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JÖRG RÜPKE

INDIVIDUAL APPROPRIATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES:
ROMAN PRIESTHOODS IN THE LATER EMPIRE

Karl Hoheisel (1937-2011) in memoriam

1. *Introduction*

Being interested in the changing place of what we call ‘religion’ today in late ancient politics and society, I try to offer observations and tentative conclusions on very restricted bodies of evidence. My evidence are prosopographical data from fourth century Roman priesthoods. I try to develop an argument that I have proffered in this context.¹

In an article of 1999 with the title of *The last pagans of Rome*² Alan Cameron has admonished us to be very careful in making assumptions about the political locus of public priesthoods. I try to summarize his findings. First, these priesthoods are no strongholds of pagan resistance. They remain part of normal careers, but are more and more left out of honorary inscriptions detailing administrative and political careers. There is, secondly, no nexus of paganism and stressing classical culture; the latter is part of elite culture as before and offers possibilities for advancement to those who are not yet members of the higher echelons of society. Third, engagement in so-called oriental cults does not betray even more fervent enmity against Christianity compared to engagement in the public priesthoods cults.³ Neither form of being a specialist in a sacral institution survived the end of the fourth century.

As the author is to restate his argument in book length, it is worth looking at the evidence again. Cameron’s claims (with which I am sympathetic in many details) do not set the agenda, but stress the importance of the question: What did change in public

¹ J. Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum: A Prosopography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome, 300 BC to AD 499*, Oxford 2008, 57-66. I am grateful to Alan Cameron for giving access of parts of the manuscript of his book *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford 2011). For the prosopography I was not yet able to use the published book for this chapter.

² Al. Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, in W. V. Harris (ed.), *The Transformations of the Urbs Roma in Late Antiquity*, JRA Suppl. 33, Portsmouth 1999, 109-121.

³ This had already been stressed by J. F. Matthews, *Symmachus and the Oriental Cults*, JRS, 63 (1973), 175-195.

priesthoods and how is any such change related to the changing relationship of religion and politics in the same period?

I start by comparing two tables from my *Fasti sacerdotum*, listing all ascertained (Roman type; if this year is the year of entry into the office, the name is written in bold type) or presumable (names written in italics) priests of the city of Rome in the years 202 and 370.

202 AD

Public priesthooths

SACERDOTES SIVE SODALES AEDIS IOVIS PROPUGNATORIS Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus Augustus qui et Caracalla; Q. Atrius Clonius

SACERDOTES COLLEGII IGNOTI SIVE FLAMINES L. *Annius Fabianus*

PONTIFEX MAXIMUS Imp. Caesar L. Septimius Severus Pertinax Augustus

PONTIFICES M. Valerius Bradua Mauricus; Q. *Pompeius Sossius Falco*; Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus Augustus qui et Caracalla; M. *Aufidius Fronto*; M. *Gavius Gallicanus*; P. Septimius Geta Caesar; L. Aurelius Commodus Pompeianus; M. Nummius Umbrius Primus M. f. Senecio Albinus; Q. *Virius Egnatius Sulpicius Priscus*; **C. Fulvius C. f. Plautianus**

FICTORES (discipulus:) Statilius Dionysius

VESTALES Numisia L. f. Maximilla; *Terentia Flavola*; *Cannutia Crescentina*; *Aurelia Severa*; *Pomponia Rufina*; *Clodia Laeta*

FICTORES Cn. *Statilius Cerdo*

FLAMINES: DIALIS *Terentius Gentianus*; MARTIALIS *Iulius Asper*; QUIRINALIS L. *Cossonius Eggius Marullus*

FLAMINICAE DIALIS *Pomponia Paetina*

AUGURES M. Peducaeus Plautius Quintillius; Q. *Hedius Rufus Lollianus Gentianus*; Imp. Caesar L. Septimius Severus Pertinax Augustus; Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus Augustus qui et Caracalla; P. Septimius Geta Caesar; P. Cornelius Anullinus

QUINDECENVIRI SACRIS FACIUNDIS M. Fabius M. f. Magnus Valerianus; M. *Nonius M. f. Arrius Mucianus*; *Ofilius Valerius Macedo*; *Pollenius Auspex*; Ti. *Manilius Fuscus*; Sex. *Cocceius Vibianus*; *Atulenus Rufinus*; Q. *Aiacius Modestus Crescentianus*; L. *Pullaienus Gargilius Antiquus*; Imp. Caesar L. Septimius Severus Pertinax Augustus; Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus Augustus qui et Caracalla; L. *Cornelius Salvius Tuscus*; *Iulius Pompeius Rusonianus*; P. Septimius Geta Caesar; M. *Antius Crescens Calpurnianus*; L. *Cassius Pius Marcellinus*; *Ulpius Soter*; Q. *Venidius Rufus Marius Maximus L. Calvinianus*; *Vetina Mamertinus*; *Saevinius Proculus*; ****rnus*; *Fulvius Fuscus Granianus*

EPULONES Sex. *Caecilius Aemilianus*; L. Valerius L. f. Publicola Messala Helvidius Thrasea Priscus Minicius Natalis; Imp. Caesar L. Septimius Severus Pertinax Augustus; Ti. Claudius Ti. f. Claudianus; Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus Augustus qui et Caracalla; P. Septimius Geta Caesar

PUBLICI *Apolaustus Modianus; Apolaustus Claudianus*

ARVALES Pollenius Auspex; *M. Antonius Iuvenis Axius M***; Q. Licinius Nepos; P. Petronius Priscus; Cn. Catilius Severus (I); Imp. Caesar L. Septimius Severus Pertinax Augustus; C. Sulpicius Pollio; Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus Augustus qui et Caracalla; P. Septimius Geta Caesar*

SALII PALATINI *M. Annius Flavius Libo; L. Annius Maximus; C. Bruttius Praesens; Vettius Sabinianus*

SALII COLLINI *C. Iulius Rufinus Laberius Fabinus Pomponius Triarius Erucius Clarus Sosius Priscus*

FETIALES *M. Gavius Crispus Numisius Iunior; P. Septimius Geta; L. Marius M. f. Maximus Perpetuus Aurelianus; Catius Lepidus*

PUBLICI *Iustus Gavianus*

LUPERCI *M. Fabius M. f. Magnus Valerianus*

Imperial Priesthoods

FLAMINES DIVORUM *L. Cossonius Eggius Marullus; L. Ragonius Urinatus Tuscenius Quintianus; DIVI AUGUSTI M. Gavius Gallicanus; DIVI COMMODI Anonymus 114; DIVI PERTINACIS P. Helvius Pertinax iun.*

SODALES AUGUSTALES **C. Licinius Licinianus/C. Licinius Trio Paulinus; Q. Clodius Marcellinus; ***pius; Imp. Caesar L. Septimius Severus Pertinax Augustus; L. Mantennius Sabinus; Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus Augustus qui et Caracalla; P. Septimius Geta Caesar; ***s Maximus; C. Fabius Lucilianus; C. Iulius C. f. Galerius Asper**

SODALES FLAVIALES TITIALES *C. Iulius Avitus Alexianus; P. Porcius Optatus Flamma; C. Iunius Faustinus Postumianus*

SODALES HADRIANALES *L. Fabius M. f. Cilo Septiminus Catinius Acilianus Lepidus Fulcinianus; M. Valerius Bradua Mauricus; Anonymus 114*

SODALES ANTONINIANI *M. Gavius Gallicanus; Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus Augustus qui et Caracalla; P. Septimius Geta Caesar*

ORDO SACERDOTUM DOMUS AUGUSTAE (Viri clarissimi:) *Attius Rufinus; L. Pontius Verus*

Others

LAURENTES LAVINATES *L. Marius L. l. Doryphoros; M. Domitius M. f. Gentianus; (Sacerdotes:) Ti. Claudius Ti. f. Claudianus*

CURIONES *L. Fabius M. f. Cilo Septiminus Catinius Acilianus Lepidus Fulcinianus; Q. Herennius Silvius Maximus*

Apparitores

TIBICINES *C. Praecilius Serenus; Ti. Claudius Titianus*

Different religious groups and temples

ARCHIEREUS SYNHODI *L. Aelius Aurelius Apolaustus*

ARCHIEROI XYSTOU *M. Aurelius Asclepiades*
 SACERDOTES APOLLINIS *L. Aelius Aurelius Apolaustus*
 SACERDOTES IOVIS DOLICHENI (Aventin:) *Iulius Aelius Aurelius Iulianus*
 SACERDOTES SOLIS ELAGABALI Ti. Iulius Balbillus

Isis

NEOCOROI (Sarapis:) *M. Aurelius Asclepiades*

Christiani

EPISCOPUS *Zephyrinus*
 PRESBYTERI *Hyacinthus (1); Hippolytus (1)*
 DIACONI *Calixtus (1)*

Mithras

SACERDOTES (M-Castra praetoria:) *Q. Pompeius Primigenius?*; *M. Aurelius Aug. l. Romulus*
 PATRES (M-Castrapraetoria:) *Q. Pompeius Primigenius?*

Mystai Liberi

SACERDOTES *M. Gavius Gallicanus*

370 AD*Public priesthoods*

PONTIFEX MAXIMUS *Flavius Valentinianus Augustus; Imp. Caesar Flavius Valens Augustus; Imp. Caesar Flavius Gratianus Augustus*
 PONTIFICES VESTAE *Clodius Octavianus; Macrinus Sossianus; L. Aurelius Avianius Symmachus; P. Vettius Agorius Praetextatus; Virius Nicomachus Flavianus; Q. Aurelius Symmachus; Petronius Apollodorus; Rufius Caecionius Sabinus*
 PONTIFICES SOLIS *C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus (2); P. Vettius Agorius Praetextatus*
 VESTALES *Coelia Concordia; Anonymus 38*
 AUGURES *P. Vettius Agorius Praetextatus; Ulpus Egnatius Faventinus*
 QUINDECENVIRI SACRIS FACIUNDIS *L. Turcius L. f. Apronianus; Claudius Hermogenianus Caesarius; Aradius Rufinus; L. Turcius L. f. Secundus; L. Aurelius Avianius Symmachus; Petronius Apollodorus*
 EPULONES *Alfenius Ceionius Iulianus Kamenius*

Others

HARUSPICES *Marcus (3); Campensis?*
 VESTALES ALBANAE *Primigenia*
 DUODECEMVIRI URBIS ROMAE *Caelius Hilarianus*

Different religious groups and temples

HIEROFANTAE HECATAE *C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus (2); Caelius Hilarianus*

SACERDOTES LIBERI *Caelius Hilarianus**Isis*SACERDOTES *C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus* (2); *Caecinia Lolliana**Christiani*CLERICI *Adiectus*; *Gaudentius* (2); *Ursus* (3); *Rufus* (2); *Auxano*; *Auxanius*; *Leontius* (3); *Rufinus* (3)EPISCOPI (Donatista) *Macrobius*; *Ursinus*; *Damasus*PRESBYTERI *Macarius* (1); *Petronius* (2); *Leo* (3); *Celerinus* (3); *Verus*DIACONI *Hilarius*; *Lupus*; *Amantius* (2); *Siricius* (1); *Mercurius* (2)FOSSORES (Coemeterium catacumbas:) *Quodvuldeo**Mithras*PATRES PATRUM (M-Piazza S. Silvestro:) *Nonius Victor Olympius/Aurelius Victor Augentius*PATRES (M-Piazza S. Silvestro:) *Aurelius Victor Augentius*; *Sextilius Agesilaus Aede-sius*; *C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus* (2); *Petronius Apollodorus*; *Ulpus Egnatius Faventinus*; *Caelius Hilarianus*HIEROCERYCES *Ulpus Egnatius Faventinus*; *Caelius Hilarianus*

Obviously, our evidence is much smaller for the later year. But regarding the most prestigious sacerdotal colleges, the dominant impression can be summarized as follows: The emperor or emperors have dropped out, instead, multiple memberships are frequent. What has happened?

2. Colleges and politics

Judging by the *commentarii fratrum Arvalium*, the religious activity of college members was concentrated on a few particular occasions per year; in the event of absence – and high functionaries were frequently absent from Rome for long periods – it lapsed entirely. This made the political and social functions of the membership all the more important. The colleges reserved for senators, at least, offered prestigious positions, regarded as heralding or crowning a successful political career, and pursued as such.⁴ Membership did not entail only the obligation to participate in a few cult activities: it

⁴ This applies at least from the 2nd century onwards; see e.g. M. W. Hoffman Lewis, *The Official Priests of Rome under the Julio-Claudians*, Rome 1955; G. J. Szemler, *The priests of the Roman republic: a study of interactions between priesthoods and magistracies*, Bruxelles 1972; J. Scheid, *Les Frères Arvales: recrutement et origine sociale sous les empereurs julio-claudiens*, Paris 1975; G. Alföldy, *Konsulat und Senatorstand unter den Antoninen: prosopographische Untersuchungen zur senatorischen Führungsschicht*, Bonn 1977, 106-7; L. Schumacher, *Die vier hohen römischen Priesterkollegien unter den Flaviern, den Antoninen und den Severern (69-235 n. Chr.)*, ANRW, II.16.1 (1978), 655-819.

was also associated with lavish meals and celebrations in members' private houses, opportunities to discuss politically sensitive subjects, personal affairs, and the like. Entering a college was associated with offering a high cost, unforgettable meal.⁵ The colleges were circles of communication within the political elite, and their significance as informal venues for the establishment of consensus among senators should not be underestimated. The mechanisms of co-optation constituted a bond between old members, the senate, and the emperor.⁶ Members had the right to nominate candidates for vacant positions, and at the end of the process they were the ones who formally co-opted the persons chosen. For the *pontifices* and *augures* at least, and probably also for the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* and *septemviri epulonum*, it was the senate that implemented the election. The emperor himself could act in his function as a member of the college, naturally as the most powerful and influential member, whose recommendations could not be disregarded. But he could also be the one to influence the senate's decisions. When Constantius II. during his visit to Rome «filled the priesthoods with nobles» – *replevit nobilibus sacerdotia*⁷ – this act must be seen in respect of the emperor's participation in senatorial appointments.⁸ The reading that the Roman colleges suffered from a lack of members because the emperor had not bothered to have vacant places filled is entirely inappropriate.

From Titus onwards presumable successors to the throne were co-opted into «all colleges» (*omnia collegia*) – a formula that must have been open to different listings of priesthoods; only when Antoninus Pius had the future Marcus Aurelius co-opted into 'all colleges' in 141 AD,⁹ a binding tradition of such co-optations appears to have been established, even if the extent implied by 'all' remains an open question. It is difficult to determine an end of this tradition on the basis of an *argumentum e silentio*, but after all we are only dealing with the question of a sporadic practice, developed in the first century and stable only during the Antonine-Severan period. This practice was tied to a par-

⁵ See J. Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum. Prosopographie der stadtrömischen Priesterschaften römischer, griechischer, orientalischer und jüdisch-christlicher Kulte bis 499 n. Chr.*, Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 12/1-3, Stuttgart, 2005, 1423-1433.

⁶ Plin. *Ep.* 4, 8, 1; 10, 13.

⁷ Symm. *Relat.* 3, 7.

⁸ Al. Cameron, *Gratian's Repudiation of the Pontifical Robe*, *JRS*, 58 (1968), 96-102, 99 thinks otherwise, pointing to D.C. 53, 17 as well as Tac. *Hist.* 1, 77 and Plin. *Ep.* 10, 13: passages whose subject is the Emperor's power to make appointments to priestly offices or to influence such appointments during the Principate. See also F. Van Haepere, *Le collège pontifical: (III^e s. a. C.-IV^e s. p. C.)*; *contribution à l'étude de la religion publique romaine*, Bruxelles 2002, 88 and P. Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers païens: la disparition du paganisme dans l'Empire romain, du règne de Constantin à celui de Justinien*, Paris 1990, 57. In Vera's commentary (D. Vera, *Commento storico alle Relationes di Quinto Aurelio Simmaco: introduzione, commento, testo, traduzione, appendice sul libro X, 1-2, indici*, Pisa 1981, 37) the role of the supreme pontiff is assumed without question; the problem is posed again by R. Stepper, *Augustus et sacerdos: Untersuchungen zum römischen Kaiser als Priester*, Stuttgart 2003, 199-200: «... the degree to which the priestly colleges surrendered their functional capacity to the Emperor and pontifex maximus, as they were evidently no longer themselves in a position to see to the refilling of vacant posts».

⁹ SHA *Aur.* 6, 3; *CREBM* 4. 42, 276-79; 4, 226, 1405-6, 228, 1411-15.

tical form of succession, and its aim was to legitimize dynastic succession in the eyes of the senatorial elite. Finally, it was independent of the role of the *pontifex maximus*. By the second half of the third century this practice must have come to an end.

Diocletian and his successors strengthened and formalized a tendency that had already been discernible earlier, that of isolating the emperor from the leading senatorial class, reducing access to him, and regularizing such access in a ritual way.¹⁰ One backdrop is certainly the real social and geographical distancing from the senatorial elite on the part of rulers after the soldier-emperors. Aurelian's conflict with the Senate from the very beginning of his reign provides a good example. Senators were excluded from an increasing number of positions in the imperial and state service, senators and officials becoming more fragmented as social classes. Legitimization of rule relied more and more on direct contact with the divine, divine protection, and identification with gods.¹¹ The tetrarchic model of identification with Jupiter and Hercules dominated the regulation of succession.¹² The emperors themselves, rather than accumulating offices and roles dating from the Republic and Principate, depended on an ideology of continuous victory and triumphalism.¹³ Solar images, the cult of Sol, the nimbus, and the crown of rays¹⁴ helped to formulate and formalize details of hierarchy, as did the purple.

In these circumstances the enforced collegiality of the *collegia sacerdotum*, with its rotating *magister* and *promagister* posts, could – with the exception of the *pontifices* – be neither attractive nor helpful. After the *ludi saeculares* of 204 AD there are no recorded instances of personal participation by the reigning Emperor in the periodic meetings and ritual activity of any college, and this even applies to large parts of the second century. Even earlier, as shown by the *commentarii* of the Arval brethren, involvement by letter, *litterae*, may have been the normal form of participation,¹⁵ enabling the emperor to avoid personal interaction and the perils of being obliged to argue face to face and replacing this by a much more asymmetrical form of communication.¹⁶

This does not contradict the growing stress on religious legitimization. Apart from the special case of the *virgines Vestales* and perhaps the *flamen Dialis*, the Roman conception of *sacerdotium* did not stress the nearness of priests to their gods. Auspices, the

¹⁰ See recently F. Kolb, *Herrscherideologie in der Spätantike*, Berlin 2001.

¹¹ J. Rüpke, *Patterns of Religious Changes in the Roman Empire*, in I. Henderson - G. Oegema (eds.), *The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity*, Jewish Writings from the Greco-Roman Period: Studies, Gütersloh 2006, 13-33.

¹² For an architectural expression of such aspirations see the palace of Galerius at Romuliana: D. Srejskić - C. Vasić, *Emperor Galerius's Building in Romuliana (Gamzigrad, Eastern Serbia)*, *AntTard*, 2 (1994), 123-141; D. Srejskić, *The Representation of Tetrarchs in Romuliana*, *AntTard*, 2 (1994), 143-152.

¹³ See F. Heim, *La théologie de la victoire: de Constantin à Théodose*, Paris 1992.

¹⁴ See G. H. Halsberghe, *The cult of Sol Invictus*, Leiden 1972; Id., *Le culte de Deus Sol Invictus à Rome au 3^e siècle après J.C.*, *ANRW*, II.17.4 (1984), 2181-2201; M. Wallraff, *Christus Verus Sol: Sonnenverehrung und Christentum in der Spätantike*, Münster 2001, 31-40; cf. J. Maier, *Die Sonne im religiösen Denken des antiken Judentum*, *ANRW*, II.19.1 (1979), 346-412.

¹⁵ According to *Acta Arvalia* 78 from 145 AD M. Aelius Aurelius Caesar took part in a meeting as *magister*.

¹⁶ I thank Claudia Moatti, Paris, for discussion of this point.

direct form of communication with Jupiter, were for the most part read by magistrates; the augurs merely assisted. During the entire imperial period, honorific inscriptions to emperors or dedicatory inscriptions by emperors did not include references to their priesthoods, with the exception of the office of *pontifex maximus*. The sacralisation of rule increasingly occurred without priestly legitimization, culminating in the divine inspiration claimed by Justinian as a basis for his legislative activities.¹⁷

Against this backdrop, we have to return to the comparison between the lists of 202 and 370 AD. For the moment I focus on the pontiffs or pontiffs *Vestae* respectively. If we deduct the *Caesares* and *Augusti*, eight pontiffs remain for each year, perhaps fifty percent of those in office. Obviously, despite the change of the epigraphic habit, attestation is not so different. How is the attestation in each case? For 202 AD first. Bradua is known by two urban and one inscription from Latium; Sosius from the urban succession list of the *Salii*. Aufidius from an inscription from Latium, Gavius likewise. Aurelius again only from the urban succession list of the *Salii*. Likewise Nummius, additionally attested in an inscription from Latium and Spain. Virius is attested in the same inscription from Latium as Bradua, Fulvius, finally, in an urban inscription.

For 370 AD Clodius is attested in a Sabine inscription, Macrinus from a dedication at Rome, Aurelius, Vettius, Virius and Symmachus from single urban inscriptions, only Vettius additionally in his tomb inscription. Petronius and Rufius are known from urban *taurobolia* inscriptions.

The comparison is surprising. In both periods, two are attested by specifically (even if different) religious inscriptions. In 202 AD five out of eight are known or also known from extra-urban inscriptions, in 370 AD only one out of eight. Here, a significant shift has happened. The priesthoods of the city of Rome, which had for so long characterized the epigraphical presence of Rome in the Roman Empire, disappear from the epigraphic record outside Rome during the fourth century. In her prosopographical analysis of fourth-century priests, Françoise Van Haepere has shown that, after 326 AD, all known higher priests come from Roman metropolitan and Western senatorial families.¹⁸ There may be a problem as to how representative the few individuals are. In the dwindling number of honorific inscriptions the fact that somebody held a Roman priestly office was no longer of interest except in Rome itself. Roman priesthoods, which had provided a model for all Italy and for many towns in the Roman Empire, had become a matter of local piety. They were no longer part of the communication and identity of a globally acting administrative elite.

3. Priesthoods becoming religious?

But this exactly is a matter of debate. As my example has shown, honorific inscrip-

¹⁷ Cf. the ambiguous use of the *lituus* as a symbol on coinage of the last years of the Republic and the Augustan period; see J. Linderski, *Imperium sine fine: T. Robert S. Broughton and the Roman republic*, Stuttgart 1996, 175-81 and no. 2380, and in this volume Grelle's paper.

¹⁸ Van Haepere, *Le collègue pontifical*, 116.

tions, naming priesthoods and magistracies side by side, dominate the record, that is, public epigraphic visibility, still by the last third of the fourth century. Cameron has concluded that priesthoods remained part of an ordinary career, without much of a religious ring. Is he right? There is conflicting evidence.

First, the material presented by Nicole Belayche in this volume to which I have nothing to add. Second, multiple membership. Here, we can realize a clear difference between the data of 202 AD and 370 AD. Originally, multiple membership of the traditional colleges was confined to exceptional cases, and was then a sign of the emperor's especial favour. This does not mean that the Emperor entirely dominated access to the colleges: against *communis opinio*, I am convinced that co-optation to the priest-hoods also acted as a channel of recommendation to the emperor, and was an instrument for the perpetuation of the narrow senatorial and equestrian/municipal elite, and not exclusively an instrument of imperial patronage. Both variants of the case assume, of course, that the emperor knew the college membership lists.

As early as the 260s multiple membership of the old colleges – combination with the sodalities of the ruler cult is common from the beginning – was becoming normal, at least for those few individuals known to us.¹⁹ The well-known lists of the specialist priestly roles of some aristocrats in the late fourth century²⁰ are not a reaction to dwindling support of these colleges by Christian emperors, but the end of a long process. Even the inclusion of functions in so-called 'oriental' cults is known from the first half of the fourth century.²¹

Now, multiple membership had enormous internal consequences. With co-optations happening at a rather early age (like the conferral of some offices), age of entering a priesthood must always have been a matter of status and pride. As the careers demonstrate, multiple membership naturally implies the biographically late entrance into a college, bringing you (even as a consul or of like status) to the bottom end of internal ranking. This might have been acceptable only, if not membership, but the renewed biographically fact of entering a college was the individual aim. Then, neither sequence nor the inclusion of offices of less centrally visible cults would negatively matter. Both would enhance religious status. Communication between priesthoods had been increased since the third century, with the Vestals passively and actively occupying a central position. Being a «baker» (*factor*) to them was attractive to the senatorial class. Here, a realm of religious communication opened. Rita Lizzi Testa has shown that the Vestals continued to attract donations down to the end of the fourth century and thus provoked Gratian to give a larger transparency to their fortunes and inheritances in 382 AD.²²

¹⁹ The first case: T. Flavius Postumius Varus (*CIL* 6, 1417 = *ILS* 2940). Cameron, *The Last Pagans*, 110, offers further examples, but any notion of a combination of the two pontificates (*Vestae/Solis*) must be excluded.

²⁰ E.g. *CIL* 6, 504 (with 6, 30779) = *ILS* 4153 (Ulpianus Egnatius Faventinus); *CIL* 6, 500 = *ILS* 4148 (Caelius Hilarianus); *CIL* 6, 1779 = *ILS* 1259 (P. Vettius Agorius Praetextatus).

²¹ Matthews, *Symmachus*, regarded the 'oriental cults' as much less important in the 'pagan revival' than the public priest-hoods.

²² R. Lizzi Testa, *Gli Anicii, i Canziani e la Historia Augusta*, in G. Bonamente - H. Brandt (edd.),

This concentration on a hollowed female priesthood points to a specifically religious interest in this group, leading to my third point.

The priesthoods themselves were becoming more religious. In a remote corner of Latium, near the sources of the Aqua Anius Novus and Aqua Claudia, seven *septemviri epulonum* placed two inscriptions, one to the Capitoline Triad (likening Jupiter to the god of the river Anio) and one to Cybele, the *mater deum magna Idaea*.²³ The fragmentary condition of the inscribed text does not allow us to determine the date more precisely within the fourth century, but it is possible to reconstruct the theological context. Speculations by Plotinus and the Emperor Julian indicate that the ‘mother of the gods’ was the subject of contemporary speculation that made the divinity a cosmological figure: the liquid matter requiring form.²⁴ The technical procedures for supplying Rome with water were evidently supplemented with sacralizing conceptions such as are manifested in this dedication.

There is another important – and much-discussed – detail. The number of seven individuals – an interpretation of the sequence of names that is not unproblematic, but is more plausible than a complex polynomial²⁵ – could be associated with the name of the college, even it had had at least ten members from the time of C. Iulius Caesar onwards and for an unknown period since. But the number seven has its parallel in other inscriptions where individuals of senatorial status identify themselves as adherents of various colleges and philosophies,²⁶ attesting again to inter-college-communication on matters of religion. One can bring these groups into juxtaposition with a painting in the catacomb of Praetextatus, also from the fourth century, which shows a meal of *septem sacerdotes*, seven priests, divided into two groups.

The sacerdotes sacrae urbis are an other example of the growing religious character. This priesthood was internally headed by a group of ten *decem primi*, thus involving a larger number of persons (and thus perhaps offering other possibilities of multiple membership). The priesthood does not appear until 286 AD, with two statues dedicated to a *virgo Vestalis maxima*. Mommsen’s assumption that it represents an agglomeration of the ancillary functions around the cult of Vesta,²⁷ and is thus synonymous with the *sacerdotes virginum Vestalium*,²⁸ cannot be maintained in view of the clear social dif-

Historiae Augustae Colloquium Bambergense, Bari 2007, 279-294; see S. Conti, *Tra integrazione ed emarginazione: le ultime vestali*, SHHA, 21 (2003), 211-222, for the last Vestals.

²³ *CIL* 14, 3469 (Triad) and 3470 (MDMI). For a discussion of the prosopographical problem see under no. 3052.

²⁴ See above R. Turcan, *Les cultes orientaux dans le monde romain*, Paris 1989, 69-75; Plot. *Ennead.* 3, 6, 19; Iul. *Eiς τὴν μητέρα τῶν θεῶν* 166a-169d.

²⁵ For discussion of this problem I am obliged to Matthäus Heil of the *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*, Berlin, even if diverging assessments remain.

²⁶ See *CIL* 6, 41314 = *NS* 1917, 22 = *BCAR* 45 (1917), 224, and *CIL* 6, 2153, the first from the turn of the third and fourth centuries, the second probably a decade later.

²⁷ Thus ad *CIL* 6, 2136-7; likewise G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, München 1912², 483 n. 2.

²⁸ Only in *CIL* 6, 2150.

ference and the lack of further evidence. Its structure belongs to the third century, and is perhaps modelled on the *ordo sacerdotum domus Augustae* of the Antonine period. Its duties are unknown; a connection with growing interest in ‘imperial talismans’, *pignora imperii*, is conceivable.²⁹

Multiple membership and the co-operation in cultic matters point into the same direction. Cameron is right and wrong. These affiliations and activities had no confessional character, they did not signal the adherence to a specific ‘cult’ or even paganism as opposed to Christianity or Judaism. We do not find a pagan political ‘party’.³⁰ But they are indicators and media of being religious in a broader sense. Without questioning the public institutionalised forms, these public priesthoods moved into a private realm, not in a legally technical sense, but as form of a religious individualisation and spiritualisation.

4. And the emperor as pontifex maximus?

But what about the emperor and his role as *pontifex maximus* in the centre of these developments? Here, I only wish to briefly restate an earlier argumentation of mine. We have to deal with the – as I will claim – fictional story³¹ of Gratian’s rejection of the supreme pontificate.

This is how Zosimus describes the situation: the *pontifices*, whose name went back to an old Greek tradition of setting up statues of gods on bridges, before the time of temple-building began,³² were the leading priestly college in Rome. Roman rulers, therefore, beginning with the kings, were given membership immediately upon taking up office. They were given the *stole* and installed as priests of the highest rank. This tradition was even perpetuated by the Christian Constantine, and down to Valens and Valentinianus. Gratianus alone declined the *stole* brought by the *pontifices*, calling it a *schema* not fitting for a Christian.³³ As antiquarian lore all of this is rather obscure or outrightly wrong.³⁴

²⁹ D. Fishwick, *A priestly career at Bosa, Sardinia*, in N. Blanc (éd.), *Imago antiquitatis: Religions et iconographie du monde romain: Mélanges offerts à Robert Turcan*, Paris 1999, 221-228, 224 sees the *sacerdotes urbis* as having responsibility for the feast of the ‘city’s birthday’, and as being associated with the Hadrianic temple of Roma.

³⁰ Thus correctly Cameron, *The Last Pagans*, 112.

³¹ The episode is still taken to be historical and dated to 376 AD by S. Conti, *Il collegio dei pontefici sotto gli imperatori cristiani*, in E. Lo Cascio - G. D. Merola (edd.), *Forme di aggregazione nel mondo romano*, Bari 2007, 363-377, 371. But see now Al. Cameron, *The Imperial Pontifex*, HSPH, 103 (2007), 341-384.

³² Van Haepelen, *Le collège pontifical*, 33-4 suggests plausibly that this ‘tradition’ of the *gephyraíoi* is no more than an invention calculated to give the Roman *pontifices* a Greek origin.

³³ See Van Haepelen, *Le collège pontifical*, 32 for an analysis of Zosimus’ sources.

³⁴ In detail shown by Cameron, *The Imperial Pontifex*, 342-351; but see Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum: A Prosopography*, 65 for a possible pontifical robe, not disproved by the arguments of Cameron.

What did happen? Neither Zosimus' conjecture – Gratian never became *pontifex maximus*, as he did not accept the robe – nor the modern line of argument – he must have repudiated the office, as it was part of his nomenclature until 379 – holds water. The conflicting claims can be expressed in the form of a question: is the *pontifex maximus* a member of the pontifical college, a traditional priesthood of the city of Rome? The antiquarian reply – yes – is clear, but too easily extrapolated. How did the emperors react? Until Constantine the question was without practical implications. Many emperors of the late third century had scarcely been present in Rome, and at the end of the century interest in direct interaction with the colleges was minimal. Conflicts were therefore neither necessary nor dangerous. Evidence from coins and inscriptions suggests that Constantine's successors changed their policy. There was no longer any interest in the title, and its use was avoided, perhaps intentionally.³⁵

The college reacted. Imperial lack of interest was unimportant: it had been the practice for decades. Perhaps prior to Julian the college of the *pontifices Vestae*, the old *pontifices*, restored the lodges of the *salii*, the *mansiones Saliorum*, at its own expense, and put up an inscription that mentioned two (otherwise unknown) *promagistri* by name. The college thus acted ostentatiously without its *maximus*.³⁶ On 9th June 364, not many weeks after possible knowledge of Jovian's successors, they went further. The base of a statue to the *vestalis maxima* Claudia (?), erected *ob meritum*, is signed by the *pontifices viri clarissimi* 'under *promagister* Macrinus Sossianus, *vir clarissimus* and *PM*.'³⁷ So far as the beginning of the text is concerned, Lanciani's interpretation of *pro meritis* is unconvincing. A first attempt at claiming the title *pontifex maximus* as internal to the college appears to me more probable.

The state of mutual *laissez-faire* might have lasted as long as the virtual head of the college did not challenge its basis. But this is precisely what happened as a consequence of the laws dating from the late 370s, and especially the end of 382.³⁸ It is possible that Zosimus' story reflects this conflict.³⁹ Zosimus' embassies might be fic-

³⁵ Kolb, *Herrscherideologie*, 89.

³⁶ *CIL* 6, 2158 = *ILS* 4944: *Mansiones saliorum Palatinorum a veteribus ob armorum magnalium custodiam constitutas longa nimi[s] aetate neglectas pecunia sua reparaverunt pontifices Vestae v(iri) c(larissimi) promagisterio Plotii Acilii Lucilli, Vitrasii Praetextati v(iri) c(larissimi)*. For the emphasis given to priestly roles by Julian see P. Athanassiadi Fowden, *Julian: An Intellectual Biography*. London 1981 (repr. 1992), 180-190; A. Wardman, *Pagan Priesthoods in the Later Empire*, in M. Henig - A. King (eds.), *Pagan Gods and Shrines in the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1986, 257-262, 260-262; R. Scholl, *Historische Beiträge zu den Julianischen Reden des Libanios*, *Palingenesia* 48, Stuttgart 1994, 91-97.

³⁷ *CIL* 6, 32422 = *ILS* 4938: *Ob meritum castitatis pudicitiae adq(ue) in sacris religionibusque doctrinae mirabilis C/lle [[Claudiae?]] v(irginis) V(estalis) max(imae) pontifices v(iri) c(larissimi), promag(istro) Macrinio Sossiano v(ir) c(larissimus) PM*. In this connection it must be understood that, with the exception of two *promagistri* from around 160 AD, all known pontifical *promagistri* belong to the 4th century.

³⁸ See Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers patiens*, 63 ff.

³⁹ I follow Cameron (*Gratian's Repudiation*) in dating the saying about Maximus to the end of 382 or the beginning of 383, but his idea that there were two embassies (97) has no institutional basis. Van

tions.⁴⁰ The scene makes sense as the college's final throw: if you are one of ours, you must now prove it, otherwise your claim to the title means nothing. The story itself reveals that its value does not lie in its historicity: the pontiffs have no sanctions or recourse of force with which to deny Gratian the title of *pontifex maximus*; their revenge must be left to history itself, in the form of an imminent successor, an other 'maximus', Magnus Maximus (383-388).⁴¹

Conclusion

The story is a fitting end to my argumentation. The imperial period, accelerating in the third and fourth centuries, saw the emergence of religion as something with its own institutional forms, with specific communicational forms, separate from politics even in the public area. This independence made political instrumentalisation, that is, religious legitimisation, much more powerful than in a civic context. The basis of this function was, however, a shared religion (in the singular), not some confession (of a plural). Thus, the emergence of Christianity as a religion⁴² is a fruit of this process, not a cause. In his recent article of 2007, Alan Cameron had added a new interpretation to the story of Zosimos. Pointing to the use of *pontifex inclitus*, «famous pontiff», in later documents had led him to the hypothesis that Gratian rejected only the 'maximus' part of his title.⁴³ Without denying the hypothetical character of this solution, I fully agree to the general line of his argument here. It is not the religious component of the imperial office that had become problematical, it is the 'confessional' character of it which had made it unfitting for the emperor of all. '*Pontifex inclitus*', however, is no longer an office coordinated with any other traditional cultic office. It is the pure sacralisation of the imperial office that had been achieved by the terminological switch. Above the new multiplicity of religions there a new religious power is established.

Haepere (Le collège pontifical, 179-186), who interprets the scene as a coronation ritual, is compelled to move it to Rome and accordingly date it to 376. The historicity of this visit to Rome is of course disputed: N. B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and court in a Christian capital*, Berkeley 1994, 88 n. 37; he follows Cameron in locating the repudiation in Milan at the end of 382 (*Ibidem*, 151).

⁴⁰ Astonishingly, their historicity has never been questioned by modern scholarship; see for example J. R. Curran, *Pagan city and Christian capital: Rome in the fourth century*, Oxford 2000, 205.

⁴¹ This pun has already been noted by the end of the 16th century, as Cameron (*The Imperial Pontifex*, 344) points out.

⁴² See J. Rüpke, *Wie verändert ein Reich Religion - und wie die Religion ein Reich?: Bilanz und Perspektiven der Frage nach der 'Reichsreligion'*, in H. Cancik - J. Rüpke (Hrsg.), *Die Religion des Imperium Romanum: Koine und Konfrontationen*, Tübingen 2009, 5-18.

⁴³ Cameron, *The Imperial Pontifex*, 373.