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Introduction

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The research group “Religious individualization in a historical perspective” at the Max Weber Centre (University of Erfurt)¹ intends to investigate *cases of individualization within the medium of religion and their consequences for religious change*, that is, in terms of their religious historical dynamics. In particular, it focuses on the presence and extent of the individual scope for religious action, the resulting forms of religious traditions, and religious reflections on individuality prior, and external to, occidental modernity and during the period of modern theory formation.

“Religious individualization” is an ambiguous term. On the one hand, it refers to the role of religion in the process of individuation. Ancient religions offered ritual forms addressing the individual’s status of health problems, they offered support for a variety of existing social bonds and offered new alternatives, they offered concepts and generic forms to reflect about one’s self. In many cases, these institutions were part of a primary and secondary socialization, which is at the same time individuation. Consequently, one might ask about the degree of de-traditionalization and of differentiation involved in these processes and offered by these forms. On the other hand, one can ask about the role of individuality in the shaping of religions. Do religious institutions – that is, organisations, rituals, texts, beliefs – accommodate, value or favour individuality? If that is the case, and effects are observable with an eye to the role of religion in individuation processes that value individuality, one can speak of religious individualization. This would not be a statement about religion in general, but about a specific historical, temporal and spatial constellation, a development that can leave permanent traces – in texts, institutions, or historical memory –, but is subject to change and easily open to processes of de-individualization.

1 Initiated by Hans Joas and Jörg Rüpke and funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG, KFOR 1013) since 2008 (http://www.uni-erfurt.de/fileadmin/user-docs/Kollegforschergruppe/Proposal_kfg_engl.pdf).

Chronologically, the research group started by analyzing the history of Mediterranean antiquity, concentrating on notions of individuation and religious deviance. Both terms indicate the range of possible questions. To talk about the individual is to focus on actors within a society. In an individual biographical process people learn about their duties and their options, different according to individual capacities, social position, gender, and age. The changing frameworks of such a process, the demands on conformity or individual decision, form important elements in any history of individuality.² Individuation is inseparably bound up with socialization, the development of a social persona with individuality. The concept of individuation, the development of personal self-identity, would hardly be separable from social functionality in integration for ancient thinkers. However, it can be used for historical analysis to map the possible fields of developing different types and degrees of individuality in religion, to look for opportunities offered by religions for increasing individual differences and spaces of action not defined by traditions, and to subsequently ask for the consequences of religious institutions and practices for the persons involved.³

If de-traditionalization is an important indicator of individuality, cases of deviant behaviour might help to identify the boundaries set against de-traditionalized behaviour as well as identify behaviour, which is not simply the ignoring or transgressing of norms, but is the developing of new ways of honouring the gods, for instance. In considering deviance, infringements on the norm, we can identify actual variations of religious behavior. How much room was there for religious individuality in antiquity? Must we question the common assumption of the collective character of pre-modern religions? But the individual is only one end of this journey, since regarding deviance also raises normative debates which try to limit or enable variations: Who established these positions? How were they enforced? Whatever there may have been in terms of individual religiosity, it happened within a communal, sometimes even rigorous framework. And yet, the ancient sources, especially normative texts, rendering judgments in any way, do not only shed light on this normative framework, granting access only to intellectual and upper class deferral and polemic. These texts also allow for a view of a – to speak with Michel de Certeau – wholly different, con-

2 See e. g. GIARDINA 1989.

3 RÜPKE 2013 (forthcoming).

torted, overreaching acquisition of norms by individuals, even if these remain anonymous.⁴

The present volume will concentrate its search for religious individuality on texts and practices related to texts. The creation of texts offers opportunities to express one's own religious experience and shape one's own religious personality – within the boundaries of what is acceptable in specific situations and genres. Inscriptions in public or at least easily accessible spaces might substantially differ in their range of expressions and topics from letters within a sectarian religious group (which, at the same time, might put enormous pressure of conformity on its members, regarded as deviant by a majority of contemporaries). Furthermore, texts might offer and advocate new practices in reading, meditating on, remembering, or repeating these very texts. Such practices might contribute to the development of religious individuality, experienced or expressed in factual isolation, responsibility, competition, and finally in philosophical or theological reflections about “personhood” or “self”. It is for the latter, that the central role of what we term “religion” is evident.⁵ The words of Patricia Cox Miller, referring to late antiquity, could easily be generalized: “Orienting the self in relation to the divine remained a constant. Rather, the shift involved a change in view of the soul's ability to make contact with god or gods.”⁶

What is “individuality”? First of all, we are talking of differences between and distinctiveness of persons. Such terms imply that individuality is not a purely descriptive term but has to be related to discourse and practical constraints. As such, it would not be fruitful to analyze whether “religious individuality” is given in a specific situation or person. Many phenomena – ritual innovations, unusual combinations of gods addressed in prayers, spectacular buildings or tombs – might indicate individuality and are results of local or trans-regional traditions at the same time. Thus, it is preferable to regard individuality as a heuristic method to analyze the relationship between structures, norms, and opportunities on the one hand, and the individual agent on the other. For heuristic purposes, however, it is adequate to identify *different types* of individuality,⁷ rather than measure different phenomena on a *unified scale* of “individuality”. Jörg Rüpke has proposed to differentiate five types of in-

4 RÜPKE 2011.

5 BRAKKE, SATLOW, WEITZMAN 2005, 3.

6 MILLER 2005, 31.

7 Cf. the “dimensions” listed by KIPPELE 1997, ch. 9.

dividuality, which are not necessarily co-related and which he termed practical, moral, competitive, representative, and reflexive individuality. Such a typology enables us to distinguish consequences of the rupture of family bonds by death, travelling, or temporary social displacements (“pragmatic”) from the ascription and acceptance of responsibility for one’s own deeds (“moral”). Elite competition in its manifold facets (“competitive”) could be taken into account as the formulation of biographies and yard sticks of individual performances that are regarded as “representative”, put into practice in different degrees by different individuals. Finally it seemed important not to make the identification of such types of individuality dependent on accompanying reflections about individuality in literary and philosophical discourse.⁸ This idea is taken up and further developed by some contributors of this volume, first proposed at a conference held at the Max Weber Centre in March 2010.

The volume begins with two chapters which map the wide range of “texts and practices”. First, an analysis of individual cult foundations by private persons from the fifth century BC to the first century AD. Starting with a glance on Xenophon’s sanctuary for Ephesian Artemis at Skillous, Annette Hupfloher describes several cases of individuals introducing new gods, for instance the establishment and embellishment of a sanctuary for the Nymphs and Pan at Vari by a certain Archedamos. As told by inscriptions, it is individual religious experience which led to the foundation, the forms of which are rather traditional. Artemidoros’ sanctuary on the island of Thera is another famous case of a former immigrant establishing step by step a highly complex and highly individual religious cult location (thus interesting himself in local security). In a diachronic analysis religious innovation and its textual elements are shown to be an instrument open to local citizens, women, and immigrants. It opens considerable space for individual action and expression and is as important for the classical period as it is for the Hellenistic.

Ian Henderson’s analysis of the Pseudo-Paulinian letter to the Colossians remains in the Greek world of the Eastern Mediterranean, but addresses a text that cannot be analyzed in terms of the author’s social position. Using the concept of a “reflective ideology of individuality”, Henderson identifies a particular economy of pseudepigraphy that is used to develop the anthropological argument about individuality and modifies Pauline eschatology. The collective character of the church

8 RÜPKE 2013, introduction.

and the ethical dimension of social life are inseparably bound up with the believer's embodied individuality. It is the text and the relationship to Christ promoted by the text which constructs a central Christian concept of personhood.

Representative and charismatic individuality are concepts employed in the second group of chapters. Richard Gordon analyzes representative individuality in a text from the turn of the third to the fourth century AD, Iamblichus' *De vita pythagorica*. He argues that Pythagoras is viewed as a model for a certain type of individuality, an optional alternative to traditional forms of competitive individuality, to the effect that the acquisition of symbolic capital by a part of the educated élite of the Roman Empire could be extended from external prestige, institutionalized power and modes of display to include forms of moral distinction, with an emphasis on hard labour and constant effort.

Sarah Iles Johnston employs the fourth century philosopher Sosipatra and her Theurgic Life based on the description of her life in Eunapius' *Vitae Sophistorum* 6.6.5–6.9.24. She shows that Sosipatra is intended to serve as model for the individual private and religious life to Eunapius' readers, an ideal to which the average person might aspire, but is seldom achieved. That is why Eunapius has awarded her a prominent place in his narrative. She is the ideal Iamblichean theurgist, her passivity of both body and soul actually being a *desideratum*. In this regard, Sosipatra is interpreted as the most highly accomplished theurgist about whom we read in the *Lives* of Eunapius and, indeed, in any ancient source.

The contribution of Blossom Stefaniw: "Working Wonders with Gregory and Gregory: Effacement and definition of individualization from the third to the fourth century" compares the panegyric farewell address of Gregory Thaumaturgus to Origen around AD 242 and Gregory of Nyssa's panegyric biography from AD 380 to trace religious change from the early third to the late fourth century by examining shifts in the scope for, and form of, individualization, or its opposite, concentrating on the religious activities of one person. Stefaniw observes that Gregory of Nyssa is able to force religious change (at least in the rhetorical realm) in a way that was unthinkable for the young Gregory of Thaumaturgus and proves a massive increase in scope for individualization, a "continuity of the wonder-working sleight of hand involved in effacing and defining individualization at the same time, but also a displacement of the realm in which such projects can take effect".

Ron Naiweld analyzes the use of the figure of Abraham as a model for the individual moral life of a holy man by Palestinian rabbis in the context of Jewish-Christian polemic in the turn of the sixth century. Abraham's fighting against personal desires in order to accomplish God's Law and to fulfill God's divine program by taking onto himself the sins of past and future generations, paints him as a counterpart to Jesus Christ. Just like Christ, Abraham radically modifies the relationship between God and the world; and just like Christ, Abraham is regarded as the person whose life should serve as a model for everyone who wishes to lead a moral life.

The third group of contributions is entitled "Reading and Writing" and includes the individual reception and composition of texts. The article of Guy Stroumsa "Reading practices in late antique Christianity and the individualization process" argues that eastern monks were responsible for a new attitude to books that had much to do with the individualization process, and which would eventually permit and even embody the late antique cultural and religious transformation. Stroumsa points out that the Christian ascetic movement, culminating in the birth and rapid growth of monasticism in the Near East and from there to other parts of the Empire, represents one of the most striking aspects of a religious revolution, which finds its epitome in the end of sacrifice in the fourth century AD. The reading of Scripture in monastic communities had a purpose entirely different from the one ordinarily attributed to reading: the transmission of knowledge. The aim of the constant repetition of a text known by heart was not the production of any new wisdom. This activity was rather soteriological in essence: it was meant as a technical method for the concentration of the mind of the individual, a way of praying Scripture, so that the Word of God may directly find a way into heart and mind.

Additionally, Greg Woolf asks why reading figures so little as a ritualized form of self-fashioning in Roman religious practices of earlier ages. He argues that the reading practices of Roman Christians in late antiquity developed out of the reading cultures of the early empire. When Christianity began to be attractive to members of those very select social classes which practiced reading during the early empire, that inheritance increased in importance, as self-fashioning through reflective reading had been a prominent part of Roman imperial intellectual life.

Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser examines the description of the source of Clitumnus in Umbria in the eighth letter of Pliny (8,8), and interpretes

it as a pattern for individual religion. Although Pliny's description mentions many small sanctuaries of local gods, Clitumnus is described as the main deity and his old traditional temple represents the center of the site. With his mention of numerous inscriptions upon pillars and walls by different persons, celebrating the virtues of the fountain, and the divinity that presides over it, Pliny ascribes to the graffiti as communication media an even greater virtue for the literate reader. What the graffiti are lacking in formal aesthetics, they gain in individual authenticity: Their minimal material value is compensated for by a significant ideal and individual statement.

Veit Rosenberger (Erfurt) presents letters of Pliny, Trajan, Libanius and Julian as a helpful medium in the search for traces of religious 'individualization' or 'individuation' in antiquity. While Pliny, Trajan and Libanius do not offer insight into their religious experience, Julian is different: he talks about how the gods ordered him to act and about his religious practices; he gives information about his concept of religion on the discursive level. His philosophical influences, e.g. Iamblichus and Libanius, do not show such decided individualization, because they lack the ambitious plans and motives of the emperor. Rosenberger emphasizes that we have strong reasons to believe that individualization gained immensely in momentum with the rise of Christianity.

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