of the Roman temple to Capitoline Jupiter. This temple was the seat of the Capitoline triad, whom Tacitus, most likely drawing on an actual formula used in prayer, refers to as the leading tutelary deities of the empire (*praesides imperi*).[78] Against such a backdrop, Hermas' renewed elaboration of the idea of a more perfect city takes on a clear contemporary meaning with strong political overtones.

According to Hermas, many people have already decided that it is not the Roman city but its more divine counterpart to which they truly belong. However, they have come to this conclusion without thinking the matter through clearly.[79] When confronted with the actual choice of minimizing their commitments to and engagement with the earthly city, they are much more reluctant to exchange their present urban community for the imagined city. Hermas offers up a thought experiment concerning how to find accommodation in the tower, which I argue is another symbol of the city. The comparison is embedded in the thought experiments of architectural competition, of the tower as an architectural miracle, an ongoing process of construction that resolves all the problems implied by its human building material. Hermas' "cities" are not compared to each other by reference to their walls. The points of reference used are the fields, which symbolize sustenance and wealth, and the houses, the primary focus of social self-representation. At the end of parable 1 (50.8–10), it is made clear that the question is not simply one of leaving the earthly city but that there are things that can be done here and now that instantiate the values of the other city to which one already belongs: caring for widows and orphans and winning souls in the earthly city are equated with purchasing fields and houses in the other city. This approach to constructing oneself is clearly confrontational or polemical: the self is distinguished from other possible selves by identifying it with a contingent choice (I discuss this sense of identity in more detail below). The city-like tower imagined by the text is intimately tied to this kind of boundary construction.

Rome, however, was more than just a city. As Pliny the Elder claimed in the early 70s CE, Rome had a universalized status, standing as a common home for

[75] Zahn 1868: 121–24. Explicitly rejected by Brox 1991: 285, n. 10.
[76] See Ios. *bell. Iud.* pr. 3–4 with § 9.
[77] See Barclay 2007: 362–69 on Josephus' view of the Romans.
[78] Tac. *Hist*. 4.53.3.
[79] *PH* 47.5.

the whole world (*una cunctarum gentium in toto orbe patria*).[80] In such a context, it is not entirely surprising that some residents of the city reacted by creating identities that were not primarily local.[81] In doing so, they were able to stress the negative aspect of universality, the loss or lack of any local home. This is the strategy followed in the slightly earlier Letter to Diognetus, a Greek text that, like the Shepherd, came from a Jewish background.[82] A different but related idea can be found in the apocalyptic literature, in which the claim is proffered that there exists a categorically different place, a heavenly town to which one's loyalties should belong.

While Rome undoubtedly provided a vital context for Hermas, the Shepherd's discourse is not directed towards the empire but towards the self: in the text, the stones used to construct the tower are alive. Indeed, the Shepherd shares with the Letter to Diognetus the presupposition that the intended readers live in just the same way as everyone else.[83] The transcendent tower is, above all, an instrument for the shaping of the self, a tower in the making. This important image offers institutionalized frameworks within a discourse that we can understand as just one element in a greater process of individualization. This process is characterized by the practice of reading, by communal meetings of the select few, and by constant reflection on oneself and one's place in society.[84] This sort of individualization is not opposed to institutionalization. Citizenship was, after all, a collectivizing and homogenizing institution as well as an engine for individualization. It both informed individuals and hung over them in the form of the oppressive and increasingly pervasive presence of the Roman Empire, which compelled the adoption of its values through a combination of forceful coercion and alluring, attractive benefits. The manifest presence of the empire helped provoke the emphasis on the individual and collective selves by distancing groups and drawing boundaries.[85]

5. Conclusions

Certain religious traditions may possess or develop practices of self-reflection that are able to foster individuality. The institutionalization of such tendencies, however, and its conceptualization *as* "individuality" is a matter of historical

[80] Plin. *NH* 3.39; see Perkins 2009: 33 for further references from the early empire.

[81] See Nasrallah 2008 on the *Acta apostolorum* as creating an empire-like network of cities.

[82] Perkins 2009: 32 on Diogn. 5.1. In ch. 6, the author of the letter to Diognetus compares the Christians to the all-pervading (Stoic) soul, in order to explain difference and local presence.

[83] In particular, 5.4–5.

[84] For this concept, see Fuchs, Linkenbach, Mulsow, Otto, and Rüpke 2019, 2013b.

[85] For the notion of boundaries, see Lamont and Molnár 2002.

contexts and social location; it is contingent and requires a descriptive frame beyond the Self. "Individualization" has the potential to fulfil this role. It can even embrace processes of de-individualization. Since processes of religious individualization are closely connected to the formation of institutions and traditions, the interactions among them must be taken into account in a systematic way. Institutional protection of individual practices, such as self-reflection and autoinspection, creates at the same time an awareness of the possibilities for heteropraxis or heterodoxy, and the tools to counteract it through standardization.

In the cities of the Roman Empire, the formation of diverse forms of religious individualism (from elective-membership groups to hermits) was associated in a reciprocal process with self-reinforcing tendencies toward normalization, whether in the criminal law of the Codex Theodosianus or in Mishnaic texts. Throughout this period, religious communities pressed, through their conduct and their stated commitments, for appropriate conduct from group members. But such communities were not a natural given. As this study has shown, it was urban diversity and density of interaction, the growth of a religious market, and the concepts and semantics of urban and trans-urban discourses that would have sparked the homologous, as well as competing, institutionalizations that attempted to regulate religious practices, collective identities, and urban religious selves.

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