Lived Ancient Religion:Questioning "Cults" and "Polis Religion"
Presentation of a new research program

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This paper presents a program of research on ancient religion that draws on the concept of "lived religion". For antiquity, we use the term to denote an approach which focus on the individual appropriation of traditions and embodiment, religious experiences and communication on religion in different social spaces and the interaction of different levels facilitated by religious specialists. Working in an international core group at the Max Weber Centre of the University of Erfurt, the program intends to include specialists from Europe and beyond in the development of new paradigms of research.

General presentation

For the period from 2012 to 2017 the European Research Council has agreed to fund the project LAR (proposal 295555). It takes a completely new perspective on the religious history of Mediterranean antiquity, starting from the individual and "lived" religion instead of cities or peoples. "Lived religion" suggests a set of experiences, of practices addressed to, and conceptions of the divine, which are appropriated, expressed, and shared by individuals in diverse social spaces. Within this spatial continuum from the primary space of the family to the shared space of public institutions and trans-local literary communication four research fields are defined. In each of them a sub-project addresses representative complexes of evidence in different parts of the Mediterranean in the Imperial period. They are bound together by the analysis of the interaction of individuals with the agents of traditions and providers of religious services in the various fields. The methodological approach is defined through the notions of religious experience, embodiment, and "culture in interaction".

Ancient Mediterranean religion is traditionally viewed through the lens of public religion, i.e. consisting of the religions of political units (usually city-states) that are part and parcel of civic identity. Such analyses of ancient polytheistic religions, whether they refer to "embedded" religion (J. North) or "polis religion" (C. Sourvinou-Inwood), work on the assumption that all members of ancient societies were in principle equally religious. From this point of view, religion (and this also applies to Judaism) is a taken-for-granted part of every biography: *rites de passage* structure the life of each individual, while ritual acts within the domestic cult, family cult or burial and death rites facilitate change of status. This basic assumption of a *homo religiosus* is bound up with the political interpretation of ancient religion: since religion is an

unquestioned given, religion is thought to be particularly well-suited to cultivate "collective identities" and to act as instrument for the justification of power. Paradigmatic of this approach is the claim, now historically disproved, that only citizens were entitled to take part in the rituals of the *polis*. Here the religious actions of individuals take place solely in those niches and predefined spaces permitted by the civic religion, which is in turn created and financed by the dominant social groups.

Modern totalising claims on its behalf notwithstanding, polis religion is also understood as supplemented by or – in the end – even in competition with "cults". Being elective in nature, these cults offered options for more intensive social interaction and in particular soteriological perspectives, starting with Orphism in classical Greece (W. Burkert). Interest is focused on the so-called "oriental" cults or religions such as those of Isis, Mithras or the Syrian deities. Recently, however, the category has encountered severe criticism (C. Bonnet, J. Rüpke), since it provides not a stable criterion either as regards content (mysteries) or geography. Furthermore, among such cults, so it was claimed, Christianity alone offered a fundamental alternative to polis religion. On this understanding, Christianity (even more than Judaism) marked a rupture with the truly ancient, the polis religions, due to its emphasis on individual promises of salvation and faith rather than ritual practices. As with oriental cults, so with Christianity, a principle revision has been its recent reinterpretation as "ancient religion" (R.A. Markus).

The paradigms of "cults" and "polis religion" leave a major gap. Religious phenomena of the ancient Mediterranean societies have been analysed far beyond what has been described so far. Ten thousands of votives in sanctuaries have been collected, documented, and studied. They are pointing to a "votive religion" that copes well with individual crises (F.T. van Straten, J. Bouma). "Magic", ranging from amulets and curse tablets to elaborate rituals and discursive methods manipulated by ancient specialists (C. Faraone, R. Gordon, G. Bohak), has been analysed as a cultural resource that might even be opposed to religion. Divination makes up another field of "instrumental religion", provided not only by and for state officials (and hence described as part of public religion), but also by a broad range of male and female practitioners. Technical studies have failed to take into account the venues of such practices in ancient religion as stressed by ancient philosophy (Stoicism, Cicero) and the Judaeo-Christian concept of revelation (N. Belayche/J. Rüpke). Finally, funerary rites and the cult of the dead are a further area that abounds with evidence, yet occupies a marginal position (if any) in the polis religion paradigm. To sum up, vast areas of evidence and excellent research done on these phenomena have not managed to open up a new, broader framework within the study of ancient religion. As a consequence, with a few exceptions, the field has assumed a marginal position in global religious studies and comparative religion, i.e. for today's understanding of contemporary and historical religion, and has not adequately contributed to our understanding of ancient

Mediterranean cultures in general.

To question the cults-and-polis religion-perspective, it is not sufficient to merely point to these fields. The challenge is to integrate all these fields into a new theoretical framework. It is the audacious aim of "Lived Ancient Religion" to provide such a framework and adequate methodological tools. In order to achieve this aim, LAR will develop key-concepts and tools beyond the present state of the art that will tackle four methodological problems of current research:

(1) the individual, who has been much underrated as a religious agent;

(2) "cults" and "religions", which have been essentialised as the decisive religious agents and frames of individual action; and

(3) the archaeology of religion, often reduced to an archaeology of belief systems.

(1) *The place of the individual*. It is a fact that non-Christian antiquity also knew individual religious practices. Ancient conceptualisations gave such *sacra privata* precedence even over the state, with respect to military conscription for example (Gellius). Cicero's "religious legislation" explicitly excluded the *sacra privata* from any kind of interference. In contrast to this ancient perception, if we survey the history of scholarship, the realm of individual religious practice emerges as a marginal phenomenon, discussed solely in exceptional cases of religious deviance such as the reckless monolatry of Hippolytus (B. Gladigow) or explicit atheism (C. Auffarth). Attention is drawn to rituals of birth and mourning and the notions of the soul and the hereafter (J. P. Vernant, J. Bremmer). The work of those authors (such as C. Calame) who have managed to go beyond family cult – mainly with respect to life cycle rituals – is dominated again by political interpretations. In the case of domestic cult, an antiquarian perspective predominates, which at best includes economic history (J. T. Bakker) and seeks no further historical contextualisation (M. Bassani). "Domestic cult" has not been properly integrated into the complex topography of individual religious action that involves various sites – house, garden, family tombs (Y. Duval), neighbourhoods (J. Scheid, H. Flower), selected shrines and healing sanctuaries as much as centralised public festivals (A. Chaniotis) – and diverse social contexts. In a series of conferences, the applicant has demonstrated the fruitfulness of taking up research on subjectivity and the religious self (C. Gill, D. Brakke) and applying the perspectives of (biographical) individuation and (institutional) individualisation to ancient religions.

(2) *Cults and religions*. The essentialising of the rituals of a city or polity controlled by legitimate officials as "the religion of XX" (or "Athenian", "Roman", "Egyptian", "Etruscan" religion) has given the plural "religions" currency. Given the local roots and immobility of such public political religion, a movable element had been conceptualised on the patterns of modern "religions", but termed "cult" for its organisational deficits and openness to pluralism. These

cults were centred upon a deity, whose "essence" *(Wesen, Natur)* or "personality" defined the character and function of the cult on a trans-regional scale. Much of twentieth century scholarship on ancient religion has been invested in locating, identifying, and classifying evidence into such "cults" and "religions". The systematic concentration on these topics has overlooked two facts. First, the importance of cult activities or (though much less frequent) membership for an individual biography and for religious activities beyond that specific context of a local group or sanctuary seems to be limited (A. Bendlin, J. Kloppenburg). We can hardly know how such an involvement informed other types and areas of religious action in a religiously pluralistic world. Secondly, the intellectual dimension of ancient religions has not managed to capture the interests of the polis religion model (C. Ando). Ancient writers on religion tended to direct their attention to ritual on a normative, descriptive and exegetical basis (M. Beard, J. Scheid, J. Rüpke). These texts are now being slowly recovered for our conception of ancient religion (D. Feeney). It is only specific circumstances that made individuals think of a specific, mostly ethnographically defined "religion". Following these exceptions modern research has separated the evidence into the classes of "religions" and has broken down the continuum of ancient intellectual discourse on religion into pagan, Jewish, and Christian texts. However, the underlying conceptualisation is far from adequate. In the absence of a concept of religion that allows the drawing of hard boundaries between "imagined communities" (B. Anderson), religions cannot be thought of in plural before late antiquity (J. Rüpke). "Lived Ancient Religion" proposes to view the formation and reproduction of such institutions not only as a framework for, but also as an outcome of individual decisions about the formation of coalition and the appropriation of group styles.

(3) *Archaeology of religion*. It is a fact that archaeology of religion flourishes. On the one hand, methodological developments in archaeology ("processual", "new") have led to new interests and possibilities to use (and construct) archaeological findings in order to reconstruct rituals and enquire about the belief systems underlying social action. Religion has come to the foreground of archaeological research in international conferences as in many studies. On the other hand, history of religion has become increasingly interested in practices of quotidian religion, in sanctuaries rather than gods. Hence, archaeological sources have gained in importance. Recently, monographs aiming at a history of religion of individual localities that are not based on literary or primarily epigraphic sources have been published for Ostia and Pompeii (D. Steuernagel, W. van Andringa). A few books titled "archaeology of religion" have been published recently, but their value and innovativity is limited. Some adopt a classical approach and limit their scope to pre-literate societies (Sh. Steadman, C. Renfrew). Others attempt to offer concise general accounts of religion and give certain prominence to archaeological sources (T. Insoll). Moreover, some representatives of the cognitive approach towards religions (rather superficially) try to

adapt archaeological material to their argumentation (H. Whitehouse/L.H. Martin). The cutting edge of research is clearly located in approaches to very specific areas such as archaeology of ritual, sacrifice, and death. These research trends in archaeology, however, easily lead to reifying religion, instead of understanding the role of objects in cultural practices of constructing religion and encountering that "religion" as objectified representation of the sacred. Here, the project offers a framework for developing the methodology as outlined below through close collaboration between archaeologists and historians of religion.

"Lived Ancient Religion" is audacious in the sense that it intends to develop a new and integrative perspective on religion in the Ancient Mediterranean and an adequate methodology. This approach sets out to replace the concepts of "cults" and "polis religion(s)" as integrative frameworks in the description of a field that could usefully be conceptualised as "religion". By refocusing on the individual and the situational, i.e., on the intrinsic determinants of "lived religion", it aims to recover the importance of *Altertumswissenschaft* and the study of ancient Euro-Mediterranean religion within global History of Religion, thereby offering an approach, which can comprise the local and global trajectories of the multi-dimensional pluralistic religions of antiquity. In more detail, the overarching objectives of the project can be summoned as follows:

* Developing and establishing "lived religion" as a new framework for the description and analysis of ancient Mediterranean religion. Such a framework will allow integration of the wealth of material and textual evidence of individual and collective behaviour, of popular and intellectual culture on a new organisational basis. Far beyond the evidence subject to scrutiny in the project, such a framework would open up possibilities to restructure the wealth of evidence for ancient religions that is documented, published in large collections, and digitalised. Classificatory principles so far employed in documentation limit the degree of accessibility. The evidence is fragmented by the separation of "cults" and "religions" that define the limits of books and "corpora", thematic collections of evidence. This makes it hard to assemble locally specified evidence, the usual criterion for publication. It is the objective of this large-scale project to analyse, interpret, and make accessible this wealth of evidence with regard to comparative research on lived religion in other cultures and epochs, and thus re-introduce ancient religion into the research community of global history within a framework which reflects its significance beyond its merely political functions.

* Re-evaluating the history of religion in the Imperial period. The inclusion of new types of evidence and the focus on new types of religious action and conduct enable the identification of new areas and criteria of religious change. Far from denying the importance of processes of institutionalisation, the focus on "lived religion" and ancient individual perspectives of change from such points of view will historicise the traditional unit of description, that is, "cult" or

"religion", and shift the latter's position in narratives of religious change. It is the objective of the project to develop historical narratives that are neither purely additive with regard to different religious traditions nor dominated by a history of competition and prohibiting syncretistic boundary transgressions. Instead, the question that has to be addressed is how and under which conditions boundaries arose and where they are appropriated by individual religious agents.

* Opening *Altertumswissenschaft*. From the Renaissance onwards, ancient religions – Greek, and Roman, but also the ritual-dominated Jewish religion as described in the "Old Testament" and (late) Egyptian religion as treated in Greek or Latin texts – have been a major instrument for the European understanding of contemporary pagan, heretical, or foreign religion (M. Mulsow). Due to the wealth of different types of sources, and a long tradition of intensive research at international level, these enquiries have produced important models and stimulated – by comparisons – research in many fields, epochs and areas of religion (Ph. Borgeaud, N. Spineto): mythology, rituals (J. Harrison, J. Frazer, J.-P. Vernant), sacrifice (W. Burkert, R. Girard), mysteries (M. Eliade), to name just a few. By its concentration on the model of public, "civic" religion, research in the last decades has indeed added to this development, but, at the same time, significantly reduced the scope of relevance of antiquity in dealing with extra-European and contemporary religion. By addressing ancient religion as "lived religion" and by shifting the accent from sign systems and other normative concepts of culture to a more naturalised individual agent (R. Martin/J. Baresi), new perspectives for interdisciplinary cooperation even beyond the humanities (e.g. with affective sciences or cognitive studies) open up.

Methodology

As the title indicates, the project is breaking new ground from a methodological point of view by employing the concept of "lived religion" that has been developed for the description and analysis of contemporary religion (M. McGuire). This is the very first attempt to employ this concept within the field of ancient religion. In its application to contemporary social analysis, the concept of lived religion does not address how individuals replicate a set of religious practices and beliefs preconfigured by an institutionalised official religion within their biography – or, conversely, opt out of adhering to tradition. Of course, considering the relationship of individuals to tradition, such an assumption could in principle work in a religiously pluralistic and a mono-confessional society. Instead, "lived ancient religion" focuses on the actual everyday experience, on practices, expressions, and interactions that could be related to "religion". Such "religion" is understood as a spectrum of experiences, actions, and beliefs and communications hinging on human communication with super-human or even transcendent agent(s), for the ancient Mediterranean usually conceptualised as "gods". Ritualisation and elaborate forms of

representation are called upon for the success of communication with these addressees.

It is important to keep in mind that such practices are not entirely subjective. For the purposes of historical research, the existence of religious norms, of exemplary official practices, of control mechanisms and enforcement should be taken into account even more than in McGuire's sketch. It is precisely such institutions and norms that tend to predominate in the surviving evidence. The term "appropriation" plays a key-role here (M. de Certeau, A. Lüdtke). The specific forms of religion-as-lived are barely comprehensible in the absence of specific modes of individual appropriation (to the point of radical asceticism and martyrdom), cultural techniques such as the reading and interpretation of mythical or philosophical texts, rituals, pilgrimages and prayer, and the various media of representation of deities in and out of sanctuaries. The notion of agency implicit in the notion of appropriation – far more so than with "reception" – is not free of problems. In view of the normative tagging of teachings, traditions, narratives etc. in the field of religion, the description of *how* ideas are taken up and the specification of processes of reception are of particular importance: Cultural-theoretical and historical-anthropological conceptions of appropriation often clash with models found in religious symbolic systems, where transcendent entities are acknowledged as norm-setting agents. The methodology of the project offers a frame for a description of the formative influence of professional providers, of philosophical thinking and intellectual reflections in literary or reconstructed oral form, of social networks and socialisation, of lavish performances in public spaces (or performances run by associations) with recourse to individual conduct in rituals and religious context.

However, the analysis does not merely describe the contrast between norms and practices or the influence of one on the other. What is more, even the intersubjective dimension of religious communication can be accessed through the records of the individuals by enquiring into their communication, their juxtaposition, their sharing of experiences and meaning, their specific usage and selection of culturally available concepts and vocabulary (N.T. Ammerman). Thus, meanings constructed by situations rather than coherent individual worldviews should and will be identified. Logical coherence is secondary to the effectiveness of religious practices for the purposes desired ("practical coherence" pace McGuire).

This constitutes a programme that conforms to the scattered evidence available. When concentrating on practices, one should accept and account for incoherence rather than coherence (even in research into contemporary religion), the stressed role of mediality (J. Rüpke) and the importance given to knowledge and biographical coherence. Ancient religions are only partially receptive of techniques established in social studies so as to create new data by means of empirical or experimental procedures. It cannot be hoped that extensive descriptions of rituals stem from people whom we know to have practiced them, or that people whose reflection on religion is preserved in the literary tradition left other evidence of personal practices. The

generalisation of the individual instance (hardly ever representative in a methodologically plausible way) is just as problematic as the reliability of elite descriptions of mass behaviour – this is, of course, the overall situation in the historical critique of sources. By drawing on the model of "lived religion", scattered evidence will be contextualised and interpreted by relating it to individual agents, their use of space and time, their forming of social coalitions, their negotiation with religious specialists or "providers", and their attempts to "make sense" of religion in a situational manner and thus render it effective. This is not a material statement about any logical priority of the individual, but a methodological option, which provides a radical alternative to "cults" and "polis religion" and a way to overcome the latter's deficits.

Corollaries

The "lived religion" approach induces methodological modifications in the process of selecting and interpreting the evidence. 1) Focus on experience rather than symbols. Experience has occupied a pivotal position in religious studies since the end of the eighteenth century. However, despite the efforts undertaken in some recent books (E. Bispham/C. Smith; S.G. Cole), the concept of experience has not yet been brought to bear on ancient religion outside Judaism and Christianity. The very subjective nature of "experience" (*pathos*, unlike the ancient notion of *experientia*, that is, learning by practising) seems to be in conflict with the dearth of ancient sources. However, recent analyses of the phenomena related to experience have produced a concept of experience that takes into account the connection between personal experience and communicated meaning, and opens up to a historical use of the concept in relation to the lived religion approach: "personal, lived experience in its qualitative-emotional dimension remains dumb and has no power to transform behaviour as long as it is not articulated symbolically" and "… any system of convictions and practices, that from the first-person point of view is no longer seen as expressive of qualitative experience, becomes increasingly obsolete" (M. Jung). "Experience", thus, could stress the role of the viewer and user of images, of sacred and domestic space, and movement towards and into sacred space within the context of pilgrimage (J. Elsner). For material culture, the term "archaeology of religious experience" (which avoids an all too constructivist approach) seems to address this perspective and stresses individual experience both indoors and in the use of public religious infrastructure. By continuing a co-operation with specialists a new field of research can be developed to enhance the objectives of "Lived Ancient Religion".

2) Focus on embodiment rather than ritual. Embodiment is a notion conjoining materiality and corporeal experience and as such occupies a central position in contemporary epistemology (G. Weiss/H.F. Haber, W.F. Overton et al.) and anthropology of religion. Twentieth century pioneer

blending of phenomenology and cognitive science has marked the powerful impact of "embodied cognition" upon scholarly discourse on culture and religion. The concept stems from M. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology-driven musings on embodiment that advocate the crucial priority of movement and gestures over mind and the principal role of the body in perceiving environments and structuring the world. The performance of gestures, even though they do not cover the whole range of bodily experiences, contextualises natural entities and their bodies by conveying mental dispositions and enacting emotions, and shapes culturally informed meanings. The human body along with the conditions of perception it entails is what nuances subjectivity and places the individual self within culture and society, thus turning it to an "embodied self" (C. Noland). The notion of "embodied agency" grounded in diverse somatised impulses unfolds the social implications of the embodied self (C. Taylor, M.L. Lyon/J.M. Barbalet). Particularly intriguing here is the extent of alterity issuing from individual operations of embodiment, that is, the set of differentiating, even self-defining processes that are being activated by the emotional as well as gestural modes of an individual's body (J. Reynolds). Recent theorising on the anthropology of religion has gone so far as to identify in embodied alterity the "phenomenological kernel of religion", itself a correlate of individual experience, perception and expression (T. Csordas).

Ritual studies, even when concentrated on individual involvement and performance (R. Rappaport, C. Bell, R. Grimes), tend to focus analysis on rules and actual or imagined repetition of sequences of action as well as on wider societal, economic or power contexts. The concept of embodiment has shifted interest to individual involvement and meaning beyond the cognitive level in religious studies and has identified new evidence even in historical studies (C. Bynum; S. Coakley). Regarding communication with invisible gods or spiritual beings in antiquity, ordinary religious action is frequently much more encoded in bodily movements. Given that memory is inextricably intertwined with sensorial mechanisms, feelings arising out of sensory input in diverse social contexts are embedded in bodily experience. Thus, religious experience was stimulated by and registered in the form of sensations and movements as well as in postures taken, for instance, in prayer or in processions. Religious experience is shared by the intersubjective coordination of bodily movements and reactions. Religious practices in the epoch under analysis were only rarely taught through formal religious instruction. Much more frequently it was acquired through appropriation and imitation of movements stored in and enhanced by memory. Thus images of rituals or gods in corresponding gestures could evoke embodied knowledge (R. Gordon). Garments, paraphernalia as well as wreaths, the use of incense and the touch of amulets change bodily status for an extended period of time – gender differences demanding attention. "Lived religion" will identify and trace the continuation or repetition of such experiences in order to relocate differentiation of public and private (domestic)

ritual.

3) Focus on culture in interaction rather than *habitus*, organisation or culture as text. Everyday religion is not to be grasped in terms of individual isolation, but is characterised by diverse social contexts that are appropriated, reproduced and informed by the agent on relevant occasions. The concept of "culture in interaction" (N. Eliasoph/P. Lichterman) can enrich the lived religion approach. The concept has been developed in the ethnographic analysis of contemporary societies as a complement to the sociology of emotion. Focusing on situational communication in groups, the concept aims to identify specific "group styles", which modify the use of linguistic as well as behavioural register within cultural contexts. Anew, gender will provide an important perspective for analysis and description. For the most thoroughly defined and stabilised social contexts of ritual interaction – namely the nuclear and wider family (including slaves), clans, neighbourhoods and voluntary associations (limited to one per person by later law) – the concept helps theorise situational differences in reproducing cultural religious representations as well as in evoking less widely shared knowledge and practices. Ancient ethnographic evidence and provisions and exceptions made by public norms (laws) could form important evidence as can archaeological remains that attest to micro-topographically different practices without corresponding attestations of variances in explicit norms. This has important corollaries. Public religion, then, as seen "from below", is the attempt to create order and boundaries rather than a normative system only imperfectly reproduced by the citizens. Such boundaries would include the notions of sacred and profane, pure and impure, public and private, but also gendered conceptions of deities. Institutionalisations such as professionalised priesthoods and the reformulation of religion as knowledge that is kept and elaborated by such professionals would constitute further features of crucial importance for sketching a history of Roman public religion from the late republic onwards. Finally, elaborated "imagined communities" would attain an important place in such forms of civic religion.

Lived religion is just as interested in observing and defining the material conditions of everyday life that pertain to religious experience, practice and belief as in the way ordinary people make use of these conditions in order to functionalise the interdependency of everyday experience and lived belief. The utilisation of learning and memory in sketching the biography of subjectivity in religious contexts along with the emotive factor constitutes a major desideratum in the study of lived religion exceeding the concerns of *Alltagsgeschichte*. That said a crucial point of differentiation lies in the way religion integrates certain explicitly secular structures of everyday experience and individual symbolisation through material culture in order to render itself "lived".

In order to bring "Lived Ancient Religion" to bear on the available evidence, research will concentrate on individual appraisal and interaction in diverse social spaces: the primary space of the house and familial interaction (including familial funeral space), the secondary space of

religious experience and interaction in voluntary or professional associations, the spaces shared by many individuals or groups in the public sites of sanctuaries or festival routes, and finally the virtual space of literary communication and the intellectual discourses formed therein. To analyse the whole continuum of social interaction ranging from domestic cult to public spaces and professionals is of particular importance for the far-reaching goals set by the project. In order to achieve an integrated framework, the use and construction of these social spaces by individual agents have to be indexed topographically, for instance, by domestic or coemeterial, urban, and extra-urban, open or architecturally defined sites. This form of indexing enables the contextualisation of religion in everyday life. At the end of the analysis, the use of these spaces has to be indexed also temporally, for instance, by time, calendar date or frequency of events – clearly, the permanent use of an amulet differs from a one-time ritual (that might, however, be remembered time and again). Religious traditions form part of such an environment; therefore they should not be studied as if they are an independent variable, but rather as a product of providers of religious knowledge and services, "priests" or professionals. Most of the evidence at our disposal is best to be interpreted neither as "authentic" individual expression nor as institutional "survival", but as media, as the results of a culture created in interaction.

"Lived ancient religion" aims to address this matrix by launching sub-projects on each of the social spaces defined as fields of research. In order to transgress the usual research boundaries of "cults" and "religions" the bodies of evidence brought together within the sub-projects cover ancient Mediterranean religion geographically in an extended manner, focusing on Egypt and Italy, Syria and Greece, but also including evidence from the Western and Danubian provinces as well as from North Africa. In order to facilitate comparison and the historical contextualisation necessary for fruitful comparison, the chronological range is restricted to and concentrated on the Imperial period. Together with comparative elements, a transversal analysis, addressing all social spaces through the lenses of religious "providers", will account for the mutual interdependence of the sub-projects and will thereby advance "lived ancient religion" to a coherent new paradigm.

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