EMPIRES AND GODS

THE ROLE OF RELIGIONS IN IMPERIAL HISTORY

*Edited by Jörg Rüpke, Michal Biran
and Yuri Pines*

**IMPERIAL HISTORIES:
EURASIAN EMPIRES COMPARED**

Empires and Gods

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Eurasian Empires Compared

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Edited by
Michael Biran, Yuri Pines, Johannes Preiser-Kapeller
and Jörg Rüpke

Volume 1

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Foreword

This volume is the second in a series of "comparative imperiology" studies—a project aimed to compare functioning patterns of major imperial formations in premodern Eurasia. It is based on the discussions held during the "Empires and Religions" workshop, Freie Universität Berlin, March 2018. We are grateful for our Berlin hostess, Prof. Dr. Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, and to the workshop's participants, including those who for a variety of reasons did not contribute a paper to the final volume. We also deeply thank our dedicated research assistant, Dr. Ishayahu Landa and Mr. Simone Ruffini, who helped us with the index.

We are also extremely grateful to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the generous support of which (via Michal Biran's Anneliese Maier Research Award) enabled us to launch our project and convene its first two conferences. In addition, in preparing this volume we were supported by the Israel Science Foundation (grant 568/19) and the Michael William Lipson Chair in Chinese Studies (Yuri Pines); the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, University of Erfurt, and the International Graduate School "Resonant self-world relationships in ancient and modern socio-religious practices" (DFG); and the Frieberg Center for East Asian Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Financial contributions of both universities, Erfurt and the Hebrew University, enabled the open access publication, for which we are very grateful.

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Jörg Rüpke, Michal Biran, Yuri Pines
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0 Introduction

This is a volume on the nexus between empires and religions. It is the second of our planned explorations in "comparative imperiology," a project that aspires to systematically study selected functioning modes of major Eurasian empires. This is also, arguably, the toughest volume. Both "empire" and "religion" are notoriously vague terms that mean very different things in scholarly and popular literature, and are applied to different phenomena in various historical contexts. We should start therefore with outlining our working definitions that establish the framework of the current volume.

The working definition of an "empire" was established in our previous volume (Pines et al. 2021a). We opted for a narrow definition that emphasized two major features of the empires: their universalistic pretensions (even though "universal" was more often than not confined to the empire's macro-region) and their ability to dominate the macro-region. Macro-region in our definition is a vast area (determined topographically or ecologically) within which human interaction and the resultant cultural cohesiveness are usually higher than with the outlying areas. We have defined five Eurasian macro-regions with distinctive imperial traditions—namely, the Near East, Europe, continental East Asia, the Indian sub-continent, and the steppe belt of Inner Asia. Each of these macro-regions was dominated for centuries by a single imperial polity or by two that vied for hegemony. We avoided applying the "empire" definition to lesser-scale expansive polities that acquiesced to the multi-polar system within their macro-region. Our relatively narrow definition of empires was adopted for heuristic convenience so as to limit case studies to a manageable number. Our goal is to outline basic parameters of the empires' functioning on the basis of most unequivocal imperial cases; later it would be possible to check which of our observations are valid for other quasi-imperial polities. In each volume we select case studies from each of the

macro-regions, trying to address also different waves of the empire formation there (the second half of the first millennium BCE, the mid-first millennium CE, and the Mongol and post-Mongol [post-1200] wave; for details see Pines et al. 2021b, 9–15).

As for "religion," the definition is even more elusive. Various spiritual, social, political, and intellectual phenomena worldwide were identified in different historical contexts as religions. For our comparative purpose, we opted for a simple definition of religion as any mode of human interaction with superhuman or supernatural powers. This minimal definition allowed us to encompass a great variety of diffused and institutionalized, inclusive and exclusive, proselytizing and self-contained, immanent and transcendental (Strathern 2019) religions in different parts of Eurasia. Our focus is on the political and social aspects of religions; their spiritual and personal dimensions will be addressed in this volume only inasmuch as they have sociopolitical ramifications. Thus, we leave out the debates about the creation of specific imperial subjectivities through certain religious beliefs and practices (cf. e.g. Ando 2008).

Even a brief glance at the modes of interactions between empires and religions will disclose the immense variety of these. For instance, many local cults in Hellenistic, Roman, Indian, and Chinese empires could coexist with the imperial polity without much mutual impact aside from periodic (and not always consequential) attempts to co-opt or regulate them (Bonnet, Rüpke, Olivelle, Pines, this volume). Alternatively, religion could become the major legitimating force behind the empire and enjoy active patronage (Christian and Muslim empires in particular come to mind, see Preiser-Kapeller, Scales, Tezcan, Wink, this volume). Religion could act as a consolidating force for the ruling ethno-class, as in the Iranian empires, without, however, encompassing the subjugated non-Iranian populations (Canepa, this volume). Alternatively, imperial rulers could promulgate a new "civic religion" as a glue to bridge over a variety of local cults, as was the case with Aśo-ka's empire in India and, to a lesser extent, with China's official cult centered around worship of Heaven (Olivelle and Pines, this volume). Rulers of multi-religious empires could privilege a certain religion or, alternatively, patronize various creeds and cults (compare Biran and Wink, this volume). And, of course, empires could be challenged by organized religions, in response to which they had to develop means to co-opt, control or even suppress religious establishment (compare Preiser-Kapeller, Benn, Scales, Tezcan, and Wink, this volume). A single empire could have highly different experience with various religions (think of Rome's interaction with local cults and with Judaism, or its interactions with Christianity before and after Constantine; cf. Rüpke and Preiser-Kapeller, this volume).

To complicate things further, religions had very different modes of interaction with various social and political groups. The chapters in the volume—sometimes

directed by the availability of sources and sometimes by the authors' choice—focus on emperors (Olivelle, Canepa), on local elites (Bonnet, Rüpke), on political establishment (Pines, Benn, Biran), or on religious establishment (Preiser-Kapeller, Benn, Scales, Tezcan, Wink); and lower strata transpire as well (Tezcan). Even on the same sociopolitical level the differences among the case studies are tremendous. Compare Aśoka (r. 268–232 BCE), who had tried, almost single-handedly to create a new civil religion (Olivelle) with the emperors of the Holy Roman empire, most of whom were "military aristocrats with little formal education" who "had only a limited part in defining terms and content" of the discourse of emperorship, framed as it was in religious terms (Scales). Or compare the political power of medieval papacy (Scales) with that of the Buddhist establishment in Tang (618–907) China (Benn). The differences could not be starker.

This huge heterogeneity of individual cases makes any attempt to summarize the empires' interaction with religions particularly challenging. We found that it was impossible to impose a rigid common framework on the various contributions assembled here. Instead, we opted to outline a set of questions, from which the contributors could select those mostly fitting their case studies. These questions addressed both sides of the religions-empires interaction. We asked to explore the empires' religious policies—from negligence, to tolerance, patronage, and coercion. How did the empire's religious policies evolve and what was their impact? What were the advantages and disadvantages of each set of policies? And speaking from below: How did religions respond to the empires' formation? How did local forms of religious action appropriate or even change imperial space? How did religions adapt to patronage or coercion? What was the impact of this interaction on the religions' own success and vitality? How did conversion affect both religions and empires? Was there any particular advantage (or disadvantage) of matching universalizing religion with a universalizing empire?

Differences aside, all the contributors to this volume are united by their decisively historical approach. Our goal is neither to create a new paradigm of the empires-religions interaction, nor to refute earlier constructs, which had often narrowed the focus on monotheistic religions. The articles in this volume show that the empires' religious policy was constantly adjusted to face new challenges and adapted to new circumstances. These policies were modified due to a variety of political, social, and ideological factors, including the religious establishment's response to the rulers' initiatives; individual preferences of political actors; the rulers' compliance with the subjects' or elites' preferences; interaction with other imperial and non-imperial polities; the power of historical precedents; and sometimes mere contingencies. What emerges from this volume is not a single set of policies but a very broad toolkit that provided imperial and religious leaders with a variety of choices in their tensed and mutually dependent interaction.

The rest of this introduction comprises two sections. Section 0.1 discusses the religions' interaction with the empires from the religions' vantage point. This section is built primarily on examples coming from a single empire—the Roman—the study of which laid the foundations for the academic subfield of "imperial religions" in general. In this section, the contributors' essays play a subordinate role only. In section 0.2, in contrast, we adopt the empire's viewpoint and analyze religious policies adopted by different imperial rulers. That section closely follows the volume's chapters and serves both as introduction to and summary of these chapters' major points.

0.1 The Religions' Perspective

Religions preceded the formation of empires by centuries if not millennia; but the interaction with expansive and declaratively ecumenic polities brought about new opportunities and challenges to the religions' functioning. In this section we focus on three angles of these new modes of interaction. First is the top down perspective: to which extent, if any, were the religions creations of the empire? Second is the spatial perspective: how did religions, which initially were primarily ingrained local practices with only a few mobile actors and thin translocal networks, adapt to the new imperial mega-space? And third is the bottom up perspective: how did religions utilize the empires for their sake (especially through converting the imperial rulers)?

When using the term "religion," and in particular the plural "religions" in relation to "empires," we should recall that the concept comes with a pedigree. The very notion of religion as an identifiable cultural realm, an ideology connected with places and persons, is frequently taken to be associated with condensed and lasting power relations. The perceived co-evolution of "archaic religions" and "early civilizations" (Trigger 2003), that is, city or court-based states (Bellah 2011, 262–263), is part of this notion. Across history, many rulers tapped into the legitimacy of divine patterns of power distribution or directly into the agency attributed by divine support (Rüpke 2021), i. e., ideological and magical power (see Strathern 2016).

0.1.1 The Top-down Perspective

For the current discussion, the particularly interesting development is the evolution of the idea of "imperial religion" in the academy. This evolution is intrinsically linked to the pre-Constantine Roman empire. Recall that in the nineteenth century,

the adoption of the language of Romantic nationalism brought about the view of religion as a direct expression of the *Volksgeist* (the national spirit; see Rüpke 1997). Yet not just religion—the state itself was also conceived as a manifestation of that "national spirit." According to Hegel, a nation's constitution, its religion, and its art form a coherent whole that transforms the *Geist* (spirit), which is concretely represented by the state, into an "individual totality" (Hegel [1837] 1928, 11 and 79). Empires, however, go beyond that, as the Roman imperial case demonstrate. It is precisely by being constructed on a supranational level that the Roman empire was capable of turning the multiplicity of individuals into its subjects, all bound up in their diverse "national" (as Hegel had it) ethical traditions. With regard to religion, this involved agglutination: The Roman state made every attempt to "assemble all gods and spirits in the pantheon of world domination in order to transform them into an abstract and shared entity" (Hegel [1837] 1928, 11 and 361 f.). The range of deities venerated in the capital was permanently enlarged by adding cults from subjugated populations. "World domination" was the highest goal.

By the end of the nineteenth century, views concerning the religion of the Roman Empire had hardly changed, in spite of the intense interest that the Empire and the complex history of its religion had attracted. Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903), a leading ancient historian, postulated a "religion of Empire" that was just a wider version of the religious practices performed at the center (Mommsen 1899, 571). As a *Reich*, the Empire was assumed to have had a dense political and administrative structure, similar to a modern state.[1] The top-down view of an imperial religion was the natural outcome of the top-down view of the imperial state.

The function of "religions of Empire" was conceived as primarily political. This narrowing of the concept has had unfortunate consequences for subsequent work on the topic, not least in Germany. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Mommsen's student, Georg Wissowa (1859–1931), a leading expert on ancient religions, saw the empire as transforming the Roman "state religion" into a "court religion" (Wissowa 1912, 79), thus stressing the paramount role of the emperor and his local, urban, focus. Simultaneously, however, the imperial government definitely allowed the inhabitants of the provinces to maintain their native beliefs and only interfered if these violated imperial laws. It were Roman officials and soldiers who carried the cult of the gods of the city of Rome to every part of the Empire and thus stimulated a process of convergence and adjustment between them and native religious beliefs (Wissowa 1912, 85). Cultic veneration of the rulers and worship of the supreme god of the city of Rome, Jupiter, were seen as integrating factors, al-

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1 Note that Mommsen himself was an engaged figure in the attempt of unifying Germany.

though they did not constitute an imperial religion. It was only universalist concepts of divinity like the Jewish or Christian one that formed the measure rod against which tribal or "national" gods of expanding elites were judged.

Although the twentieth century historical analysis did not substantiate the Hegelian postulate of religions that were co-extensive with their respective polities, the political prism of analysis was not abandoned. German theologian and historicist scholar, Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) postulated "the creation of a religion of Empire (*Reichsreligion*) to keep the Empire together" (Troeltsch 1925, 89). Troeltsch simply presupposed the functional necessity of a "religious basis for the creation of the Empire," which he concretely identified with the ruler cult. It is obvious that the latter was eminently political. Troeltsch's observation did not signal sympathy with the concept, though. Since the ruler cult directly sacralized a particular constitutional form, that is, rendered the emperor sacred, the concept of "state religion" was discredited for all Christians. The emperors before Constantine were the very opponents of the followers of Christ and Christ himself.

With a view to the global aspirations of the Roman empire, the discussion took an apologetic turn. The question was not how monotheistic elements were implied in certain constellations of Greco-Roman polytheism and came to the fore (the so-called 'pagan monotheism,' intensively discussed from the end of the twentieth century, see, e.g. Mitchell and Van Nuffelen 2010; Athanassiadi and Frede 1999; cf. Cerutti 2010), but how the "victorious" later monotheism offered itself as solution to existent problems. Thus, links between monotheism and political empire were foregrounded. Would not a religion venerating just one universal god be perfect for a monarchy, the rule of one man over a vast (if not universal) empire (e.g., Peterson 1935; Momigliano 1986)? On the other hand, the observation was adduced that such political religion never went beyond lip-service, a "religion of loyalty" lacking genuine belief or emotional embracement (e.g. Nilsson [1961] 1988, 708). Having postulated that political functionality and popular emotional attachment are incompatible, scholars started viewing the two as completely separate aspects of religion, which did not normally coincide in the case of the Roman Empire (e.g. Fishwick 1978, 1253).

Two implicit assumptions far beyond the Roman example collide here and point to what we called the pedigree of the concept of religion. On the one hand, religion is supposed to be able to legitimate the political order, precisely because it can draw upon the non-political, on "emotional energy" (Collins 2004) produced in rituals of smaller social formations. On the other hand, within the gamut of the religious spectrum as a whole, the imperial cult of the rulers has been seen by many later interpreters as so dedicated to legitimating the political that it is no longer "religious," but purely "political." As a consequence, it can no longer fulfil its intended function. This observation is relevant to several instances of the reli-

gion in the "first wave" empires discussed in this volume. For instance, Aśoka's attempt to forge a new unifying "civil religion" to his subjects met with very limited success, historically speaking (Olivelle this volume). In China, the cult of Heaven and other official cults were also not designed to provide religious experiences to their subjects, a lacuna, which was filled in part by Buddhism (Pines and Benn, this volume).

0.1.2 The Local and the Trans-Local

This observation allows us to shift our perspective from that of the religion's service to the imperial rulers (a topic that will be revisited in the next section) to the vantage point of religions themselves. Speaking from this angle we may immediately note that religious space was not coterminous with the imperial space. Typically, religious action was local, at times even private. The participants, male or female, communicated with the divine *and* with each other. Through the use of texts, clothing and choreography, religious roles strengthened or modified social roles in local contexts. And when supra-regional religious practices emerged, there were still many pragmatic limitations to their uniform diffusion, even within a unified empire. A good example is the cult of past or present emperors and members of their family in the Roman empire. Rather than being a unified practice, it was the result of local initiatives, reflecting the interest of local elites to strengthen their local position by tapping into the resources of imperial symbols and associating with the empire's power (Price 1998; Bonnet and Rüpke, this volume). Even identical practices, such as identical names of gods, formulae, practices, or materials, were only rarely enacted as repetition of a central, "Roman," practice. (This was unlike unifying religious practices in transregional religions, such as the Islamic *Fatiha* or the Jewish *Shma Israel*). Occasionally, spatial limitations could be overcome by reporting specific ritual actions to the center. This comprised, in an institution as centralized as the Roman army, for instance, exceptional oaths for the emperor, the swearing of which would be transmitted by letters. Daily reports were made of the performance of regular cult-acts in administrative centers or military camps. There are further examples of conscious creation of a link between local action and the empire as a whole, such as the stereotyped dedications to a range of deities *pro salute imperatoris*, "for the benefit of the emperor" (a formula that could be combined with a great variety of addressees and concerns), or worship of such an "imperial" deity as the goddess of victory.[2] Yet again, these

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2 The goddess of victory was normally worshipped near the borders of the Empire and at strate-

were primarily regional fashions rather than uniform or chronologically progressive behavior.

Religious agents need not wait for imperial agents to provide unified infrastructure. They could take initiative and utilize the imperial space for their purposes. The empire ensured not just (relative) domestic peace which allowed religious personnel safe travel across huge distance. It also facilitated exchanges due to high internal mobility—of military and civilian personnel, of merchants and artisans, of voluntary and involuntary migrants—which could help the religious agents. Jewish communities sent messengers to Jerusalem and *vice versa* (Krauss 1905), Christian communities exchanged letters and thus created an early "empire of letters" (cf. Bannet 2005); Syrian soldiers introduced Sarapis and Isis, originally Egyptian deities, whom they considered as characteristic of "Roman religion" into the northern frontier regions of the empire.

The interaction of the local and the trans-local could be seen in processes of translation within empires that create a unity above diversity (Rüpke 2014). Despite the great importance of local, that is, traditional pre-Roman deities, especially for the non-elite local population, the media of symbolic communication between center and periphery and within the periphery were often gods who acquired Roman or Greek names. The agents of this process, which is being discussed as "Roman translation" (*interpretatio Romana*—and other cases of employing divine names in translation, see Rives 2011; Bonnet 2012; Chiai, Häussler and Kunst 2012; Bettini 2016) and those who drove imperial extension and intensification, were not only Roman citizens. They were also natives who were not comfortable using indigenous names, at least in written and politically significant contexts.

0.1.3 The Bottom-up Perspective

With this we move to the bottom-up activity of religious agents, a matter that could have far-reaching consequences for the empires. Of these bottom-up activities, conversion was the most notable. The most famous case, undoubtedly, is the Roman Empire witnessing the conversion of the emperor Constantine (r. 306/324–337) and his successors to what is more and more profiled as a Christian church different from other groups and above all Judaism. For one, Christian thinkers provided a new god, Christ, closely related to the popular and politically frequently invoked

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gically important locations; but dedications to Victoria Parthica or Armeniaca, i. e. victory in West Asia, put up in Northern Africa indicate that the donors saw their own situation in the context of the Empire as a whole (Smadja 1986).

Sun-god. Secondly, the trans-local network of that church that saw itself in alignment with the dominant local organizations at Alexandria and Rome offered Constantine valuable advice and support. Constantine co-opted several bishops as his council, restored Church property, and conveyed privileges onto the organization (for the subsequent phase, see Preiser-Kapeller, this volume). The emperor assumed the role of a patron without even being baptized. First self-alignment and later forced alignment with this choice converted the functional elite and administration of the empire, massively changing conditions of the competition between religious groups. Legally, semantically, and visually, the Roman Empire was Christianized.

Another notable case of bottom-up conversion is that of the Mongol Empire discussed by Biran, this volume. The Empire's dimensions, its policies of religious pluralism, and its promotion of trade and various other movements of population across its immense space—all created favorable conditions for missionary activity, notably among the Mongols themselves. In this "conversion race," Islam was the great winner. It was the most mobile, mercantile and cosmopolitan religion in the Mongol empire and it had already amassed considerable experience of converting the nomads. Muslim soldiers, traders, administrators, scholars, captives and refugees expanded Islam into the Eurasian steppe, China, India, Southeast Asia and Africa, and led to the Islamization of three out of the four Mongol khanates (Biran 2007, 93–98; 2015; this volume).[3] In all the three, the process of Mongol conversion was bottom-up, eventually influencing the rulers. The clearest and best studied example is that of the Mongol ruler of Iran, the Ilkhan Ghazan (r. 1295–1304). Ghazan adopted Islam primarily for winning over the Muslim segment of his Mongol army, which itself was gradually Islamized during its first generation of stay in the Middle East (Melville 1990; DeWeese 2009, Biran, this volume). Ghazan's adoption of Islam enhanced his legitimation among his mostly-Muslim subjects, enhanced the conversion of other rank and file Mongols, and allowed him to compete for the leadership of the (now caliph-less) Islamic world.

To sum up, empires opened up spaces of action and reflection for religious agents and religious institutions. Even if typically locally or ethnically rooted, religions explored the imperial space and adapted to the interpretive and organizational challenges thus posed. At the same time, they provided tools for the imperial rule and influenced those employing these tools. High-level or large-scale conversions changed both, religions and empires.

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3 In the fourth (China), the court embraced Tibetan Buddhism, but this remained a top-down development with very limited impact on the rank and file Mongols (let alone the Chinese).

0.2 The Empires' Perspective

Having discussed the empires-religions interaction from the religions' perspective we shall shift now to the empires' vantage point. In what follows, by closely following the chapters assembled in this volume, we shall highlight different strategies adopted by imperial rulers in interacting with dominant religions of their macro-region. How did the empire's religious policies change once proselytizing, ecumenic, and exclusive religions entered the scene? What were the costs and benefits of different strategies employed by the imperial rulers?

One can outline three potential contributions of the religions to the imperial enterprise: justification of expansion, providing a glue to stabilize the empires' rule over heterogeneous population, and bolstering the legitimacy of the empire and its leaders. The first of these topics—the connection between religions and the imperial expansion—was discussed in our previous volume (see, especially, Pines et al. 2021b: 21–23) and, therefore, was not addressed by the contributors to the conference from which the current volume evolved. Here, suffice it to briefly summarize that in most cases divine support was not a significant factor behind the empires' expansion and for sure not its primary trigger (for a major exception of the early Caliphate, see Peacock 2021). Although the empires' military success could at times engender belief in divine support and prompt further conquests, as was the case of the Mongols (Biran 2021), more often claims of the divine backing were used to justify the territorial aggrandizement in retrospect rather than provide a mobilizing motif in the first wave of imperial expansion. Even in the case of proselytizing religions, the expansionist zeal bolstered by the idea of "one God—one empire—one emperor" was usually short-lived (Fowden 1993). Neither the two Christian (Preiser-Kapeller, Scales) nor the two Muslim empires (Tezcan, Wink) discussed in this volume committed resources for territorial expansion for the sake of proselytization, even though incidentally their leaders could invoke the concept of "holy war" in conflicts with the infidels. The proselytizing religions, in turn, could piggyback on successful empires to facilitate their own expansion; but the history of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam shows that the imperial backing was an important but not necessarily the decisive factor behind the religion's success in attracting new converts.

0.2.1 Religions as Unifying Force

Whereas the religions' contribution to the empires' expansion is debatable, their potential to become the empires' glue was much more consequential. Any empire,

by the mere fact of its expansionist origins, was multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. The question was whether or not to acquiesce to this heterogeneity or to forge unifying cultural traits among the subjects. In the latter case, religions could play an important role. Thus, whereas many empires were prone to maintain "politics of difference" (Bonnet, this volume, citing Burbank and Cooper 2010), others did try to achieve greater cultural unity if not necessarily homogeneity. In the latter case, a transregional religion could greatly facilitate the integration of divergent subjects.

With this regard, the trajectories of the empires discussed in this volume differed dramatically. Some—like the Ptolemaic Empire discussed by Bonnet and the pre-Christian Roman empire discussed by Rüpke—were not concerned at all with religious unity. As Rüpke reminds us (p. 101), "the power of the emperor rested on his armies and economic resources, not on ritual or divine status." In both empires, the imperial cult was promulgated with a potential of strengthening the ties of localities to the imperial center. Yet, as noted also in the previous section, this cult was part of a broader pattern of cultural and linguistic integration that was not necessarily imposed from above but often emerged due to bottom-up initiatives. Nor did these two early empires try to unify divergent local cults, limiting their regulation only to infrequent attempts to outlaw illicit "barbarian" practices.

That Ptolemaic and early Roman emperors seem to be indifferent to religious unification is not surprising by itself once we recall that back then organized universalizing religions were still at their infancy in the Mediterranean area. This was not the case of the Maurya empire in the Indian sub-continent, though. There, in addition to local cults, powerful organized religions—Brahminic Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism—vied for influence. The greatest Maurya emperor, Aśoka, was in due time incorporated into Buddhist hagiography as the patron of that relatively new creed; and his role in Buddhism's subsequent prosperity is often compared to that of Constantine the Great's role in the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire.[4] In this volume, however, Olivelle proposes a radically novel analysis of Aśoka's enterprise. Rather than endorsing one creed at the expense of others, Aśoka "articulated in his inscriptions what could be termed a moral philosophy, an imperial ideology, and a civil religion—or even a 'political theology'" (p. 34). The new "civil religion" promoted by this "unique emperor and, more importantly, a unique human being" (p. 40) was aimed to encompass different organized and local cults and glue his heterogeneous empire together. The degree of his success in the long term is questionable, but this was for sure one of the boldest

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4 For just a very recent example of such a comparison, see Bieber and Beyers 2020.

ever attempts to provide the imperial subjects with "a moral basis for their belonging to his [Aśoka's] empire" (p. 41).

Whereas Aśoka's attempt to create a new "civil religion" for his subjects may have been short-lived, China's imperial rulers were much more successful in creating a unifying official cult centered around the worship of Heaven and the imperial ancestors, superimposing it on a heterogeneous religious landscape. The formation of this religion is traced in Pines's essay. Ancestral cult and the concept of the Mandate of Heaven as the core of the dynasty's legitimacy were formed in China early in the Bronze Age, but in the wake of political and intellectual developments of the second half of the first millennium BCE, the belief in the ancestors' and Heaven's political efficacy was shattered. Nonetheless, soon after the imperial unification of 221 BCE, the concept of Heaven's Mandate—and the adjacent system of official cults—had been gradually resurrected. These cults, however, aimed neither to inspire devotion in the masses nor to supplant popular religion, which remained vibrant throughout the imperial millennia with only minimal supervision from above. Rather they were created largely by officials and for officials as a symbolic manifestation of the imperial order that encompassed everything between Heaven and Earth. The real glue that hold the Chinese empire together was not religion but the stratum of scholar-officials, the bearers of both cultural and political power (Pines 2012, 76–103). Religion played only a subordinate role in sustaining the empire's unity; arguably higher than in the Hellenistic and Roman empires, but not considerably higher.

During the formative age of the Chinese empire, the country still did not encounter organized or transregional religions. They emerged soon enough under the Han dynasty (206/202 BCE–220 CE): first, the indigenous Daoism and then the imported Buddhism. The latter had a tremendous impact on Chinese society, causing one scholar to speak of the Buddhist "conquest of China" (Zürcher [1972] 2007). Politically, however, the encounter of the Chinese empire with a universal religion had very different outcome than in the Roman case. As Benn shows in his chapter, whereas the Tang imperial rulers were eager to use Buddhism "as the spiritual arm of the state" and use its institutions to keep "the social fabric of the empire together," and whereas some emperors and many elite members were clearly attracted to Buddhism, the political establishment as a whole was primarily concerned with controlling Buddhist (and Daoist) clergy. "The Tang state mostly concerned itself with questions of how to co-opt mainstream Buddhist ideas by harnessing or tweaking doctrine while also taming the wilder fringes of the religion" (p. 219). In China, any organized religion, however popular, could play only subordinate role, politically speaking.

Benn's essay brings us to the empires of what we dubbed elsewhere (Pines et al. 2021b, 12–14) "the second wave"—namely, those formed in the third to eighth

centuries CE. These second-wave empires (and their heirs of the third, the Mongol and post-Mongol wave) faced a very different religious landscape than their predecessors. The proliferation of proselytizing universalistic religions in the first centuries CE created new challenges and brought about new opportunities for empire builders. Most notably, the religions that henceforth dominated Western Eurasia—Christianity and Islam—were exclusive creeds, which made maintaining "the politics of difference" much more difficult. Moreover, these new powerful religions played henceforth the major role in the identity and legitimation of most of the "second wave" empires, turning religious factor into more notable in the imperial enterprise than it was among the empires of the first wave.

Five empires discussed in this volume had much stronger inclination to identify themselves with a single organized religion and utilize its resources to forge a new imperial identity. The trajectories of these five cases were highly different, though. The earliest was the Iranian case discussed by Canepa. The ruling stratum's commitment to Zoroastrian dualism and apocalyptic eschatology is discernable already during the Achaemenid dynasty (539–333 BCE), but back then it seems to be confined to the ruling Persian ethno-class and was not actively promulgated throughout the empire. In the case of the Sasanian Empire (224–642 CE), as judged by its monumental reliefs and sanctuaries, the rulers were committed to forging a pan-Iranian political entity (Ērānšahr), in which they occupied the central place. Canepa's ruler-focused discussion shows how the political cosmology forged by Sasanian leaders "could align the empire's aristocracy and military with the goals of the king of kings" (p. 138). The empire's dualistic discourse targeted primarily its elites, and eventually "the newly expanded and reformed petty landholders," but it was not directed at religious minorities (Jews and Christians), who had to seek other routes of accommodation with the "king of kings."[5]

Creation of a unified religious space for the empire's subjects had been most successful in the two Christian empires discussed in this volume. As Preiser-Kapeller shows, the Eastern Roman Empire succeeded—primarily through discriminating against the pagans in public life and job allocation—to eliminate the pagans' visibility (and eventually their presence) throughout the imperial space. Gradually, the ostensible religious homogeneity had been achieved (except for the Jews who "were 'allowed' to remain the most important non-Christian minority in the East-

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[5] Payne (2015) analyzes relations between Zoroastrian political cum religious establishment and other confessions (primarily Eastern Christians). He concludes that the dominant pattern was "the differentiated, hierarchical inclusion of religious others," a pattern "rooted in Zoroastrian cosmological thought" (p. 26). The question to be addressed is to which extent this inclusion on an intrinsically lower position was beneficent for the integration of the minorities into the Sasanian imperial space.

ern Roman Empire in the following centuries" [p. 184]). Yet whereas the empire was generally successful in promoting Christianization, its power remained less effective in bridging over doctrinal disagreements that soon enough split its subjects. The new cleavages had immensely weakened the empire, especially in its eastern provinces, which generally favored the "heterodox" miaphysite (monophysite) view of Christ's nature, and which became more vulnerable to foreign (first Iranian, and then Arab) aggression.

The Holy Roman Empire in the West was designed as a paradigmatic example of religion cum empire symbiosis. In what appears as an inversion of the original Roman empire as depicted in Rüpke's chapter, its medieval heir was inseparable from the Catholic church. As Scales observes, "where other empires had armies, fleets, and bureaucracies, the medieval western Empire had images, symbols, and authoritative texts" (p. 287). In the first centuries of its existence, the empire was active in expanding the borders of Christendom eastwards, first against the Saxons, and then against the Slavs. This aggressive proselytizing was successful. Prior to the onset of the Reformation, the Holy Roman Empire enjoyed arguably the highest degree of religious homogeneity among all the empires discussed in this volume (notwithstanding, again, Jewish presence). Yet this became in due time a liability rather than an advantage. The exceptional power of the Church curtailed the imperial power. In particular, the eleventh century "Investiture Contest" demonstrated the weakness of the imperial establishment. Overall, the empire failed through much of its history to maintain a robust political system. Scales asserts: "It can appear difficult, based on the criteria often applied in modern comparative studies, to justify speaking of the *Reich* as an empire at all."

Islam is the only religion that can be credited with creating an empire (the Caliphate) almost from its onset. Yet the phenomenally rapid expansion of the Caliphate, especially under the Umayyads (Peacock 2021) did not result in the immediate conversion of its subjects. Much like in the Eastern Roman Empire, the conversion was a gradual process, prompted not only by the Empire's success but also by suppression of the pagans and, mainly, institutionalized discrimination against the infidels. This said, the Caliphate was never committed to full religious homogeneity. Stressing its position as heir of both Christianity and Judaism, Islam was more accommodative toward Jews and Christians than Christian empires toward the Jews. Eventually the Muslims tolerated also Zoroastrians and even Buddhists. The status of the religious minorities as *dhimmis* (people of the covenant) was integrated into Islamic law, thereby creating precedents for multi-religious empires under Islamic rule in the post-Caliphal and especially post-Mongol worlds. Another source of heterogeneity in the Caliphate, much like in the Eastern Roman Empire, were internal cleavages—most notably the Shi'a-Sunni divide, a political-

cum-religious schism. This divide eventually contributed toward weakening of the Caliphate and continued to haunt its successor states (Cook 2015).

The "third wave" of empire-building starts with the Mongol Empire discussed by Biran. This was an exceptional empire, both in terms of its unprecedented territorial scope and also due to its ability to creatively merge distinct imperial traditions of steppe and sown. This exceptionality is duly observable in the Mongols' bringing the "politics of [religious] difference," typical to the non-exclusive religions of East and South Asia into the monotheistic world of Central and Western Eurasia, as well as allowing religious brokers, Muslims and Buddhists, to turn their indigenous immanent religion into a transcendental reality (for these terms, see Strathern 2019). The Mongols' phenomenal success—which convinced subjects and foes of different creeds that Chinggis Khan and his heirs received divine support—allowed them to maintain throughout their huge realm a typical steppe policy of religious pluralism, mobilizing "the spiritual resources of their domains for the sake of the empire just as they did with their human and material resources" (p. 231), and relativizing the main religious creeds of Eurasia. Although the Mongol religious tolerance had obvious limits (customs deemed offensive of the Mongol indigenous creed were disallowed, and so were religious challenges to the imperial power), it was nonetheless remarkable in comparison to most other second- and third-wave Eurasian empires. The Mongols' successful "pay for pray" patronage of major creeds (Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Islam) resembles the attitudes of some of China's imperial rulers (cf. Benn, this volume). Yet unlike the Chinese empire, the Mongols (as their steppe predecessors) did not strive to develop a uniform official cult. On the contrary, after the dissolution of the empire (after 1260) and the halt of the imperial expansion (1279), the Mongols, who were already undergoing partial assimilation among their subjects, turned either to Tibetan Buddhism (in China), or Islam (in the other Mongol polities) as an additional source of legitimation (see section 0.1 above). This conversion did not mean complete abandonment of indigenous beliefs, though. In the Muslim world, in particular, the Chinggisid concept of charismatic sacred kingship was Islamized and appropriated by the early modern Muslim rulers from the Timurids (1370–1501) onwards.

Two such early modern Islamic empires of the "third wave" are discussed in this volume. Both the Ottomans (Tezcan) and the Mughals (Wink) inherited certain aspects of the Mongol religious pluralism, but both also exemplify a major dilemma faced by the Muslim empire in endorsing the "politics of difference." In both cases, appeals to Islamic credentials of the ruling dynasty played an important role in the empires' emergence and expansion. Their rulers justified incursions into Christian and Hindi areas as *ghaza* (frontier warfare, normally, even if not exclusively directed at infidels; Dale 2021). The Islamic identity of the core group (which could be compared to the ruling ethno-class in the early Persian empires) was an

important asset of the imperial rulers, never to be dispelled with. However, both empires ruled a sizeable non-Muslim population (a vast majority in the Mughal case) that played an important economic and political role, and most of which resisted conversion. Excessive Islamization could alienate these subjects and weaken the empire's cohesiveness. It was more prudent then to adopt the Mongol (or, in Burbank's [2021] parlance, "Eurasian") pattern and pursue tolerant and pluralistic policies. This, however, could amount in the eyes of pious Muslim clerics as forsaking the empire's Islamic (more precisely Sunni) identity, which would weaken the rulers' position within their core group. The tension between these two conflicting imperatives explains much of the fluctuations of the empires' policies, as is particularly notable in the Mughal case discussed by Wink.

Wink shows that at its inception the Mughal empire was, and to a certain degree remained "a successful multi-cultural and multi-religious political formation." However, it also "presided over an epochal but slow religious transformation that sought to overcome these conditions of cultural and religious pluralism. This was the crossover from old pagan beliefs and religious cults to the monotheistic religion of Islam, a process that had a parallel in the crossover to Christianity in the Mediterranean and Europe but began much later and was never completed" (p. 322). In the long term, the tendency was toward assertion of the superiority of one creed (in its Sunni interpretation) over the others. The appeal to the core group was more important than maintenance of pluralistic stance.

Tezcan's study also shows the transformation of the Ottoman polity from one which embraced open-ended understanding of Islam (what Tezcan dubs the First Ottoman Empire, ca. 1453–1580) to one prioritizing a more pious Islamic identity so as to strengthen the sultans' appeal to the core Muslim population. Tezcan particularly emphasizes the importance of the Muslim religious establishment and its ties to the Muslim masses, especially in the capital, Istanbul, as a force that the imperial rulers had to reckon with. Coming at the time of profound sociopolitical transformation, the renovated empire in which the political sphere was expanded "to include urban Muslim masses had a negative impact on the lives of non-Muslims. ... Thus, mediating socio-political class differences through a collective identity defined by religion during the Second [post-1580, post-expansionist] Empire pushed non-Muslim Ottomans away from the ruling class" (p. 316). Indeed, any alliance with organized religion, even if beneficent for the empire's formation and maintenance, could not but come at a price. We shall turn now to analyzing the relations between the empires' rulers and the religious establishment as another major factor affecting the empire's functioning.

0.2.2 Religions and Legitimation: A Double-Edged Sword?

In a recent comprehensive study of the interaction of religions with the political realm, Alan Strathern (2019, 108) noted that "religion was unignorable for rulers" due to its being "a vast reservoir of *social power.*" Among many contributions of the religions to the polity's functioning, bolstering the ruler's legitimacy (and, more broadly, that of the dynasty, the political regime, or the polity itself) is singularly important. Differences among individual cases aside, the chapters in this volume exemplify the common pattern of the imperial rulers' predilection to claim divine support for themselves and their undertakings. From Aśoka's self-identification as the "Beloved of Gods," to Chinese monarchs' titles "Son of Heaven" and "August Thearch," to the Mediterranean imperial cults, to the Iranian monarchs' self-placement as active participants in the battle between good and evil, "prefiguring and even joining in the struggles at the end of time" (Canepa, p. 168), to the idea of "Christomimetic sacral monarchy" (Scales, p. 272), to the Steppe's Heavenly Mandate and charismatic rulership, as well as the later development of "a new vocabulary of Muslim sacral kings" in the post-Mongol Islamic world (Biran, p. 254)—all belong to this lengthy chain of rulers seeking divine legitimacy. However, more often than not, this legitimacy came at a price. To validate their claims of divine approval, most rulers had to rely on intermediaries—members of different religious establishments. In exchange for their support, the religious personnel could demand not just material benefits but also political influence much above what most rulers would like to grant. In not a few cases, religion could turn from a supportive to constraining force (cf. Strathern 2019).

In this context, it seems that the more the religious legitimation was effective, the costlier it was for the empire's rulers. Let us start with the weakest cases discussed in this volume. As Bonnet and Rüpke show, in both Ptolemaic and Roman empires the imperial cult remained of limited political importance; for sure it was neither the pillar of the emperors' nor of the empire's legitimacy.[6] Yet this politically weak cult did not require reliance on powerful religious establishment, freeing the emperors from potential competitors. This was *mutatis mutandis* the case of the early Mongol empire as well, were the rulers' legitimacy in the eyes of their subjects derived primarily from their demonstrable success rather than from the cult of Tengri per se. Moreover, the Chinggisids appropriated the direct connection to the divine, thereby marginalizing the Mongol native religious personnel, which

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[6] Note, however, that in the later period of Roman imperial history, as Preiser-Kapeller reminds us, "as a reaction to its constant threat through attempts of usurpation from the rows of the military, it [the imperial office] was increasingly elevated into the sacral sphere" (p. 177).

was in any case relevant only for a small Mongol ruling minority and not to the vast majority of the imperial subjects. In the case of Maurya, as noted above, Aśoka had been adopted posthumously by the Buddhist establishment, but his real-life attempt to create a new "civil religion" was again of limited consequences. During his life time, the officials duly disseminated his ideas to the remotest corners of the empire, as manifold inscriptions testify, but in all likelihood this effort ended with Aśoka's passing away. Not incidentally the word "unique" is repeatedly raised in Olivelle's discussion of this very peculiar monarch.

In the case of China, the ideology of the Mandate of Heaven was a very convenient legitimating device, providing both the justification for the current dynasty's rule and the norms under which this rule could be terminated. Yet the religious dimension of this ideologically powerful (and appealing) construct remains disputed, as Pines shows. The peculiarity of China's case was the ability of scholars-officials to position themselves as quasi-priests of the Heaven-centered official cult, a position that ideally suited their role as the empire's custodians, and also gave them some additional leverage vis-à-vis the emperors who could be criticized and potentially restrained in the name of Heaven. More significantly, maintaining the cult of Heaven and other related official cults, added sacrosanct dimension to the emperors and, by extension, to their bureaucrats. This in turn, empowered the political establishment vis-à-vis organized religions, as is demonstrated in Benn's chapter.

Among the five empires that forged solid alliance with independent religious establishment, discussed in this volume, the Sasanians appear as the greatest beneficiaries of this alliance. As Canepa asserts, their sophisticated self-positioning as participants in the apocalyptic battle between good and evil could not have been achieved without the assistance from "leading [Zoroastrian] priests" who "no doubt collaborated in crafting the dynasty's messages." Simultaneously, "the empire's diverse and decentralized Zoroastrian priesthood were also a potential audience of these messages" (p. 138). But what was the price—if any—that the "leading priests" demanded for their support of the emperors' elevation to superhuman height? How did the emperor's strategy influence their relation with the priesthood as a whole? Here the dearth of sources prevents a clear answer. Looking from the angle of monumental sculpture (the major source of Canepa's analysis), the emperors do not appear to have paid much in exchange for the priests' support. This picture of relatively amicable relations between the Zoroastrian priesthood (which had an important political role) and the Sasanian political establishment is supported by other studies (Payne 2015; Shaked 1990).

In Christian and Muslim empires, the situation was different. The Sasanians' western neighbor, the Eastern Roman Empire, is often depicted as a Caesaropapist regime in which "interdependency between Empire and Church has often been

contrasted with the eventual 'separation' of *imperium* and *sacerdotium* ('priest-hood') in the medieval West" (p. 198). However, as Preiser-Kapeller shows, this is a premature conclusion. Whereas individual emperors could at times impose their will on the Church, many others faced backlash when they tried to bend the Church to their political needs (most notably, the emperors failed to promote union with the Western church even when this failure threatened the empire's mere survival). Preiser-Kapeller further observes that the Church's support for the imperial authority was somewhat akin to the Chinese idea of Heaven's Mandate: it sanctified the imperial office as such but not necessarily bolstered the power of individual emperors.

The Eastern Roman Empire's western counterpart, the Holy Roman Empire, presents arguably the most radical manifestation of the price paid by the imperial rulers for claiming divine support to their position. Whereas "the early-medieval imperial monarchy was founded upon an exceptionally close relationship of mutual dependency between ruler and Church," the "Investiture Contest," that is the struggle between the ecclesiastical and secular authority brought about dramatic change in this relationship. As Scales shows, in lieu of this conflict "both the ideological and material strength that emperors drew from the Church were severely curtailed" (p. 272). To understand the exceptional power of the Church suffice it to recall an almost unimaginable (in other empires) situation: in the hundred and fifty years that followed the onset of the Investiture Contest, "only two rulers of the Empire would avoid papal excommunication" (p. 280). The result of this cleavage was that "the idea of sacrality was transferred from the monarch's person onto the Empire itself" (p. 274). This was an insufficient compensation though, as the progressive weakening of the empire demonstrates. From the comparative point of view, the fate of the Holy Roman Empire could serve as a warning to secular authorities about the danger of overreliance on mediators between the emperors and divine powers.

In the Islamic world, the religious establishment was less powerful than the Catholic Church in the West, but it was sufficiently assertive to eventually counterbalance the empire's rulers. The tension emerged early in the history of Islam with the establishment of the Caliphate and revolved in particular around the power of the Caliph. This topic, which is not covered in our volume, had been systematically discussed by Hugh Kennedy (2016), who shows how the attempt of the caliphs in the ninth century to assert their authority in religious matters backfired. The caliphs' power of judgment in religious matters had been irreversibly "lost to the professional jurists," whose "authority came … from the respect of the fellow jurists and the approbation of the public… The caliph had become a ruler without power of legislation in many of the matters which affected his subjects closely" (Kennedy 2016, 85).

Muslim rulers in later periods, discussed in our volume, were not immune from similar challenges, even though they secured certain aspects of legislative power for themselves, partly as a result of the Mongol legacy. Tezcan shows how the progress of the Ottoman polity from a "feudal polity" to "expansionist patrimonial empire" and then to a stable empire in the late sixteenth century was accompanied by changing perceptions of Islam and of its relation to the rulers' power. In general, the Ottoman sultans maintained considerable religious prestige (including legislation functions), and even succeeded to impose a degree of control over Muslim scholars, in a way that curiously resembled the Byzantine case: "the political authority had a certain degree of control over the *ilmiye* [Muslim scholars] hierarchy but at the same time had to respect the legal-religious authority of that institution" (p. 315). Yet even this impressive attempt to monitor the religious establishment had its limits. Insofar as "Islam offered a collective identity that could bring the new rulers and the majority of the ruled together" (p. 296), the rulers had to acquiesce to the newly defined "correct" form of Islam. This change was accompanied by "the rising significance of urban masses and the pulpits of grand mosques where one could preach to them, an emphasis on justice and pious activism in public discourse, and the cooptation of this pious activism by the royal authority to spread fear with a view to crush political opposition" (p. 295). In the new situation, charismatic preachers such as Kadızade Mehmed (d. 1635), on whose career Tezcan's chapter focuses, could acquire much greater authority, causing the sultans to adopt more pious posture than they would have otherwise be inclined to.

The Mughal empire discussed by Wink demonstrates yet another example of tensions between the rulers and the Islamic establishment. Whereas the article focuses primarily on the relations between the Sunni Muslim rulers and their Indian (and Shi'i) subjects, it shows also the pressure of pious Muslim clerics—such as a contemporary of Kadızade, the Naqshbandi Sufi theologian Aḥmad al-Sirhindī (d. 1624)—whose reactions to Akbar's pro-Hindi policies and his confessional experimentations resulted in relentless accusations of the earlier and contemporary Mughal rulers. Although Sirhindi's writings were banned by the later Mughal ruler Aurangzeb (Alamgir, r. 1658–1707), who was threatened by the former's millenial ideas, the reactions of the more conservative *'ulama* (Muslim scholars) to Akbar's policies might have facilitated Aurangzeb's shift toward a more pious and militant imposition of Islamic norms (Friedmann 1971; Truschke 2017).

The immense complexity and variability of the empires' interactions with religions is such that no single volume can pretend to cover the topic comprehensively. We hope that case studies assembled in our volume outline advantages and disadvantages of different types of religious policies from the empires' point of view, and shed light on the immense tensions that accompanied different modes of the imperial cooptation of or accommodation to religious powers (Strathern's "un-

earthly powers" [2019]), especially in the "second" and "third" wave empires. In retrospect, paraphrasing the Chinese thinker Xunzi (d. after 238 BCE), we can suggest that powerful religions could act as the water for the empire's boat. The water could support the boat; but it could also capsize it.[7]

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7 Xunzi's original statement concerns the ruler's relations with his people. For translation, see Hutton 2014: 70.

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1 Imperial Ideology and Religious Pluralism in the Aśokan Inscriptional Corpus

In 326 BCE the Macedonian king Alexander, in search of conquest and the establishment of a world empire, after defeating the Achaemenids crossed into the Punjab region of India. He did not get far into the Indian heartland, however. But five years after Alexander's Indian expedition and one year after his death, that is, in 324 BCE, a new and mighty empire, at its height larger than any the ancient world had seen up to that time except, perhaps, for China, was born. It was the Maurya Empire founded by Candragupta. It did not last long by historical standards, just 139 years. It disintegrated around 185 BCE.

In comparing the data we have for studying the Maurya Empire with those for other ancient empires, such as the Neo-Assyrian or the Chinese, we are faced with an interesting puzzle. For those other empires we have a wide variety of data—inscriptions, texts, official letters, and a variety of other documentary and archeological evidence—all of which permit us to delineate the major contours of the empire, including its geographical extent and boundaries, administrative structures, economy, legal system, religion, and the like. What we don't have for these empires, however, are reflections of the emperors themselves about their own roles, what they thought about their subjects, about life and morality, and what goals they had for their empires. We do not have first-hand accounts from the rulers themselves that show a modicum of self-reflection.

When we come to the Maurya Empire of India, on the other hand, the situation is inverted. We have almost no data about its extent, administrative structure, economy, legal system, and the like. We cannot even offer an educated guess as to the extent or the density of the population, as we have for other ancient empires (see note 8 below). What data we possess come from later textual accounts colored by religious biases and a few accounts from Greek authors, most of them dependent on the lost book *Indica* authored by Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleucus to the court of Candragupta around 303 BCE. Even the date of Candragupta could only be determined through Megasthenes' testimony. We would not even know the extent of the territory of the empire except for the placement of his inscriptions by Aśoka, Candragupta's grandson. They are found across the subcontinent from Afghanistan in the west to Karnataka in the south.

What we do possess, however, are very personal and introspective letters of Aśoka, the third emperor of the dynasty, who ascended the throne in 268 BCE

and died probably in 232 BCE. Aśoka inscribed about thirty-four letters on stones and pillars across his empire. Even though we have, for example, inscriptions from Persia dictated by or written in the name of the emperors,[1] those messages celebrate their exploits and victories, boast of what they have accomplished. They are very much in line with the inscriptions of later Indian kings, inscriptions appropriately called *praśasti* in Sanskrit, that is, eulogy or glorification. Aśoka's messages, on the other hand, are unique in India and probably in the world.[2] The one time (Major Rock Edict XIII) he mentions a conquest pertains to his war against Kaliṅga, modern-day Odisha in northeastern India, and in it he does not boast about his power but expresses regret and remorse at the loss of life that the brutal war entailed.

> Eight years after the royal consecration of the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, the Kalingas were conquered. People deported from there numbered 150,000; those killed there totaled 100,000; and almost that many died. Thereafter, now that the Kalingas have been secured, the intense study of *dharma*, love of *dharma*, and instruction in *dharma* occupy the Beloved of Gods. This is the regret that the Beloved of Gods has after conquering the Kalingas. For, conquering an unconquered land entails the killing, death, or deportation of people. That is deemed extremely painful and grievous by the Beloved of Gods.

This paper will not deal with religion in, of, or for an empire, but religion as it emerges from the very personal writings of a single emperor, Aśoka. The Aśokan inscriptions provide a glimpse into the religious diversity of his empire. More significantly, they permit us to understand the emperor's own attitude toward this diversity, his perspectives with regard to religions as he found them on the ground in his large empire, and his use of religious ideas, ethics, and symbols for the construction of an imperial ideology or, perhaps, a "political theology".[3] I will deal with Aśoka's views on religion under three broad categories: local or folk religions, organized religions, and civil religion, that is, Aśoka's own political theology.

Let me, however, first give a brief conspectus of the Aśokan inscriptions to provide the background for readers unfamiliar with Aśoka and the Maurya Empire.

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1 Some have claimed that the Persian inscriptions served as the model for Aśoka: see Adrados 1984.

2 Salomon 2009, 45 has noted the atypical and even unique nature of Aśoka's inscriptions: "In terms of format, content, and tone, there is practically nothing in the later inscriptional corpus of the Indian world that even resembles Aśoka's inscriptions." "Aśoka," he concludes, "stands as a unique figure in Indian, and indeed in world history. And if so, why shouldn't his inscriptions be unique?" (Salomon 2009, 51).

3 I thank Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum for proposing this interesting concept during the discussion at the Berlin conference where I presented this paper.

They consist of three classes of major texts: Minor Rock Edicts (MRE, with several versions), Major Rock Edicts (RE; a total of 14 inscribed in several locations), and Pillar Edicts (PE; six inscribed on six pillars, and a seventh on the Delhi-Toprā pillar), as well as several other inscriptions, and edicts translated into Greek and Aramaic and found in what is today Afghanistan. Most edicts are found in multiple versions inscribed in multiple locations. Even though they have been traditionally referred to as "edicts", they are better seen as letters[4] from the Emperor to his officials, subjects, the Buddhist monastic order, and other religious groups. Their significance lies also in the fact that they are the earliest written and datable texts from ancient India,[5] and, since they were inscribed on stone, we have the added benefit of having them exactly as they were originally inscribed. The consecration of Aśoka as king probably took place in 268 BCE. His first dated inscriptions (RE III and IV) were inscribed 12 years after his consecration (i. e., 256 BCE), although his inscriptional activity probably began earlier with the Minor Rock Edicts that are thought to predate the Major Rock Edicts. Norman (2012, 51) dates them to the 11th year (257 BCE), that is, one year before the beginning of the RE series. The last inscription, the 7th Pillar Edict, was done 27 years after his consecration, that is in 241 BCE. If we accept that Aśoka died in 233–232 BCE (Thapar 1997, 196), then there is an absence of writing, or at least extant writing, during the last decade or so of his life. We should also keep in mind that the RE and PE series are anthologies[6] of Aśoka's writings compiled either by him and/or by his officials. It is more than likely that the writings that have survived are only a portion, possibly a small portion, of Aśoka's writings.[7]

We have thus a period of about 17 years during which Aśoka wrote his extant messages. Although it is difficult to assign specific dates to each edict—only a few contain a date—I think it is important to our understanding of Aśoka and his literary, political, and religious activities to recognize that his ideas and policies may have changed and developed over that period of time. We know, for example—be-

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4 I have argued elsewhere that the so-called edicts of Aśoka can be described better as letters, fitting into the epistolary tradition of contemporary Greece: Olivelle 2012, 164. For the near contemporary Greek imperial letters, see Welles 1934; Salomon 2009, 45–46.
5 There are, of course, earlier texts from ancient India, especially the Vedic texts, but they were all composed and handed down orally.
6 I have argued in detail elsewhere for considering the edicts as anthologies, that is, texts selected from a larger corpus of letters for inscriptional purposes: see Olivelle 2012 and 2024.
7 I use "writings" (and "wrote") to refer to the texts that were authored by Aśoka and written and inscribed on stones and pillars subsequently. It is, of course, unknown how Aśoka himself composed these texts, or even whether he was himself literate. It could well have been that he dictated his messages orally, which were written down by scribes and dispatched to the various locations where they were inscribed.

cause he says so—that his creation of a new senior-level of bureaucracy, the *dhar-mamahāmātras* or high officials in charge of furthering his mission to propagate *dharma,* was an unprecedented innovation introduced by him during the 13th year after his consecration (i. e., 255 BCE), that is, five years after the end of the Kaliṅga war, probably four years after his conversion to Buddhism, and two years after he started his program of *dharma* instruction through inscriptions.

The Maurya Empire during the time of Aśoka was not only vast but also diverse—ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously. It is difficult to estimate its population, as has been attempted for the Achaemedid, Greater Athenian, and Roman Empires.[8] Some estimates have been provided by demographers: Tim Dyson (2018) proposes 15 to 30 million, and Sumith Guha (2001) twenty million or less. According to Schlingloff's (2013, 32) recent calculation, Pāṭaliputra, the Mauryan capital, "was the largest city in antiquity" having a defensive rampart 33.8 kilometers in circumference enclosing an inner city of 25.5 square kilometers. Alexandria was only one-third its size; Rome, within the Aurelian walls with an area of 13.72 square kilometers, a little more than half its size. Pāṭaliputra was over 11 times larger than Athens. Extrapolating from archeological excavations at other urban sites of the period in India, we can estimate that Pāṭaliputra within its defensive walls may have had a population of over one million. Linguistically, in the southern regions, then as now, non-Indo-Aryan languages of Dravidian origin must have been prevalent, while in other parts of India various vernacular forms of what has come to be known as Prakrit (middle Indo-Aryan) were spoken, and in the far northwest the linguistic map included Greek and Aramaic.

1.1 Local Religions

Religious diversity of Aśoka's empire was most prominently displayed in the multitude of various religious practices that ordinary people engaged in. This diversity was probably spread across regional, ethnic, class, and gender lines. Unfortunately, we do not have much information about these practices, except as we encounter them in Aśoka's own writings.[9] Aśoka does not appear to be overly concerned

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[8] The Achaemenid population of 30–35 to 17 million (Wieshöfer 2009, 77), and the Roman population of around 45 million (Frier 2000). For Greater Athenian, see Morris and Scheidel 2009.

[9] Lubin 2013 suggests that the prohibition of killing animals for sacrifice and of fairs (RE I) and the disparagement of auspicious ceremonies (maṅgala) in RE IX are clear references to Brahmanical practices, especially those inculcated in Gṛhyasūtras, where also the knowledge of such ceremonies is ascribed to women. Some of these practices, especially licentious behavior at festive gatherings, were also popular folk practices, as noted by Falk 2006, 56–57. See also Olivelle 2024: 23339.

about these various religious practices, except when they conflicted with his own moral philosophy, which we will explore in section three, or when he could use what he considered frivolous practices to inculcate a higher form of religious morality. So, in a sense, these statements are a point of entry into his own religious ideology that is the major focus of this paper.

In the first Major Rock Edict, Aśoka makes this statement:

> This writing on *dharma* has been made to be inscribed by the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi.
> Here[10] no living creature is to be slaughtered and offered in sacrifice. And no festivals (*samāja*) are to be held, for the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, sees much evil in festivals. There are, however, some festivals that the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, considers good.
> Formerly, in the kitchen of the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, many hundreds of thousands of creatures were slaughtered every day to prepare stews. But now when this writing on *dharma* is being inscribed only three animals are slaughtered to prepare stews: two peacocks and one game animal, and the game anima[11] also not always. Even these three animals are not going to be slaughtered in the future.

In this first of the series of fourteen Major Rock Edicts, Aśoka deals with two popular religious practices. The first is animal sacrifice, and he uses the technical term from the Sanskrit root *pra- √hu,* meaning "to offer in sacrifice" especially in a sacrificial fire. Now, animal sacrifice figures prominently in the Vedic ritual, and the horse sacrifice is an imperial ritual act to proclaim the king's universal sovereignty. Yet, that is probably not what Aśoka is referring to, at least not exclusively, even though he uses terminology very much reminiscent of the Brahmanical sacrificial vocabulary (Lubin 2013). But Aśoka's abhorrence of killing, whether human or animal, is, as we will see, a central plank of his religious ideology. The second prohibition dealing with fairs underscores the folk nature of sacrificial killing.[12] The term for festival or fair, *samāja,* is common in the *Arthaśāstra,* the famous treatise on political science by Kauṭilya. There it is often combined with *utsava,* religious feast (see *Arthaśāstra* 1.21.28; 2.25.36; 13.3.56), and it appears that fairs featured both religious ceremonies and commercial activities and entertainment, and

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10 The reference of 'here' is unclear. It could be taken literally as referring to the places where the inscription is located. Sometimes Aśoka uses 'here' to refer to Pataliputra, the capital city where he was composing his edits (see RE V). I think it is more likely that in this Edict 'here' refers to Aśoka's territory, and the term is used with that meaning in RE XIII. For a discussion of the two parts of this Edict, see Vigasin 1997–98.
11 The term miga (Sk. mṛga) used here can refer more specifically to a deer, which is the paradigmatic game animal. My translation, however, leaves the term open to a broader interpretation.
12 The Brahmanical legal texts (Dharmaśāstras) also looked down upon festival: Āpastamba Dharmasūtra 1.3.12; 1.32.19. Manu (9.84) forbids especially women from attending fairs (see also Yājñavalkya Smṛti 1.84). Buddhist monks were also warned against visiting fairs (Falk 2006, 57).

they may have been held in conjunction with a festival of a god. But Aśoka, after condemning fairs, goes on to say that certain kinds of fairs are good, but fails to state what they are. In a similar statement on auspicious ceremonies that I will discuss below, he actually tell us what a good auspicious ceremony is. Here, however, his abrupt passage to the practices of his own kitchen perhaps indicates that what he has in mind is fairs that do not involve the sacrifice of animals.

Aśoka next addresses popular religious practices in Major Rock Edit IX. Here the issue is not animal sacrifice but various auspicious ceremonies (*maṅgala*) performed at important events, such as marriage and birth. Although he does not condemn these outright, he does not like them much and tries to wean his subjects away from them:

> People perform auspicious rites of diverse kinds—during an illness, at the marriage of a son or daughter, at the birth of a child, when setting out on a journey. On these and other similar occasions, people perform numerous auspicious rites. At such times, however, womenfolk perform many, diverse, trifling, and useless auspicious rites.
>
> Now, clearly, auspicious rites are going be performed. But, equally clearly, such auspicious rites bear little fruit.
>
> But this, clearly, is what bears copious fruit, namely, the auspicious rite of *dharma.* It consists of the following:
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> proper regard toward slaves and servants, reverence toward elders, self-restraint with respect to living beings, and giving gifts to Sramanas and Brahmins.
>
> This and anything else like it are called 'auspicious rite of *dharma'.*

These two examples show two aspects of Aśoka's stance toward popular religious practices. One theme running through all his inscriptions is his aversion to killing. On this he does not compromise. We will see below also examples of his prohibition of killing especially within the context of defining *dharma.* On the other two kinds of practices, festivals and auspicious ceremonies, he is more nuanced. He appears to say that there are some kinds of festivals he approves of, without specifying what they may be. Perhaps ones that do not involve killing or other reprehensible activities. He is, however, more specific with regard to auspicious ceremonies carried out at significant junctures of a person's life, such as illness, birth, marriage, and setting out on a long journey. He is accurate in considering women as the principal authorities with regard to these, the careers of folk knowledge, as pointed out also by other literature of the period (Lubin 2013). His objection to these is that they are of little benefit. And he uses this example to draw people to his central message of *dharma,* the moral philosophy he is preaching through his inscriptions. He calls the practice of *dharma* metaphorically an "auspicious ceremony" or *maṅgala,* but a ceremony that carries a large reward both in this world and especially in the next.

1.2 Organized Religions

The most significant aspect of religious pluralism in Aśoka's territories is the presence of several organized religious groups called *pāṣaṇḍa* by Aśoka. The difficulty of determining exactly what they were and what sort of membership they had stems from the fact that we encounter this term for the first time in Indian literary history precisely in the Aśokan inscriptions.[13] The term is probably not of Indo-European derivation and in all likelihood is a local indigenous term possibly from northeastern India. In Aśoka's usage it refers to religious organizations that were demographically identifiable. The same term is used in later literature with a pejorative meaning, referring to the "other" or heretical groups, especially ascetical groups. Aśoka, however, uses it with a neutral meaning.

His discussions of *pāṣaṇḍas* permit us, moreover, to discern his attitudes toward them. He respected them and made donations to them; he wanted them to aspire to spiritual growth; he instructed them not only to live in harmony with other *pāṣaṇḍas* but also to respect and learn from each other; and he explicitly permitted them to live everywhere in his kingdom. Yet, he also wanted to exercise some control over them, appointing high-level royal officials called *dharma-mahāmātra* to oversee them.

I want at the outset to address the issue of membership in these organized religious groups. The evidence is somewhat ambiguous, but I think we can state with some degree of confidence that two kinds of individuals were members of or closely associated with them. First, there were those who had left home and family, cut off social ties, and assumed an ascetic mode of life, frequently as itinerant mendicants. Aśoka called these *pravrajita,* "the gone-forth." These were professional religious virtuosi, and they were clearly members of *pāṣaṇḍa* groups; indeed, often when the term is used it refers specifically to such ascetics. Second, there were those referred to as *gr̥hastha* by Aśoka. The term literally means "the stay-at-home," in clear contrast to *pravrajita,* "the gone-forth." These were religious people committed to the doctrines of their respective *pāṣaṇḍas,* but who chose to remain at home rather than assume an ascetic lifestyle. They may be called "householders" but with the caveat that they were not simply anyone living a married life in a house, but very special people who sought to live holy lives at home. Their connection to the *pāṣaṇḍas* is not altogether clear, but they were closely associated with them. Whether they were actual members of *pāṣaṇḍas,* just like the *pravrajitas,* is less clear, but I believe that at least in some *pāṣaṇḍa* groups they were ac-

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13 For a detailed analysis of the meaning of pāṣaṇḍa in Aśoka and in other early texts, see Brereton 2019 and Olivelle 2019.

tual members. If this is correct, then we can say that *pāṣaṇḍas* were actually "religions" in the modern sense of the word, and that they represented religious pluralism within Aśoka's domain (Freiberger 2013). Let us look at some of the evidence with regard to these religious groups and Aśoka's attitude toward them.

It is in Major Rock Edict XII, a message completely devoted to the conduct of various religious groups and written sometime after 255 BCE, that we get the first mention of the term *gṛhastha* and the clearest statement both of its meaning and about its relationship to the two other categories: *pāṣaṇḍa* and *pravrajita.* The beginning of this inscription reads:

> King Priyadarśin, the Beloved of the Gods, venerates all *pāṣaṇḍas,* ascetics ("the gone-forths" *pravrajitas*) or householders ("the stay-at-homes" *gṛhasthas*), with gifts and diverse kinds of veneration.

The maximalist way to read this is to take ascetics and householders as sub-categories under *pāṣaṇḍa.* The minimalist way would be to take the householder as in some manner closely related to *pāṣaṇḍa.* Otherwise it is difficult to explain why the term always occurs in close proximity to *pāṣaṇḍa* and never in some other context. The fact that Aśoka speaks of householders in the same breath as *pāṣaṇḍas* shows that in his mind the two were connected.

Taking a cue from his own gifts and acts of veneration to these groups, the rest of Aśoka's message to the *pāṣaṇḍas* tells them that he considers it far better than any gift or act of veneration he may bestow on them that all *pāṣaṇḍas* attend to the growth of their "essential core" (*sāra/sāla*), an obscure term that probably refers to *dharma* (Brereton 2019).

> No gift or homage, however, is as highly prized by the Beloved of Gods as this: namely, that the essential core (=*dharma*) may increase among all *pāṣaṇḍas.* But the increase of the essential core takes many forms. This, however, is its root, namely, guarding speech—that is to say, not honoring one's own *pāṣaṇḍa* and not denigrating the *pāṣaṇḍas* of others when there is no occasion, and even when there is an occasion, doing so mildly. Honor, on the other hand, should indeed be paid to the *pāṣaṇḍas* of others in one form or another. Acting in this manner, one certainly enhances one's own *pāṣaṇḍa* and also helps the *pāṣaṇḍa* of the other.
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> When someone acts in a way different from that, one hurts one's own *pāṣaṇḍa* and also harms the *pāṣaṇḍa* of the other. For, should someone honor his own *pāṣaṇḍa* and denigrate the *pāṣaṇḍa* of another wholly out of devotion to his own *pāṣaṇḍa,* thinking, that is, 'I'll make my *pāṣaṇḍa* illustrious'—by so doing he damages his own *pāṣaṇḍa* even more certainly.
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> Therefore, meeting one another is, indeed, excellent. That is—they should both listen to and take guidance from each other's *dharma.* For this is the wish of the Beloved of Gods. That is—all *pāṣaṇḍas* should become highly learned and follow good discipline. And no matter which of these they may be devoted to, they should acknowledge: 'No gift or homage is as highly prized by the Beloved of Gods as this: namely, that the essential core may increase among all *pāṣaṇḍas.*'

> Large numbers, furthermore, have been dispatched for this purpose—Mahamatras in charge of *dharma*, Mahamatras overseeing women, officers in charge of farms, and other classes of officers. And this is its fruit: enhancement of one's own *pāṣaṇḍa* and making *dharma* illustrious.

Aśoka points out that the root of what he calls "increase of the essential core" is the control or guarding of speech. And this consists especially of not disparaging the *pāṣaṇḍas* of others and not praising one's own *pāṣaṇḍa.* The thrust of Aśoka's plea is that members of the various *pāṣaṇḍas* should live in harmony and mutual respect. But Aśoka wants them to take a further step and recommends *samavāya.* This term has been translated as "concord" (Thapar 1997; Nikam and McKeon 1959), "réunion" (Bloch 1950), and "restraint" (Sircar 1975, taking the reading to be *sayamo*). I agree with Norman (1972, 114) that the meaning here is "coming and meeting together." Aśoka asks them to meet with each other, a form of ecumenism. In this way, Aśoka says, they will become truly learned (*bahuśruta*) and both honor their own *pāṣaṇḍas* and assist the *pāṣaṇḍas* of others. Even though *bahuśruta* (literally, "much heard") is a common term in early Sanskrit literature to refer to a learned man, I think Aśoka appears to play on the term *śruta,* which is related to listening. Earlier he had said that members of *pāṣaṇḍas* should consort with each other and "listen (*suneyu*) and take guidance from (*susūseyu*) each other's *dharma,*" The terms here for learning actually refer to hearing or listening (from the verb √*śru*), and etymologically connected to *śruta.* So, in a sense one can become truly learned, truly a *bahuśruta,* only by listening to each other.

It is clear that inter-religious rivalry and doctrinal disputes were, on the one hand, prevalent among religious groups, and, on the other, it was considered deleterious to spiritual advancement even within these religious groups, such as the Buddhist. For Aśoka there was an added layer of concern: he wanted to maintain harmony in his empire, and it is evident that he also believed in the importance of religious pluralism where no single religion would occupy a privileged position. Further, his advancement of *dharma* included its success within the groups devoted exclusively to religious pursuits, that is, the *pāṣaṇḍas.* He believed that none of them had a complete insight into the true *dharma;* they had to be humble enough to listen to and learn from each other. Perhaps a fool's errand, but then Aśoka was not your run-of-the-mill king.

The most significant passage about *pāṣaṇḍas* in the Aśokan corpus occurs in Pillar Edict 7. The relevant section begins:

> As to my Dharma-Mahamatras also—they are occupied with various matters that are beneficial, that is to say, both to those who have gone forth and to those staying at home. And they are occupied also with all *pāṣaṇḍas*

After this introductory statement, the edict continues with concrete examples of *pāṣaṇḍa* groups:

> I have ordered them to be occupied with matters relating to the Buddhist monastic order; I have likewise ordered them to be occupied also with Brāhmaṇas and Ājīvikas; I have ordered them to be occupied also with the Nirgranthas (Jains); I have ordered them to be occupied also with various Pasandas—different Mahamatras with different Pasandas according to the special features of each. But my Dharma-Mahamatras are occupied with these and with all other *pāṣaṇḍas.*

In this passage, Aśoka specifically identifies four *pāṣaṇḍa* groups: the Buddhist monastic order (*saṅgha*), Brahmins, Ājīvikas, and Nirgrantha or Jains. All four are major religious traditions well known from other sources as well. It is clear that there were also other similar groups, for he says that his officials are occupied also with "other" *pāṣaṇḍas.*

In considering this religious pluralism in Aśoka's domain, it is important to remember that Aśoka himself converted to one *pāṣaṇḍa* group, namely, Buddhism. This may well be the first known case of an emperor adopting a particular religion among the many within his empire in the ancient world, five centuries before Constantine. His conversion took place around 258 BCE, soon after his horrendous war against Kaliṅga. He calls himself a Buddhist lay follower (*upasaka;* MRE), goes on pilgrimage to the Buddha's birthplace (Rummindei Pillar Inscription), intervenes in the internal affairs of the Buddhist monastic order (Schism Edict), and even has the audacity to tell monks what kinds of Buddhist scriptural texts they should read (Bhabra Inscription).

Yet, he takes pain, as we have seen in the above citations, to be impartial to all religious groups, to treat them equally. It is from the position of celebrating religious pluralism that Aśoka embarks on the construction of a civil religion, which was in effect a moral ideology aimed at giving legitimacy to his rule and an identity to his subjects.

1.3 Civil Religion

It is within this religiously pluralistic society—both at the local/folk level and in terms of organized religious groups—that Aśoka articulated in his inscriptions what could be termed a moral philosophy, an imperial ideology, and a civil religion—or even a "political theology". Given that he did this while professing to be a committed and observant Buddhist shows that it was a moral philosophy that stood above the distinct religions of the day, something that anyone belonging

to any religion or none at all would be able to adopt without giving up his or her specific religion. This civil religion was *not* Buddhism.

As I have already noted, his moral philosophy was anchored in the term *dharma.* The term has a widespread use in all religious traditions of India both before and after Aśoka. It was also the central term for the doctrine of the Buddha (for detailed studies of the semantic history of *dharma,* see Olivelle 2005; 2009a). The dominant position of the term in Aśoka's vocabulary—he uses it over one hundred times in his inscriptions and had it translated into Greek and Aramaic—shows its centrality in Aśoka's philosophy. I have argued that the prominence of the term in later Indian culture may well be due at least in part to its adoption by Aśoka. We are also fortunate that we do not have to guess or deduce what *dharma* meant for Aśoka. In nine passages spread through seven edicts (MRE; RE III; IV; IX; XI; XIII; PE VII), the emperor spells out in detail what he meant by *dharma* and the kinds of virtues he wanted his officials to preach to and cultivate among his people. I give here a few examples:

> Obedience to mother and father—excellent! Giving gifts to friends, companions, and relatives, and to Brahmins and Sramanas—excellent! Not killing living beings—excellent! Spending little and accumulating little—excellent! (RE III)

> There is no gift comparable to the gift of dharma—the praise of dharma, the distribution of dharma, the bond through dharma. From that follows: proper regard toward slaves and servants; obedience to mother and father; giving gifts to friends, companions, and relatives, and to Sramanas and Brahmins; and not killing living beings. (RE XI)

> obedience to authority, obedience to mother and father, obedience to elders, and proper regard to friends, companions, associates, and relatives, and to slaves and servants, and firm devotion. (RE XIII)

Putting together the elements contained in these definitions, we can come up with this list of virtues that constituted the Aśokan *dharma:*
(1) obedience to mother and father, and to elders and superiors;
(2) kindness to living beings;—in a special way, abstention from killing living beings;
(3) generosity to friends, relatives, close associates, Brahmins, and ascetics;
(4) speaking the truth;
(5) spending little and storing little, i. e., life not given to extravagance;
(6) proper regard to slaves and servants,
(7) loyalty.

A significant point of Aśokan *dharma* is that it does not differentiate various social groups; it is a universal *dharma* applicable to all, regardless of social station, economic status, gender, ethnicity, religion, or nationality. In one of his early inscrip-

tions (MRE), Aśoka says that growth in *dharma* is not reserved to the rich and powerful; poor people also can achieve it if they are zealous in their pursuit of *dharma.* There is no concept of a *svadharma,* the specific *dharma* of a person in so far as he or she belongs to a particular group, so central in the later Brahmanical understanding of the concept. Aśoka's *dharma* is so broad that even people living in foreign countries were assumed by him, as we will see, to be capable of following *dharma* preached by his foreign envoys. In this formal aspect, the Aśokan *dharma* is similar to the universalist *dharma* of Buddhism.

Another significant point in the enumeration of virtues in the definition of Aśokan *dharma* is its silence on social vices or crimes, such as theft, murder, adultery, and other sexual offenses. Clearly, these must have been of major concern to the state, as seen in all the legal literature of ancient India. Indeed, theft is often cited as the main reason for the very institution of kingship. It would have been an easy move for Aśoka to include prohibitions against such vices within his *dharma,* just as he did in the case of killing animals. It appears, however, that Aśoka considered his *dharma* to be something far more personal and "religious"—the development of character, virtue, and spiritual growth—than abiding by civil and criminal law.

Comparing the elements of Aśokan *dharma* with the Buddhist *dharma* directed at lay people encoded in the "five precepts," the *pañcaśīla,* furthermore, we see a significant divergence. There are only two common elements: truthfulness and not killing. Three central elements of the *pañcaśīla* are missing: sexual misconduct, theft, and abstention from alcoholic drinks. And even truthfulness is mentioned only in two definitions, the very earliest in MRE and in one of the three definitions given in PE VII. The major reason why the Aśokan *dharma* is not narrowly Buddhist is his repeated assertion, as we have seen, that he honors equally all the ascetic sects and Brahmins, and that these sects should live in harmony with each other without exalting one's own sect and running down others. Even though it may have been prompted by and drew inspiration from the Buddhist *dharma*— as is indicated in his earliest inscriptions (MRE)—the ideology of *dharma* that Aśoka was propagating had a different and broader intent than the propagation of the Buddhist religion. It had to be sufficiently broad to traverse ethnic and religious boundaries.

This universalist aspect of Aśoka's *dharma* is demonstrated by his pregnant silence with regard to central beliefs of several religions in his home territory of Magadha in the northeast of India. As Bronkhorst (2007; 2016) has argued, key religious doctrines of this region were rebirth and karma, and one may add liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*). These are conspicuous by their absence in the entire Aśokan inscriptional corpus. Why did he not mention them, especially when he had numerous opportunities. When he talks

about the reward of good actions, he points to heaven and not to rebirth in a better condition. I think one possible answer to this riddle may be that he felt these to be regional beliefs, which people in other regions or belonging to other religious traditions would have found strange and unconvincing.

Aśoka's imperial civil religion also had an international dimension. He says that, because of his practice of *dharma* the "sound of war drums" (*bhelighose*) have been converted into the "sound of *dharma*" (*dhaṃmaghose*). In his letter of remorse at the carnage he caused in the Kaliṅga war, he talks about the "victory by/of *dharma*" as the foremost victory:

> This, however, is deemed the foremost conquest by the Beloved of Gods, namely, conquest through *dharma.* This again has been secured by the Beloved of Gods here and among all the neighboring lands—as far as 600 Yojanas[14] where the Greek king named Antiochus resides; and, beyond that Antiochus, the four kings named Tulamaya, Antekina, Maka, and Alikasundale;[15] and, consistently, the Codas, the Pandyas, and as far as Tamraparni [Sri Lanka]. Likewise, here in the king's domain, among the Greeks and Kambojas, the Nabhakas and Nabhapantis, the Bhojas and Pitinikas, the Andhras and Paladas—everywhere they follow the instruction in *dharma* of the Beloved of Gods.
>
> Even where envoys of the Beloved of Gods do not go, after hearing the discourses on *dharma*, the ordinances, and instruction in *dharma* of the Beloved of Gods, they conform to *dharma* and they will conform to it in the future.

Aśoka's *dharma* diplomacy was both a mission to make kings and peoples outside his realm follow his version of *dharma* and the promotion of a pacifist international order where victory of morality and right living is more significant than military victories. Aśoka's missions, however, involved more than mere words; just like Christian missionaries of the modern age, Aśoka attempted to match his words with deeds, sending medical knowledge and materials to these far-flung places. He talks about this in his second Major Rock Edict:

> Everywhere—in the territory of the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, as well as in those at the frontiers, namely, Codas, Pandyas, Satiyaputras, Keralaputras, Tamraparnis, the Greek king named Antiochus, and other kings who are that Antiochus's neighbors—everywhere the Beloved of Gods, King Piyadasi, has established two kinds of medical services: medical services for humans and medical services for domestic animals.
>
> Wherever medicinal herbs beneficial to humans and domestic animals were not found, he had them brought in and planted everywhere. Likewise, wherever root vegetables and fruit trees were not found, he had them brought in and planted everywhere.

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14 This is likely to be a distance of 4,320 km.

15 These have been identified as Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (285–247 BCE), Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia (276–239 BCE), Magas of Cyrene (death dated to between 258 and 250), and the last either Alexander of Corinth (252–244) or Alexander of Epirus (272–255 BCE).

> Along roads he had trees planted and wells dug for the benefit of domestic animals and human beings.

Aśoka makes clear that it is not just his preaching but his actions that promote *dharma.* People not only follow his instructions, but in a special way they imitate his actions. He is very aware that he must set a personal example of virtue to his subjects.

I want to suggest further that Aśoka's ambitions with regard to *dharma* were much greater than merely articulating an imperial ideology based on the ethics of *dharma*, although that aspect was certainly present. Aśoka's "obsession" (Thapar 1997, 175) with *dharma* throughout his long reign, including his missionary activities in Sri Lanka and western countries, indicates that *dharma* was for him something far greater than simply a political strategy, a simple means for consolidating his far-flung empire. But how can we theorize this work of Aśoka—both his literary corpus and his bureaucratic re-organization relating to *dharma* —spanning over quarter of a century?

I want to suggest that the term "civil religion" coined by the 18th century political philosopher Jean Jacque Rousseau and made famous by the American sociologist Robert Bellah (1970) may be a useful category in coming to terms with Aśoka's *dharma* activities at least for heuristic purposes. We need, of course, to rid the concept of its content that is specific to the United States of America, and more generally to modern western nation-states. Taking the "civil" part first, I conceive of "civil religion" as relating to the state and society in general, participation in which is closely associated with citizenship. It is implied that this civil religion is not connected to any organized religion or sect that may operate within that society, even though a vocabulary, themes, and symbols derived from them may be used within the civil religion. Thus, a civil religion can rise only in a relatively complex society where multiple religions co-exist. Turning to "religion," a civil religion contains some aspects of a religion. Bellah notes such rituals and religious elements as a national flag, a national anthem, a national holiday, founding fathers, a constitution as a quasi-scripture, and the like. But these elements will be different in different societies and historical situations. One central symbol is "God" for the American version of civil religion, a term that means so much and so little that anyone can fill it with the meaning he or she wants. With reference to the use of "God" in John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech, Bellah (1970, 170) notes:

> He did not refer to any religion in particular. He did not refer to Jesus Christ, or to Moses, or to the Christian church; certainly he did not refer to the Catholic church. In fact, his only ref-

erence was to the concept of God, a word almost all Americans can accept but that means so many different things to so many different people that it is almost an empty sign.

This is precisely why "God" is such a central and convenient concept for the American civil religion, and why "In God We Trust" can be printed on every American dollar note without rousing opposition.

I propose that in the case of Aśoka's civil religion, the place of "God" is taken by "*dharma.*" Indeed, we can substitute *dharma* for God in Bellah's passage and come up with an accurate statement regarding Aśoka's use of it in his civil religion: "(*dharma*) a word almost all (Indians) can accept but that means so many different things to so many different people that it is almost an empty sign." We see a religious dimension in the very term *dharma*, which had come to define the core of many religions, as well as the moral and other-worldly discourse of Aśoka. If it did not have this resonance already among at least a large segment of the population, his use of the term would have been ineffective. Yet, like "God," *dharma* was a vacuous concept into which individuals and groups could read whatever content they desired. Aśoka's definitional elements were broad moral principles, and, much like the Americal political slogan "family values," nobody could be opposed to them. *Dharma* had the potential to become all things to all people, and thus could serve as a core value and symbol around which all citizens of the empire could rally. The civil religion of *dharma* was a religion that could both encompass and transcend particular religions. This ecumenical spirit also imbues Aśoka's exhortation to members of organized religious groups (*pāṣaṇḍa*) not to disparage but to live in harmony with each other and to listen to and learn from each other.

The aim of *dharma* was to create a moral citizenry with cultivated virtues that informed their relationships to significant others within their social universe, a moral cultivation that will lead to happiness both here and in the hereafter. Aśoka believed that a state full of such citizens will be a prosperous, peaceful, and moral nation; there will be little need for prisons, police, armed struggles, and injury to living beings. He may even have believed—much like the slogan today that democratic nations do not initiate wars—that if other countries abided by *dharma* there will be no wars; there will be universal peace, harmony, and prosperity. Aśoka's civil religion thus had an international dimension as well. It is instructive to note how the translators employed by Aśoka rendered *dharma* into Greek and Aramaic. The use of "eusebeia" (piety)[16] in Greek and "qšyt" (truth)

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16 See Adrados 1984, 12 for the use of the same term by Antiochus ("Among my worldly good, I consider the Sacred Law (eusebeia) is for all men not only the safest possession but also the most pleasurable enjoyment"), which he considers to be an imitation of Aśoka. For a study of Aśoka's Greek inscriptions, see Parker 2012.

in Aramaic appears to have been an effort to present *dharma* in terms better intelligible to the Greek and Aramaic readers.

The very "canon" of Aśokan texts inscribed on stone served as a textual basis, a form of scriptural authority, for this civil religion. There was both an iconic and a performative aspect to these inscriptions. Aśoka's stone and pillar inscriptions were the very first publicly visible written documents in ancient India. They were displayed on beautiful, polished, and imposing pillars and on large natural rock slabs. Remember, also, that Aśoka, at least in some of his writings, requires that they be read aloud publicly on sacred days of the liturgical calendar. It is not improbable that all or most of his letters were intended to be so performed publicly. The existence of a civil liturgical calendar is indicated also in Pillar Edict V, where killing of fish and animals, castration of bulls and other animals, and the branding of horses and bulls are forbidden on the full-moon days of Cāturmāsa and Tiṣya.[17] The permanent nature of his inscriptions on stone—he hopes that they last as long as the sun and the moon—also served to underline their significance even when Aśoka was no more. At the end of RE V, he says: "For this purpose this *dharma*-inscription has been inscribed. May it last long. And may my offspring adhere to it." (see also the conclusion of RE VI) In RE IV he expresses the desire that his sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons promote *dharma* "until the end of the world."

1.4 Conclusion

Aśoka was a unique emperor and, more importantly, a unique human being. Few, if any, parallels are found in world history not just with regard to Aśoka as a person but especially with regard to his inscriptions (Salomon 2009). No emperor before or after him in India, and perhaps in the rest of the world, has bared his soul and conscience publicly in quite the same way.

Even though we get a unique perspective into the mind of the emperor through his inscriptions, there are many areas that are black holes of information, not just with regard to various aspects of his empire and administration but especially with regard to religion within his empire and even his own personal life. We do not know, for example, the geographical spread or the numbers of adherents of the various religious groups (*pāṣaṇḍas*) that Aśoka mentions. How many Buddhists

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17 Cāturmāsa is the period of four months falling within the rainy season between July and October. Generally, the reference is to the full-moon days falling within this period. Tiṣya refers to the full-moon day of December-January when the moon is in this asterism.

or Jains were there? How many Brahmins? Where were they concentrated? Were Buddhists found in the extreme northwest or the extreme south? Given the paucity of archeological remains from this period, these questions, and many others, crucial for our understanding of religions during Aśoka's time remain unanswered and currently unanswerable.

But there are significant issues pertinent to our discussion on which the Aśokan inscriptions shed considerable light, and these will be important for the cross-cultural study of religion within imperial governance. One is that in Aśoka's empire, as perhaps in most large empires, religious pluralism was the norm. Aśoka, however, did not simply recognize this diversity but celebrated it, providing space for various religious groups to thrive and to express themselves. It is this very religious pluralism that enabled the establishment of what I have called Aśoka's "civil religion." In Aśoka's far-flung empire, as in most large-scale polities, an "imagined community" to which citizens belonged became increasingly difficult to imagine. We have to assume that rulers of large territories with great ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity must have sought ways, especially symbolic ways, to make it easier for people to imagine such belonging. Aśoka's moral philosophy of *dharma* is a highly unusual and perhaps unique way in which he attempted to provide a moral basis for their belonging to his empire, to being his subjects.

But his foreign missionary activities show that he viewed his moral philosophy not simply as a way to consolidate his empire. It was also a personal cause to which he dedicated immense time and resources. Time and again he tells his people aspects of his own personal life; he aims to set an example to his people through his personal cultivation of *dharma.* He even exposes his own past failings, like the killing of hundreds of thousands of people in the war over Kaliṅga and the killing of animals for food in his own kitchen. He promises to do better in the future. We will be selling him short if we cynically take it as simply a political move, which it certainly was; but it was, I think, much more than that.

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Yuri Pines

2 Secular Theocracy? State and Religion in Early China Revisited

> Gongmengzi said: "There are no spirits and deities." He also said: "A noble man must learn how to sacrifice."
> Master Mozi said: "To claim that there are no spirits and to learn how to sacrifice, is like performing guest ritual without guests, or making fishing nets when there are no fish."
> *Mozi*, "Gongmeng"

Few issues in the history of traditional China aroused more scholarly controversies than that of the position of religion in the Chinese empire. Famously, the Jesuits defined China's mainstream ("Confucian") religion as "civil religion," namely a system of rites devoid of underlining appeal to supernatural protection. This definition—interpreted and reinterpreted by Enlightenment scholars, such as Leibniz (1646–1716)—had influenced the understanding of Chinese religious life in the West for centuries to come.[1] However, the Jesuits' view was immediately challenged by their rivals from within the Catholic establishment and later by the Protestants, and it continues to ignite the ire of not a few scholars well into our days. Recently, for instance, one of the most prolific scholars of Chinese religions, John Lagerwey, dedicated a whole monograph to bitter polemics with the Jesuits and with their accomplices from among the members of China's educated elite. In his interpretation, China was, contrarily to the Jesuits and to the Enlightenment philosophers, a profoundly "religious state" (Lagerwey 2010).

At the first glance, the correctness of the latter definition seems to be beyond doubt. Chinese state was indeed permeated by religious rituals. The Ministry of Rites was one of the six pillars of the imperial bureaucracy. The emperors were obliged to personally participate in dozens of sacrifices annually (even though many of these obligations could be relegated to meritorious ministers or to close kin). Magistrates presided over sacrificial activities in their localities. And, even if some of these official sacrifices could be interpreted as civil cults, the religious dimensions of many others are undeniable. Suffice it to recall the largely symbiotic relations between the official and popular religion, and between both and the na-

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1 For the complexity of this definition—which included profound re-conceptualization of the term "religion" in the West—see Standaert 2017.

tive and naturalized organized religions (Daoism and Buddhism) through much of the imperial period to justify Lagerwey's assertion. For many participants in the official cults, supernatural protection surely mattered.

And yet at a second glance, we can discover some of the rationale behind the Jesuits' uneasiness about applying the Western notion of "religion" to the literati (China's educated elite) cultic activities. For an observer coming from the seventeenth century Europe, enmeshed as it was in bitter religious wars, or for an observer coming from the current Middle East, like the author of this paper, traditional China may well appear secular. Consider that religion played only a marginal role in determining social and political identities of the vast majority of educated Chinese. Nor did it play a decisive role in shaping their moral outlook. Furthermore, religion's impact on China's political dynamics remained for most time minuscule. True, periodic millenarian rebellions brought religious beliefs and questions of heterodoxy to the forefront of political life, but even in their case one should beware of over-emphasizing the rebellions' religious dimensions. Promises of salvation to the faithful or of supernatural protection to those engaged in fighting the government forces could galvanize the supporters of a millenarian movement, serving as an excellent means of mobilization. Yet should the rebellion gain momentum, it would invariably move toward a more traditional modes of political and social conduct in which eschatological promises played marginal if any role.[2]

These very general observations suffice to outline the paradoxical nature of the religion's political role in imperial China. On the one hand, the Chinese empire had clear theocratic dimensions. On the other hand, it appears as impressively successful in taming the religion and minimizing its potentially disruptive role in political life. To clarify the latter point just consider this: For most educated Chinese, the very idea that conflicting interpretations of the nature of the divine and of its interactions with the humans can become a source of violent conflicts, mass persecutions and individual martyrdom, would be as odd as for an educated European would be violent conflicts, mass persecutions and individual martyrdom revolv-

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[2] The earliest large-scale millenarian rebellion of which we have sufficient information is the so-called Yellow Turbans uprising of 184 CE (Levy 1956). For an example of a well-studied (albeit smaller scale) millenarian rebellion, see Naquin 1976. For some of the ideologies behind these rebellious activities, see Zürcher 1981; Seiwert 2003; Liu and Shek 2004. For the difficulty in determining the true outlook of these "rebels," see Ter-Haar 1992. The best example of the transformation of a millenarian rebellion into a replica of traditional political establishment is the case of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) founder, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398) (discussed, e.g., in Dardess 1983). For the general tendency of rebel leaders throughout Chinese history to adapt themselves to the traditional political culture as rebellion progressed, see Pines 2012, 134–161; q.v. for further references.

ing around the surname of the ruling family (which was the major source of frictions throughout Chinese history). It may be surmised that whereas religion permeated individual and social life of the vast majority of China's population, only rarely and exceptionally could it become a significant factor in the country's political life.

In this essay, I want to trace the roots of this ostensibly paradoxical situation by exploring the role of religion in political life of pre-imperial and early imperial China. I shall focus on the evolution of the state's religious policies during the millennium that preceded China's imperial unification of 221 BCE and during the first two centuries of the imperial rule. I hope to show that China's major peculiarity was the political establishment's success in preventing formation of an independent and powerful priestly stratum. This sidelining of religious functionaries, in addition to the avowed desire of the ruling elite to regularize relations with superhuman powers and prevent those from disruptive activities, became the cornerstone of China's religious life. Remarkably, the nature and intensity of religious beliefs—which fluctuated considerably during the period under discussion—seems to have only marginal impact on this overall trend.

Before I start the discussion, a few clarifications should be made. First, in what follows, I am not intending to discuss Chinese religious life in its entirety but to focus exclusively on religion's political dimensions. Second, it should be clarified that much of our information of the religious life in China's pre-imperial period is skewed due to the paucity of sources. Sometimes—as for the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE) of which we know primarily from the oracle-bone inscriptions (see below)—these may err into the direction of overemphasizing the elite's religiosity. Sometimes—as for the Warring States period (Zhanguo, 453–221 BCE)—this religiosity may be, in contrast, glossed over in the writings of the literati. Third, given the nature of my sources and my interest in religion's political dimensions, the following discussion will focus overwhelmingly on the elite perspective. The religiosity of the lower strata can be duly analyzed in political context only when we enter the imperial age, especially with the advent of organized religions (first Daoism, then Buddhism; see Benn, this volume). Finally, given the nature of our volume, I shall reduce references to primary sources and to secondary sources in Asian languages to an absolute minimum.

2.1 Foundations: The Shang Theocracy

The Shang, China's first fully historical dynasty, was known primarily from the accounts written many centuries or even a full millennium after its demise.[3] This situation—which caused some skeptical scholars at the turn of the twentieth century to question Shang's historicity—had changed profoundly with the discovery since ca. 1899 of the inscribed oracle bones from the Shang age. These bones (bovine scapulae and turtle plastrons) were used for divinations in continental East Asia from the late Neolithic period. The Shang innovation was recording the charge, the deities' answer, and, infrequently, the verification of this answer on the scapula itself. Well over one hundred thousand inscribed bones had been discovered heretofore, allowing us to reconstruct aspects of Shang's religious life with considerable precision. Moreover, paleographers succeeded to distinguish between earlier and later inscriptions, allowing us to trace the evolution of Shang's religious practices.[4]

The most prominent feature of the Shang oracle-bone inscriptions, especially the earliest ones, coming from the reign of Wuding (r. ca. 1250–1192 BCE), is an extraordinary broad range of questions involved. Military campaigns and harvests, settlement building and meteorological conditions, childbirth and sickness, hunting and sacrifices, routine prognostication for the forthcoming days and interpretation of dreams—all were repeatedly queried about by the Shang kings (Keightley 1997, 30–41). From the inscriptions it appears that the kings dared not start any major undertaking without ascertaining first the will of the divine powers.

Shang divination differs considerably from e.g., the Delphi oracle. Judging from the inscriptions, the intercourse with the deities was highly regularized, and charges and answers were supposed to be as precise as possible. For instance:

> Crack-making on *jiashen* (day 21 of the 60-day cycle). Que divined: "Lady Hao will give birth and it will be good." The king read the cracks and said: "If it be on a *ding* day (4th day of the ten-day week) that she give birth, it will be good. If it be on a *geng* day (7th day) that she give birth, it will be prolonged auspiciousness." After thirty-one days, on *jiayin* (day 51, the first day of the week), she gave birth. It was not good. It was a girl. (Keightley 1997, 38)

Other inscriptions present a complementary pair of charges, i.e., "We will receive millet harvest. We will not receive millet harvest." Here the deities (or, as specialists on Shang religion prefer to call them, Powers) have even less possibility for

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3 The *Canon of Documents* (*Shujing*) contains several speeches allegedly made by the Shang kings and their aides, but all these appear to have been produced long after the dynasty's fall.
4 For the introductions to Shang inscriptions, see Keightley 1997 and Eno 2009.

unclear reply. The diviner simply does not allow deviation from the "yes or no" answer. The leading specialist on Shang history, David N. Keightley spoke of the Shang "love of order" as reflected "in the systematic nature of Shang divination, which frequently presented the divination topics in complementary, positive and negative forms carved on the turtle plastron with rigorous symmetry" (Keightley 1978, 222). This estimate surely makes sense.

The Shang pantheon, as seen from the inscriptions, was headed by the supreme deity Di 帝 (Lord or Thearch; or Lord-on-High, Shangdi 上帝). Putting aside the debates about the nature of Di (for which see Eno 2009, 72–77), some of its most noticeable features are: First, Di could order other Powers (such as a variety of natural deities). Second, Di was in charge of a very broad range of issues, and could occasionally harm the Shang unless appeased. Third, unlike all other Powers, Di never received cult. It seems that requests of Di on behalf of the Shang kings should be made by the deified ancestors of the ruling lineage.

These deified ancestral spirits played the central role in the Shang religion. They were the major addressees of divination inquiries; they were also the major recipients of sacrifices. It was through their efforts that Di and other Powers could be soothed and manipulated to serve the interests of the Shang. The ancestral spirits were not uninterested helpers; rather, they depended on the ruling king as the major donor of sacrifices. The symbiotic *do-ut-des* (I give in order that you give) relations between the king and his ancestors stood at the center of the Shang religious life. Archeological data provide further confirmation to the ancestors' importance: their lavishly furnished tombs with abundant gifts (including sacrifice of humans and animals) demonstrate the descendants' concern with the ancestors' well-being (Keightley 1999, 263–270).

From the Shang inscriptions we learn about the extraordinary power of the king as the chief mediator between the ancestors (and other Powers, including Di) and the community of the living. The Shang did employ professional diviners, but the final interpretation of the Powers' reply was the prerogative of the king. Presumably, his direct blood ties with the deified ancestors made him singularly fitting for the task of ascertaining their will. Keightley summarized the political impact of the king's role as the supreme diviner as follows:

> It was the king who made fruitful harvests and victories possible by the sacrifices he offered, the rituals he performed, and the divinations he made. If, as seems likely, the divinations involved some degree of magic making or spell casting, the king's ability to actually create a good harvest or a victory by divining about it rendered him still more powerful politically. (Keightley 1978, 213)

Comparing earlier and later oracle-bone inscriptions, scholars noted an important change in the content of divination. The number of inscribed scapulae diminishes,

and so is the scope of the topics divined about, and the number of Powers involved. Late Shang oracle bone inscriptions focus overwhelmingly on the ancestors alone; Di and other Powers almost disappear from the charges, and so are the questions about harvests, mobilizations, new settlement construction and the like. It is possible that these topics continued to be addressed through other means than scapulimancy, e. g., through milfoil divination. Alternatively, the late Shang kings may have felt secure enough to act politically without ascertaining the deities' will. More unequivocally, we do observe regularization of ancestral worship in the late Shang. Prognostications become "terser, less detailed, and always optimistic" (Keigthley 1997, 30). The Shang "love for order" in the human intercourse with the deities becomes even more pronounced.

The nature of our sources for the Shang religious ideology cautions against sweeping conclusions. But it may be summarized that three of its aspects are particularly important for subsequent development of China's state religion. The supreme pontifical power of the king is the one. The pivotal role of ancestral cult for ensuring the descendants' well-being is the second. And the desire to regularize and order human relations with the supernatural powers is the third. Religious perceptions will change a lot in centuries to come, but these three pillars of the Shang religious legacy will remain intact long after most of Shang's practices will be discarded and forgotten.

2.2 The Western Zhou: Heaven and Ancestors

The Zhou dynasty's replacement of the Shang ca. 1046 BCE was a momentous event in China's history. Having put an end to the centuries-old Shang rule, the victorious Zhou leaders had speedily established their control over vast sways of the Yellow River basin and beyond. This change in rulership and in the political system (of which see more below) was accompanied by a profound re-conceptualization of religious ideology. The new religious order was centered on the omnipotent, omniscient, and interventionist deity, Heaven, which merged with Shang's Lord-on-High, Di. Throughout the next centuries, especially during the so-called Western Zhou period (ca. 1046–771 BCE), the belief in Heaven's supervision remained the cornerstone of Zhou's religious ideology.

Before we go into details of the Zhou religion, we should mention a radical change in our source materials. The practice of scapulimancy, or more precisely the practice of recording the divinations on scapulae and plastrons was discontinued shortly after the Zhou victory, possibly sidelined by a more prestigious divination by milfoil and other means. Hence, our knowledge of Zhou thought comes from very different media. These are, first, the subsequently canonized odes, reli-

gious hymns, and important pronouncements of the Zhou kings, assembled in the *Canon of Poems* (*Shijing*) and *Canon of Documents* (*Shujing*). Second come the inscriptions on bronze vessels that were used for sacrifices in ancestral temples and were also interred in the tombs of the deceased ancestors (for all these, see Kern 2009). Besides, rich material data—coming as in the Shang dynasty primarily from the elite burials—provide us with an additional source of knowledge about Zhou views of life and death (Thote 2009). This change in the sources inevitably influences our understanding of aspects of the Zhou religion. For instance, we know very little about early Zhou pantheon: all our sources focus on Heaven and on deified ancestors only (Eno 2009: 99). However, insofar as political aspects of Zhou religion are concerned, our knowledge is quite adequate.

The cornerstone of the Zhou religious ideology is the belief in the Mandate of Heaven (*tian ming* 天命) as the foundation of the Zhou rule. According to this belief, the supreme deity, Heaven (*tian* 天; an equivalent of Shang's Di) is in charge of proper order on earth. When the ruler behaves violently and oppressively—as was allegedly the case of the last king of Shang, Zhòu 紂 (d. 1046 BCE; not to confuse with the Zhōu 周 dynasty)—Heaven, out of concern for the people below, transfers its Mandate to a better incumbent. It was through his utmost morality and concern for the weakest members of society that King Wen of Zhou (d. 1047 BCE) attained the Mandate, allowing his son, King Wu (d. 1042 BCE) to overthrow the Shang and establish the new dynasty. But the Mandate is "not constant." Should the future generations of Zhou kings lose their *de* 德 (moral virtue, but also charisma, *mana*), "merciless Heaven" will withhold the Mandate and transfer it to a better candidate.[5]

Zhou worship of Heaven appears as a perfect civil religion akin to the one that Aśoka tried to establish in India (Olivelle, this volume). It was so much subordinate to political ideals and moral standards may that some consider it devoid of "real" religiosity, something "more akin to a type of political philosophy" (Poo 1998: 30). Yet we should not neglect strongly pronounced religious dimensions of this cult as well. One of the Zhou hymns states:

> Revere it! Revere it!
> Heaven is clear-sighted.
> The mandate is not easily [preserved].
> Do not say that [Heaven] is too high—
> it exalts and degrades [human] affairs,
> it constantly watches us here. (*Shijing* # 288; cf. Waley 1996, 302)

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5 For the ideology of Heaven's Mandate, see Creel 1970, 93–100; Luo 2012; Luo and Pines 2023, 3–5; for the concept of *de*, see Kominami 1992; Kryukov 1995; Wang 2015.

This hymn could be easily recited anywhere throughout Eurasia. To claim that the monarch rules on behalf of the supreme deity and is constantly supervised by his divine protector is arguably among the common denominators of political religions worldwide. Yet in Chinese case there was one major peculiarity. Oddly, there was no accepted way of communicating with Heaven. No prophets spoke on its behalf, no scriptures encapsulated its instructions, no priests interpreted its will. Curiously, our sources do not even mention mantic practices, which surely were employed to assess the immediate will of Heaven (Kern 2018). Yet these practices in any case were insufficient to understand Heaven's abstract moral requirements. The supreme deity turned out to be inscrutable.[6]

A text, allegedly produced at the onset of the Zhou dynasty, but more likely coming from later generations, rationalizes Heaven's interaction with the humans in a way that sounds surprisingly democratic. Heaven was supposed "to see through what the people are seeing, to hear through what the people are hearing" and to "inevitably grant what the people desire."[7] Yet this "democratic" aspect of the supreme deity was mitigated by the arrangement through which the king—and the king alone—was supposed to mediate between the community of the living and the supreme divinity. From the tenth century BCE on, the Zhou kings adopted proud designation as Sons of Heaven, elevating them to the super-human status. Since sons had an exclusive right to communicate with their deceased parents and secure their blessing, the Zhou Sons of Heaven, much like their Shang predecessors, became *ex officio* the sole mediators between the supreme deity and the community of living.

In communicating with Heaven, the Zhou kings benefitted not only from their nominal position as Sons of Heaven, but also from the fact that their meritorious ancestors, especially the dynastic founder, King Wen, were supposed to stay in the Heavenly abode of the Lord-on-High.[8] This ongoing reliance on the ancestors explains why the ancestral cult remained the second major pillar of the Zhou order. There were additional political reasons to maintain it. To rule their vast realm, the Zhou founders established strongholds in outlying territories. These

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6 The problem of Heaven's inscrutability continued to haunt Chinese thinkers of the early imperial period, when (as discussed in section 6 below), Heaven regained its primary political importance. See Wagner 2018 for further details.

7 These three statements are cited from the original text of "The Great Oath" ("Tai shi" 泰誓) (which was subsequently lost and replaced with a forgery currently incorporated in the *Canon of Documents*). In all likelihood the original is from the Western Zhou period. For citations, see *Mengzi* 9.5 and *Zuozhuan*, Xiang 31.3. All citations from *Zuozhuan* henceforth utilize the translation of Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016 with slight modifications.

8 See, e.g., *Shijing*, "Wen Wang"; Waley 1996, 227.

strongholds, ruled on hereditary basis by regional lords (*zhuhou*), evolved into autonomous polities under the nominal authority of the kings. Since most of the regional lords came from the Zhou royal lineage, kinship ties played an important role in perpetuating their subordination to the Zhou kings. The kings, as heads of the major branch of the ruling lineage, had preferential access to the deified dynastic founders, who could ensure ongoing prosperity of their descendants. The importance of the lineage cohesiveness (centered around joint ceremonies in the ancestral temple) is the topic that permeates many of the early Zhou texts, especially the *Canon of Poems* (Kern 2009).

The ancestral temple was the focus of religious life of the Zhou kingdom and, *mutatis mutandis*, of the local polities established by regional lords. It hosted sacrificial ceremonies and ensuing banquets and performances (Kern 2009, 156–164). It was also a politically significant place. It was in the ancestral temple that major appointments were announced, wars declared, and their outcome reported to the spirits. Yet even more important were the deeper links between the ancestral ceremonies and the sociopolitical order as a whole. In the ceremonies, one's position was determined by the lineage's rank and by one's seniority within the lineage. This pattern in which everybody's functions were determined by his or her birthright could be extended to other spheres as well. Should this principle be fully implemented, the entire pedigree-based social system could be solidified forever. A later observer noticed:

> According to ritual, the gifts of a lineage do not exceed those of the state; the people do not drift; peasants do not move [to new lands], artisans and merchants do not change [their occupation], *shi* 士 (lower nobles) do not overflow,[9] officials do not exceed [their responsibilities], and the grandees dare not seize the lord's profits. … [When] the ruler commands, ministers are reverent, fathers are kind, sons filial, elder brothers loving, younger [brothers] respectful, husbands harmonious, wives gentle, mothers-in-law kind, daughters-in-law submissive: this is ritual. (*Zuozhuan*, Zhao 26.11)

This speech was pronounced long after the end of Western Zhou, and it reflects a mature understanding of ritual as primarily a social and political rather than religious force. This understanding crystallized only gradually, but its seeds are discernible already during the Western Zhou period. In particular, it may be reflected in the ritual reform that took place in the ninth century BCE. This reform is not attested to directly in the received texts, but it is observable from a profound change in mortuary practices. New assemblages of bronze vessels indicate a

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9 Meaning that members of the lowest aristocratic stratum of *shi* would not be allowed to "overflow" the high-ranking nobles to whom the speaker himself belonged.

shift from "Dionysian" rituals, in which drunken trance of participants induced what appears as direct communication with the ancestral spirits, toward "more formalized ceremonies of 'Apollonian' character, in which it was the paraphernalia themselves and their orderly display that commanded the principal attention of participants" (Falkenhausen 2006, 48). What mattered henceforth was not communication with the ancestral spirits as such but rather the *ritually appropriate* communication. The reform promulgated new sumptuary rules that fixed sets of ritual vessels to be used in ancestral sacrifices and in the grave (Falkenhausen 2006, 29–74ff.; cf. Yin 2001). Similar, even if less rigid gradation regulated usages of other mortuary objects and the tomb's size. It may be inferred that similar regulations encompassed other ritual practices, including court ceremonies, and the like. Social and political life became more regularized. The new order promulgated by the ritual reform was that of the strongly pronounced hierarchy based on hereditary privileges.

We may note a common trajectory of the Late Western Zhou ritual reform and the modifications of divination charges during the Shang. In both cases there was a move toward a more predictable, regularized, and easily maintainable way of interaction with the divine powers. In the Western Zhou case, this regularization had even more far-reaching consequences than in the Shang. It eventually fostered understanding that rituals are valuable not just for their role in communicating with the ancestors but primarily for their role of perpetuating hierarchical social order. As we shall see, for some of the philosophers and statesmen in subsequent centuries, this latter function of religious ceremonies became a justification of their continuation even when their religious efficacy was no longer taken for granted.

2.3 "Heaven's Way is Distant, Human's Way is Near": The Skeptical Age

In the second half of the ninth century BCE, the Western Zhou polity entered a deep crisis which brought about catastrophic collapse of the royal power in the dynasty's core western areas in 771 BCE. Although the crippled dynasty survived in its eastern domain for another five centuries (the Eastern Zhou period, 770–255 BCE), the blow to its prestige, to its military and economic prowess, and to its ability to control regional lords was devastating. It was also the devastating blow to the ideology of Heaven's Mandate. Contrarily to the ideas expressed in canonical documents, the Mandate was not transferred to a better incumbent; it simply disappeared. Bitter complains "foreboding Heaven is a cruel affliction" in the odes com-

posed prior to the Western Zhou collapse or in its immediate aftermath reflect the despair of those who were used to rely on Heaven as the protector of political order.[10]

The period following the demise of the Western Zhou—the so-called Springs-and-Autumns period (Chunqiu, 770–453 BCE)—is marked by the profound change in the views of Heaven's Mandate. First, the idea of an exclusive and universal Mandate transferred from one virtuous dynasty to another had been sidelined. As contemporaneous bronze inscriptions demonstrate, any powerful regional ruler could claim to possess the Mandate. Initially, these claims were made by the leaders of most powerful states, such as Qin and Jin; but gradually, even leaders of second and third tier polities could occasionally claim that they benefit from Heaven's Mandate. Clearly, this term was no longer associated with universal territorial control; rather it referred to the right to rule a single polity or just to an opportune situation. Eventually, the compound *tianming* will become closer to an individual (good) destiny; hence, by the end of the Springs-and-Autumns period a few inscriptions indicate that even an ordinary noble could have claimed to possess "Heaven's Mandate" (Luo 2020; Luo and Pines 2023, 6–17).

The second change occurred in the views of Heaven itself. Our major source for the period under discussion, *Zuozhuan* (Zuo Commentary), presents a great variety of views of Heaven. Putting aside the thorny question of which speeches in *Zuozhuan* reflect the views of contemporaneous statesmen and which were tampered with by the text's composers, editors, and transmitters, it is undeniable that the text as a whole presents a much more multi-vocal perspective of the Springs-and-Autumns period thought than what we have for preceding centuries.[11] This multivocality is fully observable in distinct views of Heaven as reflected in *Zuozhuan* (Li 2007: 14–15).

Zuozhuan abounds with references to Heaven, which, however, almost never invoke Heaven's Mandate as a source of political order (for an exception, see *Zuozhuan*, Xuan 3.3). Not a few statesmen invoke Heaven's will to justify the proposed course of action—be it aggression or appeasement (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 15.4e; Xi 19.4; Xi 22.8). These invocations imply that Heaven-related arguments were still convincing for some elite members. Elsewhere, however, we are explicitly told that a few statesmen applied to Heaven not in good faith but rather to whitewash morally dubious actions (*Zuozhuan*, Zhao 26.4 and 27.4). Some express hopes that Heaven would maintain its role as supervisor of human affairs and prevent the wicked

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10 See, e. g., *Shijing* odes # 194 and 195, cited from Waley 1996, 172 and 174.

11 For debates about nature, dating, and reliability of *Zuozhuan*, see Schaberg 2001; Pines 2002; Li 2007; Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016, xvii–xcv; and Pines, Kern, and Luraghi 2023, 1–20.

from gaining the upper hand (*Zuozhuan*, Wen 15.11; Zhao 11.2c); but other endorse a morally neutral view of Heaven's impact on human affairs (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 33.3a; Xuan 15.2; Cheng 2.3 g). Similarly, the term the "Way of Heaven" (*tian dao* 天道) is sometimes viewed as morally compelling (*Zuozhuan*, Wen 15.11; Xiang 22.3); elsewhere is equated with the morally neutral natural course of affairs (*Zuozhuan*, Zhuang 4.1; Ai 11.4); and sometimes refers just to the movement of celestial bodies (*Zuozhuan*, Xiang 18.4; Zhao 9.4; Zhao 11.2). Notably, not a few speakers openly admit that Heaven is inscrutable; hence discussions of its favor and disfavor are often preceded by the word "perhaps" (*Zuozhuan*, Xuan 3.6b; Xuan 12.5; Xiang 27.7a; Zhao 4.1a). This skeptical attitude is epitomized by Zichan (d. 522 BCE), one of the most revered protagonists of *Zuozhuan:* "The Way of Heaven is distant, while the Way of Men is near; unless it can be reached, how can [Heaven] be known?"[12]

The multiplicity of views of Heaven—from reverence to skepticism—is echoed on the lower level of the pantheon inhabited by a variety of terrestrial deities, ancestral spirits, and lesser deities and ghosts. Once again, we find immense presence of the religion in political life. Altars of soil and grain (*sheji* 社稷), the ritual center of a polity are routinely referred as the ultimate symbol of the polity itself (Bilsky 1975, 141–143). Ancestral temples play an even more pronounced role in political dynamics; for instance, in times of emergency, rulers (or other leaders) feel it necessary to make a report in person to the ancestors there.[13] The ongoing importance of ancestral cult can be demonstrated by the ever more lavish burials (Falkenhausen 2006, 326–369). Discontinuation of ancestral sacrifices due to one's loss of power—i. e., depriving the ancestors from their "bloody food"—is considered a major disaster (*Zuozhuan*, Zhuang 6.3). For the rulers, presiding over sacrifices sometimes is viewed as more important than running administration (*Zuozhuan*, Xiang 26.2). The pontifical power of the sovereign is the sine qua non of his position.

The divine is present in other aspects of political life. Deities serve as guarantors of covenants, which were the primary means of settling interstate and domestic conflicts. A violator of the covenant would incur on himself wrath of the deities who would "punish him, let him lose his people, his life cut and lineage destroyed, his state and the family overthrown."[14] Divination was a convenient means of "resolving doubts" (*Zuozhuan*, Huan 11.2), and it was practiced on the eve of the battles, or when other extraordinary action was planned. *Zuozhuan* furthermore pro-

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12 *Zuozhuan*, Zhao 18.2. For further analysis, see Luo and Pines 2023, 17–26.
13 E. g., *Zuozhuan*, Xiang 14.4; Zhao 7.3; Zhao 18.3.
14 Xiang 11.3. For covenants, see Lewis 1990, 43–50.

vides rich glimpse into popular religion which inevitably influenced elite members. We learn of vengeful ghosts, of deities who demand bribes, of deities who assist in (or obstruct) military efforts, of those who influence human health, and so forth. Dragons are observed fighting; stones speak; odd terrestrial and celestial phenomena are duly recorded and reported (Poo 1998, 41–68). And yet beneath all this richness of divine presence, we discover a subtle but well palpable trend of turning away from the deities in the political sphere and even questioning their very existence.

Three parameters explain the reluctance of many of the *Zuozhuan* protagonists to over-rely on deities. First is the broad conviction that the intercourse with the deities should be strictly regularized by ritual rules. Hence, whenever a deity requests (i. e. through one's dream or through a divination reply) establishing new sacrifices to itself, this request is rejected if the sacrifices fell outside the existing ritual framework (e. g., *Zuozhuan*, Xi 31.5; Xiang 10.2). Second, speeches attributed to eminent statesmen reiterate: "the people are the master of the deities." Namely, deities are responsive to the sentiments of the people below rather than to rich offerings, and if the ruler wants to secure good fortune for himself and his state he should "listen to the people" rather than "listen to the deities" (e. g., *Zuozhuan*, Huan 6.2; Zhuang 32.3; Zhao 20.6). Third, the text records many instances of cynical and manipulative attitude toward the deities. For instance, not a few statesmen are ready to brazenly violate a solemn covenant, disregarding the promises of divine punishment (e. g., *Zuozhuan*, Xiang 11.3). And, since some of the violators seem to get off, we may infer that the deities are not as powerful as they were expected to be.[15]

The combination of the above factors explains why, aside from unequivocal respect toward deities, we hear more and more skeptical voices of those who doubt that the dead have consciousness or that deities exist at all. The phrase "*if* spirits and deities exist..." recurs time and again in *Zuozhuan*, especially in its latter part (*Zuozhuan*, Xuan 4.2; Xiang 10.2; Xiang 14.4; Xiang 20.7; Zhao 27.5). Even though the skepticism was not universal, it sufficed to undermine the political importance of divine powers.[16] Hence, when amid a political dispute among two polities, one demanded to consult the deities to prove its rightness, the arbiter of the dispute considered this appeal a brazen case of deception (*Zuozhuan*, Ding 1.1). Once again, as in the uttering of Zichan, cited above, the bottom line is that polit-

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15 For further discussion, see Pines 2002, 70–87; cf. Schaberg 2001, 98–130.

16 Interestingly, even the bronze inscriptions of the Springs-and-Autumns period reflect reorientation from the ancestors (who were the inscriptions' addressees in the Western Zhou period) to the vessels' donors themselves. See Mattos 1997, 86–87.

ical problems should be dealt with here and now, without involving too much the superhuman forces.

The relative sidelining of deities and spirits in political life is paralleled by the relatively low position of officials in charge of the intercourse with the divine. These officials—scribes, invocators, diviners, shamans, and so forth—transpire frequently throughout *Zuozhuan* narrative. These people had similar functions to priests in other cultures. They deliver the ruler's reports to the deities and are responsible for interpreting the deities' replies. They assist in making prognoses through a variety of means: crack-making on turtle's plastrons, divining by milfoil stalk, interpreting dreams and omens, observing astrological phenomena, and even interpreting children's songs. The expertise of these functionaries is much needed, and some of them are respected, but this respect does not come because of their superior access to the transcendental but rather because of their good understanding of human affairs. This understanding, however, is not the monopoly of religious functionaries. As noted by Marc Kalinowski (2009, 372–373), "wise counselors and political advisors" not only rival the knowledge of scribes and diviners, but actually display a superior ability to predict the course of events. Whenever a prediction based on the technical knowledge of divination or astrology is contradicted by the one by "wise counselors" based on political and ethical considerations, the latter is invariably correct. This is yet another indication that human affairs should be solved in the realm of humans and not of deities.

The contradictory picture of the religious life during the Springs-and-Autumns period may become easier to understand once we analyze it not from the point of view of individual beliefs but from the point of view of religion's social and political functions. Whatever their views of the transcendental, rulers and statesmen cited in *Zuozhuan* all agree that sacrifices and the adjacent rituals should be maintained. The understanding that ritual principles as embedded in religious ceremonies are essential for the perpetuation of aristocratic social order seems to be widely shared across the spectrum of divergent opinions about Heaven and deities. Hence, we encounter repeated condemnations of those who performed rituals perfunctorily (Pines 2002, 89–104). Actually, the overall awareness of the importance of ritual increases over time, as is witnessed from the speech cited in section 2 above (p. 53). This awareness that proper maintenance of the religious *system* is important in itself and should not be related too much to individual *beliefs* becomes the major legacy of the Springs-and-Autumns period to subsequent Chinese religious culture.

2.4 Heaven, Deities, and Ritual in Political Philosophy and Popular Practices of the Warring States Period

The Warring States period was the most dynamic age in China's history. It witnessed profound socioeconomic, political, cultural, and intellectual transformation. At the heart of this transformation stood the replacement of loose aristocratic polities of the Bronze Age with an activist bureaucratic territorial state. Of equal importance was the demise of hereditary aristocracy that was submerged by a broader elite stratum of men-of-service (*shi* 士). This was also the most vibrant period in China's intellectual history, frequently dubbed the age of the Hundred Schools of Thought. Ideas put forward by competing thinkers laid the foundations for imperial Chinese political culture. To a certain extent Chinese empire as such was the intellectual product of these thinkers (Pines 2009).

Changes of the Warring States period encompassed the religious sphere as well. Novel views of death and afterlife proliferated (Falkenhausen 2006, 293–325), new deities were added to the pantheon, and the views of human interactions with the divine sphere became even more variegated than in the preceding era. For the current discussion what matters most are debates over political role of Heaven and of deities that permeate the texts of the competing thinkers.

One notable feature of the Warring States-period philosophic discourse is the ongoing marginality of the concept of Heaven's Mandate. When the compound *tianming* is mentioned in the philosophers' texts, it overwhelmingly refers not to political legitimacy but to individual destiny (which is more often referred to as *ming* without the "Heaven" [*tian*] adjective; see more in Puett 2005). The interaction between Heaven and human beings is focused on individuals rather than on political entities; as noted by an eminent thinker, Xunzi 荀子 (d. after 238 BCE): "The destiny of humans is determined by Heaven; the destiny of the state is determined by rituals."[17] Heaven may be relevant to one's fate but not to the polity's success or failure.

When we do encounter references to the Mandate in its original Western Zhou sense, this is mostly done in the context of the Mandate's change in the past, primarily during the power transfer from Shang to Zhou. The interest in the past, immortalized in the canonical documents that were continuously transmitted, commented upon, and probably also forged, was not just antiquarian. For the endorsers of moralizing discourse, such as the followers of Confucius 孔子 (551–

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17 *Xunzi* 10: 291 ("Qiang guo") and 17: 317 ("Tian lun").

479 BCE) and Mozi 墨子 (ca. 460–390 BCE), these events were precious manifestations of the "just deserts" principle. Whereas recent history provided little if any proof for Heaven's ability to punish evildoers and reward the meritorious, the remote past was firmly in the hands of the moralizers. This explains the ongoing circulation of the stories about the rise of the Shang and Zhou dynasties. This circulation, in turn, ensured eventual preservation of the political concept of Heaven's Mandate as "ideology in reserve."[18] But amid the ongoing political fragmentation, the immediate applicability of this ideology remained limited.

The Warring States-period thinkers differ dramatically in their views of Heaven, its nature, and its political role.[19] Some, like Mozi and other contributors to the book that bears his name, adopt an overtly religious stance. Mozi argues that Heaven is a sentient and active deity that intervenes in human life to promote justice and to punish the evildoers. He claims to have fully understood Heaven's intent—which, unsurprisingly, is aligned with Mozi's own controversial doctrines, such as that of "universal love" or "care for everyone" (*jian'ai* 兼愛). This understanding did not derive from a divine revelation, though, but from the thinker's logical deduction and especially from the transfers of Heaven's Mandate in the past, which Mozi viewed as the ironclad proof of Heaven's ongoing supervision of human affairs. Mozi's Heaven was further assisted by spirits and deities, who acted as its executives. Putting aside the question of whether or not Mozi was a genuine believer in sentient Heaven or used this concept as a convenient ideological construct, one cannot deny the clear proximity of his views to those of Western Zhou.[20]

Mozi's views remained exceptional in the Warring States-period intellectual landscape, though. This exceptionality is visible from comparing Mozi to Mengzi 孟子 (aka Mencius, d. ca. 304 BCE), another major thinker who assigned Heaven an important political role. At times, Mengzi appears as echoing Mozi, e. g., when he asserts that "he who complies with Heaven is preserved, he who goes against Heaven is ruined," or when he mentions Heaven's desires, which may imply a sentient deity (*Mengzi* 7.7; 4.13). Most notably, Mengzi invokes Heaven to justify the instances of non-hereditary power transfer in the remote past. According to Mengzi, it was Heaven that allowed the legendary Thearch Yao to be inherited

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18 For the concept of "ideology in reserve," see di Cosmo 1999 and Biran, this volume.

19 Scholars equally differ in their assessment of the role of Heaven in political and ethical thought of the Warring States period. My discussion is based on Luo and Pines 2023. For a different view, see, e. g., Jiang 2021.

20 Mozi's views are encapsulated in chapters "Heaven's Intent" ("Tian zhi") and "Elucidating Spirits" ("Ming gui") of *Mozi*. For the evolution of views of Heaven in *Mozi*, see Standaert 2013; for spirits and deities, see Sterckx 2013.

by his worthy minister, Shun rather than by his son.[21] Yet facing pressure from a skeptical disciple, Mengzi acknowledges: Heaven could not express its will directly. Rather, its support to Shun was manifested primarily through the people's endorsement, as well as by the length of Shun's tenure as Yao's chief aide. Mengzi concludes with the affirmation of the old principle: "Heaven sees through the people's seeing, Heaven hears through the people's hearing" (*Mengzi* 9.5). What really matters in politics is the people's sentiment, not "Heaven's intent" as is claimed in *Mozi*.

In contrast to the paucity of references to activist Heaven, we encounter in the Warring States-period philosophical much greater interest in Heaven as the normative cosmic order that influences the functioning of the sociopolitical realm. This view recurs across a broad range of texts, many of which are associated with the so-called Huang-Lao 黃老 tradition, most clearly represented in a group of silk manuscripts discovered in Tomb 3, Mawangdui (Hunan).[22] These manuscripts (and parallel transmitted texts) aver that Heaven interacts with humans through a variety of astro-meteorological phenomena, sending its omens and portents. Heaven is sometimes depicted in these texts in anthropomorphic terms, which implies a sentient deity on a par with the Western Zhou ideas, but parallels may be misleading. Heaven's superiority over humans does not imply direct supervision of and intervention in human affairs. Rather, Heaven epitomizes the guiding norms of both cosmic and sociopolitical order, and these norms should be internalized by a sage ruler. Heaven (and, often, its terrestrial and celestial counterparts—such as Earth, sun and moon) should serve a source of inspiration for and emulation by the sovereign rather than an object of cult.[23]

This reconceptualization of Heaven allowed many thinkers to combine reverent attitude to Heaven as the supreme entity with negation of its divine nature. For instance, one of the chapters of *Zhuangzi* 莊子 explains the difference between Heaven and men in this way: "Oxen and horses having four feet: this is called [from] Heaven. Haltering horses' heads and piercing oxen's noses: this is called [from] men" (*Zhuangzi* 17: 428 ["Qiu shui"]). In this interpretation Heaven retains its superior position, yet not as a deity that should be communicated with but rather as manifestation of impartial norms of which should be understood and uti-

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21 For the political sensitivity of this narrative about legendary abdications in the past and for the debates around the Yao-Shun power transfer, see Pines 2005; cf. Allan 2016.

22 The name Huang-Lao comes from two major heroes of these texts, the legendary Yellow Thearch (Huang Di) and *Laozi* 老子, the putative author of the eponymous—and exceptionally influential—text. For the complexity of *Laozi*'s views of Heaven, cp. Perkins 2014; Luo and Pines 2023, 35–36.

23 See more in Chang and Feng 1998, 28–40; Peerenboom 1993, 27–41 ff.; Luo and Pines 2023, 35–39.

lized. Xunzi is most unequivocal in promoting the irreligious understanding of Heaven:

> Instead of magnifying Heaven and contemplating it,
> Why not domesticate and curb it?
> Instead of being subservient to Heaven and singing paeans to it,
> Why not curb Heaven's Mandate and put it to use?[24]

Xunzi's views may sound to some almost sacrilegious (think of "curbing" God and "putting it to use" elsewhere). In the Warring States period, they were not exceptional, but surely formulated more blatantly than in other texts. In the chapter "Debate about Heaven" ("Tian lun") Xunzi explicitly rejects Heaven's sentient nature: Heaven does not intentionally punish evildoers, nor does it endorse the morally upright kings. Xunzi furthermore dismisses belief in omens and portents. Odd celestial and terrestrial phenomena do happen, but they should not be pondered about: what matters more are "human portents," namely "shortsighted and immoral acts through which human beings bring on their own destruction" (Goldin 2020, 189). Nor there is any place for deities in Xunzi's scheme. Humans should maintain their affairs solely within the human realm (Graham 1989, 238–244).

Yet if so, what about sacrifices and the accompanying rituals? Xunzi is unequivocal: these are essential for the maintenance of proper sociopolitical order and for the cultivation of elite members, the "noble men" (*junzi*). It is just that "noble men" consider these ceremonies as reflecting one's cultural refinement; only the uncultivated commoners consider these as related to the deities.[25] The focus of the noble men should be on proper performance of rituals. Ritual is the "unifying thread" of human order, the foundation of the proper functioning of society and the state. It is the true focus of Xunzi's concern. Although deeply rooted in religious ceremonies, ritual becomes in Xunzi's eyes fully emancipated from this background. Proper behavior at a ceremony reflects one's refinement; it may serve as catharsis when mourning for the deceased parents; but it has nothing to do with attaining divine support.[26]

Mozi and Xunzi are two thinkers who discussed Heaven and deities in great detail and who proposed radically opposing views of these. Most other thinkers, especially Xunzi's fellow Confucians, adopted a stance that was closer to Xunzi but without openly rejecting the divine nature of Heaven and deities. Confucius

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24 *Xunzi* 17: 317 ("Tian lun"); translation modified from Graham 1989, 240.
25 *Xunzi* 17: 316 ("Tian lun").
26 For Xunzi's views of ritual, cp. Pines 2000, 34–40; Goldin 2020, 201–228; Sato 2003, 343–423. For interesting parallels between Xunzi and Durkheim, see Campany 1992.

himself is cited as saying: "Respect deities and ghosts, but distance yourself from them" (*Lunyu* 6.22). Many ritual texts written by Confucians at that era provide a variety of interesting takes on the question of how to serve the dead, whose consciousness remains disputable (Goldin 2015). However, debates aside, one may note the broad agreement that solutions to political—unlike personal—problems should be sought in the human realm alone.

It should be immediately recalled at this point that turning away from Heaven and deities in the context of political thought does not mean "secularization" of early China as is sometimes assumed. Actually, when we abandon the philosophers' writings and turn to numerous manuscripts unearthed from the tombs of the Warring States period elite and sub-elite members, we discover manifold religious phenomena that permeated the lives of the populace at large. We learn of divination, especially in matters relating to the patron's illness (Kalinowski 2009, 374–385); of exorcist rituals; of belief in ghosts and spirits, and of rich pantheon which is only marginally mentioned in the transmitted texts. Normally, these newly discovered manuscripts do not concern with Heaven, nor do they address fundamental political and ethical issues discussed at length by philosophers. Their focus is to attain divine assistance in matters related to one's "personal welfare" (Poo 1998). For sure, these personal issues could have become politically important once a sick person who turned to deities for help was not a commoner but a ruler.[27] But overall, currently available evidence indicates: however vibrant was religious life on a personal level, politically speaking the role of superhuman powers was limited.

Their different loci of interest aside, unearthed and transmitted texts alike—all reflect the ongoing marginalization of the religious personnel even in the matters of interactions with the divine sphere. To a certain extent these personnel were sidelined by manuals that circulated widely among literate and semi-literate strata and provided them with the needed technical knowledge of how to deal with deities and ghosts. The most notable of these manuals are hemerological *Daybooks* 日書 that resurface in elite tombs from the Warring States to the early imperial period (Poo 1998, 69–102). The *Daybooks* contain explanations about auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of daily activities based on the day of the sexagenary cycle. They also contain specific recommendations about how to deal with a variety of problems, ranging from childbirth and marriage to apprehension of thieves, building houses, going to battle or making new clothes. They teach the reader how to neutralize malevolent spirits and how to deal with toothache. What is remarkable

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27 This interrelation is most vividly observable in the inscription on the jade tablets with a king of Qin's prayer to Mt. Hua to aver his illness (Pines 2004, 4–10).

is that fundamentally there is no need (or very limited need) in professional religious practitioners to tackle these problems. Any literate person would be able to resolve hemerological or "demonographic" (Harper 1985) issues on his (or her) own.

This "do-it-yourself" attitude is observable also in another interesting development of the Warring States period: the phenomenon of self-divinization (Puett 2002). Many philosophical texts from that age promise an adept that through proper training (ranging from moral and intellectual self-cultivation to a variety of psychosomatic techniques) he would be able to master superhuman powers, or in Michael Puett's apt definition "to become a god." Views of self-divinization differ from one text to another, but again they do not require any input from professional religious personnel.

This redundancy of the religious personnel even in the matters pertaining to the divine sphere is not accidental. It reflects the ongoing deterioration in the position of religious functionaries in the eyes of elite members. This deterioration is most notable in the case of shamans, who acted outside the official establishment and served the illiterate masses below (Lin 2009). The philosophers' texts despise them, as they despise physiognomists, diviners, and the like. Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BCE) notes that "people treat the shamans and invocators with little respect." He ridicules resort to divination in dealing with military emergencies. Elsewhere he argues that the ruler who "resorts to hemerology, serves ghosts and spirits, trusts diviners by bone and milfoil stalks, and is [overly] fond of sacrifices, is likely to be ruined."[28] The *Methods of War of Sunzi*, China's most renowned military manual, demands of the commander to "prohibit the taking of omens."[29] Xunzi derides the art of physiognomy as deceitful and unorthodox.[30] And a slightly later text reminds us: "the diviners are despised by people in society."[31]

To be sure these repeated invectives suggest that all the aforementioned religious practices were relatively widespread. Below we shall learn that not a few technical specialists could benefit from the rulers' patronage, notwithstanding the philosophers' indignation. Yet politically speaking, it seems that the government apparatus was determined to limit if not outright eliminate the political and social impact of unruly deities and of those who could speak on their behalf. Anecdotes scattered in different texts—all suggest: the interaction between hu-

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28 *Han Feizi* 50: 462 ("Xian xue"); 23: 192 ("Shui lin xia"); 15: 109 ("Wang zheng").
29 *Wu Sunzi fawei* 11: 107 ("Jiu di").
30 *Xunzi* 5: 72–76 ("Fei xiang").
31 *Shiji* 117: 3216.

mans and deities should remain regularized or outright curtailed.[32] Officials who were able to subdue local cults were hailed (*Shiji* 126: 3111–3113). Supervision of the potentially unruly impact of divine forces on humans became the elite desideratum even prior to the establishment of the bureaucratic empire.

2.5 Qin's August Thearch: A New Type of Religion?

In 221 BCE, King Zheng of Qin succeeded to realize the dreams of the Warring States-period thinkers and statesmen: having extinguished all of Qin's rivals, he unified "All-under-Heaven." Proud of his unprecedented achievement, King Zheng adopted the new title, "emperor" (literally, August Thearch, *huangdi* 皇帝), and he is known subsequently as the First Emperor of Qin (emp. 221–210 BCE). Although his hopes to create an eternal dynasty failed and Imperial Qin (221–207 BCE) collapsed shortly after his death, the impact of the First Emperor on China's subsequent history is undeniable. Here I shall confine myself only to those of his steps that contributed to the emergence of the new religious policies, which buttressed the emperor's position *above* the deities.

Two major features distinguish the First Emperor's religious self-positioning from that of his predecessors. First is his overt theomorphic posture, as exemplified by the title August Thearch with its explicit religious connotations (Puett 2002, 225–242). The First Emperor was also the first ruler to designate himself as a "sage" (*shengren* 聖人), a title associated in many of the Warring States-period texts with superhuman powers (Puett 2002; cf. Liu Zehua 2015). Second, the First Emperor departed from the Zhou kings not only in the titles he adopted but also in the one he eschewed—that of the Son of Heaven. This was not an accidental omission. Insofar as we can judge from the First Emperor's stele inscriptions—the most reliable source for his self-image (Kern 2000a)—it is clear that he paid no attention either to Heaven as the supreme divinity or to the idea of Heaven's Mandate. Nor does Heaven appear to have played a significant role in Qin's imperial pantheon.[33] It seems that after centuries of neglect, the discourse of Heaven's Mandate—connected as it was with the long defunct Zhou dynasty—was simply not attractive enough to merit the Emperor's and his aides' attention.

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32 For the best example, see the story about "separation of Heaven and Earth" from *Guoyu* 18.1: 512–516 ("Chu 2"), discussed Lin 2009, 401–403.

33 For Qin's pantheon, see "The Treatise on the *feng* and *shan* Sacrifices" ("Fengshan shu" 封禪書) in *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 28: 1366–1370).

The First Emperor's dismissal of the idea of Heaven's Mandate—the corner-stone of the Zhou dynastic legitimacy—may be viewed as another manifestation of his notorious hubris. Having succeeded to unify all the known realm after centuries of turmoil, Qin's August Thearch considered his achievements as infinitely superior to those of his predecessors. Indeed, the emperor's aides duly ridiculed the former rulers:

> The Five Thearchs and Three Monarchs of antiquity, though aware that their teaching were not identical and that their laws and regulations were unclear, relied on the awe-inspiring authority of spirits and deities to deceive the people of distant regions. But because their real [power] did not match their titles, they were unable to continue for long. Even before their lives had come to an end, the regional lords turned on them in revolt, and their commands ceased to be observed. (*Shiji* 6: 246, trans. modified from Watson 1993, 49).

This haughty stance which diminished the former paragons' achievements on the one hand and openly identified "the awe-inspiring authority of spirits and deities" as a means "to deceive the people of distant regions" on the other distinguishes Qin not only from its predecessors but also from the subsequent imperial dynasties (see more in Pines 2014). Yet we should not jump to a premature conclusion that Qin eschewed divine legitimacy altogether. Having dismissed Heaven, the First Emperor readily acknowledged his indebtedness to meritorious ancestors (*Shiji* 6: 236, 239, 247; Kern 2000a, 12–13, citing Mt. Yi inscription). As recently discovered materials show, Qin was actively promulgating its ancestral cult in the recently occupied territories. Strict regulations defined the officials' tasks in performing sacrifices in the newly erected temples; local functionaries who procrastinated were severely punished (Yang Yong 2020; cf. Fan Yunfei 2019). Whether or not Qin's ancestral cult was designed to become the core of the new religious system cannot be currently ascertained, but this possibility cannot be dismissed.

Parallel to bestowing honors on his ancestors, the August Thearch was busy in reshaping the empire's pantheon. There were many reasons behind this reshaping: the desire to amalgamate local cults of the recently conquered states with those of Qin; the bureaucratic need to order rituals and sacrifices just as everything else on earth was ordered; and possibly the emperor's personal interest in certain cults that were conducive to his alleged search for immortality (Puett 2002, 238–240). Yet putting all these aside we may conclude that the impact of the reshaping of the pantheon was reasserting the superiority of earthly authorities over the divine realm. It was up to the emperor and his bureaucrats to decide which deity will receive offerings, and how much. The officials engaged in the cults not authorized by the state were to be penalized (Hulsewé 1985, 166 [D141]). The emperor's superiority over the superhuman forces is reflected also in the anecdotes that speak of him

punishing the deities who ignited his ire (*Shiji* 6: 248 and 263). The reliability of these anecdotes—just as the reliability of depictions of the First Emperor as a superstitious person, a ridiculous seeker of immortality, who was constantly duped by the specialists in the occult techniques (*fangshi* 方士, often translated as "magicians")—cannot be ascertained.[34] But overall the picture is clear. Institutionally speaking, even if not necessarily personally, the emperor was positioned above the divine realm. This became one of Qin's major legacies to Imperial China.

2.6 Heaven's Comeback under the Han

The Han dynasty was established in the wake of seven years of devastating civil war. The victor, a former petty official from a peasant stock, Liu Bang 劉邦 (d. 195 BCE), faced a radically new situation than the Qin. He presided over a diminished realm, the eastern half of which was ruled by autonomous princedoms. His dynasty faced a difficult task of reconstruction. And it lacked Qin's legitimacy both in terms of the founder's pedigree and in terms of his practical achievements. This may explain the dynasty's turn to Heaven as a source of renewed legitimacy. Thus, whereas Heaven is conspicuously absent from the Qin stele inscriptions, it resurfaces—together with the [Supreme] Thearch, Di—as an object of the dynast's gratitude in the sacrificial hymns composed at Liu Bang's court (Kern 1996). The renewed designation of the emperor as the Son of Heaven reaffirmed Heaven's position as the supreme deity.

From the early years of the Han dynasty we witness rapid resurrection of the idea of Heaven as the major power in political life. In particular, the concept of Heaven's Mandate became prominent once again. This comeback of the old and almost forgotten idea may be understood circumstantially. The dramatic collapse of Qin, and the ensuing astonishing success of Liu Bang, an undistinguished commoner who succeeded to overpower all of his formidable rivals, defied imagination. It is not incidental that the highest occurrence of references to Heaven's Mandate in *Records of the Historian* is in the speeches of the statesmen who analyze Han's success (see also Hou Xudong 2015). Slightly later, a new set of ideas came to strengthen Heaven's political role. This was the ideology of resonance between Heaven and the humans, particularly between Heaven and the emperor. This ideology, the seeds of which are palpable already in "Huang-Lao" ideas mentioned above, matured under the great Han thinker, Dong Zhongshu (ca. 195–115 BCE). Dong's

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34 Recall that the reliability of the "Basic Annals of the First Emperor" in Sima Qian's (ca. 145–90 BCE) *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*) is bitterly contested.

ideas, developed by his disciples had become the cornerstone for subsequent conceptualization of the emperor's divine role.

Dong Zhongshu came to prominence during the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE), an exceptionally assertive ruler, who re-enacted much of the First Emperor's achievements, and also re-adopted the First Emperor's theomorphic posture. Dong, as many contemporary thinkers, was seeking a viable mode of coexistence between the throne and the educated elite. Dong's achievement lies in forming a set of ideas that not only successfully addressed the need to bolster the emperor's authority but also preserved a stronger position of intellectuals vis-à-vis the throne than was in the case of Qin.[35]

Dong Zhongshu had creatively synthesized two strands of Heaven-related discourse of the preceding centuries: Heaven as a sentient Mandate-giving deity, and Heaven as an equivalent of cosmic laws. According to his interpretation, Heaven resonates with the humans through omens and portents. It is specifically attentive to its "son," the emperor. Any malfunction of the emperor and of his immediate entourage may generate negative celestial and terrestrial phenomena. By contrast, a properly functioning emperor would bring about "all the things of blessing and all the auspicious omens" (*Hanshu* 56: 2503). Dong specifies:

> Benevolence, righteousness, ritual, knowledge, and trustworthiness are the way of five constants. It is what the True Monarch must cultivate. When these five are cultivated, you will receive Heaven's support and enjoy the numinosity of the spirits and deities. Your virtue will spread beyond the boundaries, reaching all the creatures. (*Hanshu* 56: 2505, trans. modified from Puett 2002, 295).

Despite its overtly speculative nature, Dong's approach proved to be successful in creating new norms of interaction between the emperor and his subjects. On the one hand, it benefitted the emperor by dramatically bolstering the sacredness of the imperial institution. Henceforth, any emperor became the focal point of interaction between Heaven and the humans: his persona became even more sacrosanct than before. On the other hand, the interpretation of Heaven's omens and portents (and more broadly, of its will) was not the prerogative of the emperor. Dong Zhongshu and his followers were pretty sure that they have the superior understanding of Heaven's intent. Not a few literati tried to use this newly gained interpretative power to curb the emperor's excesses and to manipulate his behavior. The most audacious of them—possibly even Dong himself—might have even cherished a hope that ultimately this power of interpretation would allow one of them

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35 Among numerous studies of Dong Zhongshu, this discussion benefitted most from Puett 2002, 289–300 and Goldin 2007, 154–161. See more in Loewe 2011; Major and Queen 2016.

to replace the emperor (Arbuckle 1995). Whereas the literati's success remained limited—both due to their internal divisions which prevented formation of an effective new system of omenology (Cai 2015) and due to the ongoing fierce competition from the "magicians" (Kern 2000b)—in the final account they had the upper hand at least in one respect. Their textual expertise was recognized as superior over mantic techniques as a means to interpret omens and portents. "Magicians" and other technical personnel in charge of religious activities were eventually sidelined by the members of the civil service staffed by the literati.

Toward the end of the Former Han dynasty (206/202 BCE–9 CE), the imperial religious system emerged in its mature form. It amalgamated all the three strands of the monarch's sacralization discussed above: the Shang-Zhou model of the emperor as the mediator with Heaven, the Qin idea of the theomorphic and sagacious August Thearch, and Dong Zhongshu's idea of the emperor as the focal point of resonance between Heaven and humans. The relative importance of each of these three strands changed from time to time, but fluctuations aside, their combination created a very potent construct. The sacrosanct nature of the throne was not challenged until the very end of China's imperial system (Zarrow 2012). It became the source of outstanding power of the monarchy vis-à-vis native and foreign organized religions, which became an inseparable part of Chinese religious landscape from the Latter Han dynasty (25–220 CE) on (Martynov 1987).

The formation of official religion centered around the emperor's worship of Heaven was a lengthy process. Throughout the course of the Former Han history, the nature of this religion was contested between the literati and their rivals, the "magicians," who initially were very successful in gaining the emperor's trust (e.g., Lewis 1999) and only gradually lost their position as the ruler's confidants. Debates between the literati and "magicians" and among the literati themselves, revolved around the nature and proper order of state cults (Bujard 2009), around their skyrocketing costs (Sterckx 2009), and around proper interpretations of portents and omens (Kern 2000b; Cai 2015). Despite their mastery of ritual canons, the officials were often frustrated in their attempts to impose a strictly organized cultic system on the emperors and on populace at large. Popular beliefs continued to influence the official religion, because many of these beliefs were shared by the emperors, by the officials themselves, and by the members of the increasingly important local elites (Poo 1998). This allowed perpetuation or periodic resurrection of "excessive" (or "illicit") shrines and cults (*yinci* 淫祠) throughout the Han history and thereafter. Yet it may be averred that this flexibility of the empire's religious system, or its "fuzziness" (Shelach 2014), were not necessarily the weakness, but rather the true source of its adaptability to the constantly changing religious landscape.

The political importance of religion under the Han may have contributed to the renewed formation of the religious mindset among segments of the educated

elite. Consider for instance proliferation, toward the end of the Former Han period, of the so-called apocryphal texts (*chenwei* 讖緯), which combined astrological predictions, interpretation of the classics and anecdotes about the past sages (Zhao 2019, 49–98). These texts presented an explicitly religious view of past and present. For instance, Confucius was transformed in these texts from an ordinary sage into a prophet who predicted and prepared the future rise of the Han. Nor was he an ordinary human any longer, but, rather, a son of the Black Thearch, i.e., a divine creature reincarnated on Earth (Zhao 2019, 80–85). Yet this outburst of the literati religiosity eventually generated a backlash and brought about bitter criticism from the Latter Han thinkers. Such an excessive religious zeal will not be associated with the official religion after the end of the Han dynasty.

In the final account, however, whether or not the officials were believers in deified Confucius, in a variety of local cults, or even in the sentient nature of Heaven itself, mattered little. Their goal as a political group was to secure their position as custodians of the state cults on behalf of the sacrosanct emperor, just as they preserved their position as powerful administrators under the nominal superiority of the reigning sage. Notwithstanding their ongoing frustration with non-cooperative emperors, with masters of the occult techniques (whom the literati routinely depicted as sycophantic charlatans), with fellow "corrupt" literati, and with local religious practitioners, such as a variety of shamans (Poo 1998, 192–194), the officials as a whole succeeded in their goal. Having solidified the position of the emperor as the head of the official cult, they promptly occupied the position of the emperor's "priests." As such, they turned the empire into a quasi-theocratic polity. Yet insofar as these officials were predicated on maintainability and orderliness of the official cults, they were not much interested in displaying strong beliefs. This may have added the religious system they established a distinctively "secular" taste.

2.7 Epilogue: The Sacrosanct Empire

At the very end of the Former Han we observe for the first time the seeds of mass popular cults. Generations will pass before these seeds will give birth to truly powerful popular religious movements (Espesset 2009). Some of these movements will be suppressed in their bud; other will confront the dynasty and will be exterminated after bloody conflicts; yet other will be duly co-opted by the imperial state. The challenge from those claiming to have their own, more effective access to the divine than the government officials, will remain palpable throughout China's history (Benn, this volume). Yet periodic outbursts of suppression and rebellion aside, not a single religion in China would be able to undermine the underlining ration-

ale of the Han imperial arrangement. It was the emperor and his officials who had the preferential (and in the eyes of some of them exclusive) access to superhuman powers. Inasmuch as this consensus remained intact, no religion could become a powerful political force on Chinese soil. Deities—and those eager to speak on their behalf—remained under the empire's firm control.

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Corinne Bonnet

3 On Imperial Intermediaries: Elites and the Promotion of the Hellenistic Ruler Cult in Ptolemaic Phoenicia and Cyprus

3.1 The Hellenistic Near East between Imperialism and Middle Ground

Alexander's conquest of the Near East has been repeatedly explored through the lens of continuity or rupture with the Persian Empire (Briant and Joannès 2006). Recent literature has emphasized the Achaemenid heritage in Alexander's management of the Eastern territories, as well as the resilience of local cultures or "micro-identities" (Briant 1996; on the concept of "microidentities," see Whitmarsh 2010). In my book on Hellenistic Phoenicia, entitled *Les Enfants de Cadmos. Le paysage religieux de la Phénicie hellénistique* and published in 2015 (Bonnet 2015), I made use of the concept of *middle ground* in order to grasp the subtle mutations that have occurred after 332 BCE, the fall of Tyre and the occupation of Phoenicia, Palestine, and Egypt by Alexander. The notion of "middle ground," coined by Richard White in his famous book on *Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (White 2010), refers to concrete and symbolic spaces or commonalities shared by different groups in a multicultural or multiethnic context. The middle ground implies processes of mutual and intricate accommodation and consists of practices that different actors or groups would find intelligible and profitable. In our case, the middle ground involves the Greek conquerors and the conquered Near Eastern populations, within a new political and cultural deal (cf. a parallel Roman case discussed by Rüpke, this volume, pp. 101–134).

The adoption of a middle ground perspective does not necessarily mean simple continuity nor does it obliterate violence, competition, and conflict. It only implies that in cross-cultural contexts due to war, conquest, business, etc., it is necessary to pay a special attention to the need for feasible and viable compromises, and consequently to cultural creativity. As a win-win zone, where asymmetrical positions tend to blur, the middle ground fosters the emergence or reconfiguration of individual and collective networks. Since Alexander's Empire and the resulting Hellenistic kingdoms of his successors are deeply cross-cultural, what kind of religious middle ground do we observe through the available evidence?

In this contribution, I will not trace the role of religion in the building-up, maintenance, or fall of the Hellenstic Empire(s) (for which see Hauben and Meeus 2014; Thonemann 2016), but would like to consider the effects of Alexander's and the Lagids' venture on religious interactions, with a specific focus on the role of imperial intermediaries involved in promoting the cult of the kings, dead or alive, outside Egypt, where these practices resonated with a long tradition of pharaonic cults. Religious honors attributed to human recipients represent an important religious innovation of the Hellenistic period, which has profound religious and political significance (Caneva 2016a; 2020; 2023; Heller and Van Nijf 2017). Honors for Hellenistic rulers question the traditional boundary between mortals and immortals in the Greek religious conceptions and practices. They also use the rituals to design horizontal and vertical relationships between traditional and new recipients of cults, between different ritual and political agencies displayed in public spaces. Within the Lagid kingdom, that extended far beyond Egypt, local and international elites express their loyalty to the imperial project through cult foundations and prestigious offerings, while at the same time taking advantage of and even promoting local/regional cultic traditions (for "religion of loyalty," see Introduction, p. 6). Religious practices could thus help bringing legitimacy to new rulers, foster personal ties between the Empire's ruler and different agents, as well as an original and efficient middle ground for local and global religious issues.

Imperialism had been common in the Near East since Assyrian dominion in the beginning of the first millennium BCE. Babylonian and Persian Empires inherited an imperial expertise in managing multifaceted territories, with their own languages, customs, gods, and ambitious upper classes (Liverani 2014). The small Phoenician and Cypriote kingdoms were used to being part of a big empire, since even the second millennium BCE, but they nonetheless became able to claim some local autonomy from the central powers, taking advantage of their geopolitical environment and economic assets (Elayi 2018). After Alexander's death in 323 BCE, Phoenicia and Cyprus were integrated in the Lagid or Ptolemaic Empire, a kingdom ruled by the Ptolemaic dynasty, which started with Ptolemy I Soter, son of Lagos, and which ended with the death of Cleopatra and the Roman conquest in 30 BCE. Ptolemy, who was originally a Macedonian general of Alexander's army, declared himself pharaoh of Egypt and created a powerful Macedonian Greek dynasty which ruled a large area stretching from southern Syria to Cyrenaica and south to Nubia (Map 3.1). Phoenicia remained under the Ptolemies' dominion until 200 BCE, when the Seleucids took over the power on that region, while Cyprus remained a Lagid possession until the Romans annexed the island in 58 BCE (Hölbl 2001). The Seleucid kingdom was ruled by another Macedonian dynasty founded by Seleucus I Nicator, another prominent figure of Alexander's entourage. At the height of its power, the huge Seleucid Empire expanded from Thrace, Ana-

tolia and Syria to Mesopotamia, Persia, and the border of India. It ended in 64/3 BCE with the Roman conquest of the Near East.

Map 3.1 Hellenistic Egypt and Near East: Lagid and Seleucid Empires ca 260 BCE. From Jean-François Salles. "The Hellenistic Age (323–30 BC)". In: *Atlas of Jordan: History, Territories and Society* [en ligne]. Beyrouth: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2013 (généré le 29 septembre 2023). Disponible sur Internet: http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/4894. ISBN: 9782351594384. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/books.ifpo.4894.

Considering the specificities of the Phoenician and Cypriote areas, and their strong religious traditions before the Graeco-Macedonian conquest, what was the impact and significance of the emergence of a royal cult devoted to the Ptolemies, the dynasty that had found its new basis in Egypt's Alexandria? Who was responsible for the promotion of rituals in which kings, queens, royal couples and royal families were considered as worthy of receiving honors "equal to the gods"? Were these cultic agents triggered by necessity or interest, or both? How should we evaluate their personal commitment in the royal cult? And finally, can we figure out the target of these specific rituals? The complete lack of Phoenician literature and the

scarcity of information provided by the Phoenician inscriptions leave us with a Greek point of view, from above. This top down perspective sheds light on the elites' agency, but almost totally masks the bottom up dynamics. The recipients of the royal cult remain therefore shadowy.

3.2 Imperial Intermediaries

This chapter will focus on these "go-between" figures, members of local or international elites, and actors of a new imperial "order." Through an accurate analysis of some Greek and bilingual dedicatory inscriptions from Phoenicia and Cyprus, I will highlight the elites' attitudes and strategies that sought to legitimize the new rulers through a "politics of difference" based on local traditions reframed in a global setting. My paper will move from the specific case of the Ptolemies' cult to more general considerations on cross-cultural dynamics as an opportunity for the Empire to improve its capacity for political appropriation. My main argument will be that the oft-used notion of "imperialism" does not do justice to the various levels and patterns of agency that the evidence reveals in the Hellenistic Near East considered as a religious middle ground. A new cultural and religious framework was obviously imposed from above, but bottom-up initiatives and new social agencies able to take advantage of the Hellenistic New Deal easily coexisted. Between constraints and creativity, I will show how people used the different resources of polytheism in order to create profitable interactions.

Before getting into some piece of the evidence, let me briefly focus on the notion of "Empire" and "imperialism," drawing on the recent and inspiring book of J. Burbank and F. Cooper (2010), *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference.* I would define an empire as a vast and complex web of different territories and peoples united by force and ambition. In contrast to nation-centered states, as Burbank and Cooper stress, empires rely on diversity to shape a global, all-encompassing order. The various local traditions become part of "imperial repertories" that constantly vary but aim at providing longevity to the empire and stability to the people. Because they are large, expansionist, cross-cultural political units, empires are incorporative, although in a different way than nation-states. While a nation-state tends to homogenize different regions, an empire implies that different peoples will be governed differently. The "politics of difference" is thus one of the four main issues that Burbank and Cooper tackle to thematize the notion of "empire," together with "imperial intermediaries" (agents in charge of the territories, mainly elites who take advantage of the cooperation), "imperial intersections" (imitation, conflict, or transformation between neighboring empires), and finally "imperial imaginaries," including religious narratives and devi-

ces, which provide a moral framework, even a legitimacy for rulers or, on the contrary, a means for contestation and rebellion against imperial intrusions. Like Richard White (2010), Burbank and Cooper refrain from any binary approach to empires, and from unproductive dichotomies such as inclusion versus exclusion, intimidation versus protection, or loyalty versus resistance. Although no dazzling array of archives is available to study the Hellenistic Near East, comparable to the prolific evidence that historians have for modern or contemporary issues, still a certain amount of inscriptions pertaining to the religious life can shed a light on original ritual configurations involving political leaders and traditional gods.

3.3 Learning to Revere the Greek Gods

When it comes to Alexander's political and cultural project in the Near East, which aimed at unifying the Greek and Near Eastern territories by force, but also through a shared cultural framework, Plutarch provides in his *De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute* an amazing piece of "imperial imaginary," built on the Greek notion of *paideia*, which means "education," "culture." According to Plutarch, who lived four centuries after Alexander's conquest, Alexander had a civilizing mission consisting in teaching the Oriental peoples how to adopt the Greek cultural model and how to venerate Greek gods (Bonnet 2016):

> But if you examine the results of Alexander's instruction, you will see that he educated the Hyrcanians to respect the marriage bond, and taught the Arachosians to till the soil, and persuaded the Sogdians to support their parents, not to kill them, and the Persians to revere their mothers and not to take them in wedlock. O wondrous power of Philosophic Instruction, that brought the Indians to worship Greek gods, and the Scythians to bury their dead, not to devour them! (...) When Alexander was civilizing Asia, Homer was commonly read, and the children of the Persians, of the Susianians, and of the Gedrosians learned to chant the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides. And although Socrates, when tried on the charge of introducing foreign deities, lost his cause to the informers who infested Athens, yet through Alexander Bactria and the Caucasus learned to revere the gods of the Greeks.

Plutarch concludes:

> Thus, Alexander's new subjects would not have been civilized, had they not been vanquished; Egypt would not have its Alexandria, nor Mesopotamia its Seleuceia, nor Sogdiana its Prophthasia, nor India its Bucephalia, nor the Caucasus a Greek city hard by; for by the founding of cities in these places savagery was extinguished and the worse element, gaining familiarity with the better, changed under its influence. (Plutarch 1.5.328c–f)

This narrative provides an idealized and "colonial" picture of Alexander's impact in the East, presented as a real and ambitious process of "Hellenization". In other words, from the point of view of Plutarch as a Greek, but widely-traveled observer, Alexander spread the Greek *paideia* as a shared, but imposed, cultural framework, made of great classics and panhellenic gods, new cities and new moral standards. Hellenism is presented as an effective, all-encompassing cultural standard that unifies and sees from a higher point of view the many local identities. As Irad Malkin (2011) convincingly argued for the archaic colonial movement, the construction of a distinctive and shared Hellenic identity—which corresponds to the concept of "Hellenism" (Bowersock 1990; Gruen 1998; Stavrianopoulou 2013)—is a result of distance, which produces convergence in terms of the frequent occurring/the active use of cultural references within this wider world. Certainly, Persians, Gedrosians, and Bactrians did not renounce their own gods, but Plutarch observes that the Greek gods became common to them all. While providing legitimacy, in the eyes of Plutarch's Greek and Roman, audience to Alexander's military violence over the conquered people, such a "civilizing" mission does not however imply the decline or disappearance of local traditions. To say it in Plutarch's words, "savagery" not only survived but even flourished under specific conditions, in specific spaces, thanks to specific agents. By taking a close look at different local contexts, which appropriated Hellenism as spread by the conquerors in a creative way, we will observe intricate top down and bottom up dynamics fostered by Alexander himself, then by his successors, and different kinds of "imperial intermediaries."

3.4 The Ruler Cults as a Political and Social Strategy in Phoenicia

Our first stop will be Phoenicia. After Alexander's death in 323 BCE, and until 200 BCE, the tiny but prosperous kingdoms of the cities of Arwad, Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre were part of the huge Lagid Empire, which was at the same time the heir of Alexander's conquest and of the pharaonic prestigious legacy. With their international and rich harbors opening onto the Mediterranean space, the Phoenician kingdoms shifted from Persian dominion to Greek, but always preserved some of their autonomy, particularly in the religious field. Each kingdom or city-state was pride of its own gods and cult places. In Tyre, for example, the divine and royal couple formed by Melqart (literally "the King of the City"), the Baal of Tyre (Bonnet 1988; Bonnet and Niehr 2014), and Ashtart (Astarte), the ultimate royal goddess (Bonnet 1996; Bonnet and Niehr 2014), remained at the very core of religious life. In Sidon, inscriptions mention the Baal of Sidon, probably Eshmun, and

Astarte again (Bonnet and Niehr 2014). In Byblos, the Baal and the (female) Baalat of Byblos are venerated together in a sacred area (Bonnet and Niehr 2014). Even though Greek language and culture permeated the whole Phoenician area before and after Alexander, the local gods were never completely obliterated by their Greek correspondents such as Heracles for Melqart, or Aphrodite for Astarte, the more frequent, although not unique Greek conceptualization of these divine powers (Bonnet 2015). Looking at the Greek and Phoenician evidence after 332 BCE, I discovered a complex and fluid religious landscape, in which Greek gods, habits, institutions, practices—to put it in a nutshell, "culture"—were certainly well established, while, at the same time, local customs remained vivid.

In Phoenicia as elsewhere, in Cyprus, Anatolia, Egypt and even in the Far East, Alexander adopted a strategy of legitimating his imperialistic power through the appropriation of local/regional tutelary gods or goddesses, like Artemis in Ephesus, Zeus Amon in Siwa, Apis in Memphis, and Melqart in Tyre (Caneva 2012; on Melqart see Bonnet 2015). The local supreme gods became Alexander's personal support and friends (*philoi*). In Siwa Alexander was even declared the gods' son, according to a pharaonic pattern. By coping directly with the supreme gods who symbolized a long lasting sovereignty over the territory and its people, Alexander displayed the new, human and divine, hierarchy of the Empire: at the top, the king or emperor "equal to the gods", then the gods, both Greek and local, considered and mobilized as his relatives, and finally the mass of people, his subjects. As a consequence of Alexander's imperial project, continued and extended by the Seleucid and the Lagid dynasties in the Hellenistic period, the local gods were diluted within a global framework, while still keeping their ancestral prestige. In his local context, each single god is rooted in a tradition and a territory, which make him/her unique and very strong. He or she is the "Lord"/"Lady" of the place and the people. Considered in a global perspective, each local "Lord" or "Lady" seems similar and may be reduced to a common "type," as it happens for the many different local Baal of the Syrian area who almost all became Zeuses. Their originality and force became less visible by comparison with other similar gods, because they were "dissolved" in a broader religious landscape.

We might call this phenomenon "Hellenism," if we emphasize the fact that local divinities did not disappear, but were reconfigured in a new environment. Their resilience—inherent to the flexibility of polytheistic systems—gave birth to creative compromises and reformulations.

Let me now flesh out these connections between Empire and Religion with some specific evidence, mainly inscriptions, coming from Hellenistic Phoenicia. It is worth noticing that the first Greek inscription from Phoenicia, found in Tyre, was carved on an altar owned by Ptolemy II, son of Ptolemy I, and his wife (and sister) Arsinoe II, called *adelphoi theoi* ("divine siblings"). The royal cou-

ple was thus worshipped during their lifetimes, approximately between 272 and 268 BCE (Caneva 2016a; 2016b). Nobody knows who made this offering, but it is likely that for the Phoenician and Greek people, the royal and divine siblings evoke the divine couple Osiris-Isis, or Sarapis-Isis. In a Phoenician inscription found in Ma'ashuq, but most probably coming from Umm el-Amed, near Tyre (Rey-Coquais 2006, 156, n°386, fig. 386), the consecration of a portico dedicated to Astarte is dated "by the 26th year of Ptolemy[1], Lord of the Kings, the powerful, who does good,[2] son of Ptolemy and Arsinoe, the divine siblings, in the year 53 of the people of [Tyre]", which corresponds to 222–221 BCE. The divine siblings are mentioned only in the dating formula, and not as the recipients of the offering, but nonetheless, in the Phoenician language, king Ptolemy III and his wife were considered as a pair of *theoi adelphoi* (in Phoenician: *'ln 'ḥym*).

Osiris and Isis, the original divine siblings, had been rooted on Phoenicia since the Persian period at least and were very popular, as various personal theophoric names show, such as Abdosiris or Isisyaton. The link between the cult of the Ptolemaic sovereigns and the cult of Isis-Osiris/Sarapis has been repeatedly stressed in the recent literature (Caneva 2016a; 2016b, Bricault and Versluys 2014). Since there is a consensus on this point, I will not explore it further. It suggests that divine protection is bestowed by gods upon kings and people because of divine benevolent attitude towards mankind and thanks to human piety towards the gods. The benevolent rulers are inspired by the gods and their cult provides communities with a ritual tool to manifest allegiance to the current power without renouncing to their own cultural heritage.[3] Like at Byblos the Egyptian goddess Hathor was a possible counterpart for the local Baalat, the "Lady of Byblos," since the second millennium BCE (Tower Hollis 2009), Isis was considered as similar to Astarte, because they both protected the royal family and more globally the kingdom as a whole. Cultural commonalities fostered a new political agenda, namely unify Greece and the Near East within an all-encompassing empire, able to put an end to an endemic conflict, which is substantially different from Plutarch's mere colonial program.

A second inscription from Tyre, dating from the end of the third century BCE, sheds more light on the role of "imperial intermediaries." In this text Ptolemy IV Philopator, son of Ptolemy III Evergetes, who reigned between 221 and 203 BCE, is honored through the offering of an equestrian statue bearing a Greek inscription:

> King Ptolemy, god *Philopator* ("father-loving")
> Son of king Ptolemy and queen Berenike

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1 This is Ptolemy III Euergetes (247–221 BCE).

2 In Phoenician *p'l n'm* is a translation of "Euergetes".

3 For a parallel with the Roman imperial cult, see Rüpke, pp. 111–114.

Theoi euergetai ("benefactor gods")
(statue that has consecrated) Thraseas son of Aetos, of the deme Eusebeios,
The *strategos* of Syria and Phoenicia. (Rey-Coquais 2006, 28–29, n°18, fig. 18a–b)

Thraseas was a high-ranking officer who decided to make a prestigious offering to celebrate the *reconquista* of the Phoenician territory by Ptolemy, who had been victorious over Antiochos III in Raphia in 217 BCE. Indirectly, by celebrating Ptolemy's achievement, Thraseas also praised his own success as a *strategos* of Syria and Phoenicia. Indeed, the dedicant came from an influential Greek family since his father Aetos had been the Ptolemaic governor of Cilicia, and was responsible for founding the city of Arsinoe in that region, a city named after the queen. Some years later, Thraseas' son Ptolemaios became one of Ptolemy IV's leading generals, although he later defected to Antiochos III (on that family, see Gera 1987). Thraseas also appears in an Athenian inscription (IG II^3, 1, 1185), receiving honors for his role as an envoy to Athens. Thraseas' family originally came from Aspendos in Pamphylia, an Anatolian region deeply hellenized. In this inscription, designed to show his loyalty to the Graeco-Egyptian king, Thraseas stresses the fact that he is a citizen of a deme in Alexandria. We can presume that he was a high officer, member of an international political and military elite, having grown up in Egypt, at the royal court, and involved in the promotion of an early and persistent royal cult in Tyre. The visibility given to Ptolemy's cult, through an equestrian statue recording his military achievement, in a strategic moment, becomes a hallmark of the new political and cultural deal. The qualification of "father-loving" and "benefactors" applied to the divine rulers contribute in building an encompassing royal ideology, which makes the conquest attracting and promising especially for the elites, but also for the people, which is supposed to take advantage from that care, under the protection of both gods and kings. Despite this idealized message, nothing suggests in Thrasea's inscription an effort to connect his action with local traditions: the language is Greek, the names are Greek, the dedicant and the beneficiaries are all Greek. The top down process does not seem to leave any space for negotiation.

A third inscription, dated to the end of the third century BCE (probably after the battle of Raphia in 217 BCE), will enable us to observe a more complex and intricate background and religious agency. An inscribed marble block, probably coming from Tyre, or from the Beqaa area, bears a dedication to Sarapis and Isis in favor of king Ptolemy IV Philopator, and the queen, his sister and wife, Arsinoe III:

For the king
Ptolemy and for
the queen Arsinoe,
gods *Philopatores* ("father-loving")
to Sarapis (and?) Isis *Soteres* ("saviors")

> Marsyas, son of Demetrios,
> from Alexandria,
> chief secretary. (*SEG* 38, 1988, 1571; *RICIS* 402/0601)

Marsyas was another high-ranking official from Alexandria who worked in the Lagid chancellery. In his dedication, he connected two couples: the divine Ptolemy and Arsionoe, who benefit from an offering made to another divine couple, namely Sarapis and Isis. Both divine pairs were given an epiclesis to stress their power: while *philopatores,* applied to Ptolemy and Arsinoe, conveys the concept of a long-lasting and ideal lineage and dynasty, *soteres* refers to the superhuman agency of Sarapis and Isis, designed to enhance the rulers' legitimacy and performativity. Thanks to the gods' proximity, the Lagid dynasty is not only protected and meant to last, but it is also able to protect the whole population, to act efficiently in favor of any single subject. The offerings placed in the sanctuaries make visible the kings' performative power granted by the gods. The triangle shaped by the interaction between the dedicant, the recipients, and the gods displays both the imperial imaginary based on the collaboration between gods and kings, and the mediation undertaken by an international elite (like Marsyas who was born in Alexandria but was chief secretary in Phoenicia), which followed the Ptolemies from Alexandria to their Levantine possessions, and made their hegemony visible and presumably beneficial for their own career and for those who joined the new political agenda.

The process of "double dedications" attested in Marsyas' inscription has been recently studied by Eleni Fassa (Fassa 2015; see also Caneva 2016a and 2016b). She notes that in Ptolemaic Egypt two types of private dedications evolved, relating gods, rulers, and subjects. Most frequently, the gods are Sarapis and Isis, whose dedications are extremely numerous, over time and space. According to the first type of dedication, the offering was made either to Sarapis and Isis (in the dative) *for* the Ptolemaic kings (ὑπέρ+genitive); hereafter, these texts will be called the *hyper*-formula dedications. In the second type of dedications, the offering is attributed to Sarapis, Isis *and* the Ptolemaic kings (all in the dative); these are the so-called "double dedications." It would be an error to consider them as equivalent expressions or mere linguistic variants. Indeed each type reflects slightly different conceptions of the relation between the divine and the royal couple; moreover, they correspond to specific stages in the development of the Ptolemaic dynastic ideology. Nonetheless, both forms express and display a close and significant affinity between gods and kings in the eyes of both the dedicant and the audience.

Marsyas' Tyrian dedication belongs to the *hyper*-formula since Sarapis and Isis are the recipients of the lost offering—maybe a statue—while the king and the queen are mentioned as beneficiaries. It is worth mentioning that the *hyper*-

style and double dedications were almost exclusively made within the Ptolemaic Empire—only rarely did the inhabitants of the Seleucid or the Attalid kingdoms combine their personal dedications to the rulers with those to the prominent deities of their respective kingdoms. From a total of 124 double dedications from the late fourth century BCE to 30 BCE, 116 refer to the Lagids, four to the Seleucids, and four to the Attalids.

Moving from the aforementioned Burbank and Cooper (2010) proposals on the framework of empires, it is clear that the dedications which associate gods and kings belong to a language of power initiated by the kings themselves and shared by different imperial intermediaries in order to shape a new map of correlated divine and human agency. This language is meant to suggest, or impose, the idea that kings and gods work together for the sake of the Empire and of the people. The religious background of pharaonic Egypt undoubtedly favored the idea of the ruler's divine nature, which was soon reflected and amplified by the Ptolemaic monarchs in the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Caneva 2018). Dedications *for* or *to* the Ptolemies may consequently be viewed as concrete signs of a cross-cultural process, similar to the Greek epigraphic habitus of giving a Greek name to a foreign deity. The pharaonic ideology of a divine king protected by the gods is relayed by the new leaders of Egypt and exported in their territories outside Egypt, where it is subtly connected to local traditions in order to be more easily received. It definitely contributes to unify the Empire through a common cultic model.

The extensive use, in space and time, of private dedications linking Sarapis, Isis, and the Ptolemies is testimony to their wide acceptance and popularity, especially during the third century BCE, although they first appeared in Alexandria in the early years of the Ptolemaic kingdom. The *hyper*-formula and the double dedication largely spread both inside and outside the Ptolemaic kingdom. The use of the same dedicatory formula everywhere, especially during the reign of Ptolemy II and his successors, demonstrates its use as a token of dynastic continuity. The same ideological discourse, the same religious practices throughout various centuries and in different places reflects the stability of the Empire through the correlations between the royal household and the prominent "Alexandrian" and global gods, Sarapis and Isis (on the notion of "globalization" applied to ancient contexts, see Pitts and Versluys 2014).

The use of the epithet *Soter* (Savior)[4] applied to Sarapis and Isis in Marsyas' inscription, but also frequently ascribed to the royal Ptolemaic couple, is highly engaging. It sheds light on the perception and representation of the organic link between the tutelary gods and the Ptolemaic rulers. In other words, both are sup-

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[4] For this epithet see Jim 2015 and most recently Jim 2022.

posed to pay attention to human destiny and to aim at helping people in their everyday lives. *Soter*, in fact, covers a wide semantic spectrum, dealing with health, war, death, dangers in travel, justice, etc. While there is almost any archaeological evidence on the ritual environment of the offerings made in Phoenicia, at Alexandria private dedications in favor of the Ptolemaic kings were associated with cultic activities for the king within the temples of Sarapis and/or Isis. The association between the divine and the royal partners was not only an ideological claim, but a concrete cultic procedure. Hence, we can imagine that the dedications with the *hyper*-formula implicitly allude to sacrifices and libations for the gods and the monarchs, within rituals shared by both recipients.

During the reign of Ptolemy Philopator (221–203 BCE), *hyper*-dedications to Sarapis, Isis and the royal couple consistently multiplied in Egypt and beyond. Many of the dedicants were members of the upper class and had various kinds of ties to the royal household. Yet it was during the reign of Philopator that a new temple was built in Alexandria, at a central location, in honor of Sarapis and Isis, the Savior Gods, and of Ptolemy and his wife Arsinoe, the Father-Loving Gods (*I.Alex. Ptol.* 18). This was the very first temple dedicated to both the divine couple and the living Ptolemaic royal pair, considered as equal to the gods event before their death. The cult is not addressed to deceased ancestors, but to deified royal figures. In other words, Ptolemy and Arsinoe were elevated to the same status as that of Sarapis and Isis; they were actually considered as their counterpart on earth.

At the same time, however, because of their specific phrasing, the ὑπὲρ-dedications did imply a mediator eager to advertise his (more rarely her) relationship with the rulers and the gods. This new epigraphic standard was the most effective way for a third person to be integrated into the privileged connection between the gods and the ruling dynasty. The relationship between the dedicants and the Lagid court might have been professional, economic, military or friendly, but most importantly it was hierarchical. By including the king in a private act of devotion, the dedicant wanted to honor the royal household and to provide a statement of praise and loyalty. Moreover, since the majority of the dedicants who used this formula were originally citizens of Alexandria, even if they were in charge of imperial provinces, such as Phoenicia or Cyprus, it is probable that dedications with the *hyper*-formula became a proper medium to stress a political, social, and cultural familiarity with the ruler. It worked as a mark of distinction for the elites and a politically-correct expression for Greek-speaking, upper class-citizens, who made up the network for imperial political strategy.

Finally, the emphasis on interconnected divine and human couples also contributed to the emergence of a shared imperial imaginary, which ingenuously interwove the public and private spheres. To what extent was this discourse spread

and shared in all the social classes is extremely difficult to say. The available sources do not mention explicitly who were the recipients of the message. The sanctuaries were mainly public spaces, open to anybody, but could everyone read a Greek inscription displayed in Tyre or Kition? However, this legitimate question does not find any answer in the current body of evidence. Not a single text expresses a divergence or opposition with the official trend.

As Stefano Caneva noted (Caneva 2014a), through different kind of discourse (inscriptions, poetry, epic, prose), a gentle, reciprocal love within the bonds of marriage is presented as a crucial and strategic value of the Ptolemaic household, ensuring wealth and social order within the kingdom as well as the continuity of the dynasty itself. This is a significant aspect of the "imperial imaginary"—a model that was also reflected in the court elite's emulation of the royal couple. Since the Ptolemaic royal couple officially claimed to be sibling union, this created political advantages in terms of legitimacy, cohesion, and stability, but also needed some mythic and cultic foundations or precedents. Isis and Sarapis obviously played this role, but Zeus, Hera, Aphrodite and some other gods participated in the construction of a new kind of sovereign and cross-cultural power.

Despite the active role of the queens in personal diplomatic commitment and mediation between the king and his subjects (Macurdy 1932; Pomeroy 1984; Caneva 2014a), in poetry even so in inscriptions, they were mainly portrayed as the king's perfect partner, as a proper source of legitimation and continuity for the royal household. Thus, the rhetoric of reciprocal love is associated with a model of an "ideal" royal couple and family where competencies are distinguished on a gender basis, where the *thalamos* (the royal bedroom) is the very core of the kingdom. This ideological motif is developed during the third century BCE and expressed through the surnames of the Ptolemies: *Soter* (Savior), *Philadelphos* (Brother/Sister-Loving), *Euergetes* (Benefactor), *Philopator* (Who Loves his Father). The message is quite redundant and aims at imposing the image of a perfect family, taking care of the subjects as if they were relatives. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the period of the *climax* for *hyper*-style dedications corresponds to the *climax* of the struggles between the *Diadochi*, especially the Lagids and the Seleucids, for the territorial heritage of Alexander.

We can now turn to the last inscription from Phoenicia, before analyzing more briefly the Cypriote case. It is a Greek inscription found in a cave, at Wasta, between Tyre and Sidon, and again dating from the third century BCE. This text sheds a fascinating light onto the cross-cultural cultic strategies encouraged by the Ptolemies and their imperial intermediaries, and probably relayed locally by the people. The inscription, which contains a double dedication, illustrates a middle-ground logic, which facilitates a creative compromise between ancestral "indigenous" traditions and new templates:

> To the king Ptolemy
> and to Aphrodite *epekoos* ("listening")
> Himilkas, son of Samôs
> (this) prayer. (*CIS* I, 6 for the *editio princeps*; Aliquot 2009, 132)

The Wasta cave seems to have housed, even before the Hellenistic period, a cult centered on the promotion of sexuality addressed to a divine couple initially formed by Melqart and Ashtart (Astarte), the very core of the Tyrian pantheon, two powerful, royal and protective gods (Bonnet 2004; 2008; 2015, 279–286). The walls of the cave show many signs connected with sexuality—Ernest Renan, as a leading figure of Orientalism, alludes to cultic prostitution! (Renan, commentary to *CIS* I, 6)—but very few inscriptions inform on the performed rituals.

The identity of the dedicant, Himilkas son on Samôs, is unknown, but he clearly bears a Phoenician name and a Phoenician patronym (Aliquot 2009, 132). However, he sends his prayer in Greek to a Ptolemy—but which one?—and to Aphrodite, called *epekoos*, "listening." Even if it is one of the most banal and self-evident epithets in ancient Greek dedications, Eftychia Stavrianopoulou has explored the reasons of its huge popularity and wide geographical distribution throughout the imperial period (Stavrianopoulou 2016, 81). She convincingly argued that "the epithet *epekoos* not only conveys an intimate relationship with the respective deity, but also represents transformations and adaptations in the religious mentalities of the Hellenistic and Roman eras." More precisely, she showed that the success of *epekoos* originated "as a cultural adaptation of patterns of personal religious practice and iconography that go back to Egypt." What was at stake is an increasing expectation in terms of the approachability of rulers and deities, in terms of gods' and kings' ability to listen to the requests of their subjects and to grant them.

In the Wasta cult, Ptolemy is mobilized together with Aphrodite to listen to Himilkas' prayer. But who is precisely this Aphrodite venerated in a Phoenician place by a Phoenician worshipper? Is she the Greek counterpart of the Phoenician goddess, Ashtart/Astarte? How do the king and the goddess collaborate in the cult? As Eleni Fassa has stated (Fassa 2015), the double dedications to Sarapis-Isis *and* the divine couple in the dative case appear later than the *hyper*-formula, and it implies equal honors for the monarchs and the gods. The ontological distance between them is strongly reduced, if not altogether absent. In contrast to *hyper*-style dedications, double dedications were more limited both chronologically and geographically. Although the oldest surviving dedication of this type comes from Ephesus (*RICIS* 304/0601), the correlation between Isiac deities and the Ptolemies in "direct" dedications developed almost exclusively in Ptolemaic Egypt.

In the Wasta inscription, however, the dedicant sends his prayer to a puzzling hybrid couple made by a king and a goddess, who are supposed to jointly answer

the prayer. Their agency is not only parallel, or similar: it is common or shared. Moreover, the dedication is written in Greek by a Phoenician worshipper, who establishes a relationship with a Graeco-Egyptian king ruling over Phoenicia and an apparently Greek goddess, who might refer to a local deity. How could that work?

This evidence is very unusual in that it does not reveal any Egyptian background, especially in the dedicant's profile. My hypothesis is that, on the contrary, we are dealing here with an appropriation and re-configuration of local cults and rituals, realized by Phoenician agents (Bonnet 2004; 2008; 2015). As noted by Eleni Fassa, the cult of the Ptolemies both inside and outside Egypt was progressively normalized, with specific formulae, an Isiac background, the whole family involved, and an established protocol. "Now the attribution of divine or godlike honors is not the result of a specific benefaction of the ruler towards a city, but the cities themselves tend to believe that this is the appropriate way to honour the Ptolemaic kings" (Fassa 2015, 141). They intended to display their loyalty and hoped to receive divine protection from them.

In the context of the Wasta offering, Himilkas probably chose to honor Ptolemy as a powerful interlocutor, together with Aphrodite, who mediates his request as a "listening" goddess (*epekoos*), in order to solve his problem thanks to a joint intervention.

To a certain extent, in this inscription, king Ptolemy played a similar role to Melqart, the Baal of Tyre and mythical king (Bonnet 1988; 2015). Melqart was the tutelary god of the Tyrian territory, in charge of protecting the population, even in the diaspora (Carthage, Gades, etc.). Himilkas is precisely a theophoric name based on the divine element "milk," which means "king," and most probably refers to Milk-qart, the "King of the City." In other words, it is likely that Ptolemy was invoked by Himilkas as the new royal god who fulfilled Melqart's prerogatives, who embodied a new divine power. In other words, Ptolemy has appropriated Melqart's divine agency, or rather, Himilkas has appropriated Melqart's powers to re-ascribe them to Ptolemy. The traditional Phoenician religious pattern of a divine couple has been reframed by a global and imperial ideology, with Ptolemy in the role of the royal god associated with a royal goddess.

Yet in the Phoenician cults, Melqart was almost systematically associated with Ashtart (Bonnet 1988; 1996; 2015). Together they represented a divine pair and shared many features, such as legitimating the monarchy and protecting the territory and its population against any kind of danger. Together they guaranteed prosperity, fertility (also through sexuality) and peace on the whole Tyrian territory. Ashtart, who is called "Name of Baal" in a royal funerary inscription from Sidon (KAI 14, carved on Eshmunazor's sarcophagus), worked as an interface between the god and his worshippers (Bonnet 2009). This is why in the Wasta inscription she is called *epekoos*, "the one who listens." Himilkas' prayer was supposedly

transmitted to the divine Ptolemy through the Greek equivalent of Ashtart, Aphrodite. Moreover, Aphrodite emphasized the "erotic" background of the Lagid courtly love, carefully analyzed by Stefano Caneva. Since the time of Arsinoe II, Ptolemy I's daughter and Ptolemy II's wife, Alexandrian court poetry depicted the deified queen as a new Aphrodite (Caneva 2014b; Caneva 2015). The Aproditean queens expressed the power of female charm over dynasts as a central feature of the royal ideology, based on continuity, harmony, and charism. By choosing Aphrodite *epekoos* as Ptolemy's cultic partner, Himilkas made visible the effect of a new political and religious agenda. Ptolemy has subtly infiltrated local, ancestral traditions, while Aphrodite, his divine spouse, contributes to the divine king's performative prestige, by giving voice to human expectations. Melqart and Ashtart have been updated and put at the service of imperial ambitions.

3.5 The Cypriote Case-Study

Coming now to the Cypriote case-study, we will provide further evidence for the local audience to the "triangles," trying to identify more precisely the sociological profile of the actors. We will also focus on how individuals or groups appropriated locally, in a global context, the new religious "products" constructed by the Lagid imperial discourse. It is worth mentioning that the island of Cyprus has provided the largest body of evidence concerning the royal cult of the Ptolemies outside Egypt (Michel 2020).[5] In Cyprus, like in Phoenicia, there were both double dedications and *hyper*-formulae, involving the Ptolemies and the Isiac gods. The civic connotation of these offerings was particularly stressed, like in Salamis, where a citizen of Samos, who is a member of the *philoi* group (the "friends" of the king), made a double dedication to Ptolemy Philometor (176–145 BCE) and to the city of Salamis, probably represented as a crowned Tyche (*I.Salamine*, n°67; Michel 2020, n°109). This singular divine pair symbolized the entanglement between the local and the global or imperial scale.

An honorific inscription from Amathous dating from the beginning of the second century BCE used approximately the same language:

> The City of Amathous (honored)
> Timonax son of Aristagoras
> because of his devotion *(eunoia)* to the king
> Ptolemy (Hellmann and Hermary 1980, 259–275; Michel, 2020, n°67)

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5 I am very grateful to Anaïs Michel who gave me the permission to use and quote her excellent dissertation, even before its publication in 2020.

This public inscription intended to pay homage to a citizen from Amathous, member of the local elite, who took care of Ptolemy's cult, most probably in a local shrine.

The high-ranking dignitaries of the imperial networks established in Cyprus displayed a slightly different strategy than Graeco-Egyptian dignitaries attested in Phoenicia. For instance, Isidoros from Antioch, who was "great intendant" (*archedeatros*) and member of the "royal court," offered a statue of Ptolemy, called *theos alexandros*, "divine Alexander," in the most prestigious sanctuary of the island, Aphrodite's sanctuary in Palaipaphos (Mitford 1961, 34, n°93; Michel 2020, n°99). Many *strategoi*, generals of the imperial army, did the same; making the presence of the king in Aphrodite's cult-place particularly visible. Again, the choice of Aphrodite's cult place is highly significant because the Paphian sanctuary is the symbol of the Cypriote heritage and a place where traditionally the royal power of the local kings was legitimated by the goddess' patronage (Pirenne-Delforge 1994). The Paphian kings were also the goddess' high priests.

In the Hellenistic period, when Cyprus was part of the Lagid Empire, even the local priests of the prestigious Paphian goddess made a dedication to Ptolemy IX Soter II, inscribed on the basis of his statue (*I.Paphos* 25; ca 105–81 BCE). The collusion between political and religious authorities was made very clear by the fact that the general (*strategos)* of the island bore the title of "high priest," at least since the end of the third century BCE (or the beginning of the second century). This important modification in the status of the highest Lagid official in Cyprus reflected the will to ground the royal cult more solidly and to institutionalize it, through the connection with the local rituals. In fact, the most important sanctuaries of the island—Aphrodite in Paphos, Zeus in Salamis, and Apollo in Kourion—hosted a gallery of royal portraits.

Another civic space used to promote the royal cult was the gymnasium, where many dedications to the Ptolemies have been found in different places. Statues of the kings were offered by local gymnasiarchs and probably set up near the traditional patrons of the agonistic activities, Hermes and Heracles. In the city of Chytroi, Ptolemy Philometor and the queen Cleopatra were honored together with Hermes, Herakles, and the Tyche of Chytroi (Mitford 1937, 33, n°8; Michel 2020, n°110). Gods and kings, traditional and new, shared the same space within the city, which benefited from new religious dynamics, bringing protection and prestige at the same time.

Finally, it is worth mentioning a bilingual inscription from Larnaka tis Lapithou, dating from the very beginning of the Lagid dominion on Cyprus, since it is probably connected to the decisive victory of Ptolemy I for the control over Cyprus in 295 BCE (Amadasi Guzzo 2015, 30–31; Bonnet-Bianco 2018):

> Greek: To Athena Savior Victory and (in favor of) king Ptolemy, Praxidemos son of Sesmas has dedicated this altar. Good Fortune!
> Phoenician: To Anat, Strength Life, and to Ptolemy, lord of the kings, Baalshillem son of Sesmay has dedicated this altar. Good Fortune! (*CIS* I, 95; *KAI* 42*)*

The dedicant Praxidemos/Baalshillem was most probably a member of the Cypro-Phoenician elite of the kingdom of Lapethos, who joined the new ruler of the island and decided to celebrate his recent victory by offering an altar. He dedicated it to the king and the goddess who made him successful in his military achievements. While in Phoenician, we have a double dedication, with Anat first and Ptolemy in the second position, in the Greek section of the inscription, which is carved on the top of the stone, before the Phoenician counterpart, we have the name of Athena first as well, with the dative case, and a *hyper* + genitive formula for Ptolemy. This hybrid solution, inspired by two Egyptian models analyzed above, was possibly adapted to the local religious landscape dominated by the prestigious Cypriote *Lady* or *wanassa,* considered through Greek eyes as Athena, and through Phoenician eyes as Anat, both characterized by their capacity to protect and attack. Like in the Wasta dedication, the initial model as propagated from the practices of the centre and by agents from the centre was reshaped by local customs and ended up in a creative compromise. By putting the emphasis on the crucial and efficient power of Athena and Anat, the bilingual inscription from Lapethos gives a prominent role to the local divine entity. It does so while paying homage to the new king and displaying the loyalty of the Cypriote elite, which rallied the Ptolemies.

3.6 Conclusion

The private and public dedications examined above attest to the diverse and complex relations between gods, kings and people during the Ptolemaic period in Egypt, Phoenicia and Cyprus. The subjects of the Ptolemies felt that they had to include the supreme political, military, and administrative authorities of the country in their acts of worship. The rulers, for their part, must have encouraged such initiatives, which granted them with legitimacy, prestige and stability. These strategies have clear parallels with what Rüpke (in the subsequent chapter) identifies as the "third authority" role played by religion in relation to the stability and legitimacy of the Roman Empire. The nuances of these new bonds were articulated in manifold ways and illuminate different aspects of the dedicants' perception of Ptolemaic imperial control.

Over the years, the cult forms addressing Ptolemaic kings became more complex and took part in a consolidation of the relations between rulers and subjects.

Dedications alluded to parallels between the royal and the divine couple, and even to intricate rituals, where human and divine powers collaborated in answering the dedicant's expectations and more broadly in shaping a new stable and fruitful order. The direct equation between gods and kings, the equal honors attributed to both, was also a social and cultural strategy aiming at promoting local cults in a global framework. Loyalty was a sort of Trojan horse that enabled the local elite to defend and even foster their own gods. Subtle agency, interweaving different levels of reality, produced middle grounds, where original reconfigurations took place. The divine nature of the royal pair was claimed, propagated and supported by multiple means and methods, not only on behalf of the Ptolemaic dynasty itself, but also thanks to prominent officials, members of the court, local elites, and military and religious authorities.

The penetration of the ruler cult gradually encouraged cross-cultural discourses, made of assimilations, identifications, and equivalences. Sarapis, Melqart, Herakles and Hermes, on the one hand, Isis, Aphrodite, Ashtart on the other hand, but also Tyche, Athena and Anat were regularly involved. The cross-cultural dynamics were substantially complex, cumulative and integrative, supported by the intrinsic plurality of polytheisms. Identifications were skillfully implied or expressed; cultic epithets contributed to defining a new ritual landscape, embracing different languages and religious status. The categorization of human and divine tended to blur, but only as far as the kings were concerned.

In what part of society do we find the drivers of these subtle shifts? Who was changing the scenery, cutting down or hampering the resistance, creating systems of alliance, and fostering transfers? The sparse documentation shows that the elites − political, military, economic, religious, and intellectual − who had much to lose and everything to gain in this "New Deal," were definitely involved, despite the fact that local monarchies, in Phoenicia and Cyprus, were abolished soon after Alexander's conquest (Bonnet 2015). While the persistent ideological framework which connected human and divine sovereignty was renegotiated, the emerging political agenda offered new stages for the ritualization of a global power locally rooted. These new forms of agency conveyed prestige and influence, but did not imply to renounce local roots and attachment to ancestral gods. In this, it is legitimate to speak of "middle ground" to describe the culture of the Hellenistic Empires, since it was in no way a choice between two cultures. Rather, the cultures were combined in varying degrees depending on the balance of power in different contexts, by developing a capacity for cultural *mimesis* that promoted integration —the key to success. All in all, the new shared (more or less imposed) ritual practices centered on the celebration of the imperial power and its capacity to echo local traditions participated in making the empire more stable, more visible,

more lasting. It also played an important role in providing a strong religious foundation to the imperial dominion and to the commitment of local elites.

In short, Greek "imperialism" ended up giving voice to Greek traditions, but also to Egyptian, Phoenician, Cypriote, in other words local cultures integrated in the "imperial repertories". These solutions enabled the many regional upper classes to successfully combine Hellenism and "micro-identities". The trend was, on the one hand, to "de-barbarize" local deities, dis-embed them from local contexts, incorporate them into international networks, and read them through the multifocal lens of cross-cultural equivalences; on the other hand, to exalt their "traditional" power rooted in a specific territory. In other words, the local and the global were linked using the royal cult as a platform for cross-cultural practices. This process ended up reinforcing at the same time the natural *multiperspectivness* of polytheisms and the human *adaptiveness* to new cultural environments. People empirically produced a language—words and images—which I would not call "syncretic," because it was not a matter of mixing or shaking, but a matter of appropriating, intertwining, reformulating, and finding an acceptable cultural balance between different intentions. All in all, "Imperialism" and "middle ground" are two concepts helpful to grasp the dynamics that transformed the religious landscape of the Hellenistic Near East. These terms insist on manifold strategies and agencies, on practices and imaginaries, and on local and all-encompassing orders.

To conclude, imperial histories imply many different strategies to gain the gods' support. Cultic honors tributed to human recipients, notably to the Hellenistic rulers, involved ritual and political agencies displayed in public spaces by local elites. In Phoenicia and in Cyprus, we traced imperial intermediaries keen to fulfil different objectives through interactions with the gods: bring legitimacy to new rulers, foster personal ties between the imperial power and their family, improve new transaction spaces for local and global regulations, reinforce symbolic resources for the imperial ideological framework. By adopting both a top-down and a bottom-up perspectives, and by focusing on the Phoenician and Cypriote case studies, which are not the core areas of the Ptolemaic empire, this chapter illustrates the "politics of difference" promoted by the Lagids: diversity and unity intertwined in the interactions with the gods. If the imperial cult remained of limited political importance, it provided a useful resource to connect local and global ritual habits.

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Jörg Rüpke

4 Religion in, for, and against the Roman Empire

In this chapter I claim that empire was more important for religion than religion for empire in the case of the ancient Mediterranean *Imperium Romanum.* This empire was conquered and ruled without monks or full-time priests. Religion was not even paramount for the legitimisation of power, but acted as a 'third authority'. As such, over the course of time it filled in the blanks left by the decreasing importance of local political authorities, establishing a dimension of rather than a competitor for empire. As such it provided some glue for the keeping together of the empire, but functioned also time and again as disruptor. The religious literature of that period, as far as it is preserved, offers a philosophical critique of religion and religious resistance to the empire.

4.1 Introduction

The Roman Empire was built on alliances, military occupation, and indirect rule via local elites (overview: Woolf 2012b). The power of the emperor rested primarily on his armies and economic resources, not likewise on ritual or divine status. Seen in the top-down perspective as introduced at the beginning of this book, religious legitimation was very restrictively used and directed at specific audiences or even appropriated by specific, geographically peripheral, political actors. Likewise, only some religious practices were very occasionally used in order to create unity throughout the empire. Certain religious practices and beliefs were even seen as dangerous and threatening to the imperial community, human sacrifice for instance, but also atheism and occasionally being a *Christianus.* This view of the administration (usually also functioning as judges) proved time and again correct, as manifold forms of resistance and rebellion demonstrated, including alternative calendars (the Gallic calendar of Coligny), hateful oracles ('Potter's Oracle', 'Sibylline oracles') and performances of 'martyrs', who demonstrated in their very bodies' their disdain to being imperial subjects.

Contrary to a long-standing tradition in scholarship on the Roman Empire, which was consequential to further reasoning about empires and religions, the establishment of a single out of several religions was not a primary aim. At the same time many people used religious practices and ideas to represent the empire at the centre as well as in many local contexts. Living and dead emperors were represent-

ed in the form of images and addressed as gods, usually on individual, peripheral initiative, thus producing central assent as much as attempts at control.[1] It is this bottom-up perspective that will be foregrounded in this chapter in a diachronic analysis with some thematical foci.

A single chapter cannot possibly summarize findings from disciplines as different as History of Religion, Ancient History, Ancient Judaism, New Testament Studies and Early Christianity, Classical Philology as well as Classical and Provincial Archaeologies, which all include or are even exclusively dedicated to religious phenomena of the period. This is above all due to the later history, a specific history of reception: Rome's religious history, encompassing as it did the entire Mediterranean basin as early as the second and first centuries BCE, is of fundamental importance for the religious history of Europe. It is this epoch that saw the emergence of a cultural space embracing Western, North-Western, Central and Southern Europe as well as the Middle East and North Africa, administratively and economically a tight-knit space that facilitated the rapid diffusion of ideas and media. This space and this epoch also saw the spread both of Christianity and of an aestheticized paganism that created the conditions for the Renaissance. The very rise of 'religions', imagined communities built on overlapping practices, ideas and even incipient institutions, which claim to be successful in establishing normative beliefs and rituals, is—in the long run—part of this history. The Roman Empire hence figures prominently in various genealogies as they were worked out by the above-mentioned disciplines and the groups and intellectual movements—from Rabbinic authorities and Christian churches to Classicist Humanism.

Roman imperial expansion was never driven by religious motives or religious agents. But once established, the empire created a space for actual movement and mediated discourse that enabled and shaped the diffusion and development of religious practices and ideas and was itself appropriated in the form of religious practices and ideas. This state of affairs defines the questions that need to be addressed within the framework of this comparative enterprise: In which ways were religious practices, beliefs, and institutions conducive to the building and running of the pre-Byzantine Roman Empire? Which types of religious media and discourses were employed as or turned out to be imperial practices? Who were the agents

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involved in these activities? And were they important or irrelevant for the empire? Last, but not least, one needs to ask about how religion changed in its entanglement with empire. It is entanglement with emergent religions, comparable with the Iranian and Mongol case, rather than the employment of or conflict with long-established religions as in the case of the Byzantine and Western European empires for instance, that is at issue here.

It was, as this chapter is going to show, the presence of 'empire' rather than the achievement of (or even aiming at) actual homogeneity that was characteristic of 'religion'. The latter had already an important role in creating publics and visible communication in those cities, on which the empire was build and by which the empire was controlled (Eck and Müller-Luckner 1999), but it also filled the imperial space beyond political and military power, legal frameworks and economic exchange. The empire became a space of religious imagination, too. The critical factor during the Roman Imperial Age was not a change or increase in the number of religions, but an alteration to the very phenomenon of 'religion' and its social and conceptual significance in the cities and towns of the Mediterranean world and its adjacent areas occupied by the *Imperium Romanum.* From a medium by which an individual could address human contingencies such as illness, insecurity, and death, and create a public political identity, it became a broad context for human life and the formulation of group identities and political legitimation (Rüpke 2014). Instead of competing 'religions' or 'cults', we can identify agents with very different agendas, appropriating and hence modifying signs deemed religious to various purposes, while professionals worked hard in order to establish and secure group boundaries (Rüpke 2018b, 2023a). In the end, it was the empire that had produced religions, not vice versa.

4.2 A Historical Overview

Starting as hegemonic power in Latium and Central Italy at the beginning of the third century BCE, Rome established itself as the dominant Italic power and an important Mediterranean player in the course of this century, not least by warfare in regions as distant as the Iberian peninsula or North Africa. By the beginning of the second century many major ports on Italian coasts were Roman colonies, Corsica with Sardinia as well as Sicily were annexed as 'provinces', growing parts of Spain and the Illyricum on the Eastern coast of the Adriatic followed. The second century saw expansions into today's Tunisia ('Africa'), mainland Greece and Western 'Asia minor'. By the end of the first century BCE, the coastal regions of the whole Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt in its totality had been added; Caesar's subjugation of Gaul in 58–50 BCE formed the basis for a slow expansion into Britain, today's

Netherlands and the Alpine regions. In the East Cappadocia and Armenia had been added to the area of deep Roman influence. Some religious media, inscriptions in particular, and cult practices were diffused by the military and adaptive provincial elites, but fundamentally, Roman religious practice focused on the city, departure from it and the display of success and booty on return to it. Without doubt, rituals like the triumph were among the incentives for expansionist moves by members of the Roman elite (Rüpke 2019, 2021a).

It was the ensuing period of Augustus' rule—more than half a century from his testamentary adoption by C. Julius Caesar (44 BCE) and his first consulate (43 BCE) to his death in 14 CE—that formed a 'saddle period' for the history of the Roman Empire and of religion due to its centralization of cultural developments and its planned territorial extension. The latter was to continue expansively for another century, finally including the Balkan south of the Danube, today's Romanina ('Dacia'), Mesopotamia, and a deep zone around the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean from Syria to 'Mauretania' (Morocco). Religiously, the new concerned the appropriation of the religious forms of aristocratic competition for the purposes of monopolised imperial patronage, initially in Rome, but (admittedly always only selectively and often with an inexplicably long delay) also in the entire Roman Empire. The construction of places of worship such as the holding of great games and extensive rituals ('games') should be mentioned in the first place, the dissemination of the imperial image outside Rome in the second. But it was a key period, perhaps to an even greater extent, in terms of the media presence, even doubling of religion. In the form of splendid inscriptions (protocols of the Arval brothers in the grove of the Dea Dia before the gates of Rome since about 30 BCE, the protocols of the Quindecimviri sacris faciundis about the secular games, 17 BCE) as well as in the form of murals and reliefs (Forum Augusti, Ara Pacis, *Res gestae divi Augusti*) and the buildings supporting them, some of them monumental, 'religion' was put on a permanent footing, beyond the brief performances of games of victory and triumphs. The emperor, supreme commander of the army and unrivalled patron, now offered an ideal projection surface, was God as well as a local legitimation resource. The sacralization of the figure of the emperor himself took place in phases, from the introduction of the cult of Genius Augusti in the city of Rome in 7 BCE to the intensification of the Flavian dynasty (Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, 69–96 CE) and the broad institutional anchoring since the middle of the second century CE. Asking this emperor for help was an important aspect of interaction and feeling as part of the empire (Lenski 2016, 87–164).

Empire was created by other forms of discourse, too, in the Augustan era. The historiography (Dionysius of Halicarnassos in Greek and Livy in Latin language) should be mentioned here, but also the poetic treatment of imperial achievements and the space and time thus created by first-century BCE authors like Vergil, Prop-

ertius or Ovid (Rüpke 2009, 2020b, 2023). These productions, drawing on forms and channels established by Hellenistic culture in the preceding centuries, fed into a space of is literary discourse, which increasingly exhausted the geographical vastness of the empire. In addition to the stories of the victors, the interpretations of the military-political losers from the Greek Polybius to the books of the Maccabees, books in the biblical tradition and the comparative perspective of Hellenistic Jews from Philo of Alexandria to Flavius Josephus became part of this, too. It must be stressed, however, that in the Greek-Roman area such literary production did never lead to a full parallel to the 'bible' with its long formation of religious texts that had emerged in different genres, from a largely fictitious historiography, prophetic social criticism and visions to exemplary narratives, collections of sayings and hymns in Judaism. Religion of the Roman centre could be exported rather in the form of images and rituals.[2]

With regard to cultural change brought about by imperial expansion, the focus must be clearly broadened beyond political change in the centre. This does not only concern the rapid diffusion, appropriation and modification of images produced at the centre, in public rituals of ruler cult or veneration of rulers in the form of private murals or garden architecture. Probably in the wake of economic and administrative mobility, captivity of war and urbanization, the diversity of religious imagery and ideas increased and furthered processes of individualization (in general, Fuchs et al. 2019). In close succession, the increasingly exotic imagery of the deities Isis and Sarapis, originally worshipped in Egypt, were moved westward into Italy and subsequently to the Eastern and Northern frontiers of the Empire. The same held true for astrology based on planetary deities, which had reached Italy in the second century BCE via Greece. If astrology was highly estimated on the basis of its 'Chaldean' origins, other practices were related to 'magoi' from the East. The use of cursing tablets *(tabellae defixionum)* and amulets, well established in the Eastern parts of the Mediterranean, had become conceivable. In addition to individual concerns about health, the attempt to influence love affairs or legal conflicts by such means was important, matters that were feared to be determined by competitors of higher social status (Gordon 2008, Gordon and Simón 2010).

In all cases, these were techniques that primarily dealt with problems of the social local area and increasingly imagined a world that was more contingent and less marked by social constraints than had previously been communicable. Even if different in their speed and paths of diffusion, these techniques joined the net-

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2 Compare to the use of monumental inscriptions on imperial initiative in ancient India and Iran (Olivelle and Canepa, this volume).

work of Asklepios sanctuaries, which penetrated from Greek Epidauros to the peripheral zones of the Hellenized world and treated diseases as individualized constellations. Here, as in many cultures, healing procedures and their social topography made statements about the relationship between a person and society (McGuire 1988, 240–257). Dreams became important, manuals were available for interpretation. The imperial era was experiencing a revival and spread of small local oracles (Bendlin 2006). Contemporary philosophy reflected on the precise position of the individual in the world *(oikeiosis)* and makes the soul as well as the Self key concepts. The development of the idea of an immortal soul had, however, not led to a widespread questioning of traditional religion (Burkert 2011, 446–448).

From the early Principate, that is, from the first century CE, it is necessary to mention further factors in order to describe the relationship of imperial development and religious change. This is first and foremost the role of space itself. Despite the typically very restricted area of everyday life for the majority of the inhabitants of the Imperium Romanum, the stable political conditions, the possibilities of safe travel and trade, the need for luxury goods in long-distance trade, the administrative elite operating throughout the empire and the military apparatus settling on the periphery of the empire, created a much larger uniform space of communication and movement. Its borders were as far as the Sahara, Mesopotamia, the Danube, as far as the Elbe and Scotland; trade links extended beyond this, as the numerous Roman coins found in southern India, for example, demonstrate that there was intensive trade across the Arabian Sea, the volume of which probably exceeded the land-based movements on the Silk Road.

'Religion' as a form of knowledge was part of such exchange, too. In the vastness of the space, in addition to the transfer of religious specialists (Wedekind 2012), the media of secondary communication, script and image, were of particular importance. Images above all assured the identity of religious signs and religious content in a society that was mostly illiterate. Model books for sculptors may have played an important role here. The design of Mithras cult rooms and bull killing reliefs offers an excellent example of this and yet also shows the high degree of remaining variability.[3]

The creation of texts was more important for the establishment of emergent religions in the long run, but more difficult to assess in its impact in the short run: Letters (as written by Paul) intended to establish communication links with specific recipients, whereas tracts of various genres (philosophical dialogues, historiography, biographies, reminder speeches) were addressed to an unspecified audience. In the long run, the two groups of texts hardly differed when they were put

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3 Clauss 1990; Beck 2007; a new study is being completed by Kevin Stoba, Liverpool.

together into collections and disseminated in larger networks (Rüpke 2011, 133–141). In detail, objects and intentions were very different. The authors of the so-called 'Second Sophism' came from the classical Hellenistic cultural area. In their often extensive works, Plutarch, Gellius, Lucian (Elm von 2006, Spickermann 2009), Pausanias or Athenaeus collected in the late first and in the second century local traditions and placed them in a universalized horizon by referring them implicitly or explicitly to the presence of the Roman Empire. Here, the attempt to preserve Greek tradition and religion under Roman rule or to redefine their role played an important role. In individual cases, religious traditions such as innovations could be subjected to biting criticism (in general, Whitmarsh 2013).

In the same situation, the reaction of cultural 'newcomers' could be just the opposite. In the same literary communication space, in the first and second centuries CE, Philon of Alexandria (already mentioned above) or Athenagoras of Athens wrote justifications of their religious position, Apuleius of Madaura defended himself against the accusation of magic. Attack and counterattack followed each other closely, as Celsus' criticism of Christianity and Origen's answer showed in the third century CE. Where addressees of such texts are named, it is not some chief priests of an opposing 'religion', but the respective provincial administrators or even the emperor himself: Religion gets into the eye of the authorities when it seems to disturb public order.

With the Jewish uprisings and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE (and its confirmation by Hadrian after the suppression of the Bar Kochba Uprising 132–135 CE), a special development occurred in Judaism (which was otherwise well integrated in the entire Mediterranean region) and intensified and exported the long-standing conflicts in the provincial area of Palestine. The recourse to interpretations of the earlier destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile led to numerous 'apocalyptic' texts. These demanded the destruction of political identity through a radicalization of the individual way of life and developed a theology of history in which the formation of great empires were functional for getting through the ages, but also had come to an end in the very shape of the Roman Empire. A 'heavenly Jerusalem' was developed as an end-time and transcendent alternative. Religion became a fundamental alternative to the present society, as it had been presented several times also for other 'axis-temporal' religions (Eisenstadt 1987). From whatever side, however, the Roman empire became a central point of reference for any attempt to determine identities.

These developments were in many instances not endangering the day-to-day running of the empire, but they were raising the question of religious authority. The publicly financed rituals of Greek and Roman cities had been determined by a rather diffuse distribution of religious authority among the regularly changing magistrates and a multitude of 'honorary' priests, mostly from the urban elites.

With the increasing importance of religion for individual ways of life, the demands and authority of religious specialists from other echelons of society were also growing. The priestly medical specialists of the Asklepios shrines had demonstrated this since the fourth century BCE. Thanks to a regional epigraphic fashion, the unique collection of Anatolian 'confessional inscriptions' from Lycia and Phrygia reveal the role of priests in the diagnosis and therapy of morally and ritually disturbed relationships with god(s) in the first and second centuries CE (Petzl 1994, 2006).

With the growing importance of religious texts, even of books, the question of authority arose differently. Upper-class authors or stars of public rhetorical competitions did not need being authorized by visions or pseudepigraphic constructions or claims of genealogies, as we can observe them in the field of Judaism and its sectarian formations (Ezra, Enoch, Paulus, John, Hermas). We can observe the tremendous importance that texts had for groups that formed at the cultural margins in the vast space of the Imperium Romanum, in particular in Christianity, which is to be addressed as a Jewish subgroup at least for the first two centuries CE. The production of group identity through shared texts and shared practices of reading and interpreting was accompanied by mistrust of the very mechanism on which such success was based: any new text harboured the danger of a new 'heresy', that is, religious competition. Here, as for other religious traditions, Rome becomes an important organizational center without stopping the productivity of the old East Mediterranean centers—Athens, Antioch, Alexandria.

With regard to contents, religious debates and their concepts were more and more related to religious practices. Neo-Platonism provided a theoretical justification for the polytheistic traditions of antiquity for the first time. In the rational discourse it was on an equal footing with the tradition of (especially Platonic and Stoic) 'philosophy' and the latter's reception by religious groups (like Judaism and Christianity, which increasingly gained their own profile). In Neo-Platonism, even new ritual forms of dealing with the gods were developed in the form of theurgy (Berchman 1998; Frede 1999).

The *constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 CE had turned the majority of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire into Roman citizens and probably also reminded them of their duty to stand up for the community among the gods. The increasing importance of religion, which was becoming tangible in this document, and the correspondingly increasing drawing of boundaries between religiously defined groups laid the foundation for the growing number and severity of religious conflicts in Late Antiquity (Mayer 2020). Paradoxically, the increased weight of the individual in religion was not associated with greater freedom of choice in a 'market of religions', but with the compulsion to publicly profess an alleged religious identity (North 2010; see also North 2003) and to remain in conformity with it. Never-

theless, the model of a struggle of 'religions', which would also endanger the cohesion of the empire, is missing the point. There are two main reasons for this. On the one hand, many religious identities remained partial and situational. When visiting the theatre, when inviting a friend, when communicating with equals in the political arena, traditional social and political identities were more important than religious ones, the latter perhaps not being considered at all. Secondly, one must not underestimate the numerous shared social spaces. The market, the circus, large houses and blocks, even the above-ground and underground burial places and the sarcophagi were shared spaces. The latter were determined by growing and increasingly complex, yet often shared, worlds of images, which were characterized above all by the (cross-religious!) trend towards bodily burial.

The fact that already at the beginning of the fourth century the Christian bishop Eusebius of Caesarea wrote and argued his own 'church history' exemplifies the efforts of the increasingly organized religious groups to build their own identity and the emergence of religions in this period. The same author's biography of the emperor Constantine demonstrates how close this is related to the 'appropriation' of the central position of power, the point of reference shared by all. Only in a long, eventful, and repeatedly violent process was this shared world subjected to a hegemonic Christian reinterpretation. The *Codex Theodosianus*, collecting laws from the fourth and fifth centuries CE impressively illustrates this process (Noethlichs 1986, 2001). The conclusion of the Christianization of the administration of the Roman Empire did no run parallel to its bolstering, but its fragmentation. Already during the third century CE the Roman Empire contracted and lost provinces for some decades in Gaul or Syria and permanently in the Germanies, Dacia, and to the Persians. During the fifth century CE the Western half fell into pieces. The Roman Empire of Late Antiquity, of the fifth to seventh centuries CE was a world of high connectivity, held together and fragmented by and along very different lines of cultural practices and differences. Religion certainly served both ends down into the Byzantine and Islamic empires treated in subsequent chapters. We have to take an even closer look at it, starting from the top-down perspective and inquiring about what religion might provide for empire.

4.3 Religion

The 'Roman religion' of the late Republic and the Imperial Age had a long history, and had arisen in constant cultural exchange (on the concept, Burke 2009) with the states and cultures of Central Italy and Etruria and the Greek and Hellenistic world (Altheim 1930; Ferrary 1988; Rüpke 2012b). That exchange should certainly not be thought of as peaceful, but lacked the dimension of religious warfare (Rüpke

2016e, 2006). Rome was part of a world characterized by 'interstate anarchy' (Eck-stein 2006). Its development was marked by an ongoing exchange of goods and populations, war plunder and enslavement, the formation of alliances, competition, and exclusion. Religious practices were heterogeneous, local, and individual: an aspect that has been far too sparsely illuminated by research (Rüpke 2016b). At the same time, however, religious practices were an instrument of political and social cohesion, especially at the elite level, and set store by control, centralization, and presence. 'Public' rituals were led by magistrates; 'public' priesthoods were filled by members of the senatorial elite as we have seen; military and economic successes were memorialized in rituals and sacral architecture.

And yet, the gods, which were called to life by the commissioning of statues and temples eluded control and were seen to display agency. They announced their displeasure in portents, destroyed their own temples by lightning, and did not stir from the spot when a temple renovation was planned. Immigrants from Italy and beyond took their own gods along, disrupting the imagination of public and priestly control. Internally, too, political conflicts could be exacerbated by conflicting readings of the signs supposedly sent by the gods. Precisely because it was not entirely subject to political control, religion offered an important source of legitimation for rule, remaining a 'third authority' (Simmel 1908, 203–206). Neither the publicly financed cult nor a particular 'pantheon'—the sum of individual decisions in respect of importations and innovations, only partly subject to social or political control—provided a basis for the categorization of such a religion. Codifications of religious traditions were also absent. The idea of codifying religion as a form of knowledge, which was so important later, did not arise in Rome until the Late Republic, to be rendered in written form in texts that do not appear until after the end of the Republic.[4] They remained largely without influence. It is not until attempts were made to perpetuate religious groupings that do not coincide with political or ancient cultural boundaries that we see successful processes of canonisation on the basis of ancient textual traditions: in this way, 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' endeavoured to invent themselves and differentiate themselves the one from the other (Stroumsa 2009; briefly, Stroumsa 2008).

The corollary is that 'religion' should neither be understood primarily in organizational terms nor primarily investigated on the basis of symbols or signs (although these are certainly of central importance) but as a form of communicative action. People (usually in social contexts, but always as socially constituted actors) attempted to enter into contact with 'gods', to communicate with them and so, in

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4 Cicero's second book *On the laws* at the end of the 50s BCE, Varro's *Antiquities human and divine* a few years later. See Bendlin and Rüpke 2005; Rüpke 2012b, 172–204; 2020c, 62–87.

turn, to communicate with one another about that communication concerning the gods. Such a definition of religion is predicated on action, which itself requires the —highly risky (Rüpke 2015, 2021b)—assumption that superhuman addressees have a social presence. Such a definition is not predicated on the transient cultural forms that assume the task of codifying contingency or legitimizing rule: and it is only such a definition that allows us to comprehend the change in the functional spectrum of 'religion' that, in my estimation, appears to be characteristic of the religious changes of the first to fourth centuries.

In the following, I will sketch the forms of the shared religious language established during this period within the space of the Roman Empire, thus taking a look at the bottom-up establishment of a cultural space underlying imperial politics and administration (4). As indicated, the starting point is religious communication initiated by individual agents employing, inscribing themselves into, and thus modifying local (and also translocal) textual or iconographic, frequently narrative traditions.[5] This is followed by a brief look at the calendar as reformed by Caesar, which has been claimed to be above all an instrument for the ruling of the empire (5). The limited capacity of this calendar to establish imperial order will lead back to the question of the role of cult of the emperor. The bottom-up perspective to be employed pays tribute to the geographically and chronologically extreme uneven spread of the relevant practices; religious practices thus appear as an instrument of the appropriation rather than propagation of empire (6). Finally, the chapter will return to literary communication and will take a look at how the empire figured in contemporary literary religious texts, stressing again the appropriation of Empire rather than its administrative bolstering (7).

4.4 The Formation of a Shared Religious Language

Many religious phenomena within the Roman Empire were of a regional character. The cultic veneration of the Roman Senate—in difference to cults of Roman provincial governors or Dea Roma—flourished in Asia, discernible by such signs as youthful portraits of the *Genius senatus* on coins.[6] The cult of the imperial family under the name of 'the divine house' (*domus divina)* flourished in Upper Germany (Herz 2003). Even for the cult of the ruler no generalized programme of the institutionalisation of such cult is attested. This holds true for imperial cult in individ-

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5 Cf. for the limited role of texts in the formation of lasting groups, Rüpke 2016d; Rüpke 2016a.
6 I owe this suggestion to Günther Schörner; see e.g Schörner 2011.

ual cities as for supra-regional shrines of the imperial cult across entire provinces or regions: the 'Altar of three Emperor' (*Ara trium Augustorum,* at Lyon), the 'Altar of the (tribe of the) Ubii' (*Ara Ubiorum,* Cologne), or the Greek 'Common institutions' (*koina)* on the basis of a couple of provinces. Probably, it was diffusion due to the habitual practice of members of the provincial administration that was at work here and which should not be underestimated (Haensch 2006, Haensch 1997). Even at this level, however, any interest in institutional uniformity in the religious dimension of the provincial administration was conspicuous by its absence. These observations are not really surprising, if we keep in mind the geographical character of the Roman Empire.[7]

If we are nevertheless looking for a religious *koine,* it is easily found at the level of media. The tradition of Roman-period religious practices is dominated by dedicatory and funerary inscriptions, that is, gifts to the gods that are accompanied by writing. They continue, intensify and massively diffuse preceding Greek practices far into Western, even analphabetic cultures. This is a fascinating fact in itself, easily lost from sight behind statistics of gods' names and the search for social statistics for patrons. Bringing along a new cultural technique, a new language and massive processes of conceptual and iconographic translation, new provincial religions on the blueprint of the Mediterranean practices were created (stressed by Spickermann 1997, Spickermann 2006). The construction of lasting monuments bearing or accompanied by inscriptions began outside Greek-influenced cultural spaces in the first post-Christian century. It reached its apogee not before the second half of the second century CE, before dramatically collapsing in the post-Severan period in the mid-third century. These short and usually massively abbreviated texts in large and mostly highly visible letters were not only an indicator of Romanization and literacy but represented a change in religious practice with far-reaching consequences (Haensch 2007; see also Spickermann 2015). It brought a new communicative dimension to religious activity, reaching far beyond those participating in the ritual of plea and thanks. It was individualising (Beard 1991; Rüpke 2016b, 122–123; 2020c, 145–165, see above) and durably documenting religious activity. Even where divine addressees were not present in the form of cult images or by means of clear topographical references (to a source, river, mountain), they could be differentially marked and given lasting presence by being

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7 The geography of the Mediterranean shoreline is marked by the small-scale nature of the topography (Horden and Purcell 2000). See also Woolf 2012a, Horden and Purcell 2005: Certainly, the Mediterranean Sea provided the possibility of rapid links, to be discerned in isolated cases as early as the second millennium BCE, and to a more intensive degree in the aftermath of Alexander the Great. The fragmentation of the surrounding coasts, however, led to regional differentiations, especially when associated with that same ease of contact.

named in writing. Space was thus provided for the formation of new tradition and for highly individual forms of religious practices. These were indicative and sometimes certainly consciously expressive of a cult competence that did not rely on the often, particularly outside of towns, limited religious infrastructure.

The permanent medium of the dedicatory inscription customarily refered back to a ritual just as common: the vow (Rüpke 2018a). The use of identical or even abbreviated formulas needed not imply that the agent had a precise conceptual knowledge of either the ritual or the deities named. Manifold variations without detectable differences in meaning are a testimony to that. However, the use of such names and formulas allowed participating in a religious *koine* and the culture shared by local elites and central holders of power.

Other rituals, requiring far more infrastructure, became part of this *koine.* Contests and enactments requiring the improvised but frequently monumental construction of theatres and amphitheatres (Bernstein 2007) were probably the most popular and survived far beyond the temporal bounds of Antiquity. From Africa to Britannia, the existence of such structures signified the presence of Roman culture.[8] Few cities, barring some in Syria, were excluded from this form of religious expression (Sartre 2005). Further architectural signs, such as temples and anthropomorphic statues, became densely widespread to a greater extent than had already occasionally been the case since the mid-first millennium BCE, in an Eastern-Mediterranean tradition that extended into the Celtic world. This is not without general significance for the development of polytheistic religion, which in this way acquired the ability to establish lasting differentiations between divine forms independently of language and the choice of 'natural' locations.

The attraction exerted by these religious techniques produced a multitude of hybrid forms in the Roman Empire, the most common being different attributes for the same deity and different names for the same iconographic sign. Even ancient, complex religious traditions were capable of adopting the new 'fashions'. At first sight, Syrian temples have the aspect of classically Greco-Roman structures; it is only upon closer inspection that they suggest other kinds of ritual and perhaps other theological concepts: where the roof of Greco-Roman temples is protection against rain, here, as in similar Egyptian structures, it becomes an important space for cult activities.

The common grammar facilitated mobility and encouraged the trans-local stabilisation of signs, names and images. Ruminant users as well as providers of such religious signs and related practices shared an interest in that. On part of the former such an interest must not be seen as continuing 'membership' in a empire-

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[8] For Gaul see Lobüscher 2002. See also Mihajlović and Janković 2020.

wide and stable 'cult', as generation of scholars had it.[9] Yet, it rendered the empire also a space of shared interpretations in the pragmatist sense of Charles Sander Peirce, that is, interpretations that were interested not simply in some cognitive 'meaning', but in the possibilities of what the use of the sign might effect (Peirce 1991; see Short 2007).

4.5 Calendars

What about the integration and attempts of integration of the empire with regard not to space, but time? The revolutionary transformation of the Roman calendar by C. Iulius Caesar in the first century BCE produced something suitable for an empire, and indeed, with the very slight modifications of the Gregorian reform by the end of the 16th century, it is this calendar that serves many parts of the world today. And yet, despite the revolutionary character, the steps taken and the modifications implemented were achieved in a basically conservative society, which was certainly not the most advanced in terms of astronomic competence at the time. Rather than enabling empire, the calendar profited from it. The lasting impact of the political and military formation of the Roman Empire was crucial for the Roman calendar's long-term success—as well as accounted for the resistance in the form of counter-calendars.[10] It hardly accounts for the shape and the thoroughness of the short-term development.

From as early as the beginning of the second century BCE, the Roman calendar gained currency (not: monopoly) in Latium as a medium of religious memorialization, with its 'feast days' (*feriae*) and 'temple foundation festivals' (*dies natales templorum*). But it was not until the Julian calendar reform in 46 BCE that the graphic form of the calendar, called *fasti* by the Romans, acquired a popularity that led to the sometimes enormous Italic marble calendars of the Augustan and Tiberian era (Rüpke 2003; cf. Feeney 2007). While such calendars at first recorded the traditional religion of the city of Rome in all its breadth, especially the new foundation days relating to the many temple restorations (Galinsky 2007, 73–74), the genre was quickly dominated by the growing number of imperial festivals with their exhaustive historical notes ('because on this day member of the imperial house X performed deed Z').

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9 The whole series of the *Études préliminaires des religions orientales* was built on that concept; see the critique in Rüpke 2012a.

10 See the ever broadening analyses of Stern and Burnett 2014, Stern 2012, Stern 2002, Stern 2001. For counter-calendars see e. g. Monard 1999, Olmsted 1992, Simon 2014 on the imperial-period Celtic calendar of Coligny, in many details building on the structure of the Roman calendar grid (*fasti).

This had media-related consequences. Marble was not a suitable material to accommodate promptly not only the rapid increase in imperial festivals, but also erasures upon successions of rule. The content of later texts[11] shows that the layers of festivals of the great dynasties—Augustus, Vespasian, the adoptive emperors, contemporaneous rulers—dominated the calendar. Outside of Rome, from the time of the Flavian municipal laws onwards, holidays were defined where legal business was prohibited 'owing to the veneration due to the imperial house' (c. 92 = *Lex Irnit.* 10 B 25–51; see Rüpke 1995, 540–546). These were highly prized as days for local rituals of a public or private nature (Herz 1975).

In a world of many local calendars, the importance of common, correctly interpreted festival dates should not be underestimated, both as confirmation of the old, personal timeframes of 'migrants' and as a sign of the trans-local persistence of this form of religious communication. Cult dates relating both to the ruling house and to deceased emperors already characterized the calendar in the first century CE, and not only in central Italy. And yet, local calendars remained the basic instruments for daily life beyond that region. They formed the basis for changes that allowed to bring such calendars in line with the Roman calendar and thus to allow predictable 'exchange rates' of dates. Such calendar reforms during the epoch of Caesar and Augustus frequently built on imperial celebrations as determinants of the year and for naming months.[12]

We do not know which material form the Julian calendars took in many cities, particularly in Western Europe and North Africa. We can only make surmises about the local festivals present in such documents. But we know about one element, which must have been present, that is festivals of the living emperor, but also earlier founders of dynasties or members of the imperial family, a practice prepared by the urban development as outlined above. The most detailed document is a law from the Flavian township of Irni in the center of the Hispania Baetica, probably documenting a law from Domitian's time (González 1986).

It is the imperial festivals that are declared imperative for this place of Latin law—and probably in like manner throughout the empire. The terminology is imprecise. The term *feriae*, which had been the technical term for 'holidays', implying restrictions in legal and some types of agricultural business, was modified and in the long run supplanted by the term 'festive day' (*dies festus).* The latter had lost

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11 Thus in particular the monumental *Fasti porticus* mural calendar in the city of Rome (Rüpke 1995, 86–90), and the *Feriale Duranum*, a list of military festivals, likewise of the Severan era, from the Mesopotamian garrison town (P. Dura 54 = Fink 1971, no. 117). For a summary of more recent research see Reeves 2004; cf. Haynes 2013, 207–226.

12 A good example is the calendar reform in the province of Asia, with its year starting on Augustus' birthday, Laffi 1967.

some of those associations, which the term *feriae* implied, but which were valid only for institutions of the city of Rome (and its surroundings). Outside of the precise context of the Roman calendar, *feriae* became a loose term for a sequence of days without public business, particularly related to periods of harvesting.

As a consequence, locally or regionally different calendars subsisted, apart from a few symbolically highly loaded days the central and provincial administrations did not invest in homogeneisation, but accepted a 'culture of difference' (for which see Bonnet, chapter 3 this volume). It did not even matter whether the birthday of Augustus was addressed as a '23rd September' or the start of a new year, whether a summer or autumn month was given the name of the emperor. Translatability was judged important, hence, lunar calendars were more and more fixed in length or even supplanted by calendars that were solar under a surface of seemingly lunar months. Only against such a background can the *return* of Jewish groups to an empirical lunar calendar be seen in its qualities of resistance and separation from the hegemonic Roman empire.[13] The Roman administration as well as the Roman army employed the central calendar even for their local clients or auxiliary troops. The papyrus fragments of such a document from Mesopotamia at the beginning of the third century CE, the so-called *Feriale Duranum* gives an idea of the mixture of participating in urban Roman religious traditions and a complex map of imperial dynasties and loyalties projected onto the course of the year and performed in (mostly small-scale) rituals at the headquarter of the unit (Dirven 1999, Kaizer 2006, Kaizer 2016).

4.6 The Emperor in Cult

Religion is a spatial practice, too (Knott 2008, Knott 2005; Meyer 2014). Religious practices are taking place in concrete space and are thereby creating and sacralising places. Above all, however, it is a practice bringing the *beyond of the specific place* into that place, by addressing persons, powers or objects that have powers far beyond the moment and the place or are present in the very place in a particularly thorough manner, depending on their character as for instance in ancient religion Olympian deities or local *genii*. For Mediterranean religious practices of the imperial age, this space-referential capacity was of particular importance. What is usually treated under the heading of 'imperial cult' is interpreted as establishing a personal relationship between emperor and patron (if not merely ex-

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13 Shown in detail by Stern 2001; cf. Ben-Dov and Doering 2017, Ben-Dov 2012 for preceding or alternative practices. On the wider range of forms of resistance see for instance Rudich 2015.

pressing the latter's loyalty).[14] More than that however, directly addressing the emperor in religious communication or bringing him (or her or them) into such communication as additional beneficients *(pro salute)* was a religious strategy developed with regard to the capacity of creating particular space. In scholarship, by talking about 'imperial cult' attention is paid to the political value at the centre and the diffusion of the practice from the centre to a geographically defined periphery. However, given the incoherent, extremely slow, and rarely centrally instigated diffusion of imperial cult, the following account will focus on the option offered by these practices to bottom-up initiatives, to the religious agency of different people (Rüpke 2020a).

Religious communication with a new addressee was easy to set in train. Just a few conventional signs or activities, altars, candles, incense, either alone or in combination, made it recognisable as such. Whether it would be judged to be appropriate by those attending or observing was far less simple to foresee. For the initiative did not have to lie with social or political elites. The involvement of living or recently deceased individuals (in possession of relatives) as new addressees in religious communication, a divine Marius or a divine Iulius, was to that extent no less charged a project than the involvement of established deities perhaps belonging to opposing groups or ethnicities, Isis and Serapis for instance, repeatedly established and thrown off the Capitoline hill during the years preceding (Varro, *ant. rer. div.* fr. 46 Cardauns).

While the religious initiative might distinctly enhance the agency of those who took the initiative, it was important to win allies for such ventures, perhaps even beyond the circle of already existing followers. Before 15 BCE at Beneventum, the arriviste Publius Veidius Publii filius Pollio, remembered in literature for his cruel practice of feeding slaves to moray eels, erected a 'Caesareum' for Augustus and the colony (*CIL* 9.1556; cf. Cass. Dio 54.23.1–6). Sometime later at Ferentinum, Sextus Hortensius Clarus erected not only an 'Augusteum', but a forum and an ancillary building for the citizens. He marked the dedication of the building, erected at his own expense and on his own land, with a great banquet (*CIL* 11.7431; further examples in Hänlein-Schäfer 1985, 89–93). It was social climbers especially who gained a new quality of public presence by successfully establishing a cult locale or annual ritual (Ladage 1980; cf. Japanese emperor cult: Yuge 1985). This made them more ready to cover the costs arising from such projects, and to commit their own time to performing associated functions. This is demonstrated by the many exam-

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14 Important insights were reached by Price 1984b; see also Clauss 1999 and the contributions in Cancik and Hitzl 2003 as well as Brodd and Reed 2011, Gasparini 2016, all concentrating on the practices and everyday realities of the cult of the reigning or previously consecrated emperors.

ples of Augustales in Italy (Abramenko 1993, Pappalardo 1995, Silvestrini 1992; Gasparini 2014). Many participants stood to gain from the extension of religious activity.

To make the addressee of religious communication the far-away ruler in Rome doubtless constantly evoked surprise; but it had much in its favour when seen against the background of the risks involved in religious communication and the selection respectively constitution of its addressees. The Roman ruler's existence could scarcely be doubted. His power too was undeniable, even if the assertion of its relevance to any particular situation may not have been indubitably plausible in every case. It was presumably more readily disputed by the denizens of distant, wealthy provincial cities or remote rural districts than by Italics, men with Roman citizenship, or those newly subjected. To all, however, the *princeps* of the moment offered an unambiguous point of reference, a person whose face was here and there to be seen, his name read, the effects of his actions related (Ando 2003).

Widespread reflection on what it meant to be human had found expression in the emergence of the term 'Good Gods' (*di manes)* on large numbers of gravestones since the latter part of the first century BCE,[15] a context easily overlooked when analysing the cult of the ruler. An answer also emerged to the question as to whether and how rulers should be addressed in political or religious communication. Within the field of possible positions, *divus,* 'divine', marked an understanding of the transition in terms of a sharply defined distinction. Formally speaking a personal title, the word's use signified an assertion of the identity of human being and god.

In Rome, the senators or the heirs provided the necessary basis for such an assertion by means of the consecration ritual. In figurative and partly also ritual terms, the metaphor of the ascent to heaven was central, whether in the form of a soaring eagle or of a journey on Sol's chariot.[16] The ascent could be observed. Like the appearance of a new star, a comet in Caesar's case, or the empty tomb with the rock pushed aside in the case of Jesus, it was empirically comprehensible or authenticated by eyewitnesses. The established ritual referred back to ancient narratives, beginning with Romulus, and repeated them reliably and observably. It always took place on the Field of Mars (topographical context and development see Albers 2013, 206–211). The organizers always released an eagle, whose ascent everyone could observe. There was always a funeral pyre, even when the corpse had long been disposed of (thus Jaccottet 2013). This theology of ascent or 'Ascension' was unsophisticated. As we shall see below, however, it permitted oversight.

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15 See Bettini 2009. Cf. Raepsaet-Charlier 2002 on the diffusion and the problems of dating.
16 This was still valid in the early fourth century: Rosenbaum-Alföldi 2015.

In a longer perspective, the Augustan age signified a time of radical change in the West, where, for the first time, rulers alive or dead were addressed wholesale in religious communication as *divi*. The threshold of this phenomenon did not simply sink in the course of the following centuries; rather, there were trends and countertrends.[17]

The same cannot be said of the alternatives to this sharply marked ascent from human being to god. They lacked in similar control and ritual standardization. The richest associations derived from the conception that the other, and above all the ruler, might be the epiphany of a known god. To incorporate this assumption into one's own project of religious communication was not only to honour the individual thus identified; it also opened up a rich spectrum of images and narratives that could be called upon to further enhance the plausibility of that project. But the contrary procedure may have been more important in everyday reality. The importance and contingent relevance of an address to a known god might be enhanced by association with personal and political facets of the identified individual. An obvious choice was the figure of Hercules (Jaczynowska 1981, Ritter 1995, Schultz 2000): energetic, creative of order, and at the same time himself a human being promoted to divine status; thus an exemplar of the matter at issue here. But the spectrum was broader. It extended from Jupiter, the main political god of the city of Rome, and Zeus, who played a comparable role in many cities of the Eastern Mediterranean world, via the triumphant Dionysos (translated as Liber Pater), to Apollo and Romulus Quirinus. In many instances, the individual affected suggested such identifications himself, by making a god a particularly important personal addressee, sponsoring temples or games to him or her, or dressing the part.

The clearly established autonomy of human personality itself provoked the question as to its ontological status, its place in an order in which angels, demons, and gods, while self-evident players, were in detail enigmatic, and in their situative identification controversial.[18] Of the possible positions, two were frequently chosen and rapidly institutionalized. One of these was the *Numen Augusti*, a 'power of assent' attaching to the Augustus. According to Varro, qualities such as this were assigned above all to Jupiter (Varro, *Ling.* 7.85; cf. Livy 7.6.8–11). It now provided a possible formulation for an addressee located beyond a situation and yet ascribed effective power within it. This concept was propagated by provincial administrations and elites in the context of prominent religious activity, for example in

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[17] See Fishwick 2002. On the nexus of tradition around the deification of Antinous see Renberg 2010.

[18] On the other hand, the utmost variety of local conceptions could lie concealed behind a concept such as 'angel' (*angelos*; Cline 2011, 75); see also Fauth 2014; Muehlberger 2013.

founding and operating central cult locales (Fishwick 2002, 234). In similar fashion, many actors rapidly appropriated (and thus shaped[19]) the concept of *genius* on their own account. Both, *genius* and *numen*, remained restricted to the Western, Latin speaking part of the Empire.

But theology was secondary to these enterprises, even if questions of how 'really' a god might be present in her or his image, were widely discussed, not least in the emerging Christian groups (Francis 2012, 146–147). Bringing a potent empire-wide actor into the local context laid at the bottom of ruler cult. The principal had thereby enhanced the status of his or her petition: while, of course, in consequence, having to respond to the challenge of giving suitably lavish form to the act of communication in question. This also applied to the case where the Augustus or Augusti were not directly addressed by the principals, but were included, perhaps along with their family, as a beneficiary of a communication with divine addressees: 'for the emperor's wellbeing' was a formula frequently used across all religious orientations.[20]. The choice unmistakably implied a claim to a relationship with the ruler as a person; its extension to the entire imperial family, the 'house of the *divus*' (*domus divina*), was accordingly unproblematic.[21]

This method of including the Augusti in religious communication locally was plausible because they were present in many ways, extending from the uncommon form of direct communication by letter—in the case of town councils and officials —to the figurative presence, not only of the rulers, but also of their growing children. In some cases, for example in imperial villas such as that at Chiragan (Martres-Tolosane in southern France), these were even on view in the form of true-to-age statue-portraits (Fig. 4.1). Especially when having such portraits created, local principals or patrons often entered into correspondence. This served both to ensure the quality of the portrait (and perhaps ascertain the subject's current likeness) and to draw attention to the personal initiative undertaken (e.g. Eck 1995). However, in making known their desire to establish religious veneration of the emperor on a permanent basis, it was not only with the centre in Rome that city representatives entered into more intensive communication. Such ventures were at the same time competitive forays against other cities of the region. This was true especially of the densely urbanized areas of Asia Minor (Price 1984a). In the cities of the Greek East, such initiatives were very carefully monitored, not least by organized mutual festival delegations, and judged to be an element of com-

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19 For the concept of 'appropriation' see Certeau 1984.

20 Reynolds 1962. This also applies to writers in a Christian context, such as Tertullian (*apol.* 29–30) and Lactantius (e.g. *mort. pers.* 34.5), see Kahlos 2011, 261–266.

21 On the emergence of this concept see Wardle 2009, 480–483. On the formula *in honorum domus divinae* see Cesarano 2015; generally on the family as *domus* Saller 1984; Hölkeskamp 2014.

Fig. 4.1 Bust of Marc Aurel, the future emperor (Augustus), as a member of the imperial family and designated successor. Found in the imperial Villa at Chirargnan, now on display in the Museum of Antiquities Saint Raymond, Toulouse, Ra 61a. Photo: Didier Descouens, CC-SA 4.0. Source: https://com mons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:(Toulouse)_Buste_de_Marc_Aurèle_César_-_Musée_Saint-Raymond,_Ra_ 61_a.jpg.

petition for renown. A delegation from Ptolemais-Barca in North Africa, sent in 154 CE to the feast of the Capitolia established by Domitian, was warned by Antoninus Pius that its visit created a precedent for yet more (unnecessary) competition (Rutherford 2013, 440–441, Text G4). The warning appears to have helped. There were alternative avenues available. The title *neokoros*, 'guardian of the imperial cult', represented an official distinction in this competition between cities for prestige (Friesen 1993; *theoriai:* Rutherford 2007, Rutherford 2013). Coins minted centrally, distributed above all by means of military wages, and bearing the portraits of the Augusti, brought the emperor's figurative presence, which underlay all these activities, into the everyday (Norena 2001, Chancey 2004, Williams 2007).

The reference to the ruling Augustus was rich in possibilities. The ruler might appear as a military victor and protector, as the quintessence of piety in the pose of sacrifice, as a generous patron, as a savior in natural catastrophes, as a source of wellbeing. This diversity was reflected far from Rome in individual interventions and donations recorded on building inscriptions, in the Augustus' presence on military standards or in the form of statues, and in images and legends on coins. In these respects, the invocation of an emperor person became plausible as it was related to a person perhaps never seen, but unambiguously existent. It was also rendered plausible in its special 'divine' quality by the minor rituals and major festivals celebrated by Roman administrators and soldiers as for instance documented in the lists of festivals used by units of the Roman army (Reeves 2004, Fishwick 1988, Fink, Hoey and Snyder 1940; Rüpke 1990, 174–176). In this way, it offered every subject of the emperor a reference point that was at one and the same time individual and socially plausible.[22]

However, the increasing sacralisation of the Augusti through the images they disseminated and the etiquette by which they formalized access to their persons also increasingly restricted the scope and flexibility of such references (Hekster 2011). The possibility of treating the particular quality of the ruler in reflection and conversation—especially after his death—was to this extent reduced. It was the senators and intellectuals of the Principate who were able to discuss the boundaries of human potential using the emperor as an example, without awaiting the passage of a great interval of time.[23]

Images of the emperors increasingly characterized the cityscape. Independently of all other considerations, the material used, say, for statues itself tells us what the agenda was: a statue made of gold and ivory had to represent a god. Nobody

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22 Further developed by Ando 2001, Ando 2003, Ando 2013. Demonstrated for instance for Paul by Maier 2013.

23 See e.g. Seneca, *On clemency* 1.10.3: no belief in divinity on command. On changes in genres and themes see also Haake 2011.

after C. Iulius Caesar drew on such materials for himself during his own lifetime (Lapatin 2010, 150; see also Pollini 2012).

The enormous lag in time of any dense spread of such practices—despite central support, when asked for—was characteristic of all the fields of religious diffusion from the centre. Typically, the initiative came from local agents and was well received, sanctioned or even supported by the imperial centre in response to that. Politics of difference, as suggested in the beginning, were fundamental. This is not to say that the centre remained idle. The sacralisation of the emperor started early, as we have seen, the very name of *Augustus*, soon to be the standard 'title' rather than an honorific adjective, had a religious ring, meaning 'the furtherer' just as rituals furthered, 'augmented' welfare, fruits or health. In the long run, concepts like providence and felicity developed into qualities of the emperors. Peace *(Pax)* likewise. The full-scale divinisation added above all the confirmation of success and the possibilities of posthumous narratives—basically, every person was judged divine from the first century CE onwards, as the widespread use of *Di manes* made clear. Easily, the specific aura of the emperor was genealogically shared and attributed already to small children of the imperial family.

Priestly roles of the emperor were above all a medium of internal control within the elite. Member of all major priesthoods, the emperor hardly ever showed up. Instead, he wrote letters that could not be in the same manner contradicted as a present member of formally equal status might have been. The only role mentioned more frequently outside of Rome was the office of *Pontifex maximus*, a declaration of religious authority rather than a specific ritual role. In inscriptions it was mentioned above all in cases of verbose texts, mentioning also other instances of the emperor being the 'greatest' like *Germanicus* or *Sarmaticus maximus.* Thus, he was not profiled as an addressee of cult in order to enlist loyalty. The persecutions of the third century were addressing people who were made Roman citizens throughout the empire by the watershed instrument of a regulation that explicitly demanded their engagement for this empire in the form of prayers, the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, fragmentarily preserved in *Papyrus Giessensis* 40 from 212 CE.

4.7 Framing by Empire

From time and space, I am turning to virtual space at the end, or rather literary texts that circulated in the *Imperium Romanum* and created overlapping spaces of literary discourse, briefly mentioned already at the beginning. Again, it would be impossible to review how the still large number of surviving texts in Latin and Greek that were circulating in the imperial period engaged with empire. Thus, I limited myself to a few observations arrived at through narratological analysis

(Rüpke and Degelmann 2015). Giving a beginning and an end to a narrative's sequence, which in principle could always start *ab ovo* and end in the presence, is one of the most powerful tools not only to simply define a place and time for a plot, but also to construe conflicts, to point to justice achieved or deferred. Gospels, martyrological, and many a hagiographic text offered sequences that were easy to follow. The interplay of the order of the dramaturgical setting and the complication and resolution of conflicts given by the narrative sequence, of scenes and peripeteias, produce the entertaining effect of narratives, asking for their prolongation and repetition (Koschorke 2012, 61–74).

It was not the necessity of the imperial cult that was lying at the basis of the decisions about a framing by reference to the spatial and temporal extension of the empire and its ruler or rulers in texts from widely different religious backgrounds, collections of moral examples, historical or autobiographical narrative, letters and treatises. What we witness are the individual attempts at interpreting religion and bringing religious innovation into a framework explicitly imperial (see already Bowersock 1994, Whitmarsh 2010, Woolf 2010). It goes far beyond lip-service or loyalty, beyond the availability of the imperial divinity (Ando 2003 and Ando 2000 on loyalty) and the presence of proper cult of the emperors as stated above. As stated before, such organized worship was surprisingly late, that is to say, absent for long periods, in many places and can neither explain the growth nor the stability of the Roman Empire. The texts were not only a result of a political and religious context but had effects themselves. It was the frequent and varying individual literary appropriation, even if not fully integrated into the story of the narrative, which accounts for the ubiquity of the figure of the emperor, which could hardly be achieved by other means. 'Religion' as a distinguishable practice is reflected within an explicitly imperial framework, thus constituting empire *and* religion. If empire and religion operate on a similar trans-local level, the avoidance of competition—seen as in the interest of both imperial as well as religious actors – demanded a careful reflection on their relationship. The lavish use of the epithet *augusta/us*, relating many divine figures or abstract concepts to the emperor and vice versa, solar attributes of the emperor, relating the political pivotal figure to the natural and frequently theological centre of the world, and a Christology that is compatible with the divine status of the living emperor, thus bringing two competing figures at least in parallel, were different solutions to this problem.

The questions posed at the beginning about the role of religion for and in the empire is not to be answered by pointing to mobility and diffusion, enabled by empire for religious signs and agents. Mobility was restricted. The imperial aspirations (Appadurai 2004) did not so much produce immediate mobility. The process of urbanization, depending on massive regional mobility, was not visibly acceler-

ated in the course of the expansion and establishment of Empire, perhaps even scaled down in Late Antiquity in its Western parts. Military service probably remained more important for young men. Thus, the interaction of religion and empire was first of all a local phenomenon. For an overwhelming majority of inhabitants of the Empire, the horizon was widened at their own place—to the detriment, as I have pointed out in the beginning, to local political elites, strengthening empire as a frame of reference (for a detailed analysis see Rüpke 2018c). If mobility was not the most important characteristic of the empire, universality was not the most important characteristic of its religion. It was above all at the fringes of the empire that religious activists felt not just an imperial, but universalist impetus of religion. Persian Mani aimed at a wider world and successfully made his followers explore it deep into Asia. Jewish entrepreneurs reached and 'converted' Caucasian kingdoms; Syrian, not Latin or Greek, Christians made Edessa a basis for going East; Arab tribes would a few centuries later move even into spaces only sporadically engaged by African Romans. And in the far North, monks from Ireland and Scotland would go out into the barbarian German regions beyond the Roman *limites.* But we need to come back to the Empire proper.

4.8 Further Developments

And yet, some people were mobile and that was of importance in the establishment of the religious *koine* described at the beginning. Sure, even in the second century, at the high point of geographical expansion of the Roman Empire, there was no deliberate 'export' of religion from the centre. If anything was being exported, it was an implicit concept regarding religion in the public space, to be covered—in the interests of simplicity rather than systematic compulsion—by just a few religious signs: *domus divina*, *divus Augustus*, Jupiter, Capitoline Triad. The absence of a deliberate export of cults brings the real role of the army for the (as we have seen, limited) diffusion of symbols and concepts from the centre more clearly into evidence. It is scarcely possible to overestimate the army as a carrier of religion in this regard. The favoured economic position of legionaries (frequently matched by the *auxilia*, as demonstrated by Haynes 2013, their prestige, and so the strength of the desire to demonstrate membership of such a body, as well as the situation regarding communication at a great distance from all 'natural' reference groups, had the critical historical consequence of advantaging the written medium. When relatives were out of reach, and the only available recourse was to fellow members of a military unit that was itself always liable to be transferred elsewhere, the written word appeared to heighten the chances of being remembered as an individual after death. It was by such means that Roman and an-

cient-Mediterranean written culture penetrated provincial religious practices via military gravestones and dedications. That the spread of Romano-Greek cult practices was restricted to the readership of such media and their authors can in fact be discerned during the early phase of the Romanization of the North-Western European provinces (Irby-Massie 1999, 160; Woolf 1998).

But developments did not stop here. The mobility of signs, afforded by the structures and requirements of the Roman Empire, and the opportunities it offered, led to a modification of the religious landscape in the long run. An observer like Minucius Felix, who had gathered experiences in Rome and North Africa, recognized this clearly, and referred at the beginning of the third century CE to the time 'before the world was open to commerce, and people mingled their rites and customs' (Minucius Felix 20.6). The mobility of more strongly organized 'followers' gave rise to the problem of trans-local recognisability. Stable solutions were obtained by various means. The fairly standardised cult image of Mithras, unusual rituals and Egyptian trappings in the case of Isis (Turcan 1996, 24–28), and the exchange of letters and narratives by Christians may be understood as equivalent from this point of view. However, the consequences of such strategies for the overall phenomenology of the systems concerned varied greatly in each case, as did the success of those systems. The spread of Judaism and Christianity clearly shows that narratives were far more easily disseminated, adapted, and reconstructed than images (Elsner 1998, 235; Cameron 1991, 19. 38–43).

Here, a growing area of non-political religion and groupings in the form local proto-religions is visible. Such 'privatisation' but also institutionalisation of religion (Rüpke 2016c) was encouraged by the growing de-politicisation of the public space, to be discerned especially in the more recently founded cities of the Roman Empire (Ando 2000, 2008). The binary system represented by the terms 'public' and 'private' fails to describe the space that was thus coming into being. The foundation of associations, either sanctioned or *de facto*, the stabilisation of immigrant networks by the endowment of cults, the quasi deification of members of the economic elite by the adoption of names of gods in highly individualised surnames, the revival or relocation of sites of healing cults and oracles, the establishment of roots by participation in local cults, or their modification by the actions of ubiquitous military and administrative elites and merchants, and finally trans-regional literary communication carried out by intellectuals—these were all factors that gave rise to an increasingly potent religious 'field' that, while highly visible, was not in the administrative sense 'public'. This indeterminately defined category proceeded by its own impetus in various non-statutory forms according to the conditions of a popularized aristocratic ethic and a citizenship whose universality was reasserted in a technical sense by the aforementioned *Constitutio Antoniniana* of AD 212, which conferred the right of citizenship on all free inhabitants of the

Roman Empire. It was here that the idea of a religious obligation related to the empire and shared by all appeared for the first time. By the end of the century it was replaced by allegiances to this or that deity that happened to be favoured by the emperor: a court-religion, as mentioned in the introduction to this volume, rather than an imperial one.

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Matthew P. Canepa

5 Envisioning Dualism and Emplacing the Eschaton: Apocalyptic Eschatology and Empire in Sasanian Iran

5.1 Introduction

The Sasanian Empire (224–642 CE) was the last great Iranian empire to rule over Western Asia before the coming of Islam.[1] The empire was founded when Ardaxšīr I (r. 224 – ca. 242), a local ruler of Pārs and vassal to the Parthian king of kings, revolted from his overlord, Ardawān IV, defeating and killing him in the Battle of Hormozgān. Ending five centuries of Arsacid rule, Ardaxšīr I quickly took control of the Iranian plateau and Mesopotamia, expanding the empire and soon bringing him into conflict with the Romans. His son and successor Šābuhr I (r. 242–272) expanded the empire eastward into Northern India at the expense of the Kushan Empire and westward into Roman territory, raiding several important Roman cities and deporting their inhabitants, including those of Antioch. By the late-sixth century CE the Sasanians had forged a centralized empire from the Parthian Empire's heterogenous network of crown lands, client kingdoms, semi-autonomous city-states, and aristocratic estates. Despite setbacks, the new powerful empire succeeded in contending with and often defeating the economic and military might of the Roman Empire, while resisting the military pressures of the steppe, and harnessing the economic forces of Eurasian trade. With mercantile networks that extended from the Persian Gulf to the South China Sea, the Empire of the Iranians exercised power over Mesopotamia, Iran, portions of the Caucasus, South and Central Asia, and briefly Egypt, Anatolia and even to the walls of Constantinople during the empire's final apogee under Husraw II (r. 590–628). Over the

1 Providing overviews of Sasanian history, art and archaeology: Wiesehöfer 1996; Daryaee 2009; Canepa 2018a and Callieri 2014. For the wider late antique art historical context: Canepa 2009; 2010a; 2015 and 2018b.

course of late antiquity, Sasanian art, architecture, and court culture created a new dominant global aristocratic common culture in western Eurasia, beguiling their Roman, South Asian, and Chinese contemporaries, and deeply imprinted the later Islamic world.

Ardaxšīr I named his empire Ērānšahr, the 'Empire of the Iranians,' for the first time in history employing 'Iran' and 'Iranian' in a unitary religious, ethnic, social and political sense (Gnoli 1989, 129–131; 1993b, 12–14). The early Sasanians initially foregrounded the half-understood Persian sites and traditions of their homeland. But as they took supreme power, they soon laid claim to the more expansive eastern Iranian legacy of the mythological Kayanid dynasty, which appealed to a wider variety of Iranian people. Ērānšahr created a pan-Iranian political entity that integrated the ancient Iranian traditions of the "Iranian Expanse" appearing in the Avesta, a compilation of the earliest Iranian religious texts that served as the 'holy book' of later Zoroastrianism but originally stemmed from an ancient tradition of oral transmission.[2] The earliest legends are present in Avestan sacred historiography, but it was known more popularly through epic legends elaborated in vernaculars throughout the Iranian-speaking world. By the late empire, the Sasanian court had produced an epic history, the *Xwadāy-nāmag* ('The Book of Lords'), which presented the dynasty as the heritors of an Iranian tradition of kingship through the Kayanids that stretched back to the dawn of humanity and situated squarely at the center for its hopes for the future.[3] In tandem with their discursive innovations, the Sasanians seized or destroyed all sites of memory associated with a venerable religious or royal past that could be leveraged to support a claim to royal power, even creating 'newly ancient' sites *ex novo* to buttress their burgeoning imperial cosmology and revised Iranian history (See below. Analyzed in detail in Canepa 2018a, chs. 6 and 12). In the late Sasanian formulation the Iranian king of kings reigned at the center of Ērānšahr, the cosmological center of the earth, and all other lands and peoples were constellated around him, over which he exercised ultimate sovereignty as "Lord of the Seven Continents" (Mid. Pers. *haft kišwar xwadāy*).[4]

This essay focuses on the Sasanians' efforts to create a coherent cosmology to support their imperial project and explores the ways in which Zoroastrian dualism and apocalyptic eschatology were suborned to serve among the Sasanians' key con-

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2 On the Avesta, see below.

3 Yarshater 1983b; Gnoli 1989, 136–137 and 178; Darayee 2002a, 6; 2006; 2007; Skjærvø 2013a; 2013b and 2013c.

4 *Vendidad* 1.2; *Greater Bundahišn* 8.1, 8.3–5; *Dēnkard* 8.13; *Māh ī frawardīn rōz ī hordād,* 32.

ceptual frameworks of empire.[5] Compared with all other Iranian dynasties, the Sasanians are rivaled only by the Achaemenids in their obsession with framing and interpreting royal action and identity through the dualistic and eschatological lens of Iranian religion.[6] Although separated by centuries, the commonalities between the royal discourse of the Achaemenid and Sasanian dynasties attest to a long tradition of Persian political dualism and apocalyptic eschatology, which were themselves in intense dialog with religious discourse.[7] Nonetheless, the Sasanians' strategic leveraging of dualism and eschatology as an imperial tool was a dynamic response to contemporary challenges. They incorporated these concepts into their contemporary political discourse and relied on them during key junctures to provide coherency to both internal conflicts and external threats. As we will see, Ardaxšīr I chose to portray the foundational moment of the empire, that is his defeat of the Arsacid king of kings Ardawān IV, as a prefiguration of the last cosmic battle between good and evil at the end of time, a precedent that provided his successors a template by which they interpreted their own struggles and victories (Fig. 5.1). As this brief introduction has already emphasized, in ancient Iran imperial cosmologies were a variant of same elite discourse that created the sacred cosmologies with a great deal of mutual cross-pollination. One cannot understand the imperial without the religious and at many key junctures, royal will actively manipulated religious discourse as much as it drew from it. This is certainly the case for the Sasanians, under whom the Zoroastrian religion emerged in a form that is recognizable today and, indeed, was substantially and reciprocally shaped by them.

The Sasanian Empire contained important communities of religious minorities whose elites collaborated with the Sasanian throne, including Christians of many creeds as well as Jews (Payne 2015; Gross 2018). However, this chapter focuses on

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5 Modifying Collins' (1979) definition, which has the benefit of intelligibility across periods, cultures and fields, to broaden its scope beyond texts, I use the term 'apocalyptic eschatology' in the sense of a revelatory discourse (textual, oral, visual, performative, spatial etc.), in which, "a revelation is mediated by otherworldly beings to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world." It should go without saying that this definition is not tethered with any single religion or canon of texts, as was the case with older approaches that focused entirely on Judeo-Christian texts.

6 On the problem of Zoroastrianism as a trans-millennial religious tradition, see below. For an entry into the copious bibliography on dualism in Iranian religions and their relationship with other religious traditions, see Gnoli 1996 and Shaked 1994.

7 On the correspondences between the Achaemenid and Sasanian royal inscriptions, see Shayegan 2012. On Achaemenid engagement with Avestan concepts and texts, see Skjærvø 1999 and Lincoln 2012.
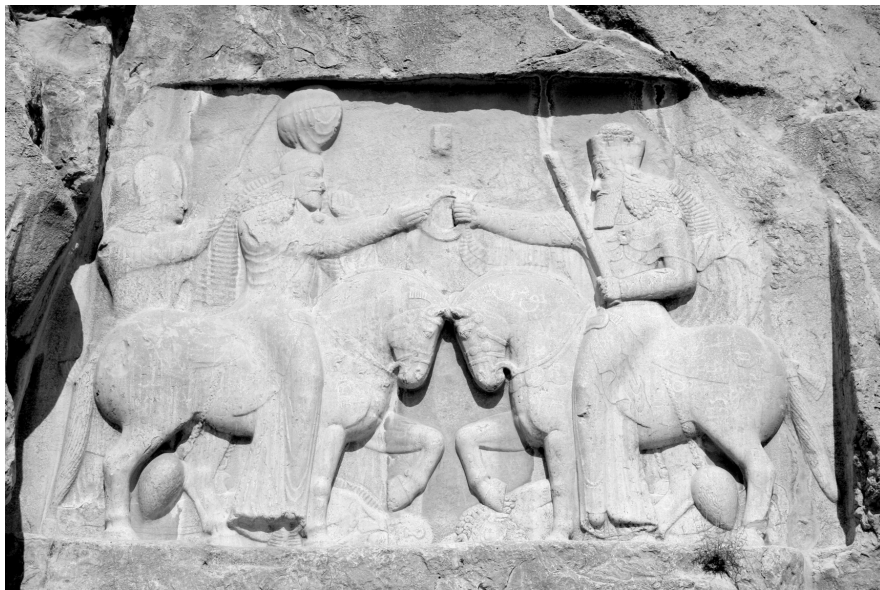
Fig. 5.1 Rock Relief of Ardaxšīr I (Naqš-e Rostam Relief I). Investiture of Ardaxšīr I (left) by Wise Lord with the defeated Arsacid king, Ardawān IV (left), and demon of demons, Ahreman, underhoof. Photo © Matthew P. Canepa.

inter-elite discourse directed at Iranian powerbase created, as far as we can surmise with the limited evidence, through a collaboration between the court and the religious specialists that served them to create a political cosmology that could align the empire's aristocracy and military with the goals of the king of kings. The Sasanians' imperial eschatologies were directed primarily at elite powerbases, that is, the Great Houses and landed aristocracies of Persia and Parthia in the early empire, as well as the newly expanded and reformed petty landholders (the *dehgāns*) in the late empire. The empire's diverse and decentralized Zoroastrian priesthood were also a potential audience of these messages, and some of the leading priests no doubt collaborated in crafting the dynasty's messages. The narratives, images and spaces implicated in these eschatological messages appear to have made an impact on also Iranians of humbler origin as well. One of the primary projects of the newly created 'Empire of the Iranians' (*Ērānšahr*) was to create 'Iranians' (*ērān*) and 'Iranian-ness' (*ērīh*). Imperial eschatology created common narratives that produced a sense of common destiny for an ever-widening group of people included among Iranians. As we will discuss in this chapter, the Sasanian dynasty's construction or refurbishment of grand fire temples associated with key eschatological figures as pilgrimage destinations made this new political

narrative tangible for those who visited them. These sites as well as the pageantry of public audiences at yearly festivals, such as Nowruz and Mehregan presented the king as fulfilling ancient promises and were reinforced by many of the Sasanian dynasty's rock reliefs, which presented these ideas in a visually impactful medium. Their messages circulated in a variety of media, some of which were accessible to the empire's subjects on the Mesopotamian plateau and new royal foundations around Ctesiphon and in the Mesopotamian lowlands in the Susa Plain. It should be emphasized, however, that these discourses, images and sites were not intended to be fully accessible, legible and interpretable to all subjects, nor was it required for them to be effective.

Previous studies of Iranian dualism and eschatology have built their arguments primarily from the textual and epigraphic sources, with which this essay engages as well. Here, however, we highlight a different body of evidence, that is visual and archaeological evidence, which, in company with the epigraphic corpora, can be considered the only truly indigenous, primary-source evidence coming securely from the Sasanian period.[8] The visual and archaeological evidence not only augments and nuances our view from the textual evidence, but in many cases preserves parallel traditions of imperial discourse unattested in them. This is indeed the case for Ardaxšīr I's eschatological interpretation of the empire's foundational event, which is not reflected in any textual source, but preserved only in a monumental rock relief. Furthermore, this essay focuses not just on the discursive content, but on the ways in which that imperial discourse shaped the landscape of Iran to make these eschatological narratives vitally present within the lived experience of the late antique Iranian world. Allied with arguments established in greater detail elsewhere, this chapter is founded on the conviction that in ancient Iran, religion, empire, and the natural and built environment were mutually entangled and co-constitutive (Canepa 2018a).

5.2 Dualism and Eschatology in Intertwined Iranian Sacred and Imperial Cosmologies

Ancient Iranian kings ruled with the knowledge that time was progressing linearly toward a spectacular end. A sensitivity to time subtly inflects the political discourse not only of those dynasties who adhered to the main lines of Iranian Zoroastrianism, but those who engaged the contemporary Iranian religion as practiced

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8 Canepa 2009, xvii. For a broader methodological analysis focused on the Achaemenid period, see Lincoln 2013.

in Persia or the eastern Iranian world only lightly as half-remembered family customs. These include the Seleucid dynasty (ca. 312/11–64 BCE), the Macedonian dynasty that ruled Iran after Alexander, as well as succeeding Perso-Macedonian dynasts, such as Mithradates VI of Pontus (120–63 BCE) and Antiochus of Commagene (ca. 69–ca. 36 BCE), who boasted of descent from both the Achaemenids and Alexander. The Seleucids never overtly ascribed to the worship of Ahura Mazda, yet without question they integrated ritual activities and engaged sites that were significant to Iranian religion. Not surprisingly, such a characteristically Iranian sensitivity to time inflects the Seleucids' political temporality too and may have offered the conceptual possibilities that presaged their introduction of a new continuous royal era counted from the foundation of the empire.[9] The later tradition of Iranian royal eras and dynastic sanctuaries grew from the Seleucids' precedents, including those of the Arsacids, Sakas, Kushans and Sasanians.[10] However, it is under the kings of the two Persian imperial dynasties, the Achaemenids and the Sasanians, that we see the most intensive exploitation of Iranian eschatologies and dualism.

Iranian Studies scholarship often finds it convenient to use the term "Zoroastrian" to refer to the broad trans-millennial tradition. Without qualification, however, the blanket use of the term obscures the vast differences between regional practices and radical changes that occurred at numerous points in Iranian history within regions and it is important to emphasize that in this chapter we are not speaking of a unified and monolithic "Zoroastrianism" that was shared by all dynasties during all periods.[11] The changes that occurred in Pārsa (Old Pers.; Mid. Pers. Pārs) between the Achaemenid and Sasanian dynasties illustrate this clearly. While the kings of both dynasties proclaimed themselves to be worshippers of the Wise Lord and visually or discursively foreground the veneration of sacred fire, we

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9 The Seleucid royal era explored in Kosmin 2019.
10 This phenomenon analyzed in Canepa 2015 and 2018a.
11 Contemporary scholarship has emphasize the historical and doctrinal differences with later periods by using the term 'Mazdaism,' while others favor 'Achaemenid' or 'Persian religion,' to emphasize heterogeneous nature of Achaemenid religious practices, which include sacrifices made to many non-Iranian gods, most notably the predominance of Elamite gods in the Persepolis archive. Such distinctions have met strong protest by de Jong 2015, 85–86, that these are 'invented religions,' which is a fair enough point. The fact remains, however, that it is no less a scholarly invention to use such terms as 'Mazdaism,' or 'Mazdaean,' than 'Zoroastrianism' or 'Zoroastrian,' since a self-proclaimed Mazda-worshipping identity in opposition to those who do not is at least attested or implicit in the primary sources, whereas Zoroaster never appears. E.g. "*A.uramazdām ayadaị...*" DB §75.D. Cf. Av. *mazdaiiasna-*. Herrenschmidt 1977, 39; Gnoli 1983; Skjærvø 1999, 18–19; 2005, 57–59. Conversely, this is not to say that Zoroaster is absent since he is absent in the inscriptions, as he never appears in any Sasanian primary source either. Skjærvø 2014, 181–183.

have no evidence of grand imperially sponsored fire temple architecture in the Achaemenid period. The veneration of sacred fire in purpose-built sanctuaries is a phenomenon coalesces as a dominant tradition in late antiquity and such temples only appears as a widespread phenomenon once their Sasanians exported their own regional variant of Zoroastrianism to the lands of the empire (Canepa 2018a, 147; Cantera 2019). Similarly, the primacy of Ahura Mazda is not shared in all regions as it was in southwestern Iran under the Achaemenids and Sasanians. The god Mithra appears as exceptionally important in certain regions with deep Parthian influence and, in the Iranian East, as attested epigraphically and numismatically, the Kushans cultivated their own pantheon led by the goddess Nana and god Oēšo followed by a vast array of other deities, the core of which were Iranian though many more arise from non-Iranian cultural origins.

With these provisos, we can state that sensitivities to time and dualism are detectible in all stages of Zoroastrianism and is present in other related Iranian religions, such as Manichaeism.[12] Zoroastrianism as it took shape under the Sasanians consistently emphasized three fundamental realities: the double dimension of existence, the extreme, combative antagonism of good and evil, and the temporary nature of finite time in which this combat takes place.[13] These concepts were not stable or present through all periods and numerous variants and counter formulations also circulated, but they are indeed a persistent force in Iranian culture. Leaving aside problems of the pathways of periodic mutual influences among Iranian, Jewish, and Christian apocalypticisms and eschatologies, the core of the Zoroastrian eschaton was very ancient and in existence before the rise of the Achaemenids even as it continued to evolve after the coming of both Alexander and Islam. It is inherent in the worldview and cosmology of the Old Avestan texts, detectible in various Greek and Roman writings drawing from or reporting on Persian religion and customs both before and after the Achaemenid Empire, and elaborated most fully in Zoroastrianism's late antique and early medieval Middle Persian religious texts (Boyce 1986; Cereti 2015). Growing from the same elite discursive tradition, it should come as no surprise then that dualism and eschatology play an especially important role in ancient Iranian political discourse as well.

In order to understand the Iranian religious cosmologies that informed and cross-pollinated imperial cosmologies, we have recourse to a variety of texts that arose from multiple different periods and were constantly revised and reshaped over the centuries. Dealing with these texts is very complex methodologically as

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12 For the most recent comprehensive overview of the concept of time in Zoroastrianism and problem of 'Zurvanism' as a separate religion, see Rezania 2010. See also Shaked 1994.
13 Stausberg 2002; Skjærvø 2011a; Lincoln 2012, 446–461; Panaino 2015, 236–238.

none can be dated exactly. In this regard, inscriptions, rock reliefs, archives, seals, coins and archaeological material from controlled excavations form our only truly primary sources. The oldest texts in Iranian language are those that make up the Avesta, a compilation of ritual texts, prayers, hymns, and purity strictures. Linguistically they can be dated from about 1000 BCE, with respect to the Gāthic Old Avestan, to 500 BCE, with respect to many of the Young Avestan texts (henceforth OA and AY), though late antique and medieval priests knew the languages well enough to compose or modify them. These religious texts eventually came to be regarded as the 'holy book' of medieval and early modern Zoroastrianism, but stemmed from an ancient oral tradition of textual transmission that was not written down until the Sasanian period.[14] The much more copious Middle Persian priestly compilations, translations and commentaries offer greater detail as do late antique and medieval works of epic; however, most texts were extensively modified and in many cases composed centuries after the fall of Sasanian Empire (Andrés-Toledo 2015, 524). While drawing on an ancient core, many are substantially works reflecting the realities of medieval Zoroastrianism under Islam.[15] With the exception of the Old and Middle Persian inscriptions we have no texts whose date and provenance can be fixed and can be unequivocally regarded as existing in the same form during the time of the empires under study. Approached judiciously with ultimate deference always to and anchored on those sources unquestionably arising from the Sasanian period (including the rock reliefs), Pahlavi texts such as the *Bundahišn* can be used to provide the broad outlines of late antique of Zoroastrian cosmology and eschatology. The earliest Zoroastrian apocalyptic eschatology is present in the Avesta, namely in the Gāthās and Yašt 19, though throughout Iran's history the basic narrative was reworked and elaborated, incorporating other prophetic and literary devices. These appear in a wide variety of texts stemming from and revised over multiple different periods. These include the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, *Zand ī Wahmān Yasn, Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*, and sections of the *Bundahišn* and *Dēnkard*, among other (Boyce 1986; Sunderman 1988).

The oldest Avestan texts are ambiguous regarding the origin of evil. Like some later variants of Zoroastrianism, they hint at two pre-existent twin spirits whose opposition generates the ongoing existential conflict that endures to the present day: the 'Life-Giving Spirit' (OA Spəṇta- Mainiiu-) and the 'Dark' or 'Evil Spirit'

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14 For an introduction to the texts, their contexts, and dates, see chapters 1–4 in Stausberg and Vevaina 2015a; Andrés-Toledo 2015; Hintze 2015.
15 Contemporary, post-Sasanian concerns affect the few examples of 'secular' prose literature too as discussed by Weinrach 2016.

(OA Aŋgra- Mainiiu-, Mid. Pers. Ahreman).[16] In the Old Avestan texts, the Wise Lord is distinct and exists beyond these two spirits, though in the Young Avesta, in the Pahlavi books, and as we will see, in Sasanian rock reliefs the Wise Lord directly faces the Evil Spirit both figuratively and literally.

While the Wise Lord was the father of Order, the Evil Spirit brought forth its disorderly, deceiving, unreal counterpart: the Lie (Av. *druj-*). This opposition between the divine, orderly Truth and demonic Lie (Old Pers. *drauga-,* Mid. Pers. *druz*) clearly inflects later Achaemenid and Sasanian royal discourse and is a cardinal feature of later Zoroastrian thought (Lincoln 2012, 213–268; Shayegan 2012, 107–138; Skjærvø 2010). All evil, small to large, was the mark of the Evil Spirit. This fallen world, while imperfect, was far from simply hopeless wreckage. The present state of the world was a battlefield between good and evil. Existence, that is, the earth and cosmos and the movement of time, was in effect, an enormous though ultimately temporary trap. It was devised to capture, defeat and eventually rid the world of Ahreman and all his evil works.

All followers of Order were expected to actively fight this battle, each according to his or her abilities. While a private person would be expected to plant their fields, clean rivers and lakes, defend their bodies against demonic assaults, and rid the world of the creatures of Ahreman, kings would perform such beneficent activities on a much larger scale.[17] The perennial battles between good and evil in the past and present culminate with the coming of the final future Savior or Revitalizer (Av. *saošiiaṇt-,* Mid. Pers. Sōšāns). The Future Savior will be a son of Zoroaster born posthumously from his seed preserved through the millennia in Lake Kąsaoya (Av.; Mid. Pers. Kayansē).[18] The Savior will perform a final sacrifice, that leads to the Wise Lord's final Renovation of the world (Av. *frašō.kərəti-,* Mid. Pers. *frašagird*), when the dead will rise and be purified in a sea of molten metal and the Wise Lord will make the earth again perfect and 'wondrous' (Av. *fraša-*).[19] After the final battles between good and evil and the Renovation of the

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16 Kellens and Pirart 1997; Kellens 2000, 16–17 Skjærvø 2011a, 2012, 8–9; Panaino 2015, 236–237; Shayegan 2012, 51–60. The will of the Evil Spirit manifests in the Old Persian inscriptions as 'the Lie' (Old Pers. *drauga-*), which is a demonic 'instrument of the Evil Spirit' in the Avesta and Pahlavi texts. Lincoln 2012, 228–229.

17 Vd. 14.5–6, 16.12, 17.3, 18.65 and 18.73; Cf. Herod. 1.140; De Jong 1997, 338–342; Macuch 2003, 167–190. On protecting the human body from the *dēwān,* see the late Pahlavi catechism, *ČAP* 3. Lincoln 2012, 244. On purifications, see Williams 2015.

18 The oldest text on the eschaton is Yt. 19.88–89 and 92–96, though it was only fully elaborated in the Pahlavi material. See Cereti 2015, 269–271 and Timuş 2015, 185–186.

19 Y. 30.7–9; Yt. 19.11; *GBd.* 34; *PRDD* 25, 48, 49, 52 and 54; Dk. 3.208; Hintze 2000; Lincoln 2012, 50–51.

earth, the foreclosure of finite time would mark the ultimate annihilation of the Evil Spirit and all his works.

5.3 The Deep History of Persian Imperial Dualism and Eschatology

With rise of the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE), Iranian ideas and institutions of kingship became the supreme idiom of legitimacy, power and prestige in Western Asia, overshadowing and subsuming those of earlier kingdoms and empires. The empire welded together an incredibly diverse array of lands, many of which themselves ruled their own empires or had until very recently been formerly independent kingdoms or city-states. Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) sponsored the invention of the Old Persian cuneiform syllabary and produced the greatest volume of reliefs and inscriptions of the Achaemenid period (Canepa 2014 and 2015). Darius I introduced royal sculptural and epigraphic traditions that his successors cultivated and followed with little deviation, both with respect to the new neo-conservative royal sculptural style that emerged under his patronage and all of his successors emulated, and the form and conventions of his trilingual inscriptions. Darius I carved a colossal triumphal relief and inscription on the great mountain of Bīsotūn (Old Iranian *Bagastāna, "place of the god[s]"). Their placement astride the Iranian Plateau's primary east-west route, natural platforms, and karstic springs drew centuries of attention and cult activity (Fig. 5.2).[20] Darius I's inscription at Bīsotūn is the largest and longest rock-cut inscription of both the Achaemenid Empire and the ancient Iranian world (Luschey 2013). The king carved the relief and Elamite inscription in 520 BCE, followed by the Babylonian version (Luschey 1965; 1968). After commanding that a new writing system be created for the 'Aryan' language (*ariya*) the king subsequently added the Old Persian version in 519 BCE (DB §70). Its contents were circulated in dispatches, as witnessed by papyri fragments of an Aramaic version of the inscription from Elephantine, Egypt and displayed in condensed form in other monumental media, as attested by fragments of a stele found before the Ishtar Gate at Babylon (Siedl 1999a; 1999b).

    The content of both the sculptural relief and inscription stemmed from Darius I's wider propaganda program aimed at presenting a coherent narrative explaining Darius I's own rise to power and the many rebellions that almost consumed the empire after the deaths of the sons of Cyrus, whose demise Darius I benefited from and may have even orchestrated in order to take power (Lincoln 2007, 8–13). In

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[20] Ghobadi, Torabi-Kaveh et al. 2015. On the cult, see Canepa 2018, 38–39, 71–78 and 186.

Fig. 5.2 Inscriptions and rock relief of Darius I with the Wise Lord (above right) triumphing over usurpers. Bīsotūn, Iran. Photo © Matthew P. Canepa.

order to cover over these shady dealings, Darius I rewrites history and presents his own actions as those of a righteous man fighting on the site of Order against the Lie. Darius I's great Bīsotūn relief portrays the king in divine conversation with the Wise Lord, lording over nine pretenders and rebels. Darius I lifts his eyes and hand to revere the Wise Lord who hovers above in a winged disk, and among his retinue is the only human figure privy to this theophany. The Evil Spirit is not named in the inscription or portrayed in the relief; instead the focus is placed on his supernatural agent "the Lie" (Old Pers. *drauga-)* and the humans that it infected causing them to rebel and falsely proclaim themselves to be king. Darius I cleansed the Lie from the earth by punishing and destroying its human agents. A caption labels each marking them and their rebellion as a product of the Lie, though all the captured pretenders are denied speech themselves. As we learn from this and his other inscriptions, he and his empire were the means by which the Great God exerted his will (Old Pers. *vašna-*) on earth. As such the king was called on to make the earth whole again after its primordial fracture, degradation and confusion by the Evil Spirit.

While not as explicit as the Achaemenids' imperial dualism, inscriptions from Achaemenid palaces may hint at an earlier Persian tradition of imperial eschatology that foreshadows the one articulated explicitly by the Sasanians. Like his other acts of ordering the empire and subduing the Lie, Darius I's foundation inscription from Susa places the construction of the palace within the context of a cosmogonic narrative and an encapsulated version of Darius I's own ideologically correct ac-

count of how he came to power and newly constructed dynastic legitimacy (DSf, 1–10).

> A great god is Ahura Mazda who created this earth, who created that sky, who created mankind, who created happiness for mankind, who made Darius king, one king over many, one planner/builder/architect (*framātar*) over many. I am Darius the great king, king of kings, king of the lands, king in this earth. I am the son of Vishtaspa, an Achaemenid.
>
> Proclaims Darius the king: Ahura Mazda, who is the greatest of gods, he created me, it is he who made me king. He granted me this kingdom, which is great, and which has good horses and good men. Both my father Vishtaspa and Arsames my grandfather were living, by the will of Ahura Mazda when Ahura Mazda made me king over this earth. This was Ahura Mazda's desire: he chose me (as) his man over the entire earth. He made me king over the entire earth. I worshipped Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda bore me aid. That which I measured forth, he made turn out successfully for me. That which I did, I did all by the will of Ahura Mazda.

Persian palatial architecture was an imperial architecture that united and subsumed numerous architectural and visual traditions creating unity out of complexity.[21] It imposed an integrative unity over its architectural, ornamental, and figural elements that presented the bloody business of building and maintaining an empire as divinely ordained, natural and awe-inspiringly beautiful. Darius I's inscription places the palace within a chain of divine and divinely ordained royal acts of creations and construction. After verbally surveying the lands, riches, and labor of his empire and their contributions to the palace, Darius ends with a subtle allusion to the End of Days:

> Proclaims Darius the King: At Susa a great wonder was built (*frašam framātam*), and a great wonder was made (*frašam kṛtam*). May Ahura Mazda protect me and Vištāspa, who is my father, and my land (DSf §7–14; Skjærvø 1999, 57–58).

The palace offers a foretaste of the wonder (*fraša-*) of the perfected world after the Renovation.[22] Equally applicable to his palace at Persepolis, Darius implies that the wonder that he built (*fraša- kṛta-*) at Susa was not only a foretaste of the perfected earth but that his actions were paradigmatically equivalent to those by which the Wise Lord will bring about the Wonder Making' of the Renovation (Av. *frašō-*

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21 For recent introductions and entries into the literature on the Achaemenid palace, see Perrot 2013a and Root 2014 (esp. 38 note 2, which constitutes an impressive and nearly exhaustive historiographical essay in and of itself).

22 *naiba-* DSe §5.C; DSi §2.C; XPa §3.D–H; XPg §1.D; XPh §5.L; XV §3.E. *fraša-* DSa §2.D; DSf §7.J and §14.B–C; DSj §3.E; DSo §2.C; DSz 14.B–C. Cf. Yt. 19.10–11; Y. 30.9 and 34.15. Explored in depth by Skjærvø 1999, 56–58 and Lincoln 2012, 200–220, 372–374; 1996.

kərəti-).[23] With this homophony between the royal and divine **fraša-kr̥ta-,* Darius I implies that royal and divine actions are aligned in purpose and in outcome. Just as proper priestly sacrifice recreated the original state of the world, so too could royal command, which brought precious raw materials and human labor from around the world to create this pre-eschatologically perfected space (Y. 30.9; Skjærvø 1999, 57–58). As supreme earthly architect, the king constructed, or rather 'reconstructed,' what the Evil Spirit tore asunder and scattered at his assault.

Although separated by over 700 years the rock reliefs and inscriptions of the early Sasanian present startlingly close thematic parallels with those of the Achaemenids, so close that, with certain qualifications as to the modes of transmission, we can speak of a trans-millennial tradition of Iranian imperial eschatology. In approaching these parallels and in characterizing such a tradition, it is important to emphasize the Sasanians only had a general awareness of a single ancient dynasty that included kings named Darius and Artaxerxes. They did not know the Achaemenids *as* the Achaemenids but rather understood them to be the last of the legendary Kayanid dynasty before the Evil Alexander's Ahremanic invasions threw Iran into centuries of chaos. For example, the linguistic and thematic parallels between Šābuhr I's inscription on the Achaemenid tower, the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt, and Darius I's inscription on his tomb just meters away are striking. So too are the ritual parallels with the memorial cult they describe between Achaemenid memorial cults, which altogether suggest that the Sasanians valued and drew on a deep cultural well of Persian traditions, collected from local priests and poets, even if they did not fully understand the exact history of their ultimate source.[24]

In other words, considering that the ability to read the Achaemenid royal inscriptions was lost by the rise of the Sasanians, the eerie parallels between the Achaemenid and Sasanian inscriptions and royal actions are best explained as arising from a deep tradition of oral discourse and ritual continuities rather than textual transmission.[25] Just as importantly, these discursive parallels between Old and Middle Persian inscriptions are matched by the Sasanians' more abundant and persistent interest in the ruins of the Achaemenid palaces, rock reliefs, tombs and sculptural traditions and their deliberate efforts to closely integrate their own visual and monumental expressions with them. As argued in detail elsewhere, the Sasanians used the half-understood architectural and rupestrian vestiges of the Achaemenid dynasty as raw material out of which they fabricated a new coherent and politically useful vision of a trans-millennial Iranian imperial past (Canepa

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23 DNb §1.B; XPg D–E; XPl §1.B Argued explicitly in Lincoln 2012, 473; 1997. Considered in Skjærvø 1999, 55–58.

24 Evocatively laid forth in Skjaervø 1985, Huyse 1990 and Shayegan 2012.

25 Explored most fully by Shayegan 2012.

2010; 2018, ch. 12). With these deep Persian roots and parallels in mind, we must nonetheless approach the Sasanians statements of imperial eschatology not just as a rebirth of an ancient tradition but vital new expressions responding to dramatic contemporary political developments.

5.4 Emplacing and Re-envisioning Iran's Past and Future in Sasanian Iran

The Sasanian dynasty cultivated an eschatologically oriented temporality as a major pillar of their imperial project. The Sasanian kings understood they were ruling at the beginning of the End Times. Ardaxšīr I founded the empire in the year 538 of the Seleucid, or as the Sasanians understood it, the "era of Zoroaster" (Yarshater 1983b, 383–387; Panaino 2015, 239; Cereti 2015, 269–271). Now integrated into the Zoroastrian cosmic cycle of 12,000 years, the Sasanians held that they founded their empire 9,538 years after Wise Lord's interruption of infinite time, 6,538 after the assault of Ahreman, and 538 years past the coming of Zoroaster. Just as importantly according to this calculation, Ardaxshir I's defeat of Ardawan IV occurred only 462 years before the conception of the first of the three of Zoroaster's posthumously born sons, the Future Saviors, whose coming would set in motion the final series of battles between good and evil (GBd. 33.29–36). By the reign of the last Sasanian king, Yazdgird III, only decades remained before the coming of the first of these heroes. The final destruction of Ahreman, the Renovation of the world and subsequent re-establishment of infinite time were still centuries to come, yet the beginning of the end was indeed nigh and the Sasanian kings were playing a key role in the unfolding of this cosmic battle against evil.

Iranian kings, both living and legendary, were pivotal in bringing about the Renovation including Kay Husraw, the exemplar of a perfect king, who would return after centuries in occultation to play key role in the final battles (Timuş 2015, 185–223, for Kay Husraw, see esp. 208–209). Much like the Achaemenids before them, the Sasanians understood that their actions were of central importance in facilitating this process (Cf. the Achaemenids Skjærvø 2005, 79–80). As we will see most vividly expressed in Ardaxshir I's last rock relief, the living Sasanian king was an anti-demonic force in the Living World, battling the forces of evil and ordering the earth. This sensibility suffused many aspects of Sasanian court life. Persian and Parthian grandees not only acclaimed the Sasanian king as animated with an immortal soul, but wished him a reign that would extend "until the Renovation," blurring his present identity with that of Kay Husraw at the end (Paikuli § 89).

Nowhere was the impending arrival of the Renovation of the earth felt more keenly that at Kuh-e Khwājā, the site understood to be the Avestan Lake Kąsaoya, the place of the conception of the Future Savior. Lake Kąsaoya was associated with the body of water known today as lake Hamun-e Helmand in the present-day province of Sistan and Baluchistan. Mt. Ušidarəna, whose name translates literally as "of Reddish Cracks," was associated with the reddish, rocky island outcrop that rose from the lake on which a sanctuary was later built (Grenet 2015, 24). We do not know exactly when the traditions of the Renovation were grounded at Lake Hamun in Sistan, but it was an ancient association well established before the Sasanians began confecting a canonical version of the Avesta.[26] It represents one of the first major attempts of the Sasanian dynasty to take control of a powerful Avestan tradition and create a monumental focus for it. It stands as one of several examples whereby the Sasanians actively reshaped the natural and built environments of Iran, building out in material form the politically useful fictions they spun to undergird their new empire. Grafting themselves onto venerable ancient sites and, just as importantly, building new ones on virgin soil, they brought the experience of the living, material world of late antique Western Asia into alignment with their new conception of the past, present and future. Archaeology shows that at the same time that the early Sasanians began carving their imperial eschatological visions they also began to claim a site that focused all of Iran's eschatological hopes and dreams.

The lake is omnipresent in Middle Persian legends and priestly literature, but no historical texts mention the sanctuary itself or attest to the activities of living kings at it. We must put the religious texts into dialog with the archaeological evidence to provide some idea of its significance. As one of the holiest sites in the Avesta's sacred topography, Lake Kąsaoya was one of the earliest Avestan mythical toponyms to receive a dramatic topographical setting and architectural focus. Described as the place where "Mount Ušidarəna stands, surrounded by waters that run from the mountain," the Zamyād Yašt places Lake Kąsaoya in "Haētumant," which is among the Avestan toponyms that is securely located and corresponds to the region of Helmand (Yt. 19.66–67 Grenet 2005, 2015. Also known as Uši.dam; Gnoli 2003c). Kąsaoya was the lake that preserved the semen of Zoroaster, where it was guarded for centuries from the demons under its waters (Yašt 13.62, 13.28; Dēnkard 7.8.1; Gnoli 2003c). In the Avestan version of events, at the end of days it would impregnate a virgin who would bear the *saošiiaṇt*, the savior who would initiate and win the final battle between good and evil and usher in the Ren-

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26 Boyce suggested it possibly reflects a local oral tradition of the Avesta that stemmed from this region. Boyce and Grenet 1991, 3: 123.

ovation (Grenet 2008; 2015). The Zamyād Yašt provides the earliest description of its role in the End of Days:

> We sacrifice to the potent Mazdā-created Kayanid Fortune [...] which will come to the victorious Savior who shall rise from the Kąsaoiia Sea at Haētumaṇt, where stands Mount Ušada, around which many waters meet, flowing down from the mountains [...] (Yt. 19.88–93).

By the Sasanian period, the number of saviors multiplied to three posthumous sons, Ušēdar, Ušēdararmāh and Sōšyans (< Av. *saošiiaṇt*), each of whom were borne by a virgin who bathed in the lake. The *Bundahišn* relates:

> These three sons of Zoroaster, about Ušēdar and Ušēdarmāh and Sōšyans it is said: before Zoroaster mated, at that time the Fortune [*xwarrah*] of Zoroaster was entrusted in the sea of Kayānsē for preservation to Āban Xwarrah ['The Fortune of the Waters'], which is the Goddess Anāhīd. Now also they say they always see at night three lights glow in the bottom of the sea; and one by one when their own time comes, in this manner it will be that a maiden will go to the water of Kayānsē to wash her head, that Fortune will mix in her body, she will become pregnant, they one by one in the same manner, in their own time thus will be born.[27]

In the commentarial tradition the lake became integrated into the narrative of the Kayanid dynasty and the radiant Iranian Royal Fortune (Av. *airiianəm xᵛarənah*-; Mid. Pers. *xwarrah*), evoked in the lake's Middle Persian name, "Kayānsē." Later its significance even mingles with that of the Avestan Lake Vourukaşa, which sheltered the Iranian Royal Fortune from non-Iranian foes (Yt. 19.51 and 56–57; Christensen 1931, 22–23; Gnoli 1967, 10–12).

With its role in the end of days and hope for the Renovation, Lake Hamun played a central role in Zoroastrian eschatology.[28] Without a doubt, the lake's tangible connection to the Future Savior, a succession of Iranian heroes and the Iranian Royal Fortune would make the site a focal point for trans-dynastic negotiations of Iranian identity through space and place, not to mention a supremely attractive and important target for royal patronage to take control of the site through some deft and generous refurbishments (Cf. Massey 2005, 140). Not surprisingly the site's archaeological evidence is multilayered, complex and in many areas, conflicted and unclear.

The architectural complex at the center of the lake located on a mountain known today as Kuh-e Khwājā (Fig. 5.3). It preserves remnants of fortification walls, outlying fortresses, a lower city, and a monumental complex (the 'Core Area'). In its Sasanian iterations it contained a fire temple at its core and likely

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27 GBd. [Td. 1 and 2] 33.36–38. On related passages, see Agostini 2017a and 2017b.
28 Sources collected and analyzed in Cereti 2015, 270–271.

Fig. 5.3 View of the Central Complex at Kuh-e Khwājā, Iran. Courtesy Rasool Abbasi17/Wikimedia.

functioned as a Zoroastrian priestly college as well as a pilgrimage site.[29] To judge from the massive scale of the site it could accommodate hundreds of inhabitants and visitors. Over the course of the last century, numerous scholars put forth numerous dates and phases for the site's architecture ranging from Achaemenid to the early Islamic era. By the end of the last century a scholarly consensus had emerged that the standing remains of the Central Complex were constructed in two main building phases.[30] A major breakthrough occurred when S. Ghanimati reported that, in the 1990's, she had performed radiocarbon testing on samples taken from the materials in the vaulting beneath the upper terrace and tamarisk pegs used to attach stucco sculpture to the façade of the temple (Ghanimati 2001, 138–139). These tests suggest that the monumental complex itself ('the standing remains') were built no earlier than the first century CE and no later than the first seventy years of the Sasanian empire (80–240 CE +/-50). The complex underwent a

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29 Overview of the site: Ghanimati 2015. On pilgrimage in ancient Iran, see Grenet 2010.
30 Ghanimati 2000, 140. Gullini's methodologies and assertion that the site exhibited multiple phases starting in the Achaemenid era had been roundly rejected even before the C14 tests. Gullini 1964; Tucci 1966; Schippmann 1971, 60–70.

major renovation under the later Sasanians and its upper temple received its final exterior decoration sometime between 540–640 CE (+/-50), providing a clear *terminus post quem*. Modifying this picture, investigations by an Iranian team in the 1990s observed that the grand complex related to the standing remains concealed hints of smaller, more modest features unrelated to the design of the standing remains.[31] Whatever existed at the site in the early Parthian period was entirely built over in the second phase, when the grand complex associated with the standing remains was first laid out and raised. Beyond the impressive architecture, which itself would put the dynasty's imprint on the site, images of royal and divine figures in paint and in stucco visually animated the site. Though meager, these painted and sculpted royal figures form one of the most important scraps of primary source evidence of early Sasanian strategies of linking the site and its traditions to the dynasty.

Kuh-e Khwājā was not a unique phenomenon in Sasanian Iran, indeed it might have inspired the development of new sanctuaries intended to bring the Avestan ideational landscape into physical form. Among the most ritually and architecturally potent—not to mention contentious—expressions of this new Sasanian topography of power were the Great Fires of Iran.[32] According to the late antique and early medieval commentarial tradition, the three Great Fires of Iran, Ādur Gušnasp, Ādur Farnbag and Ādur Burzēn-Mihr were created by the Wise Lord, "for the protection of the world." Royal patrons built monumental complexes to match the natural and mythical grandeur of these sites. While we have some indications that Ādur Farnbag, Ādur Burzēn-Mihr not to mention the sanctuary of the Future Savior at Kuh-e Khwājā were in existence at the time of the Arsacids, those that have been located and have yielded archaeological evidence show that they were radically rebuilt in the Sasanian period. Moreover, all archaeological evidence suggests that the site of Ādur Gušnasp was built entirely by the Sasanians with no other monumental sanctuary at the site before. These post-Achaemenid architectural complexes did not depend on a connection to the physical relics of a previous dynasty, as was the case with Seleucid or Arsacid activity at Bīsotūn, or the much more complex memorial practices of the early Sasanians in and around the remnants of Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam. Rather, their royal patrons intended these new, naturally beautiful sites to appeal in a more

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31 Ghanimati 2000, 141. When Ghanimati published her article in 2000, these results were to appear in the *Journal of Sāzmān-e Mīrās-e Farhangī-e Kešvar*; however, as of now they remain unpublished and it appears there are no current plans to do so. The only details presently available of these investigations come from Ghanimati's 2001 dissertation, 2000 article and 2015 *EIrO* entry.
32 *Bundahišn* 18.8; *Zādspram* 3.84–86. See Canepa 2018 for full discussion of these sites and traditions.

evocative sense to the religious and cultural heritage of a wider spectrum of Iranian peoples, and from a more cynical point of view, appropriate that wider Iranian heritage exclusively for the dynasty in power. These sanctuaries appear to have been the focus of intense pilgrimage, whose popularity lasted well after the fall Sasanians (Grenet 2010). Ādur Farnbag, Ādur Burzēn-Mihr and the related fire of Ādur Karkoy and the sanctuary of the Future Savior at Kuh-e Khwājā were clear inventions of the Arsacid and Sasanian periods and many of the toponyms clearly (at least to the modern scholar) translated from eastern Iran. But no matter their actual history, most importantly, these sanctuaries offered pilgrims the chance to step back in time and experience the age of prophets and heroes, or a foretaste of the Renovation.

5.5 The Living Rock and Imperial Temporality

It is no accident that the clearest, most powerful and enduring expressions of Iranian imperial eschatology were preserved on rock. Monumental rock reliefs and inscriptions, either carved into the living rock or on highly valued ruins played an especially important role in the formation, maintenance and manipulation of memory in ancient Iran and, under the Achaemenids and Sasanians, monumental rock reliefs were the domain of the king of kings (Explored in Canepa 2010; 2014 and 2018). The actions of patrons and experiences and practices of viewers divided by centuries or even millennia with regards to rock-cut monuments continually reshaped perceptions of the past, bridged huge gulfs of time and losses of memory and created useful pasts, either as direct interventions into royal or collective memory during the time of their creation or as raw material during later periods.[33] The primary audience of these reliefs were the elites and shaping their common understanding of the past was their primary vocation. Modern approaches to ancient art sometimes assume a democratization of viewership and legibility, which is anachronistic for the ancient world. Nevertheless, both the Achaemenid and Sasanian reliefs were placed next to important routes, prominent natural features or sites of religious significance that drew many people. Even if the exact meaning of the reliefs or inscriptions were not understood and if viewed from afar for the majority of the population, their presence demonstrated the power of their patrons to the many. Just as importantly, visually and discursively articulated landscapes not only shaped Iranian conceptions of the past but from a certain point view might be explained as the means by which Iranian culture expe-

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[33] This approach is evocatively laid forth by Harmanşah 2018.

rienced the living past and immanent future within the present and continually reconsolidated Iranian identities.[34] Ancient rock-cut monuments, either newly created or reworked over centuries, invited, compelled or even seduced the viewer to momentarily or even permanently experience the reality where past, present and future as a unity. In exercising this prerogative, kings of kings could control the past and shape perceptions the future. Through their presence alone, a rock relief transformed the landscape, augmenting its horizons, altering the profiles and textures of its natural features and its inhabitants' movement through or experience of natural or ritual space. Resistant (though not impervious) to natural and human depredations, the "material rhetoric" of rock-hewn sculpture, transformed ephemeral political discourse into a permanent immutable reality in the present. Much like their superhuman size, which dwarfs any human observer, their superhuman temporal scale made the viewer feel similarly small and ephemeral in comparison to their monument and patron.

5.6 A New Vision of Iranian Imperial Apocalyptic Eschatology in Sasanian Iran

In his one and only rock relief carved into the cliffs of the ancient Achaemenid necropolis at Naqš-e Rostam, the first Sasanian king of kings, Ardaxšīr I, created the most succinct and powerful formulations of imperial temporality and eschatology (Fig. 5.1) in ancient Iranian history. The rock relief represents the culmination of over a decade of experimentation and refinement of Sasanian monumental sculptural technique. It reflects an equally important process of experimentation in conceptualizing and imaging the king of kings' achievement and the cosmological import of the new empire and would make a major impact on his successors. The king of kings' earlier rock reliefs experimented with diverse ways to visually conceptualize and communicate triumph and divine investiture. His two rock reliefs carved into the cliffs of the Tang-e Āb river gorge to the north of his newly founded city of Ardaxšīr-Xwarrah draw on earlier ancient Iranian compositional traditions (Canepa 2018, 127–128). Relief I, which portrays the king of kings unhorsing the Arsacid king of kings Ardawān IV, grew from a long tradition in Parthian

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34 Thus these and other rock-cut monuments might be described as petrified transhistorical "ecstasies" in the sense of Heidegger: "Temporalizing does not signify that ecstasies come in a 'succession'. The future is not later than having been, and having been is not earlier than the Present. Temporality temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in a process of having been," Heidegger 1962, 401.

monumental art that used equestrian battles to conceptualize and communicate victory. Relief II, further up the river gorge and carved at the site of a bridge, portrays a fully anthropomorphized Ahura Mazda handing the king of kings a diadem. This basic theme is replicated more elaborately in Ardaxšīr I's relief at Naqš-e Rājāb, with a larger cast of human and supernatural characters viewing the proceedings.

In his equestrian triumph over Ardawān IV at Naqš-e Rostam, Ardaxšīr I combined two of the most common themes in ancient Iranian rock reliefs, not to mention ancient Western Asian art more broadly: triumph and divine investiture. Compared to the rougher hewn style of his earlier reliefs, Ardaxšīr I's relief at Naqš-e Rostam presents a new, deliberately 'classical' sculptural style growing from a newly constituted artistic school that integrated ancient Persian and Mediterranean forms and ideas. Ardaxšīr I presented this novel statement as intrinsically ancient by strategically replicating Achaemenid sculptural forms and finish in executing it (Canepa 2018, 259–260). Yet, the relief's composition is very much a contemporary creation, drawing from and speaking to a broader visual culture of triumph informed just as much by images and ideas from contemporary Rome as ancient Mesopotamia.

The image of a god handing a sovereign a circular object symbolizing royal power can be interpreted as engaging over two millennia of precedent in ancient Western Asian visual culture even if it was updated to match contemporary realities. The circular object visually evokes the coil of rope offered along with a rod in the earlier Mesopotamian divine investitures of Sumeria and Babylon. This circular object had been simplified in Darius I's Bīsotūn relief and all the Achaemenid royal tombs, where Ahura Mazda proffers the king of kings a circlet, which may have been intended to evoke that worn by the king of kings. Yet, while its circular shape might evoke these ancient precedents, in the Sasanian relief the Wise Lord offers a diadem with long streaming ties. The royal diadem (Mid. Pers. *didēm*), the superlative insigne and symbol of supreme royal power in Iran, had been introduced into Iran by Alexander and, in fact, had persisted in Iranian visual culture for centuries after it ceased to be an actual piece of regalia in the Mediterranean.[35] While the relief can be interpreted as referencing these broader Mesopotamian and Iranian visual precedents and themes, Ardaxšīr I's relief at Naqš-e Rostam introduces something compositionally and conceptually new into Iranian and ancient Western Asian visual culture. The relief is not simply interested in communicating that the king receives his crown through divine will, or defeats his enemies utterly; it presents a new and powerfully succinct formulation of a dis-

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35 See also Shenkar 2018 for an overview of the textual sources on the Sasanian diadem.

tinctly Zoroastrian kingship and the deeper cosmological, temporal and eschatological import of all of king of kings identity and earthly actions.

King and deity are both mounted and are represented as exactly the same height. The king is identifiable visually by his distinctive crown, though inscriptions on the horses ensure there is no ambiguity and identify him and the god in Parthian, Middle Persian, and Greek. God and king each trample their sprawled, unconscious enemies, the former Arsacid king of kings Ardawān IV and Ahreman, the "demon of demons." The Parthian king is dressed in his court costume and is most immediately recognizable by the domical Parthian tiara marked with a heraldic symbol. This royal image would have been familiar to a wide variety of viewers from the similar profile view afforded by the obverses of Parthian coins. As far as extant evidence allows us to conclude, Ardaxšīr I's relief is the first time in history that the Evil Spirit was represented visually in full corporal form. In order to envision the demon, the relief adapts and modified two serpentine iconographic devices from Greco-Roman visual culture, though not the traditional compositions associated with them. Ahreman's hair is a writhing mass of serpents, evoking Medusa though he is viewed in profile rather than frontally like the Gorgoneion. His legs terminate in serpent like Greco-Roman portrayals of the Titans or, more specifically, Typhon, though the prone profile representation diverges from the traditional frontal representations in Greek and Roman art of such deities. In addition, Roman portrayals of mounted emperors trampling barbarians may have provided raw material for the basic compositional subunit of king or deity trampling their adversaries, though it does not copy any one iconographic motif exactly. Despite the creative adaptation of these compositional and sculptural elements and intentional archaism of certain stylistic elements, taken as a whole, the relief presents a largely unprecedented vision. The composition is utterly unprecedented within both ancient Western Asian reliefs and Mediterranean triumphal imagery.

The relief's incredible theological sophistication suggests that it was produced with considerable input from priestly as well as royal agents. The composition divides the pictorial plane between the Living and Conceptual worlds on the horizontal axis, between left and right, while the vertical axis encodes an opposition between beings and states of existence belonging to the realms of divine, orderly Truth (OA *aṣ̌a-*, Old Pers. *arta-*) and demonic Lie (Old Pers. *drauga-*, Mid. Pers. *druz*). Just as the relief offers a variety of identities and ontologies for the king of kings, it offers them in inverse to the defeated Arsacid king. The composition predicates the identity of Ardaxšīr I's main Arsacid rival and all his works, and thus the Parthian Empire *in toto,* on that of the Evil Spirit and his disordered, false rule. The Arsacid king and the Parthian Empire are represented as the supreme earthly manifestations the swarm of adversarial 'counterfeits' (*paitiiāra-*) that Ahreman hacked out of the material world to oppose the Wise Lord's good

creations, or a *xrafstra*, one of the noxious, polluting, violent creatures that the Evil Spirit brought forth from his own filth to disorder and harass creation. And insofar as the Evil Spirit was unable to create anything substantially new and living himself, as a counterfeit Ardawān IV's rule and the Parthian Empire had no real, truthful substance. If the viewer interprets the relief as occurring in the near present, the king of kings' destruction of Ardawān IV is similar to a good Zoroastrian's effort to cleanse the world of the Evil Spirit's corruptions, though effected on a colossally royal scale. In removing him, Ardaxšīr I has incrementally cleansed the earth and brought it slightly closer to its prelapsarian perfection. The king of kings' historic, earthly destruction of the Parthian Empire as paradigmatically equivalent to the Wise Lord's ultimate triumph over the Evil Spirit, though it occurs in the historic time.

The relief, however, orients the viewer to the future too: during the *frašagird* all Ahuric creations fight and vanquish their dark, Ahremanic counterfeits (Gbd. 34.27; Zd. 35.37–38). Ardaxšīr I's actions and their import place him functionally in the place of Kay Husraw when he comes out of occultation to battle the demons and reign over one last golden age before the end times. The theologically nuanced viewer might perceive an even more audacious interpretation: the relief could represent the king as performing the role of Sōšāns, who wins the final battle between good and evil and bring about the Renovation. From this temporal perspective, this relief was a visual counterpart to and equal partner with the long tradition of Zoroastrian apocalyptic texts mentioned above. The relief shares with some texts a strategy of *vaticinatio ex eventu*, presenting Ardaxšīr I as the 'Prince that was Promised' who would defeat Iran's enemies and restore the Good Religion, though unlike the Middle Persian literature, which was 'updated' with later foes well into the Middle Ages and alluded to other rulers and enemies, the rock relief preserves a view from the early Sasanian Empire uncontaminated by later emendations. The relief acted as a revelation that disclosed a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisaged eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involved another, supernatural world (Cf. Collins 1979). Furthermore, it was "intended to interpret the present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority." (Cf. Collins 1986, 7.) The Sasanian version was state-sponsored, however, and thus intended to unite earthly and otherworldly authority.

5.7 The Legacy of Ardaxšīr I's Imperial Apocalyptic Eschatology

Beyond his own reign, Ardaxšīr I's relief offered a flexible conceptual paradigm through which later kings interpreted the challenges and triumphs of their own reigns. Compared to the abundant textual sources offered by the cuneiform world preserved in clay and Classical Mediterranean preserved on vellum and papyri, late antique Iran presents a notorious paucity of primary source textual evidence. Since as we do not have substantial coeval, indigenous textual evidence from the Sasanian empire, the rock reliefs, become crucially important as our most reliable primary sources, and it is here that we can clearly tracks the impact and continuing influence of the Ardaxšīr I's initial ideological productions created to conceptualize his empire and new royal identity. The Sasanians' strategic leveraging of dualism and apocalyptic eschatology as an imperial tool was a dynamic response to contemporary challenges and Šābuhr I's triumphal output changed radically after his victories over successive Roman armies. The majority of Šābuhr I's reliefs that celebrate his Roman victories cluster at Bīšābuhr, including reliefs I, II and III at the site (Figs. 5.4 to 5.6). The reliefs at Bīšābuhr seem to form a thematic and, with respect to reliefs II and III, formally and compositionally related grouping. Relief I at Bīšābuhr is the king's first rock relief at the site and it shows a progression in conceptualizing his first victory over the Romans portraying his early Roman victory through the visual paradigm that Ardaxšīr established with his final relief at Naqš-Rostam. Šābuhr I created images that celebrated these victories in other media, including small, portable objects like a special gold double dinar proclaiming the submission of Gordian or the Paris Cameo, which portrayed his capture of Valerian (Figs. 5.7–5.8). Yet his rock reliefs elaborate the cosmological import of his victories using Ardaxšīr I's precedent as the visual and conceptual referent point. Unlike his father who left no such record, Šābuhr I's trilingual inscription carved into the Achaemenid tower at Naqš-e Rostam (*ŠKZ*) offers an additional stream of evidence on how the king of kings intended the rock reliefs to be interpreted (Ed. Huyse 1999). The content of his trilingual inscription strongly suggests that the compositional parallels were not mere formal emulation, but originated from a deeper and more complex Iranian imperial worldview that interpreted the world discursively and visually through the paradigm of a broader anti-demonic, pre-eschatological struggle.

Fig. 5.4 Rock relief of Šābuhr I (Bīšābuhr Relief I). Investiture of Šābuhr I with the Roman emperor Philip the Arab submitting and Gordian III underhoof. Photo © Matthew P. Canepa.

Fig. 5.5 Rock relief of Šābuhr I (Bīšābuhr Relief II). Detail of central panel with Šābuhr I with the Roman emperors Valerian captured, Gordian III slain, and Philip the Arab submitting. Photo © Matthew P. Canepa.

Fig. 5.6 Rock relief of Šābuhr I (Bīšābuhr Relief III). Detail of central panel with Šābuhr I and the Roman emperors Valerian captured, Gordian III slain, and Philip the Arab submitting, before the defeated Kushan kings and submitting Kushan and Roman armies. Photo © Matthew P. Canepa.

The Iranian king of kings' relationship with the Roman emperor was much more varied and complex than his relationship with the last Arsacids, whose valence were stably demonic. In Šābuhr I's reliefs, each emperor is made to play a role representing one of the many complex roles that unfolded from Iran's relationship with Rome, inflected by either dualistic cosmology or epic lore. In effect, the emperors split off different possibilities for the king of kings' Roman 'brother.'[36] These range from a vengeful sibling infected with the Lie to invade and cause harm to Iran to a newly obedient and chastised subject.[37]

The Roman emperor Gordian III (r. 238–244 CE) died on campaign against the Sasanians though the Roman and Iranian sources diverge on the manner of his death. The Roman historiographical tradition claims Phillip the Arab assassinated the valiant young emperor in order to take power while Šābuhr I's inscription implies that he was killed (Parthian *ōzad*) in the battle of Mišīk, though he does not specify that it was by "he himself with his own hand" (*xwad pad xwēbaš dast*), a

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[36] Daryaee 2006; Canepa 2009, 126. On the Parthian precursors of the Sasanian vision, see Wiesehöfer 2011, 121.

[37] Canepa 2009, 126. On the changing identity of Alexander, see Wiesehöfer 2011.

Fig. 5.7 Gold double dinar of Šābuhr I, weight: 14.85 g, diameter: 28 mm. After Alram, Blet-Lemarquand and Skjærvø 2007.

fact that he was sure to emphasize with regards to the capture of Valerian.[38] Even if he was killed by fellow Romans in a camp coup rather than by the king's own hand, Šābuhr I seized on the death of Gordian III for a figure that could play a role analogous to Ardawān IV to frame his victory as more than equal compared to his father's. The Roman invasion, which had initially defeated a Persian army at Rhesaina, posed an existential threat to the king of kings. It would have gravely damaged the young king's and his dynasty's hold on power and damaged Iranian interests. The fact that Šābuhr I succeeded in turning it was woven into the Iranian narrative as triumph of clash between good and evil.

While extremely damaged from the river, the relief's full composition is recognizable as a variation on Ardaxšīr I's relief at Naqš-e Rostam. The figure of Gordian

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38 *SHA* Gord. 29–30; Eutr. 9.2–3; Zos. 1.18–19; Oros. 7.19; *ŠKZ* §§ 6–7.

Fig. 5.8 The Paris Cameo. Šābuhr I (right) triumphing over Valerian. Sardonyx. Paris BnF, Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, inv. 1893.

III harnessed the complex visual argument that Ardaxšīr I constructed to demonstrate that the king of king's earthly enemies and victories enjoy deeper eschatological parallels with, or more to the point, prefigurations of the Wise Lord's ultimate victory. Although the Persians had triggered the invasion by raiding into Roman territory, with the composition Šābuhr I portrays it as unprovoked malice similar in nature to Ahreman's *ēbgat,* the assault on the Wise Lord's good creations and order. The Roman senate and the historiographical tradition that generated our Roman narrative sources were hostile to Phillip, yet Gordian III's death was convenient for both camps at Mišīk. Phillip took the purple and Šābuhr I was able to portray himself as simultaneously destroying a demonically infected enemy while rehabilitating and setting the world back in order by installing a suitably faithful emperor in his place. In the *ŠKZ* the king of kings claims: "Phillip *Kēsar* came to us as a suppliant and gave us five hundred thousand *dēnār* for ransom for (his and the army's) lives and became tributary to us."[39]

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39 ŠKZ § 8; cf. the parallels analyzed in Alram, Blet-Lemarquand and Skjærvø 2007, 23–25.

Phillip the Arab's genuflection portrayed Rome's submission to the king of kings in a way that would be visually understandable on both sides of the frontier, though it was an image that Šābuhr I seems most intent on communicating to his Iranian elites and client kings. The king of kings sought to broadcast emperor's supposed submission and reduction to tributary status in a wide variety of media. Šābuhr I's portrayed the submission of Phillip differently in the rock reliefs compared to the portable media, a difference that is echoed with his treatment of the figure of Valerian. In the rock reliefs the emperor performs *proskynēsis/adoratio* in a manner that conforms ritually and iconographically to Roman tradition and is without visual precedent in Sasanian or Arsacid official art. By strategically selecting this mode of expressing submission, Šābuhr I appropriated and inverted a long tradition of Roman triumphal iconography portraying Iranians as defeated and subject to Rome (Analyzed in detail in Canepa 2009, 53–78). The reverse of the gold double dinar portrays the emperor performing a different ritual act. To ensure that there could be not be any confusion it is surrounded by the legend: "This [was at] that [time] when he placed Phillippos Caesar and Rome in tribute and servitude" (*ēn ān ka-š fripōs kēzar ud hrōmāy pad bāz ud bandag[īh] estād hēn*) (Alram, Blet-Lemarquand and Skjærvø 2007, 23). Phillip stands with his back to the viewer with both legs slightly bent and his head raised to the king of kings who is mounted. The emperor's hands are held in front and are not fully visible to the viewer. They may be interpreted as an act of supplication or even as holding the reigns of the Iranian king's horse, marking his transformation from sovereign to a loyal vassal.

The capture of Roman emperor Valerian in 260 outside the cities of Carrhae and Edessa expanded Šābuhr I's triumphal repertoire and was his crowning achievement (ŠKZ §§18–22). The capture of Valerian appears in the king of kings' four subsequent rock reliefs, one at Dārābgerd where the event is portrayed alone, two at Bīšābuhr (reliefs II and III, Figs. 5.5–5.6 above), which combine all three Roman emperors and events into a much larger composition, while the one at Naqš-e Rostam, portrays only Phillip and Valerian (Fig. 5.9).[40] The capture of Valerian, portrayed as an equestrian combat, is the sole focus of the Paris Cameo (Fig. 5.8), whose existence implies that this image was emitted in all sorts of portable media. The later Bīšābuhr reliefs, however, depict a multitude of other figures

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40 Portrayed with his father's crown, the rock relief at Dārābgerd sculpted into a rock face overlooking a spring a tableau portraying the king of kings capturing a Roman emperor, palming his inclined head his hand. The relief is eccentric formally and compositionally and, with respect to the crown, iconographically to the other reliefs, but not thematically. It presents a variant and likely locally significant retelling of the event expressed visually in the Paris Cameo and reliefs at Bīšābuhr and Naqš-e Rostam.

with the Roman emperors appearing as permanent iconographic appendages to the king of kings and subordinate to the larger composition. Bīšābuhr I presents the fullest visual account of the Sasanian court's ongoing interpretation of the events of 244, though it underpins the basic internal logic of the central scenes of Bīšābuhr II and III. One might interpret these later reliefs as combining the outcome of the battle of Mišīk in 244 (subsequently renamed by the king as Peroz-Šābuhr "Victorious-is-Šābuhr") and Carrhae and Edessa in 260, collapsing the pivotal events visually into one composition. In all of the Bīšābuhr reliefs, the related relief at Naqš-e Rostam, and the Paris Cameo, the king of kings holds Valerian's wrist or hands. Indicating that this was an outgrowth of a broader politico-theological program, his inscription portrays Valerian as "made prisoner with our own hands," (*xwad pad xwēbaš dast dastgraw kerd*, ŠKZ Mid. Pers. § 22).
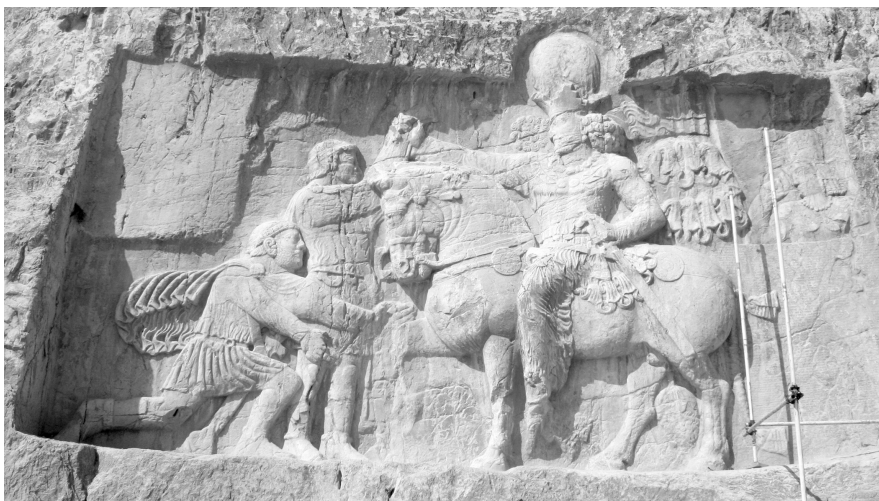
Fig. 5.9 Rock relief of Šābuhr I (Naqš-e Rostam Relief VI). Šābuhr I with Valerian captured and Philip the Arab submitting. Photo © Matthew P. Canepa.

Keeping in mind that the relief and the king of kings' royal inscription were created years after the event, the reliefs communicate multiple, ongoing simultaneously true realities about Iran's evolving relationship with the Roman empire. While the Arsacid Empire could be destroyed once and for all, the Roman empire continued to endure. Furthermore, unlike the Arsacids, the Roman emperors presented a range of possibilities in life, foreign policy, and eventually in Iranian epic: brothers, tributary subjects, allies, and enemies. Gordian III's place within the composition implies that his actions are alike in substance to those of Ahreman as the king of kings' are to the Wise Lord. During the reign of Šābuhr I the Roman em-

pire's right to exist was never called into question although individual emperors might be seduced to by Ahreman and the demons. Šābuhr I's inscription portrays the Valerian as breaking faith with the Iranians in intervening and describes his treatment of Armenia using terms of demonic speech and action: "And Caesar lied (*druxt*) and violated (*wināh kerd*) Armenia."[41] The verb for "violate" or "harm," also has the connotation of "sin," adding another layer of complexity, suggesting he was moved by Ahreman to lie, though his sin was on a human scale, not Ahreman incarnate as the figure of Gordion III. Visually, the reliefs resolve the ambiguities by splitting these roles into multiple personalities and represent one very important step along the way to the more ritualized state of affairs that unfolded between the two empires in succeeding centuries (Explored in Canepa 2009). Furthermore, it is no surprise that this same period also witnessed other attempts to leverage apocalyptic revelations in Iran, eschatological and otherwise, both those within the Sasanian elite, like the high priest Kartir, and outsiders like the prophet Mani. Kartir, a Zoroastrian priest allied to the court undertook a journey to the otherworld to prove the veracity of his teachings (an apocalyptic revelation, though not of the eschaton) leaving an inscriptional record, and the prophet Mani, whose own apocalyptic eschatology conveyed in both texts and images foretold a different account of the ends of days.[42]

5.8 Cleansing Iran of Ahreman

Ardaxšīr I's visual paradigm of dualism and eschatology was adapted to explain internal turmoil and even usurpations. Šābuhr I was succeeded by Wahrām I (273–276) and Wahrām I's son Wahrām II (276–302); Narseh (r. 293–302 CE), as a younger son of Šābuhr I, was cut out of the line of succession. When Wahram II's son, Wahrām III (293), came to power, Narseh was reportedly invited by a co-

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41 ŠKZ 9.3 (Mid. Pers./Parth. *druxt*; Mid. Pers. *wināh kerd*, Parth. *winās kerd*; Gr. *epseúsato; adikían epoísen*).

42 For an entry into the literature on both, see Skjærvø 2011b, Baker-Briant and Canepa 2018 and Gulácsi 2016. Several Pahlavi texts mentioned integrate attacks by Rome or Romans as part of prophesies or eschatological narratives, including the *Bundahišn, Dēnkard, Zand ī Wahman Yasn, Jāmāsp-Nāmag* and *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag.* However, these texts were composed well after the fall of the empire to the Arabs with prophetic inclusions of the Romans intended to provide 'proof' of the veracity of the text. Nevertheless, within Zoroastrian historiography, "Alexander the Roman" is the quintessential figure of a 'Roman' doing the work of Ahreman. While the texts were composed later, the conflicted figure existed in Sasanian discourse and may have provided a template for understanding the behaviors of the actual Romans. For an entry into the literature on such texts, see Agostini 2013; 2017a and 2017b.

alition of the grandees of the realm to take the crown instead (Weber 2016). Narseh forced his grandnephew to abdicate after a short four-month reign, subverting his father's wishes that the crown should pass through the elder male line. Narseh resorted to a variety of legitimizing strategies, some of which were novel while others drew from deeper Iranian discursive, visual, architectural traditions. Some of these included staging an election by a counsel of the nobility, a step that he implied Wahrām III had foregone in his inscriptions. After he had secured power, he built a monument that evoked Šābuhr I's treatment of the Kaʻba-ye Zardošt, which carried an extensive inscription giving his version of events at the site where he claims the "Landholders, the Princes, the Grandees, the Nobles, the Houselords," of the realm met and welcomed him (Fig. 5.10).[43] Furthermore, in order to convert what was, in effect, a brazen usurpation into an epic battle between good and evil, Narseh claimed that his grandnephew had been seduced by Wahnām son of Tatrus, who according to Narseh, was not a counsellor, but an evil sorcerer and agent of Ahreman. In his inscription he claims that: "And Wahnām, son of Tatrus, [through] his own falsehood and [with the help] of Ahreman and the devils, attached the Diadem [to the head of {Wahrām}, king of Sakas]."[44] By cleansing Iran of this disorder, Narseh's actions are as paradigmatically equivalent to those of the Wise Lord paralleling Ardaxšīr I's visual argument. Narseh claimed that his role on earth was to eradicate the works of Ahreman and, anticipating what would occur cosmically at the Renovation, renew Ērānšahr and bring it back in alignment with the true order of things. Furthermore, when met by his supporters Narseh was exhorted to "hold and govern the country till the time of the renovation" (NPi H5 § 89. Cereti and Terribili 2014, 381–382). Well beyond simply wishing him a long reign, this acclamation sets up a familiar comparison between the king and Sōšāns.

With clear inspiration from Ardaxšīr I's precedent, Narseh not only expressed this verbally but made this eschatological argument visually. Going a step further than his monument and inscription at Paikuli, rewrote history by reshaping the seemingly indelible rupestrian heritage of Bīšābuhr. Before Narseh came to power, Wahrām I, the son of Šābuhr I and grandfather of Wahrām III, carved his own rock relief into the walls of Bīšābuhr's river gorge. Emulating Šābuhr I's

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43 NPi §§ 82–83; trans. Cereti and Terribili 2014, 381. The monument was discovered in 1843 by H. Rawlinson and surveyed by E. Herzfeld in 1924. The site has recently been re-explored by an Italian-Kurdish team led by C. Cereti. Its inscriptions were published by Humbach and Skjaervø 1978–1983 with additions resulting from the discoveries of the Italian-Kurdish project as published in Cereti and Terribili 2014. On its connection to the broader tradition of Sasanian memorial practices and the deeper significance of the tower, see Canepa 2018, 251–270.
44 NPi A8,02–A15,02, trans. Shayegan (with modification). See also Shayegan 2011, 12–14.

Fig. 5.10 Site of Narseh's tower at Paikuli. Courtesy Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin/Wikimedia.

second relief at Naqš-e Rājāb (Relief IV), Wahrām I carved a relief at Bīšābuhr (Relief V) that replicated the basic composition of Ardaxšīr I's relief, though without any enemy underhoof (Fig. 5.11). These reliefs use the classic composition to make the simple assertion that the king of kings receives the kingship from the Wise Lord and is his representative on earth. At some point after he had taken power, Narseh claimed and re-carved Wahrām I's rock relief at Bīšābuhr, modifying the crown and inscription. In doing so he obliterated the image and public memory of the founder of the branch of the Sasanian dynasty that had produced his former rival Wahrām III. More importantly, for the purposes of this study, it visually framed the usurpation as yet another successful struggle of good over evil.

Narseh modified the relief adding a fallen and defeated enemy under the hooves of king of kings' horse, which at a stroke modified the significance of the relief. The fallen figure betrays its later origins through a different sculptural style and wear pattern compared to the rest of the relief and was undoubtedly intended to represent Wahnām son of Tatrus. It is noteworthy that Narseh did not bother to add the figure of Ahreman under the Wise Lord, quite likely because at this time the composition itself was so securely indexed to that of Ardaxšīr I at Naqš-e Rostam and Šābuhr I's many reliefs at the same site that any viewer in the know would automatically fill it in and understand its implied visual argument. The inclusion of the enemy compositionally imputes an Ahremanic nature to

Fig. 5.11 Relief of Wahrām I, re-carved by Narseh (Bīšābuhr Relief V). King of kings (right) invested by the Wise Lord (left) with the traitor and agent of Ahreman, Wahnām, son of Tatrus underhoof (added by Narseh). Photo © Matthew P. Canepa.

the defeated enemy and reinforces the king's own righteousness and role as an Ahuric agent of order. Like the inscribed tower at Paikuli, it adapts the monumental idioms that his grandfather and father established to portray the events of his reign as divinely ordained, reshaping the official version of events of his reign just as he reshaped the relief itself, effectively erasing the progenitor of the line Wahrām III from monumental history.

5.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored how Sasanian kings conceptualized pivotal events in their reigns as participating in a long battle between good and evil, prefiguring and even joining in the struggles at the end of time. The Sasanians' strategies participated in a long tradition of Iranian royal and religious eschatological discourse, and their own interventions decisively shaped late antique and medieval Zoroastrian apocalyptical speculation. What sets Sasanian imperial eschatology apart from previous and subsequent iterations was the extent to which it developed not just as an oral or textual discourse but as a visual, spatial and ritual

one as well. The Sasanians' monumental reliefs and sanctuaries made an experience of the eschaton present in the lives of their elites and populace. These efforts were primarily directed at an elite aristocratic or priestly audience, and indeed likely carried out with their collaboration. However, they were not without significance for the wider Iranian demographic core of their empire. This is especially noticeable at Kuh-e Khwājā, the Lake of the Revitalizer which hosted a priestly college and was likely the focus of pilgrimage. It offered visitors a chance to stand at the site where the end of the world would begin and look out across the very lake that held Zoroaster's seed and where Sōšāns would emerge after his virgin birth to initiate the Renovation.

Ardaxšīr I's relief at Naqš-e Rostam represents a pivotal monument in the conceptual development of Iranian imperial eschatology. Many Sasanian rock reliefs allowed the viewer a glimpse at the unseen World of Thought (Old Av. *manahiia-*, Young Av. *mainiiauua-*, Mid. Pers. *mēnōg*). This operated behind the scenes, offering a visual impingement of the divine realm upon the terrestrial realm with gods and goddesses occupying the same pictorial space as mortals. However, Ardaxšīr I's relief at Naqš-e Rostam and those that follow it go several steps further opens up vast transtemporal vistas beyond the present. It extends this vision into the past and, most significantly, deep into future offering the viewer an omniscient viewpoint that not only blurs the Living World and the World of Thought but collapses "cut" and "uncut" time. These reliefs challenge the viewer to ask not only "what?" but "when?" and "why?" In answer, Ardaxšīr I's relief offers multiple possibilities, a slippage that the patron likely encouraged: in historic time (after Hormozgān) or the End Times (at the Renovation when the dead will rise and be purified in a sea of molten metal and the Wise Lord will make the earth 'wondrous,' or in infinite, 'uncut' time. Furthermore, its symmetrical composition presents a powerful unified expression of past historical and future eschatological events and the relationship between them. The composition's symmetry implies that everything happening on one side is paradigmatically equivalent to what occurs on the other. No matter how one interprets it temporally, the relief's symmetrical composition portrays Ardaxšīr I's as the earthly counterpart of the Wise Lord and, by extension, all of his actions both flow from the Wise Lord's divine plan and divine work to effect it. This established a surprisingly flexible lens through which later kings could view the challenges and successes of their reigns. It allowed Šābuhr I to conceptualize and communicate his relationship to the numerous and concomitant identities and actions of his Roman adversaries, from Gordian III's Ahremanic *ēbgat*, to Phillip's chastised subjection, to Valerian's tragic seduction by the demons to lie and sin and punishment for it. With it, Narseh integrated his usurpation discursively, architecturally and visually into a longer dynastic and Iranian legacy of struggle against the works of the Evil spirit. As visual counterparts to the

long tradition of Zoroastrian apocalyptic texts the visual experience of these reliefs collapse space and time and provide hope for the true believer that all the violence, destruction and misery that came in wake of the Sasanians' rise to power, wars of conquest and internal upheavals had a purpose. Like the traditions of Zoroastrian apocalyptic eschatology, which were similarly reshaped and redeployed many times throughout ancient and medieval Iranian history, this image provided a flexible heuristic method for making sense of the triumphs of Iranian history and imagining possibilities to face and overcome its inevitable tragedies.

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Johannes Preiser-Kapeller

6 A Christian Roman Empire? Byzantium between Imperial Monotheism and Religious Multiplicity, Fourth to Ninth Century CE (and Beyond)

6.1 Introduction

The Christian Roman ("Byzantine") Empire of the East has often been identified as a "religious" empire par excellence, more or less the political embodiment of the (Byzantine) Orthodox branch of Christianity (and thereby a model for other Orthodox polities, especially the Russian Empire). The highly diverse religious landscape of the Roman Empire up to the fourth century CE (see Rüpke, this volume), however, would have allowed for several other options to organize the relationship between imperial power and the sacred, as also the various examples from other empires in the present volume illustrate. Yet once initiated by privileging one among the various religious communities of the empire with an exclusive claim onto the "true" faith, the "Christianisation" of the Empire turned out to be a self-enforcing process, whose dynamics and shapes (as before) often emerged beyond the control of the imperial regime and in contrast challenged it in new ways quite quickly. Nevertheless, the increasing equation of *Romanitas* ("Roman-ness") with Christianity contributed to the cohesion of central and provincial elites, urban and rural populations during the severe crisis of the fifth and especially the sixth to seventh centuries—and thus to the very survival of the empire in the core regions to the west and east of Constantinople, though at the price of an alienation of those eastern provinces where other interpretations of the Christian dogma became predominant (see below). The loss of the latter to the Arabs in the seventh century allowed for a higher degree of religious homogeneity within the remaining empire. Harmony between imperial and ecclesiastical power, however, was short living—and the conflicts between emperor and church were often not less pronounced as in the (since Charlemagne) Western "Holy Roman Empire" (Scales, this volume), maybe even more so since emperor and patriarch shared the same urban and ceremonial space in Constantinople (in contrast to the West, where itinerant rulers only occasionally challenged the Pope in Rome).

The focus on the following pages is on the impact of religious change on the internal cohesion of the late antique and medieval Roman Empire, although (also imperially sponsored) proselytization allowed for the establishment of new

layers of political and cultural allegiance of communities and polities beyond the imperial borders. These linkages, however, rarely resulted in a (sustained) expansion of these borders. More important, the existence of a number of religiously affiliated polities served as proof for the "universal" grasp of imperial Roman Christian power when the actual spatial extent of the Byzantine polity had contracted dramatically (especially in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries). Furthermore, doctrinal controversies complicated the integration of newly conquered Christian populations (such as in Armenia in the sixth-seventh century and in Armenia and Syria in the eleventh century, see Preiser-Kapeller 2021a) or, as already mentioned, even added to other factors for the loss of large parts of the Empire in the East to the Arabs in the seventh century (although this story is more complex than sometimes assumed, see below).

In total, the embracement of one specific religion among the many of their empire by the Roman rulers of the fourth century even in the short term created as many challenges as opportunities, if seen in comparison with other cases discussed in the present volume. While one may not fall into line with those who attributed the "Fall of Rome" (meaning the Western Roman Empire) to its Christianization (as both "pagan" authors of the fifth century as well as thinkers of the Western European enlightenment in the eighteenth century did, see Demandt 2014, 246–273), as Almut Höfert (2015, 236–237) makes clear, the "price which the Christian Roman Empire paid for the larger religious-cultural cohesive power of imperial monotheism was an increased potential of conflict resulting from dogmatic struggles" (both within and beyond the borders of the empire). In the long term, however, the intertwinement between Christianity and Roman-ness in the Byzantine world over more than one millennium also allowed for the continuity of the later (as "Romaiosyne" of orthodox Greek-speaking population in the Eastern Mediterranean) beyond the end of the empire in 1453 up to the nineteenth and even twentieth century—at a time, when nowhere else within the former Imperium Romanum (with the exception of the city of Rome) one would still identify as "Roman" (Koder 1990; Pohl, Gantner, Grifoni and Pollheimer-Mohaupt 2018; Kaldellis 2019).

6.2 The Emergence of Imperial Monotheism and the Changing Nature of Religious Multiplicity in the (Eastern) Roman Empire, Fourth to Sixth Century CE

The significance of the so-called "Constantinian turn", which initiated the transformation of the Imperium Romanum into a Christian empire, is undisputed. Under Emperor Constantine (r. 306/324–337 CE), the Christian churches turned from a persecuted community into a not only tolerated, but even privileged religious institution. At the same time, there is still a lot of discussion up to the present day as to whether this also included a personal "conversion" of Constantine I to Christianity. Both Christian and "pagan" interpretations of the visions of the Divine existed, which Constantine is said to have experienced before defeating his rival Maxentius in the Battle of Pons Mulvius in Rome (October 28, 312 CE). His personal view of these events and beliefs derived from them remain contentious (Girardet 2010; Edwards 2015).

Even before, in the third century CE, the character of the imperial office in the Roman Empire had changed. Also as a reaction to its constant threat through attempts of usurpation from the rows of the military, it was increasingly elevated into the sacral sphere (cf. also Kaldellis 2015, 174–176). With this, a tightening of the punishment of religious deviance went hand in hand. Already Emperor Decius between 249 and 251 CE initiated a first extensive persecution of the now widespread Christian faith, another one followed under Emperor Valerian in 257/258 CE. During the reign of Diocletian (r. 284–305 CE) and the regime of the four emperors (Tetrarchs) initiated by him in order to stabilise the Empire after the "military anarchy" of the preceding 50 years, efforts to preserve the traditional cults, which were also aimed at the worship of the emperors, intensified. These efforts were first directed against the Manichaeans, a dualistic religious community originating in Sasanian Persia (see Canepa in this volume). In 303 CE, legislation against the Christians followed, ordering their removal from offices and honours (in the army and administration), the destruction of churches and copies of the Holy Scriptures and, in cases of perpetual resistance and refusal of sacrifice, decreeing death. The actual extent of the persecution depended on the "élan" of the emperor of the respective part of the empire or of the local functionaries; it was most intense in the east of the empire, where the largest Christian communities were to be found (Jones 1964, 70–76; Pfeilschifter 2014, 35–42; Höfert 2015, 96–97). It was also in the eastern parts, that the "Tolerance Edict" of 311 CE proclaimed by Emperor Galerius shortly before his death ended the persecutions of Christians.

The full freedom of faith was then granted by the Emperors Constantine I in the west and Licinius in the east to all subjects in 313 CE in the famous "Edict of Milan". Furthermore, Constantine I provided Christian churches with extensive privileges in his realm: in 319 CE, the Christian clerics were exempted from all tax obligations. In 321 CE, the Sunday rest was legally enshrined. At the same time, the emperor became not only a patron, but also a leader of the church: already in 314 CE he confirmed the vote of a council convened by him in Arles (in Southern France), which condemned the doctrine of the Donatists. This Christian church had emerged in North Africa and opposed the resumption of clerics who had renounced their faith during the pre-ceding period of persecution (yet, despite the synod's verdict, Donatism would thrive in North Africa until the sixth century CE). The favouritism of Christians by Constantine, however, aroused the distrust of Licinius. As the tensions between the two emperors intensified, Licinius violently attacked the Christians, which served as a *casus belli* for Constantine. After his victory in 324 CE, Constantine I ruled over the entire Empire and perpetuated his triumph with the laying of the cornerstone of a new capital at the Bosporus, integrating the ancient Greek colony of Byzantium (hence the name of the emerging Christian Roman Empire in the East in later scholarship). Constantinople was not planned as a purely Christian city, but received also pagan monuments in addition to churches. The direction of imperial favour and the increasing influence of Christianity became clearly visible in public space, however, with church buildings in both the new and the old capital (Rome), and in Jerusalem (Edwards 2015; Girardet 2010; Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller 2016).

Shortly after his victory over Licinius, Constantine had to deal with another debate within the church, which revolved around the doctrine of the Priest Arius from Alexandria. He asserted that Jesus Christ, as a creature, was only similar to God-Father, but not the same; the father alone is God (Berndt and Steinacher 2014). To clarify this question, Constantine in 325 CE rallied a general ("ecumenical") Council of more than 200 bishops to Nicaea in northwestern Asia Minor. The church thus also became visible as an organisation that already covered all provinces of the empire. At the council, the doctrine of Arius was condemned and contrasted with the dogma of the triune God in the identity of God-Father, God-Son and God-Holy Spirit. With the council, the imperial office had established itself as a crucial element in the structure of the church; Christian authors developed a Christian image of the imperial office and tried to integrate the empire into the divine plan of salvation (see below, also on the actual effectiveness of this imagery).

Garth Fowden and most recently Almut Höfert used the term "imperial monotheism": "one god, one emperor as an image of God, one world empire, one

faith".[1] Yet, the debate over the so-called "Arianism" (as the one on Donatism, see above) right from the beginning also pointed out the limits of imperial influence in matters of doctrine, for the teaching of Arius did not disappear at all, but continued to find adherents (Piétri and Piétri 1996, 271–344; Dagron 2003; Morrisson 2004, 58–64, 88–90; Berndt and Steinacher 2014). Even Constantine I himself later showed sympathy for the Arian position, as did one of his sons and successors Constantius II (r. 337–361 CE). Constantius II, however, equally could not enforce his preferred interpretation of faith against the resistance of the followers of the doctrine of Trinity.

Despite these conflicts, the influence of Christianity and the number of its adherents among the elite of the empire grew steadily. This also Constantius' II nephew Julian (r. 361–363 CE), by Christian chroniclers called "the apostate", had to acknowledge, who turned to a Neoplatonic-philosophically oriented "paganism" and after his ascendance to power in the entire empire in 361 tried to reduce the influence of Christians in public life, in education and in the charitable sector. His early death on a campaign against the Sasanian Persians in June 363 CE put an end to all these efforts (Cameron 1994, 105–119; Piétri and Piétri 1996, 396–413; Demandt 2007, 119–135; Pfeilschifter 2014, 90–100). The Emperors Iovian (r. 363–364) and Valens (r. 364–378) in turn professed Christianity again, Valens in its Arian form. However, the Trinitarian doctrine gained the upper hand also through the influence of personalities such as the so-called "three Cappadocian church fathers" (Basil of Kaisareia, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa), again demonstrating the potential for a challenge of imperial religious politics by charismatic figures (Piétri and Piétri 1996, 417–449; Pfeilschifter 2014, 101–103).

At the same time, decisive steps were taken towards a final Christianisation of the empire. Emperor Theodosius I, who was the first emperor to be already baptised during his reign, assembled a second ecumenical council in Constantinople in 381 CE, in which an updated version of the Creed of Nicaea was declared binding for the entire imperial church. In a law in 391 CE, not only the practice of contradictory beliefs was forbidden, but also the imperial support of all non-Christian cults. Christianity thus became the only state-sponsored religion, the Christians by these decades presumably represented the majority of population in the empire (Piétri and Piétri 1996, 450–471; Morrison 2004, 63–64; Pfeilschifter 2014, 108–120). Theodosius I was also the last emperor to rule both the Eastern and the Western half of the Imperium Romanum; in the West, emperors now did not reside in

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1 Fowden 1993; Höfert 2015, 129–150. Garth Fowden even speaks of a "late antique zeitgeist of universalism", which combined political and religious-cultural rule to a higher degree than before, drawing also comparisons with Sasanian Persia or Buddhist and Hindu ideals of the universal ruler ("*Chakravartin*"); cf. also Preiser-Kapeller 2018, 73–76.

Rome anymore most of the time, but in other cities such as Milan. There, Emperor Theodosius I by the influential Bishop Ambrose in 390 CE was forced to publicly repent after imperial troops had bloodily quelled a rebellion in Thessaloniki, killing more than 7,000 Christians. As became evident, a baptised emperor, whose legitimation increasingly relied upon his ("correct/orthodox") Christian belief, could now also be compelled to obey the rules of the church (Kaiser 2014, 52–54; Grünbart 2014, 16).

Theodosius I died in January 395 CE in Milan; before his death, he had installed his sons Arcadius (in the East, born in about 377) and Honorius (in the West, born in 384) as co-emperors. This division of the empire now proved to be permanent, even if the empire was still perceived as one entity. There were also divergent developments in the ecclesiastical debates, not least because of the different linguistic conditions (dominance of Latin in the West, of Greek in the East), but with the most severe theological disputes being fought within the Church of the East in the following centuries. These revolved mainly around the relationship of divine and human nature in Jesus Christ ("Christology") (Winkelmann 1980). Disputes over faith were entangled with conflicts between the rival patriarchates (i. e., hierarchs claiming supervision over a larger number of bishoprics in the surrounding provinces) in the "mega-cities" of the East, Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria and Constantinople, which had emerged as the highest echelon within the episcopal hierarchy. Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria (in office 412–444) acted as an advocate of a doctrine of "one nature" (in Greek "Miaphysitism", also referred to by opponents as "Monophysitism"), according to which the divine and the human in Christ would have formed one nature. Therefore, Mary could also be called *Theotokos* (in Greek literally the "God-bearer"). The Patriarch of Constantinople Nestorius (in office 428–431) turned against this formulation and proposed a doctrine of two natures (divine and human). In contrast, the strict separation of the two natures and the assumption of two persons in Christ attributed to Nestorius and his followers by Cyril and his party at the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus 431 and at later occasions cannot be proved in retrospect. Nevertheless, Nestorius was convicted and dismissed at the council; followers of a similar doctrine found refuge especially in the Persian Empire, where a separate "Nestorian" church of the East emerged beyond the borders of the Imperium Romanum (later expanding across Central Asia all the way to China in the seventh century, interestingly partly under Sasanian—non-Christian, Zoroastrian—imperial patronage) (Grillmeier 1989–2002; Selb 1981; Baumer 2005; see also Canepa in the present volume).

The triumph of the one-nature doctrine within the Roman Empire, however, did not last long. A few years after the death of Cyril, another council convened in Chalcedon (at the Asian side of the Bosporus vis-à-vis Constantinople) in 451

CE, at which a doctrine of two natures (Dyophysitism) was made binding. As the Council declared, there was a divine and a human nature in Christ, "unmixed, unchanged, undivided and unseparated" (Grillmeier 1989–2002; Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller 2016). Again, the imperial centre could by no means enforce the general recognition of the Council's decisions; especially in the rich provinces of Egypt and Syria, but also in parts of Asia Minor, the doctrine of one nature remained strong. There, doctrinal opposition mixed also with elements of regional identity, as became evident with the emergence of Coptic, Syriac or Armenian as languages of liturgy and of Christian literature in addition to and competition with Greek. The decision of Chalcedon in contrast was supported by the sole Patriarch of the West in Rome, Pope Leo I (in office 440–461).[2] In Chalcedon 451, also the organisation of the imperial church in five patriarchates in the hierarchical order Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem was codified (map 6.1) (Piétri 2001, 113–117). At the same time, however, the political framework of the Roman Empire in the West already had begun to fragment. The plundering of Rome by the Goths in 410 CE and the conquest of the richest provinces in North Africa by the Vandals from 429 CE onwards made the "Fall of Rome" and the consecutive establishment of regional kingdoms increasingly plausible. Against this background, Augustine in Hippo Regius in North Africa between 413 and 426 wrote his twenty-volume treatise on the "City of God" (*De civitate Dei*), where he made clear that Christian faith and Christian church could also exist without the Roman Empire. At the same time, he rejected accusations of "pagan" authors that the disavowal of the traditional gods in favour of Christianity had brought about the Western empire's calamities (Brown 2000; Seele 2008).

The Empire in the East however could be stabilised due to the wealth of the provinces in the Levant and Egypt, which were beyond the grasp of invaders, and the relative cohesion of the regime in Constantinople, which became permanent imperial residence from 395 CE onwards. There, similar to the first two centuries of the Principate in imperial Rome, a relatively balanced "system of acceptance" emerged. An individual's appropriation and preservation of the imperial office depended on the recognition by the leading representatives of the civil elites, the people of the capital (with whom the Emperor "communicated" especially during the games in the Hippodrome) and the troops stationed in and around the capital, but without the military acting as (almost) sole emperor maker or breaker as in the third and fourth century CE (Pfeilschifter 2013, 1–40; Pfeilschifter 2014, 21–22, 196–205). Gradually, also church representatives played a role in this process: lack-

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2 Piétri 2001, 90–113, 120–129; Morrison 2004, 69–7. On languages in the Eastern Roman Empire, cf. esp. Millar 2006, esp. 93–115.
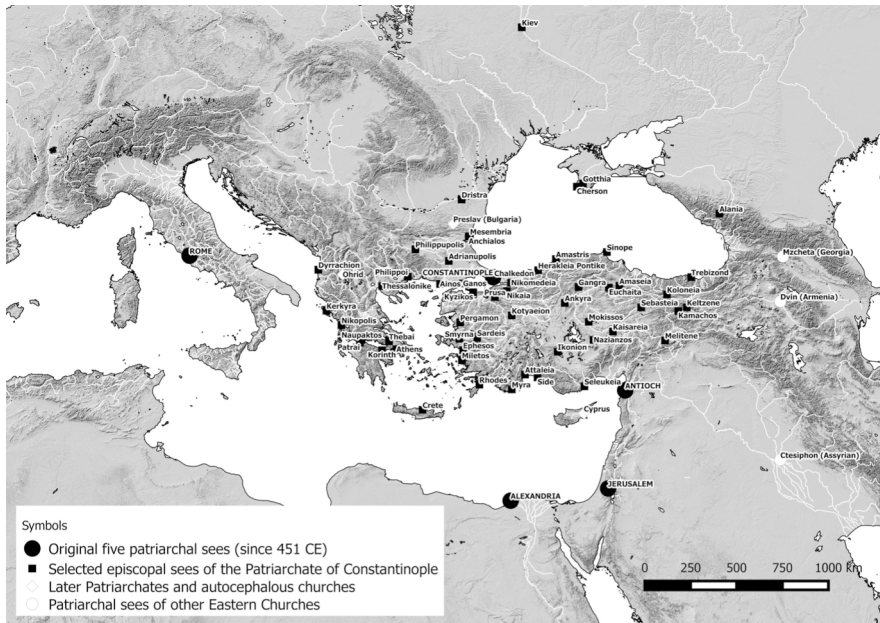
Map 6.1: Patriarchal and selected episcopal sees (since the Chalcedon council, 451).

ing (legally by no means necessary but useful) dynastic connections to his prede-
cessors, in 457 CE Leon I was crowned as the emperor after his election by the Pat-
riarch of Constantinople to increase his legitimacy. Yet the seizure of imperial
power remained legitimate without such an ecclesiastical ceremony for centuries
(Cameron, Ward-Perkins and Whitby 2000, 45–46; Dagron 2003).

At the same time, the emperors of the East also had to deal with the threat
doctrinal differences within the church and accompanying social unrest and
even violent conflicts between competing groups could pose for the integrity of
their polity. Emperor Zeno (r. 474–491) and Patriarch Acacius of Constantinople
(in office 471–489) in 484 CE initiated a compromise attempt to quell the debate
about the relationship of natures in Jesus Christ (with the so-called "*Henotikon*"
edict, trying to reconcile the dogmatic differences between the supporters of the
Council of Chalcedon and its opponents). While some relaxation was achieved
with the miaphysite communities in the eastern provinces, the popes refused
any deviation from Chalcedon. The consequence was the so-called "Acacian
schism", which divided the churches of Rome (since 476 under the rule of German-
ic princes) and Constantinople until 519 CE (Piétri 2001, 131–137, 180–209; Kötter
2013; Feld 2005, 287–297; Pfeilschifter 2014, 178–180). Furthermore, competitors
for the imperial office used the supposed deviation of the emperor from "Ortho-

doxy" to mobilise zealous followers of the dogma of Chalcedon within the provinces of the Eastern Roman Empire. The same was true for Zeno's successor Anastasius I (r. 491–518 CE), whose election in the hippodrome of Constantinople was already accompanied by chants demanding a "Roman" and an "orthodox Emperor". With some effort, however, Anastasios despite his clear miaphysite sympathies was able to appease a similar minded crowd in the hippodrome in 512 CE (Piétri 2001, 137–146; Meier 2009, 250–288).

In 519 CE, Emperor Justin I again took a swing in church politics away from the compromise formula of the "Henotikon" towards a clear Chalcedonian line. The schism with the papacy in Rome was thus ended (in 526 Pope John I even visited Constantinople), but the conflict with the followers of Miaphysitism in the Eastern provinces rekindled (Piétri 2001, 146–152). Justin I in August 527 was succeeded by his nephew Justinian I (r. 527–565 CE). The newcomer was filled with a special sense of mission; he described himself in the prologue of one of his many laws as "appointed by God to govern our kingdom, which has been given to us by heavenly sovereignty" (and thus located his position beyond the mere earthly election by the senate, people and army, although also these "pillars" of the regime were evoked in other texts) (Leppin 2011, 89–91; Meier 2003, 104–135; Höfert 2015, 182–197).

The first phase of Justinian's government was also characterised by a tremendous zeal for reform. His goals included the "completion" of the Christianisation of the Empire and the final suppression of "paganism". This was marked by the closure of remaining prominent "pagan" institutions such as the Academy (originally founded by Plato) in Athens in 529 CE or the Isis Temple on the Nile island of Philae in southern Egypt. Not only followers of pagan cults were persecuted, but also those of Christian "heresies" such as the Montanists or Arians or of special religious groups such as the Manichaeans or the Samaritans (a community related to Judaism). The Samaritans for instance were not allowed any more to hand down or to inherit property. Later, however, these laws were abrogated for Samaritans living as tenants in the countryside in order to maintain their ability to cultivate land and to pay taxes; here, the interest of the Roman state (as in other cases) outpaced the desire for religious purity (Dölger, Müller, Preiser-Kapeller and Riehle 2009, nr 25b).

For the Jews themselves, originally the freedom of worship granted to all citizens of the Roman Empire in the Milan Agreement was also applied. Yet the increasing influence of Christianity limited the freedom of non-Christian religions in the course of the fourth to sixth centuries, although Judaism was not subjected to a total ban. Yet, for Jews the service in the administration or army, public teaching, the conversion of Christians or the construction of synagogues were completely forbidden or hindered, and since Justinian I also the possession of Christian

slaves or the testimony in court against Christians were prohibited. For Christian clergy and laypeople, interactions with Jews were legally restricted. With these discriminations (and the occasional imposition of special taxes), the Jews were "allowed" to remain the most important non-Christian minority in the Eastern Roman Empire in the following centuries. Only during periods of severe crises such as in the seventh and eighth centuries, we also hear about imperial attempts to enforce baptism on the Jews in order to appease god with the "purification" of the empire from non-Christians. These initiatives, however, also poorly documented, remained without enduring effects and neither were in the long-term interest of the state nor found the official approval of the church, whose canons only accepted voluntary conversion (Schwartz 2004; Bonfil et al. 2012).

Justinian's policy was also directed against the followers of the miaphysite doctrine, but in this regard was mitigated by his wife Theodora (d. 548 CE), who showed sympathy for the one-nature-doctrine. She also supported clerics following this dogmatic position, such as Jacob Baradai (d. 578, after him also the name "Jacobite" emerged for the Syrian Orthodox Church), who built up their own church organisation parallel to that of the Chalcedonian imperial church. Thus, in the course of the sixth and seventh century, independent miaphysite churches emerged in Egypt and Syria and outside of the imperial territory in Armenia, Nubia and Ethiopia (Brown 1999, 153–155; Pietri 2001, 426–460; 491–518; Leppin 2011, 92–106). This illustrates the extent of the "Christian Oecumene", but equally the dimension of the internal divisions. These aspects of the spread of Christianity could also both extend as well as limit the potential for Roman politics to exert influence beyond the empire's borders based on a common Christian faith. Polities such as Axum (modern-day Ethiopia) or Iberia (Eastern Georgia), where Christianisation started in the 4th century, acted as Roman allies against Sasanian Persia, for instance. Doctrinal difference, however, contributed to resistance against Constantinople's rule in equally Christian Armenia after Roman borders expanded there in the late 6th and early 7th century (Preiser-Kapeller 2016; see also below).

6.3 Aspects of the Christianisation of the (Eastern) Roman Empire between Constantine I and Justinian I

The two centuries from Constantine I to Justinian I brought about the transformation from a religiously multifaceted Imperium Romanum (cf. Rüpke 2016) towards a Christian Roman Empire, where religious communities others than the Christians only formed small minorities. About the numerical development of the Chris-

tianisation of the population, we can only guess. Bagnall (2007) based on the onomastics in the papyri estimates the share of Christians in Egypt in 313 CE at about 20 %, in 337 CE (when Constantine I died) at about 50 %, and at 80 % in the early fifth century, when Christianity had become the only state-sponsored religion. A somewhat different dynamic can be observed among the holders of the highest offices in the western half of the empire between 324 and 423 CE, where it was not until the end of the fourth century that Christians made up an absolute majority (Salzman 2004). We can therefore expect different rates of Christianisation, depending on the region and social group. In the first centuries, Christianity was above all a religion of the cities; especially in rural areas, where the extensive conversion began relatively late, we have indications of "islands" of paganism for longer times (Cameron 2013).

This scenario is supported by archaeology. Thus, in the fourth century, church buildings were largely confined to the major urban centres; it was not until the early fifth century that a city-wide church infrastructure emerged, even in larger cities such as Ephesus. Still in between 540 and 570 CE, the Monk John of Amida (later miaphysite bishop of Ephesus) claims to have baptized more than 70,000 pagans on several journeys through the west of Asia Minor. Yet even before the final condemnation of pagan cults, their followers were subject to increased restrictions; already under Emperor Constantine I, "pagan" practices that were considered particularly offensive were forbidden, such as magic, extispicy or temple prostitution. Pagans withdrew from public life in their religious practice, as observed, for example, in Aphrodisias in southwestern Asia Minor, where pagan statues and ritual practices were maintained in secluded rooms in private buildings until the late sixth century. In return, new rules applied to the converts to Christianity; both space (through churches and other ecclesiastical monuments and sculptures) and time (through Sunday rest, holidays and Lent) were reordered. Adultery and other violations of Christian faith and morality were increasingly punished by the church (through expulsion from the community or penitential practices), and from the later fourth century onwards also by the Roman state. In late antiquity, however, civil marriage, which was concluded according to Roman law, was still recognized by the church; only in later centuries did Christian marriage law fully develop (Piétri and Piétri 1996, 236, 474–475, 688–699, 735–815; Piétri 2001, 428–429; Rapp 2004, 149–150).

The spatial framework of the entire Roman Empire was also permanently modified by the emergence of pilgrimage (Kötting 1950). With the growth of the Christian communities in the fourth century, the motivation to visit the places of salvation in the provinces of Palaestina prima and secunda, especially Jerusalem, intensified. A further increase of the city's prestige was brought about by the "discovery" of the tomb of Christ and (allegedly) the holy cross in 325 CE by

the mother of Emperor Constantine, Helena (Hunt 1984; Drijvers 1992; Wilkinson 2002; Drijvers 2011). The relics of various martyrs attracted many pilgrims equally to other places, such as in the Abu-Mina monastery near Alexandria in Egypt, at the sanctuary of St. Nicholas in Myra (Lycia) or of John the Evangelist in Ephesus (Hellenkemper and Hild 2004, 342–359; Pülz 2010; Maraval 2011; Daim and Ladstätter 2011). The more the glory of a saint spread, the greater the number of pilgrims at her or his sepulchre became. However, the foundation of pilgrimage sites could also be planned as a measure of religious policy. Thus, the establishment of the worship of the "seven sleepers" under Theodosius II (r. 408–450 CE) in Ephesus was also part of an "investment package" for the city. Stylites (saints living on columns) and other forms of extreme asceticism especially attracted masses; after his death in 459 CE, the site of Symeon Stylite the Elder became the pilgrimage centre of Qal'at Sima'n/Telanissos in Norther Syria with its huge, cross-shaped church, in the centre of which the saint's pillar was worshiped. Prestigious relics were sometimes transferred to Constantinople, which also resulted in a shift of sacred worship. Such developments changed the points of attractions within the network of the sea and land routes; the "Holy Land" as well as Constantinople moved into the centre of the "mental maps" of the faithful in all parts of the empire and even beyond (Piétri and Piétri 1996, 683–687; Mango 2002, 115–119; Külzer 2015, 51–64; Ritter 2019).

With the support of the emperor, the confession to Christianity became above all also an issue of the elites or those who wanted to rise to these ranks. Already in 333 CE, Emperor Constantine I had the consulship transferred to two Christians; but even under Emperor Theodosius II (r. 408–450 CE), pagans still could make a career. In the upper classes, only the measures of Justinian I and his successors removed the "most persistent" remnants of pagan cults in the later sixth century. A new Christian elite, on the contrast, emerged in the functionaries of the church, increasingly entangled with the Roman state. Already since the late second century CE, the leadership of Christian communities came into hands of bishops. As a result, this office became increasingly important for the life of the church. The bishop was regarded not only as a successor of the apostles, but also as an image of Christ (identifications otherwise also sometimes used for the emperor), especially in his liturgical function and as the "source" of all priestly activity in his area of jurisdiction. Within its boundaries, he was the supreme teacher (especially in the form of the sermon), highest pastoral officer (supervision of all clerics, religious foundations and monasteries) and judicial officer. Since the time of Emperor Constantine I, bishops increasingly enjoyed special privileges, which gradually equated them with the officials of the state. In return, the state made use of the growing authority of the episcopate in a majority Christian society: since Emperor Anastasius I (r. 491–518), the bishops belonged to the rows of the local notables,

who supervised the financial administration of the cities and their surrounding areas. Equally, with the Christianisation of the elites, it was often members of the upper classes who entered the service of the church and held the highest offices (though there were also "newcomers" from more humble backgrounds), some moving directly from state to church offices. The fusion of secular and ecclesiastical power is also reflected in the fact that public buildings were "Christianised" by the addition of symbols. As a rule, there was a bishop in every major city. In the sixth century, the episcopate in the Eastern Roman Empire (according to the list of Hierokles) consisted of more than 900 local bishops. They met regularly at the provincial level for meetings (synod); larger, empire-wide councils as in 325 in Nicaea under Constantine I were devoted to the debate of the major theological and organisational issues and could potentially also symbolise the spatial and religious cohesion of the empire. But, as shown above, at these occasions unity could not be achieved or different communities split off from the doctrinal orientation of the imperial centre, each of which defined itself as "orthodoxy", and established its own, parallel episcopal institutions (such as the Miaphysites in Syria and Egypt in the sixth century). The more Christianity encompassed society and the more the imperial church was used to support the imperial regime, the more doctrinal and organisational diversification became a nuisance for the emperors (Piétri and Piétri 1996, 635–666; Piétri 2001, 521–578; Rapp 2004; Rapp 2005; Höfert 2015, 110–118, 145–150, 190–193, 197–206).

Furthermore, with the progressive integration of the Church into the fabric of the empire, a movement to turn away from the world gained in strength, especially in Egypt. Anchorites (from Greek *anachōreō*, "retreating") wandered into the desert, seeking a life of seclusion, also as a kind of bloodless martyrdom after the end of the violent persecutions. Some of them settled close to each other and formed ascetic communities. The archetype of the orthodox ascetic became Antonius (d. 356 CE), especially because of the Vita written by Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373). On the other hand, Pachomius, a former soldier who established after some years of ascetic life around 321 a monastic community in Tabennisi in Upper Egypt was the founding figure of coenobitic (from the Greek *koinos bios* "life in community") monasticism. All aspects of living together (prayer, work, clothing and food) were strictly regulated. The monks were under an abbot and not allowed to have private property; this should be left to the monastery for common use upon entry. In the tradition of Pachomius, many monasteries arose, also outside of Egypt. In particular, Basil the Great (d. 379) with his rules laid the foundations for Byzantine monasticism; himself Bishop of Kaisareia in Cappadocia, he pleaded for a monastic life in communion under ecclesiastical supervision (Piétri and Piétri 1996, 816–847; Cameron, Ward-Perkins and Whitby 2000, 155–156, 745–780, 941–946; Demandt 2007, 548–551).

In fact, the growth of the new "way of life" of monasticism created some potential for unrest in church and society. In Egypt, for example, bishops used bands of radicalized monks as "combat groups" in dealing with ecclesiastical (also doctrinal) and secular opponents. During the so-called "robber's synod" of Ephesus in 449 they were even employed at the highest ecclesiastical level in the conflicts between the followers of the doctrines of one nature and of two natures. Charismatic monastic circles repeatedly demonstrated that they could mobilize the masses against church political and political decisions. According to canon law, since 451 CE monasteries were placed under the control of the local bishop in order to prevent monks from acting independently. Emperor Justinian I ordered that the local bishop should not only supervise the founding of a monastery, but that he also had the right to confirm the election of the abbot of a monastery. Likewise, however, the sale of the (growing) assets of the monasteries was banned and their possessions placed under special protection. These attempts of the "domestication" of monasticism succeeded only partially; until the end of the Eastern Roman Empire, it remained a potential haven of resistance to imperial encroachments into the church (Cameron, Ward-Perkins and Whitby 2000, 781–810; Mango 2002, 209–213; Hatlie 2007; Kaldellis 2015, 79–80).

Thus, the growth of the Christian church without doubt established additional layers of authority, organisation and loyalty across the empire and within local communities with the potential to increase the cohesion of state and society (on the concept of social cohesion see Roehner 2004). For the imperial office, Christianisation indeed demanded the renouncement of any claims of imperial divinity (as still expressed by Constantine I himself); it was replaced by ideas of divine selection of the ruler. Nevertheless, Andrew Louth even argued that for the imperial office "the Christianisation of the imperial cult tended to enhance its authority rather than to diminish it, since the representative of the only God was hardly reduced in status in comparison with a divine emperor holding a relatively lowly position in the divine pantheon." (Louth 2005, 309). Recently, however, Anthony Kaldellis has challenged the "imperial idea" evoked in almost all previous Byzantine scholarship: He points to the fact that "the Byzantines, including both elites and the people of Constantinople, seem to have had little compunction about rebelling against, deposing, and even killing their divinely appointed ruler; they did so regularly". This, Kaldellis argues, may say more about the actual political effect of the "Christianisation" of the imperial office within (what he terms) the "Byzantine Republic" than the theoretical considerations of a few authors such as Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339/340 CE), who is often as referred to as an "intellectual father" of the Christian imperial idea. Citing Patriarch Photius (in office 858–867 and 878–886), Kaldellis demonstrates that even the highest cleric of the Byzantine Church (who was also a leading intellectual of his time) could argue that "our Sav-

iour and God had no intention to establish political regimes (...), for he knew well, that human beings would be able to provide these things for themselves from their own experience", thus putting into question the very idea of a divinely ordained imperial system. Yet, as even Kaldellis admits, the Christian "aura" of the emperor in specific contexts could function "to ameliorate the monarchy's systemic instability" as the sacralisation of the imperial office had done during the crisis of the third century (see above). These observations on the ambiguity of the imperial office remind one of similar statements of Yuri Pines on the "subtle and yet discernible bifurcation between the monarchy as an institution and the monarch as an individual" in the Chinese tradition (Kaldellis 2015, 165–198, esp. 169, 176 and 184 for the citations; Pines 2012, 46). In his recent work, Kaldellis furthermore acknowledged Christianity as a further significant (but not necessarily pre-dominant) layer of Roman ("Byzantine") identity in the East from the fourth century CE onwards, in addition to "the Greek language, and identification with the Roman polity" (Kaldellis 2019, 30–31, 106–113, 126–154). As mentioned above, however, the "price which the Christian Roman Empire paid for the larger religious-cultural cohesive power of imperial monotheism was an increased potential of conflict resulting from dogmatic struggles" (Höfert 2015, 236–237).

Still, in the sixth century, the Christian Roman Empire could claim to encompass the core of the Oecumene around the Mediterranean, even more so after the "re-conquest" of the provinces in North Africa, Italy and Southern Spain during the reign of Justinian. In addition, more or less all Christian communities and polities outside of the empire's borders would at least pay lip services to Constantinople's position as centre of the Christian world (ruling also over the Holy Land) and its role as warrantor of a divinely ordained world order, beyond doctrinal differences (Signes Codoñer 2014; Preiser-Kapeller 2016).

6.4 External Challenges and the Struggles for "Orthodoxy" in the Christian Roman Empire, Seventh to Ninth Century CE

The optimism of the above-mentioned first phase of Justinian's government gave way to a doomsday atmosphere. The "other age" of Justinian (Meier 2003, 359–364) was introduced in an almost apocalyptic way in 536 CE by a "darkening of the sun" lasting several months, most probably a cloudiness of the atmosphere caused by a large volcanic eruption, which was observed from Ireland to China (Gunn 2000; Mitchell 2007, 372–375). The associated cooling, resulting in weather extremes and crop failures, proved to be permanent, as modern climate research

finds, speaking about a "Late Antique Little Ice Age" (LALIA) between 536 and 660 CE (Büntgen et al. 2016). In 540, an invasion by the Persians under the Sasanian Great King Khosrow I shook the eastern provinces and culminated in the conquest of Antioch, the empire's third largest city. This catastrophe made a lasting impression on the population, which was in part (as Miaphysites) also divergent from imperial orthodoxy. The imperial promise of security ("pax Romana") became fragile, even more as this attack marked the beginning of series of lengthy wars interrupted by intermittent truces, which would affect all areas from Arabia to the Caucasus from 540 to 562 CE, 570 to 590 CE and finally 602 to 628 CE (Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 103–130; Dignas and Winter 2007, 39–41).

A further blow followed in 541/542 CE, when a plague pandemic hit the whole empire, indeed the entire Mediterranean area, Europe and the Middle East and maybe killed a quarter to a third of the population.[3] This (possible) demographic loss could have proved to be even more sustaining as the epidemic recurred in waves every few years until the middle of the eighth century (as the great plague epidemic of the late Middle Ages did). Together with climatic changes and the deterioration of the security situation, it may have contributed to the decline of various cities and regions (Stathakopoulos 2004; Little 2006; Sarris 2011, 158–160). Faced with what was perceived as an accumulation of disasters, end-time moods spread, which had been around for some decades. According to Christian calculation, the creation of the world dated to around 5500 BCE (to 5508 BCE, in the most common chronology), thus the advent of the seventh millennium of the world with the dawn of the last days and the return of Christ could have been expected for the period around 500 CE. Even though the end of the world did not materialise, the uncertainty of the time led to an increase in lay piety, which was reflected in new forms of worship of the Mother of God or sacred images (icons). These practices of veneration, however, later would become another apple of discord within the church of Constantinople (see below). Furthermore, the above-mentioned politics of Justinian I to suppress non-Christian and "heretic" groups, whom the emperor in his legislation (together with homosexuals) singled out as causes for the divine wrath manifest in the plague and other catastrophes, were intensified. Cohesion among the majority was restored at the price of the expulsion or even persecution of minorities (Brandes 1997; Meier 2003, 11–20, 64–100, 373–386, 481–560; Leppin 2011, 206–215).

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3 Kislinger and Stathakopoulos 1999; Harper 2017; Preiser-Kapeller 2018, 217–219. On the debate on the demographic effects of the Justinianic plague see Haldon et al. 2018; Mordechai et al. 2019; Preiser-Kapeller 2021b, 29–66; Sarris 2022.

Calamities for Byzantium, however, did not end—and at nadir points during the following period of crisis from the later sixth to the early eighth century, a collapse of the Christian Roman Empire became a possibility. During the reign of Emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641), the Sasanian troops of Great King Khosrow II (r. 590–628) conquered Armenia, Syria, Palestine with Jerusalem (in 614 CE) and also Egypt, the richest province of the Roman Empire. Persian armies even marched up to the Bosporus, while the Avars, coming from the Carpathian Basin, laid siege to Constantinople in the summer of 626. The salvation of the city was attributed to the Virgin Mary. In addition, divine favour seemed to have returned to the empire in general when Emperor Heraclius was able to defeat the Persians in various campaigns between 622 and 628 and to make a triumphal entrance into Jerusalem in 630 with the relic of the Holy Cross the Sasanian troops had carried off to Persia. These remarkable events, connected with notions of a "Holy War" against Persia, were met with attention and applause as signs of divine intervention by contemporary observers all over the Christian world (see also below), and even beyond in the emerging Islamic community, where the surah ar-Rum (nr 30) in the Quran "prophesied" the victory of the fellow Roman monotheists over the Persian infidels. Yet only two years later in 632 CE, the first invasions of the new Arab-Islamic "umma", established by the Prophet Muhammad in the years before while the two "superpowers" of the Middle East where at each other's throat, took place. Within the next 20 years, the Arabs conquered Syria, Palestine, Egypt (and later also North Africa), depraving the Roman Empire of its richest provinces (with maybe two thirds of its revenues), while the Sasanian Persian Empire fell to the invaders in its entirety. After having established their rule in Syria, the Caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty tried to "knock out" the remaining imperial competitor with massive maritime strikes on Constantinople in the 660s and again in 717/718 CE. The failure of these attacks guaranteed the survival of the Eastern Roman Empire, but it was reduced to the status of a significant, yet regional power in the eastern Mediterranean (Jankowiak 2013; Preiser-Kapeller 2016). Traditional imperial claims where however maintained, especially within the Christian Oecumene, where for the time being no other polity in the East or West could compete with Constantinople's prestige.

On the contrast, during these severe crises contemporaries even more resorted to biblical and especially Old Testament models and equated the Christian Roman Empire with the "chosen people"; and Constantinople became not only the "New Rome", but since the sixth century also the "New Jerusalem".[4] These in-

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4 For parallel uses of the "the Bible as 'repertory of identification'" in the post-Roman West see the

terpretative frames were also used beyond the borders of the Roman Empire and the Chalcedonian Orthodoxy. In the seventh century in the face of the Sasanian attacks, which culminated in the conquest of Jerusalem 614, and later of the threatening Islamic expansion, biblical and apocalyptic interpretations became even more prevalent (Reinink 2002; Thomson 2001a, 74–79; Watt 2002, 73). One telling example is the seventh century Armenian history attributed to Sebēos, who used biblical motives "to give extra depth to his narrative and to signal the providential framework of contemporary history", as James Howard-Johnston (2002, 49) has stated. His narrative of the march of the Persian army against the Bosporus and Constantinople and the salvation of the city in 626 (Sebēos 1979; Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 79–80) is based on the description of the ultimatum by the Assyrian king Sennacherib to King Hezekiah of Juda and the king's reaction to this ultimatum and his letter, which we find in the book of Isaiah (Greenwood 2002, 335). In the same way, Sebēos described the attack on Constantinople under the command of the Arab general and later Caliph Muʿāwiya in 654 CE; once more, the Lord saved Constantinople (Sebēos 1979, 169–170; Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 144–145; cf. also Greenwood 2002, 369–371). In the eighth century, the Armenian historian Łewond made use of the story of Sennacherib's letter, whom he even names as precursor of the Arab general Maslama in his story (Martin-Hisard 1996, 143–144), when he narrates the Arab attack on Constantinople in 717/718 CE during the reign of Emperor Leon III (r. 717–741) (Łewond 1887, 105–112; Arzoumanian 1982, 109–113). When the Arabs were defeated, Maslama according to Łewond confessed: "I was unable to fight against God". To Leon III, who during the defence of Constantinople "himself carried the triumphant and invincible victory, that is the standard of the cross, on his shoulders", as Łewond writes, is also ascribed a long letter to Caliph ʿUmar regarding the defence of the Christian faith, which is integrated in the work of Łewond. It includes elements of Christian anti-Islamic polemics also found in other texts of this period, especially a mixture of defence against the allegations made by Muslims against Christianity (especially against the Trinity, the conception of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the alleged falsification of the Holy Scriptures and the worship of images), and of attacks against Islam, claiming that Muhammad was a false prophet who was inspired by heretics (or Jews) and that his Qur'an was a book full of fallacies and shameful rules (polygamy, calling for violence in the holy war). After the initial shock of the Arab conquest, Islam thus became "domesticated" up to a certain degree as another "heresy" in a row of similar aberrances which had emerged since the very

beginning of Christianity and which God used to test and punish his "chosen people".[5]

The significance of the Roman Empire for God's plan and the history of salvation became even more highlighted through its identification with one of the four beasts from the vision in chapter 7 of the Book of Daniel. Within the Byzantine "Reichseschatologie", as Gerhard Podskalsky has called it, the Roman Empire was normally identified with the fourth beast and equated with the *katechon*, "the withholding power" from the second letter of Paul to the Thessalonians (2 Thess 2, 7); accordingly, the Imperium Romanum would be the only empire which would exist until the Last Judgement and whose existence postponed the end of days. As it became clear that for the time being Constantinople and the Empire would not fall into the hands of the Muslims, this interpretation again became popular, as we can see in the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, composed in Syriac in the last decade of the seventh century. In that text this apocalyptic interpretation was combined with the hope that a Roman Emperor from the West ("the King of the Greeks" as he is also called in the Syriac text of Pseudo-Methodius, see Brandes 2007, 72–73; Greenwood 2002, 383–384; Hoyland 1997; Scales in the present volume) would defeat the Muslims and liberate the Christians of the East.[6] This interpretation was also integrated in the Armenian tradition, as is documented by the apocalyptic work "The Vision of Enoch the Just", preserved only in Armenian, but most likely a translation from Greek. This work is obviously a reaction to the Arab siege of Constantinople in 717/718 CE, which ended with a Byzantine victory, and underlines the essential role of the Roman Empire, represented by an "eagle with eight wings and four heads" in the events the Last Judgement and the second appearance of the Lord. Rome/Byzantium remained the Christian Empire to which Christians "looked for eschatological victory, at least for the next centuries" (Hultgård 1993, 71–74; cf. also Thomson 2004, 382, 385; Möhring 2000, 347; Brandes 2007, 86; Hoyland 1997, 299–302).

But despite their identification of Constantinople with Jerusalem, Armenian historians such as Sebēos and Łewond uttered less optimistic forecasts (Thomson 2001a, 75; Thomson 2001b, 91; Howard-Johnston 2002, 44–46; Thomson 2004, 381–382; Brandes 2007, 68–69; Martin-Hisard 1996, 140); the later for instance wrote that "the king of the Greeks [= the Eastern Roman emperor] lost courage and con-

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5 Cf. Martin-Hisard 1996, 138–139; El Cheikh 2004, 60–71; Trapp 1966; Todt 1991. For the establishment of a "modus vivendi" between the Eastern Roman and the Islamic Empire cf. also Preiser-Kapeller 2021a.

6 Cf. in general Podskalsky 1972, esp. 4–76; Brandes 1997, 24–25; Reinink 2002, 82–83; Watt 2002, 71–72. On the Ps.-Methodius apocalypse see: Pseudo-Methodius 2012; Möhring 2000, 58–92; Magdalino 2003, 240 and 253; Brandes 1997, 50–52, and idem 2007, 81; Hoyland 1997, 263–267, 294–299.

fidence for he knew that the failure of his power had been caused by the Lord. He no longer attempted any attack against the Arabs" (Łewond 1887, 12–13; Arzoumanian 1982, 53). A similar opinion we find in a speech attributed to the Armenian prince Ašot Bagratuni (cf. also Greenwood 2008, 347): "Even the Roman Empire was unable to raise its hand against the dragon [= the Caliphate], and it stills continues to tremble before it and has not dared to act against the dominical command." (Łewond 1887, 142–143; Arzoumanian 1982, 132–133). Equally, the Armenian historian Movses Kałankatuac'i gave an apocalyptic meaning to the events of the seventh century in a similar pessimistic manner: "(...) for as the multitude of waters flood the earth with their furious waves, so the kings of the Romans with their massed armies spread their multitudes thickly over the entire world. Now, however, the exalted power of that throne, thus dissipated, passed away (...). Then the Emperor of the Romans took the remnants of his army, hastened across sea, and passed within the borders of the distant isles of the west. (...)." (Movsēs Kałankatuac'i 1983, 192–193; Dowsett 1961, 124–125). This passage can be connected with the year 662 CE, when Emperor Constans II in the face of the Arab advance transferred his residence from Constantinople to the West and took personal charge of the territories in Sicily and Italy (where he was murdered in 668) (Howard-Johnston 2002, 56–57 and 59–60; Greenwood 2008, 343).

The examples from the "miaphysite" Armenian historiography of the seventh to eighth centuries illustrate that the doctrinal separation between Constantinople and its (former) Eastern provinces did not necessarily imply the Miaphysites' enthusiastic welcome of the Arab conquerors. This separation may however have eased compromise with the new Islamic regime once it became clear that for the time being Roman imperial power would not return to the East. In addition, the downfall of Rome could be attributed to its (in the eyes of miaphysite authors) "heretic" deviation from doctrinal truth since the Council of Chalcedon.[7]

Within the Eastern Roman Empire and Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, similar interpretations of the effects of doctrinal deviation emerged. After the war with Persia had devastated the provinces of the East between 602 and 628 CE, Emperor Heraclius once had again tried to achieve ecclesiastical unity with the compromise formula of the so-called "Monotheletism" (a doctrine according to which there are two natures in Jesus Christ, but only one "will" or "energy"), which however did not find lasting favour among the miaphysite churches and led to a renewed split between Constantinople and Rome. Still, also Heraclius' successors tried to enforce the new formula, which its "Orthodox Chalcedonian" opponents such as the

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[7] Cf. also Heilo 2016. See, however, Kaldellis 2015, 196–198, for more "secular" modes of explanations for the crises of the empire by Byzantine historians in the eleventh century, for instance.

famous theologian Maximus Confessor (d. 662) identified as one cause of God's wrath against the empire and the calamities of the time. Only the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 680 CE condemned Monotheletism and made the original formula of Chalcedon again binding. Meanwhile, the (permanent) loss of the miaphysite areas of the East to the Arabs had removed the urgency of an agreement with the opponents of Chalcedon, while ecclesiastical unity within the remaining territories in Asia Minor, the Balkans and Italy (with the Papacy) seemed more important (Winkelmann 2001; Haldon 2016).

In addition, this unity was soon once again put into question when doctrinal debates within the imperial church developed further. As mentioned above, the political crisis was interpreted also as a religious one, and therefore one could question established religious practices (Heilo 2016). This included the creation and veneration of images of Jesus Christ and the saints, which had increased especially since the beginning of the time of crisis in the sixth century (see above). Yet if Christ was both all human and all God, as confirmed once again at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680, could the divine be depicted? The debate over this issue, and in particular the adoption of these concerns by the imperial religious policies of the eighth and ninth century, which led to the temporary ban on the worship of the sacred images (icons) or their destruction, was summed up in earlier research under the term "iconoclasm". However, the critical analysis of the surviving sources, informing us exclusively from the point of view of the worshipers of images (the "iconodules") who finally emerged victorious in 843 CE, has led to a revision of older views in some of recent research. Thus, the beginning of iconoclasm was traditionally dated to the removal of an image of Christ from the Chalke gate of the imperial palace in Constantinople in 726 at the order of Emperor Leon III (r. 717–741), for whom also influences of Islamic prohibitions against images had been suspected due to his origin from the eastern border areas. This act was said to have been followed by a general ban on worshiping icons. In fact, there is no sure indication of a systematic anti-icon policy of Leon III. Only under his son and successor Constantine V (r. 741–775), at a council in Hiereia near Constantinople in 754, the worship of images and their leading advocates, such as the theologian John of Damascus (d. 754), who was living on Arab territory, were condemned (Brubaker and Haldon 2011, 69–155; Krannich, Schubert and Sode 2002). Research now casts doubt on the truthfulness of sources that report a systematic and cruel persecution of image worshipers and a destruction of images, met with widespread opposition. In fact, Leon III and Constantine V were popular rulers among the army and people throughout their lives, especially because of their military successes in the defence against the Arabs; but without doubt, Constantine V and his successor Leon IV (r. 775–780) actually tried to curtail the worship of images. The regency of Empress Irene for her underage son Constantine VI from 780 onwards initiated anoth-

er religious-political turn, which was marked in 787 CE with another council in Nicaea. There representatives of the Byzantine church recognised a theology of image worship (indicating that the material image is not the object of worship, the veneration applies to the depicted saint) as an official doctrine (Thümmel 2005; Brubaker and Haldon 2011, 156–276; Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller 2016). However, the victory of the venerators of the holy images was not yet permanent, not least because Empress Irene and the following emperors proved militarily unsuccessful against the Arabs and the Bulgars. Emperor Leon V (r. 813–820) renewed in 814 the rejection of the worship of images, this time combined with a stronger persecution of dissenting views and of iconodules, especially to be found in monastic circles around the Abbot Theodore of the Stoudiou-Monastery in Constantinople (Brubaker and Haldon 2011, 366–452; Pratsch 1998).

Both during the first and the second phase of Iconoclasm, monasteries, monks and nuns were prime targets of imperial measures, not only because of their opposition against iconoclast policies, but also due to their significance as "absorbers" of workforce and property, which was thus lost for the purposes of the state. Already since the sixth century, especially after the demographic depression caused by the plague, we find legislation against the entry of state officials or soldiers into monasteries before the fulfilment of their periods of service as well as against the inflation of the ranks of the clergy of church institutions (such as the Hagia Sophia) beyond their financial capacities (Dölger, Müller, Preiser-Kapeller and Riehle, nr 110a, 125a, 165, 172a, 175). Under the extreme conditions of the Sasanian conquest of the 620s threatening the very existence of the empire, Emperor Heraclius had even resorted to appropriate treasuries of the Church in order to pay his troops (at that time, with the Patriarch's consent) (Dölger, Müller, Preiser-Kapeller and Riehle, nr 176). Measures against images (made from precious metals, for instance) and monasteries and their properties thus also provided a pretext for the "re-integration" of ecclesiastical wealth into the economic and fiscal cycle in the interest of the state. Interestingly, we find similar patterns of imperial politics around the same time in Tang China and Tibet, where the wealth of the Buddhist monasteries was targeted during periods of crisis (Preiser-Kapeller 2018, 115–119, with further literature, and Benn in the present volume).

Emperor Michael II (r. 820–829) and especially his son Theophilos (r. 829–842) continued the policy against icons. After Theophilos' death, however, his wife Theodora, again an empress, who led the regency for her underage son (Michael III, r. 842–867), in 843 convoked a synod in Constantinople, which proclaimed the worship of images now permanently as an official doctrine. This event marked the preliminary endpoint of the doctrinal evolution leading to the emergence of the particular "Byzantine Orthodox" form of Christianity over the course of 500 years since the time of Emperor Constantine I (Pratsch 1998; Thümmel 2005).

Thus, also the period of severe crisis from the seventh to the ninth century illustrates the delicate balance between the "cohesive power of imperial monotheism" and "its increased potential of conflict" resulting from religious controversy (Höfert 2015, 236–237). The regress to interpretative models of the Old Testament and apocalyptic could both boost the empire's significance for the salvation of humanity as well as explain and even legitimise its weakening in favour of the new Islamic superpower (for the subversive potential of apocalyptic notions in the Chinese Buddhist tradition see for a comparison Benn in the present volume). Equally, the search for those transgressions which may have caused God's wrath over his "chosen people" allowed for various interpretations, according to the doctrinal preferences of the individual author or community within and beyond the limits of imperial Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and of the empire. In all the controversies of the seventh to ninth century, emperors and other decision-makers had to operate against a complex entanglement of expectations in the centre (Constantinople) and in the provinces of what was left of the Roman Empire and equally outside of it. The loss of Syria, Palestine and Egypt with their miaphysite communities "eased" the return to the strict interpretation of Chalcedon in favour of doctrinal harmony with Rome, the other patriarchal see besides Constantinople to remain under Byzantine rule (until the eighth century). The controversy on Iconoclasm, however, temporarily disturbed ties with the Chalcedonian ("Melkite") minority communities in Syria, Palestine and Egypt now under Arab rule (and thus beyond the grasp of imperial power) and permanently beclouded the relations with the Papacy in Rome, even after the victory of image worship. The popes also used these "heretical aberrances" of the emperors in Constantinople to legitimise the loosening of their political ties with Byzantium in favour of a new alliance with the Kings of the Franks from the Carolingian dynasty, who emerged as supreme power in the post-Roman West from the mid-8th century onwards. This "change of protector" culminated in the crowning of Charles, since 768 King of the Franks and since 774 of the Lombards in Italy, as "Emperor of the Romans" on 25 December 800 CE. Thereby, Constantinople now had to face a competitor both for the Roman imperial heritage as well as for the "management" of the Christian Oecumene intricately connected with each other. These ideological conflicts between East and West would simmer until the very end of Byzantium (and even beyond) (Nerlich 1999; Preiser-Kapeller 2021a).

6.5 The Establishment of "Byzantine Orthodoxy" and the Role of Emperor and Empire, Ninth to Fifteenth Century: An Outlook and Conclusion

Among these developing multiple "Christianities" in West and East, the Eastern Roman/Byzantine Empire maintained its role as centre within the emerging distinct sphere of "Orthodox Christianity" until the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 CE. Missionary activities in cooperation between emperors and patriarchs enlarged this sphere in the ninth and tenth century with the "Christianisation" of new polities in South-eastern and Eastern Europe. Despite all political conflicts (as between Byzantium and Bulgaria, for instance) they maintained strong spiritual and ideological connections to the political and ecclesiastical centre in Constantinople. Dimitri Obolensky has called this new emerging sphere of influence the "Byzantine Commonwealth" (Obolensky 2000; Shepard 2006, 17–28; Fowden 1993; Signes Codoñer 2014). In later centuries, the reference to these people and territories under the spiritual (and partly also still political) guidance of emperor and patriarch served as a proof for the "ecumenical" importance of the imperial office (in compensation for the shrinking territorial extent of full imperial power) also in the confrontation with the Papacy and the renewed Roman Empire in the West. "Soft power" thus had replaced "hard power," although the almost total lack of the latter since the mid-fourteenth century also affected the efficiency of the first (Shepard 2006; Preiser-Kapeller 2013).

This interdependency between Empire and Church in Byzantium has often been contrasted with the eventual "separation" of *imperium* and *sacerdotium* ("priesthood") in the medieval West (see Scales in the present volume), but still often-used terms such as "Caesaropapism" (the notion that the Byzantine Emperor acted also as "quasi-Pope" of the Orthodox Church) do not justice to the complex interplay between emperor and church (respectively the patriarch) (Congourdeau in Mollat du Jourdin and Vauchez 1991, 610). Patriarch Photios (in office 858–867 and 878–886), a dominant figure of the period after the victory of image-worship, has been attributed the formulation of the ideal of a cooperation between emperor and patriarch on (more or less) equal footing (for his even more daring opinions on the actual divine legitimation of the imperial office, see above). Reality however remained less harmonious, for the time being mostly with a significant preponderance of imperial power (Grünbart, Rickelt and Vucetić 2011 and 2013).

Yet, any attempt of circumscribing the emperor's role within the church even in the most lavish terms would eventually shift the weights in favour of the side

doing so, i.e. the Church. This also Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–969), one of the most successful "warrior emperors" of the tenth century, who (re-)conquered Crete, Cilicia and Northern Syria from the Arabs, had to learn when he demanded that, similar as in Islam, those soldiers who had lost their lives in the wars for the Christian Roman Empire should be recognized and revered as martyrs in paradise. The emperor could not prevail against the representatives of the church; the Synod in Constantinople rejected his suggestion and invoked earlier decisions that the killing of enemies in the war for defending the empire was unavoidable, but that one could not equate death in battle with the non-violent death for the faith, which the martyrs had suffered. Thus, again limits were set for the "exploitation" of religion for the empire's purposes (Stouraitis 2009 and 2012). In addition, even a layperson such as Kekaumenos in the eleventh century stated, "that the emperor is a man and is subject to the laws of religion."(Kekaumenos 2013, ch. VII; Kaldellis 2015, 79).

Since the twelfth century, the emperor was addressed as "common epistemonarches of the Church"; but this brilliant title could not hide the extent to which the church had "trimmed" the emperor's power in religious affairs. The canonist Demetrios Chomatenos (1217–1235 Archbishop of Ohrid) defined the rights of the imperial "epistemonarches" thus: "The Emperor supervises (…) the synodal decisions and ratifies them. He regulates the order of Church ranks and issues laws on the conduct of life and behaviour of the clergy, on episcopal and clerical matters and on the occupation of bishoprics. He has the right to perform promotions, such as raising a bishopric to Metropolis to honour the virtue of a man or a city."[8] The emperor's position thus fluctuated between supervisor and mere executor. A few decades later in 1273 CE, Job Iasites on behalf of Patriarch Joseph made clear, that the emperor as "epistemonarches" did not have any authority to modify or act against decisions of the synod of the bishops if they were agreed upon in accordance with the ecclesiastical laws and the traditions of the church fathers (Dagron 2003, 253–256).

Around that time, Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos in 1274 was able to enforce a formal recognition of a union with the western church against large-scale opposition in the Byzantine church; but already his successor had to annul this agreement. When the emperors of the fourteenth and fifteenth century tried to re-activate it in order to gain support from Western Christianity against the growing threat of the advance of the Ottomans, they risked a major rift in church and society and a de-legitimation of their position as *epistemonarches* with-

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8 Cit. after Congourdeau in Mollat du Jourdin and Vauchez 1991, 614; cf. also Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller 2016.

in the Orthodox Church. This position in turn was more or less their strongest basis to still exert influence beyond the shrinking borders of their state in the "Byzantine Commonwealth" in South-eastern and Eastern Europe. One often cited example is the letter of admonition Patriarch Antonios IV of Constantinople in 1393 wrote to Great Prince Vasilij I of Moscow, who had cancelled the name of the Byzantine emperor from commemoration in the liturgy due to the Empire's dramatic loss of power. In this text, the patriarch also insisted that "it is impossible, that Christians have a church, but not an emperor, since the imperial office and the church form a firm unity and association, and it is impossible to separate them from each other" (Meyendorff 1989, 254–257; Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller 2016). Yet not only in Moscow, the majority of the bishoprics of the Byzantine Orthodox Church at that time found themselves already outside of the borders of Byzantium. The fall of Constantinople to the (Muslim) Ottoman Sultans in 1453 CE finally proved the possibility to have a church and patriarch (and even Roman identity, see above) also without a Christian Roman emperor.

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James A. Benn

7 "Action Buddhism" in the Medieval Chinese Empire

7.1 Introduction

This essay will focus mostly on the Tang dynastic empire (618–907 CE), a "second wave" empire as defined in the Introduction to this volume, and its relations with Buddhism, although it will be necessary to say something about earlier Chinese dynasties and about other religions. As we shall see, an awareness of history permeates the relationship between the Tang imperium and the Buddhist establishment; both parties were well informed as to what had happened between them before and tried to act accordingly. I will first give an overview of the normative state of relations between the Tang imperial government and the Buddhist church and supply some background on the historical context in which those relations occurred. I will then indicate what I see as the recurrent problems and potential benefits of the relationship (an issue common to empires and religions, as noted in the Introduction), mostly from the perspective of the Tang rulers. Then, I will examine the strategies adopted by the state with regard to religion and the occasional alliances made between imperial government and Buddhist institutions. But surveys such as this one may tend to represent medieval Chinese Buddhism as a rather bland and benign cultural force and Buddhists as primarily interested in a quiet life of the mind. That is not the Buddhism that I know. There was actually a fanatical and extreme edge to Tang dynasty Buddhism and where I will diverge from earlier studies of relations between state and religion is my focus on what I will refer to as "action Buddhism." As we shall see, "action Buddhism" was a corporeal form of practice and ideology aimed at producing an immediate impact that drew in literati and commoners, elite monks, and even rulers. I suggest that we need to take this strain of Buddhism seriously in any account of the empire's dealing with the religion.

7.2 The Historical Situation

To some extent I will be going over well-trodden ground in this essay.[1] Historians of medieval Chinese Buddhism are fortunate to possess a relative wealth of primary sources, both official and more ephemeral. This is not to say that our sources are evenly distributed, of course. There are many lacunae in our knowledge, and it is often hard for us now to reach down to religion as it was practiced on the ground. Our view is also shaped largely both by official historiography of the period, and by Chinese Buddhist historiography—a mode of writing that we are just starting to understand better.[2] The versions of past events that these two types of sources provide are often so divergent that they seem almost to be describing quite different histories. Official historiography in China disdains religion as a matter of course (Twitchett 1992), while the Buddhist chronicles adopt a partisan point of view. Significant events chronicled in detail in one genre are entirely omitted from the other, or quite different information is presented, so that it takes a good deal of patient detective work to arrive at some kind of impartial and veritable overview.

7.2.1 Buddhism and the State in Pre-Tang Times

Both Buddhism and Daoism—the two major religions of medieval China—emerged in a time of disunity and political fragmentation that held sway for a few hundred years between two great central empires—the Han (206/202 BCE–220 CE) and the Tang (618–907 CE). Buddhism was initially most visible as a religion practiced by foreign traders in larger cities, but by the fourth century CE the religion had permeated all sectors of Chinese society (Zürcher [1959] 2007). During this period of disunion both Buddhism and Daoism gained patronage from various polities, so several distinct concepts of the state's relationship with religion had developed by the time a unified empire was achieved again under the Tang's short-lived predecessor, the Sui (581–618 CE) (Wright 1978). More importantly, by this time both religions were comfortable with the idea of state patronage and had strategies and rationales for dealing with rulers. The Tang administration thus found itself responsible for a vast territory in which religious institutions were well embedded

1 Although somewhat out of date, Weinstein 1987 remains the classic study in English of the Tang's state relationship with Buddhism. In Japanese, one might mention Tonami 1999. Gernet 1995, originally published in French as Gernet 1956, is still essential reading, but see the review of Silk 1999.
2 A recent study on this topic, Kieschnick 2022, just appeared.

and had developed a sense of self-confidence in dealing with secular power. The Tang could not ignore the power of religion either at home or abroad, since neighbouring polities too had Buddhist rulers and populations (Sen 2003).

There is not space here to summarize four hundred years of Chinese Buddhist history, but we should bear in mind that the protagonists in our story had a good sense themselves of what had occurred under previous regimes. Some key moments in the deeper background to our current subject would include the occupation of Northern China by invaders from Inner Asia from 311 CE onward and the deliberate engagement of some of the northern non-Chinese regimes with Buddhism as a state religion, especially the dynasty founded by the Tuoba people and known as the Northern Wei (386–535 CE); a period of intense and serious translation of Buddhist literature from India, particularly associated with the skilled and industrious translator Kumārajīva (344–413) in the fifth century; and, by the early Tang, the establishment of large-scale monastic landholding and the participation of Buddhist monasteries in finance and enterprise. By the early seventh century, Buddhism was much less dependent on its Indian and Central Asian roots than during its initial phase of assimilation and had established China as a Buddhist heartland in its own right. There were by now intellectual, ritual, and practice traditions that were completely indigenous. Particularly in the area of practice, there were important ramifications for this shift in authority. In India, for example, Buddhism presented itself as a "Middle Way," carefully distinguishing itself from the ascetic excesses of other śramaṇic traditions whose members often sought to subdue the body with regimes that included nudity and physical postures maintained for long periods of time (Thapar 1978). In China, however, there was no tradition that occupied the extreme paths of bodily practice, and so Buddhists themselves occupied that ascetic space. In other words, in China, Buddhists could do (and did) quite extraordinary things to their bodies while remaining within the bounds of orthopraxy. As we will see, the state had to find accommodation with a broad range of practices that were considered orthodox within the Buddhist tradition, including self-immolation (often in the form of auto-cremation).

As I noted above, different understandings of the state's relationship with Buddhism had taken hold prior to the Tang. Broadly speaking, there was a difference in attitudes between North and South. During the period of disunion, Northern rulers often inclined to Buddhism but definitely saw it as subordinate to the state. In the South, there were pious emperors such as Wudi of the Liang dynasty (r. 502–549) who put Buddhism at the heart of his style of governance, but overall the Buddhist church was much more autonomous in its operations and its sense of itself (Chen 2006; De Rauw 2008; Janousch 1999 and 2017; Palumbo 2010).

There were two significant persecutions of Buddhism prior to the Tang (Shi 2016). The first occurred under Emperor Taiwu (r. 423–452) of the Northern Wei

dynasty (386–534). In 438 Buddhist monks under the age of 50 were forced to return to lay life. In 444, Buddhist monks were singled out in an edict prohibiting witchcraft and prognostication. The persecution proper began in 446. During the suppression of a rebellion, imperial forces allegedly discovered a cache of arms in a Buddhist monastery in Chang'an. The monks involved were immediately executed. Further searches turned up alcohol and the property of laypeople in the monastery storehouse. The emperor concluded that all monks in the capital were failing to follow the Vinaya and were probably involved in sedition. Executions of monks by live burial were ordered on a wide scale, although we do not know how many were carried out. Buddhist images were destroyed. The proscription of Buddhism remained in force until the end of Taiwu's reign, but the ban seems to have gradually been relaxed after 450.

The second persecution was instigated by Emperor Wu (r. 561–578) of the Northern Zhou (557–581) in 574. Both Buddhism and Daoism were abolished by imperial decree. Scriptures and images were destroyed and all Buddhist monastics and Daoist priests returned to lay life. Buddhist sources estimate that perhaps as many as two or three million monks and nuns were laicised and 40,000 religious establishments forcibly closed. We do not have any way to confirm these figures independently. In 577 Emperor Wu defeated the Northern Qi dynasty (550–577) and the persecution of Buddhism was extended into the conquered territory.

In both persecutions, the corruption of the Buddhist clergy and its failure to abide by its own rules were cited as reasons for the extreme measures taken by the state. There may have been ideological reasons for trying to extirpate religions. In the case of the Northern Zhou persecution, Daoism was also implicated, and it is possible that the persecution of both religions was intended to end by force sectarian disputes and to impose ideological conformity from the centre. One of the most obvious outcome of the persecutions of Buddhism, especially for the Northern Zhou, was the economic benefit to the state. The state acquired the resources of the monasteries and limited the erosion of its tax revenue by ending the possibility of becoming a tax-exempt monastic.

These two persecutions represent the extreme end of imperial religious policy. While they seem to have been instigated by particular historical individuals who perhaps had an animus against Buddhism, they remained a theoretical possibility for Tang officials in search of measures to control religion. In the minds of Tang Buddhists these loomed large as an existential threat even at times when imperial patronage seemed assured.

7.2.2 Buddhism and the Tang Dynasty

To characterize the Tang dynasty itself, I will borrow the words of the great Dutch historian of Chinese Buddhism, Erik Zürcher (2014), to say that it was "a pre-modern, agrarian-based, centralized bureaucratic empire with a dominant elite of scholar-officials and a universalistic state ideology." We also think of the Tang as a cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic empire (Lewis 2009). At its height, the Tang was diverse in ideas and ethnicities, tolerant, and fantastically wealthy. In the seventh and eighth centuries, the capital, Chang'an, was the centre of world culture. Famously (or notoriously, perhaps), the Tang imperial house itself was not of Chinese origin, a fact which obviously affected its choices with regard to sources of legitimation.[3] Beyond the domestic arena, Buddhism played an important part in the Tang empire's foreign policy—a kind of soft power, if you will. Climate moderation in the Central Asian deserts allowed travellers, pilgrims, and merchants to travel with relative ease between China and Central Asian regions such as modern-day Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and northern India where Buddhism flourished. The Tang empire was thus well connected to a larger Buddhist cultural sphere that also extended eastwards to Korea and Japan and southwards to what later became South Vietnam.

There are a couple of notable breaks in the historical trajectory of the mighty Tang that deserve mention, not least because of their effect on the relationship of state and religion. There was a significant interregnum when China's only female emperor, known as Empress Wu, took the throne. She declared her own Zhou dynasty and ruled (actively and very effectively) from 690 to 705. As a woman in a determinedly patriarchal state, sources of traditional legitimation for her rule were hard to come by (Confucian traditions were actively hostile to female participation in ruling, for example), and she turned instead to Buddhism which became the state-sponsored orthodoxy of the Zhou dynasty. Her reign saw some of the most sophisticated manipulation of Buddhist ideology and symbols ever witnessed in Chinese history and the collusion of many senior Buddhist intellectuals of the time (Barrett 2001; Chen 2002: Forte 1988 and 2005; Rothschild 2015).

The An Lushan rebellion represents the great turning point of Tang history (Pulleyblank 1976). An Lushan was a non-Chinese general (probably ethically Soghdian-Turkic) who had won favour within the court but who had long plotted to take the empire for himself. In 755, he turned his troops against the imperial forces at

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3 The imperial Li clan had Turkic ancestors and retained Turkic language and customs within the palace. They also had Xianbei roots and early Tang emperors married Xianbei women (Holcombe 2013).

the capital who were quickly overwhelmed. The emperor Xuanzong (r. 713–756) fled the capital and An Lushan began campaigns to take all the Tang territory. It took nearly ten years for the Tang ruling house to defeat the troops of An Lushan and his successors. It is hard to exaggerate the chaos and bloodshed that occurred: millions of people died or were displaced during the violent upheavals. The rebellion and its aftermath were devastating for Tang power and afterwards the state was never as confident and powerful as it had been. The territory controlled by the imperial government contracted in the post-rebellion period and the loss of the Western regions had the effect of diminishing the importance of Buddhism as a means of maintaining cultural unity with the West. Suspicions of foreigners such as An increased after the eighth century and Buddhism, despite its long presence in China, now became a focus of xenophobic sentiments.

What was the prevailing "universalistic ideology" of the Tang state itself? Historians sometimes have a rather lazy tendency to label all pre-modern Chinese empires from the Han onward as "Confucian." I do not think that adjective is particularly helpful as Confucian ideology was never static and the descriptor "Confucian" does not really tell us very much with regard to public policy or governance. In the case of the Tang, I think the label "Confucian" is plain wrong. There may have been some bureaucrats who would have styled themselves as "*ru*" (a term that sometimes can mean "Confucian" but in other contexts more properly equates with "scholar" or "classicist") but for the most part the state ideology of the Tang is could be dubbed "Neo-Legalist," somewhat moderated by a classicist aspiration that virtue might be cultivated among the population (Pulleyblank 1960).

The Legalist state, as created originally by the Qin empire (221–207 BCE) and later refined by the Han dynasty, seeks maximal social control. The emperor, as autocrat, prescribes through laws (hence "Legalism") the actions of his subjects, rewarding them for meeting the standards set by the state or punishing them for failing to do so. Laws are the final arbiters of actions. The state assumes no good will or morality on the part of the empire's subjects. It expects only that people will pursue rewards driven by their greed and seek to avoid punishment out of fear.

To put it succinctly, the structure of the Tang state itself was Legalist; it was a government of laws, but it was overseen by officials recruited on the basis of their cultural knowledge who had some degree of affiliation to a broad classicist tradition and a shared moral education. It is not unhelpful to think of the Tang state as having a hard Legalist core that was enveloped in a softer layer of morality and benevolence which incorporated ideas from the classical tradition (what some call "Confucianism") as well as from Daoism and Buddhism.

Aside from Buddhism, the other major religions in the Tang empire were Daoism and what was formerly termed "Nestorian" Christianity, but is now known as East Syriac Christianity (Tang and Winkler 2016). There is not sufficient space to discuss the case of Christianity here, but the religion did receive recognition and patronage from the Tang state. Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, and Islam could also be found in the Tang empire—existing mostly in communities of immigrants in Chang'an and other urban centres. We can therefore think of the Tang empire as having policies towards the larger category of "religion" that extended beyond the specific cases of Buddhism and Daoism. Medieval Daoism consisted of regional traditions with quite distinct (even incompatible) heritages of doctrine and practice until reunification under the Sui and Tang brought them together and, with state support, an overarching intellectual and ecclesiastical framework was put in place (Barrett 1996). Much of the structure of Tang Daoism, both institutional and intellectual, owed a debt to Buddhism. The Tang imperial house also claimed a special relationship with Laozi, the putative founder of Daoism, who had long since ascended to the status of a deity known by his title Supreme Lord Lao (*Taishang Laojun*). This move was intended partly to make their Li clan seem more Chinese than its actual Turkic origins, but it also effectively enlisted divine aid for Tang rule and aligned the Daoist church on the side of the empire. Support for Daoism was also used by the Tang emperors as a check on the power of Buddhism. Daoism was officially proclaimed the highest religion in the empire on two occasions in the early years of the regime, 625 and 637. The Tang was one of the very few dynasties to accord primacy to Daoism.

The height of Daoist patronage by the empire came under the emperor Xuanzong, widely considered the most able of all the Tang emperors. After the An Lushan rebellion, imperial patronage of Daoism diminished somewhat. By the late Tang, having benefitted from centuries of patronage, Daoism was a full-fledged popular church complete with miracles, saints and hagiographies, rituals, sacred sites, and an extensive repertoire of scripture and commentary. Daoism may have been officially designated the highest religion, but Buddhism was always more popular and influential. Both religions were sponsored by and controlled by the state.

The Sui paved the way for the Tang in many ways, and Sui Wendi (r. 581–604), the founder of the short-lived dynasty, was both pious and practical with regard to Buddhism. He had been brought up by a Buddhist nun for whom he retained affectionate memories. He had witnessed the Northern Zhou persecution of Buddhism in 574 and 577 and realized that repression of the religion was not a sensible policy. He dropped restrictions on monastic ordinations, established state-sponsored monasteries in every prefecture, encouraged the copying of sūtras and making of sacred images. He also tied Buddhism to imperial legitimation in material ways by

sponsoring highly orchestrated campaigns of imperial distributions of Buddha relics in imitation of the legendary Indian Buddhist king Aśoka (ca. 300–232 BCE; r. 268–232 BCE). Aśoka (discussed by Olivelle, this volume) became a model of kingship for Buddhist everywhere and was celebrated in legend for his devotion to Buddhism. In China, he was known in particular for his distribution of the Buddha's bodily relics in eighty-four thousand stūpas built across his territory. The relic distribution campaigns in China following Aśoka's model proved an efficacious way of attaching the affective power of relics, which were enthusiastically venerated, to the imperium and they were remembered and later imitated by other rulers, most notably by Empress Wu. The enshrinement and veneration of relics were often accompanied by outbreaks of self-immolation (Benn 2007a).

Tang emperors, for the most part, were not that keen on Buddhism personally —the first two actively disdaining it. But by the early seventh century it was too late and too politically costly for them to do without the religion. Before the An Lushan rebellion (mid-eighth century), the fundamental policy of the imperial state was to patronize Buddhism as necessary, but to keep the religion's power and wealth curbed as much as possible. After the An Lushan rebellion, the empire was often too weak to enforce effective centralized policies with regard to religion, and turned to the sale of monastic ordination certificates in search of a short-term infusion of cash. The major persecution of Buddhism under the Tang came rather late in the dynasty, in 845.

7.3 The Problems

The presence of large numbers of Buddhist monastics and their institutions within Tang territory posed a number of challenges for a state that fundamentally required and expected total control of its population. Influential Buddhist leaders and Buddhist ideas were also potential sources of threat to the imperial bureaucratic state. Many of these problems were already identified and expanded upon by anti-Buddhist polemicists among the cultural elite during the Tang and earlier (Wright 1951). The large numbers of ordained full-time monastics posed two, interrelated difficulties for the state 1) loss of tax revenue (which was actually supposed to be paid not in cash but in grain and corvée labour) and 2) a non-productive section of the population that lived off the charity of those who did work the land. Buddhist monasteries were tax exempt, but were also major landowners—thus taking land out of the hands of the taxpaying population (Twitchett 1956). In actuality, real landholdings by Buddhist monasteries were hard to determine, since some wealthy landlords might build a small Buddhist chapel on their land, "donate" it to the monastery so it became tax exempt, but continue to work it themselves.

In addition to the fiscal impact, Tang rulers knew well from relatively recent history that religion could be a potential cause and locus of sedition and of widespread revolt against the state—the Daoist courtier Fu Yi's (555–639) diatribe against Buddhism cites ten rebellions prior to the Tang that had been instigated by Buddhists (Wright 1951). That number is not much of an exaggeration (Seiwert 2003, 94–161). If monks could be confined to the larger monasteries, then they could be surveilled and controlled, but wandering monks, thaumaturges, and popular healers (of which there were many) were all suspect in the eyes of the state. At any one time there were always charismatic figures who might become centres of cult activity that were potentially hostile to the state, or at the very least disruptive to the necessary agricultural routines of the rural populace. As far as possible, these marginal members of the Buddhist community needed to be kept under control by institutional monastics. The possibility of religious subversion pointed to a more fundamental issue—Buddhist monastics (it was said) did not owe their primary allegiance to the state or to the Emperor, but to the Buddha, an other-worldly foreign figure who taught an alien creed.

Aside from rogue monks who might preach their own form of messianic or apocalyptic Buddhism, radical alternatives to state ideology also circulated in written form. Due to the fact that copying scriptures was a very popular merit-making activity there was a good deal of Buddhist ideology transmitted in textual form. Both Buddhist ideas and the Buddhist scriptures that contained them therefore had to be policed. There was a significant amount of "unofficial," popular Buddhism that contained all kinds of unorthodox ideas often invented in China but passed off as having Indian origins (Buswell 1990). Popular Buddhism often had a strong messianic or millenarian strain to it that was always prone to pose a danger to the state. As we will see, even orthodox Buddhism in medieval China could take surprising and extreme forms. Since the state scarcely possessed the personnel or the expertise to police the Buddhist canon itself, it sponsored leading monastics to do the work. Their endeavours usually took the form of catalogues of approved texts and a careful accounting of the many illegitimate works that were to be withdrawn from circulation (Forte 1990: Lewis 1990: Tokuno 1990: Hureau 2009). Such texts were often massively popular and hard to eradicate, at least to judge from the large numbers of surviving copies and references in other works.

7.4 The Benefits

The chief benefit of patronizing Buddhism was that its institutions stood ready made and well established to serve as the spiritual arm of the state. A network of imperially-sponsored monasteries distributed throughout the realm, one per

prefecture, combined with Buddhist palace chapels within the imperial compound ensured that the Buddhist church was tightly entwined with the imperial project (Chen 2006; Forte 2005). Imperial monasteries housed not only ordinary monks but also the elite Buddhist authors, compilers, and commentators who shaped Chinese Buddhist doctrine. The translation of Buddhist scriptures from India—a complex and resource-heavy task—also took place in imperial monasteries. Aside from textual work, monks in imperial monasteries were also available on call to conduct state-protection rituals, to celebrate imperial birthdays, and to conduct memorial services for deceased. This last role was very important in the early years of the Tang when the corpses of the war dead littered the battlefields of the empire. Buddhist monks were really the only religious professionals willing and able to conduct large-scale memorial rites for those who had died in battle, whose unquiet spirits might otherwise harm the living. Rites for the war dead offered an important means for securing legitimacy and support for the dynasty in its early years. In addition to large formal rituals, monasteries were sites for large-scale vegetarian feasts, and lay ordination ceremonies. At these events, monks (especially those with large popular followings) conferred the "bodhisattva precepts" which practitioners might take on multiple occasions to create religious merit for themselves and their families. These mass gatherings offered opportunities for skilled Buddhist preachers to weave into their homilies praise for the imperium and lectures on the proper conduct of the empire's subjects.

Buddhist doctrine often proved helpful to the Tang empire's "thought work" and propaganda. Buddhist theories of kingship—especially concept of the universal monarch known as a "wheel-turning king" (*cakravartin*)—had already been rapidly and skillfully turned to practical propaganda use by pre-Tang dynasties (Palumbo 2012). This *cakravartin* ideal continued to be indexed by Tang rulers and by Empress Wu particularly (Forte 2005). Some basic and widely accepted Buddhist concepts, such as karma and rebirth, often seemed to favour the ruling classes—if peasants had been born poor that was surely not anyone's fault but their own. Their current status was nothing other than a consequence of their own acts in their past lives and they should accept their place in society. If people wanted to rise in status then they ought to behave morally, which, as Buddhist scriptures often indicated specifically, equated to obedience to the law of the land. Buddhist ideas were thus easily adaptable to projects of social control and behaviour modification that were necessary for an empire that was geographically vast and populous but administered by a relative handful of bureaucrats. The Tang state did not even have to propagate these ideas themselves—indeed, at the local level such a task was probably quite beyond the capabilities or resources of the local magistrate or village headman. Instead, monks (and perhaps sometimes nuns) could do the work. Buddhist preaching in Tang times was both very popular

and quite sophisticated—it incorporated techniques of narration, verse summary, audience participation and the use of images to reinforce the message to audiences who were largely illiterate (Schmid 2006). Buddhists thus commanded excellent means of spreading popular morality, although by law they were not permitted to preach outside their monasteries for fear of sedition. Societies of lay Buddhists, led perhaps by a single monk or nun, were also popular (Gernet 1995). These societies offered the Tang state an effective vehicle for reinforcing community values and for policing the behaviour of the empire's subjects.

Lay societies, together with larger monasteries, played an important role in keeping the social fabric of the empire together. They provided hospitals and pharmacies, fed the hungry, took in orphans, and looked after the elderly and infirm. In addition, Buddhists built roads and bridges and widened river channels to make them navigable. All this work was done for religious merit, and cost the state nothing. The Tang infrastructure benefitted significantly from the free and enthusiastic labour of Buddhists.

Buddhism offered practical benefits to the imperial household: monks conducted rituals, offered magical charms and spells, and some were experts in healing. For these boons the Tang house drew on both Buddhists and Daoists. In the realm of technology, Buddhists had been quick to adopt woodblock printing (by the seventh century at the latest and perhaps even earlier). The state was grateful for this innovation and soon harnessed it for its own ends. Empress Wu was particularly far-sighted in her adoption of printing (Barrett 2008). Buddhists also played important roles in importing innovations from outside of China, such as sugar technology, or Indian, Iranian, and Hellenistic calendar science, or the chair (Kieschnick 2003, Kotyk 2017). Large-scale Buddhist construction projects of monastery complexes and gigantic images seem to have been used by the government as work-creation schemes for populations displaced by flooding or other natural disasters (Chen 2006). On the financial side, the state could and did sell monastic ordinations granting tax-free status for a quick infusion of cash (Barrett 2005; Gernet 1995). This was a particularly visible strategy after the An Lushan rebellion, but the long-term effects were not beneficial to either church or state. Ultimately, it exacerbated the narrowing of the tax base and diluted the quality of the Buddhist saṃgha.

7.5 Strategies

We had already noted the nature of the Tang as a "centralized bureaucratic empire," so it is not surprising that one approach that the Tang adopted was simply to place Buddhism under bureaucratic control. It came under the Bureau of Sacri-

fices, an office in the Ministry of Rites. This oversight of the religion was by no means a Tang innovation: Buddhism had been under bureaucratic administration in both North and South China since the early fifth century. But those regimes had appointed a senior Buddhist monk who served somewhat nominally as the "chief administrator" of the saṃgha. Taizong, the second Tang emperor, exchanged this single figure for "Ten Monks of Great Virtue," but the original members of this body were not replaced, so eventually in the Tang central bureaucracy Buddhism was overseen by lay officials only.[4]

The policy lever most frequently employed by the Tang state was its control of monastic ordination. The fact that anyone wishing to join the saṃgha required official permission to do so in the form of an ordination certificate allowed the bureaucratic empire to restrict the size of the (legal) monastic population. Sometimes, there were basic competency tests before someone could be ordained. Aspiring monks and nuns had to be able to recite a scripture, for example. On occasion (during Gaozu's [r. 618–626] reign for example) severe restrictions were imposed on the numbers of the clergy and of state-supported monasteries. Monks and nuns who exceeded the official quota were to be forcibly returned to lay life. This reaction was relatively generous in comparison to that of Taizong, who in 627 insisted on the death penalty for those holding illegal ordinations. Any such controls (or even the suggestion of them) were always bitterly opposed by the Buddhist metropolitan elite who no doubt remembered the purges of Buddhism conducted by previous regimes as recounted above (Benn 2007b). Ultimately, the Tang state supported elite monastics as part of its efforts to have Buddhist institutions police themselves. The unspoken contract with the Buddhist church was something like this: you can practice your religion and we will support that religion as long as there is no hint of subversion. But if you cannot control your congregation, then we will have to do it for you.

There was one major attempt during the Tang at the empire-wide suppression of Buddhism and confiscation of monastic property in 845. Controversy remains about how deep or long-lasting this twenty-month persecution of Buddhism actually was (Shi 2016). But otherwise, Tang emperors mostly left Buddhism alone, being usually unwilling to face the consequences of a large community turned against them. In any case, Buddhism had both intellectual and emotional appeal for rulers and ruled alike, so "rational choice" cannot explain every policy decision with regard to the religion.

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4 Taizong drew here most immediately on Sui dynasty precedent (Chen 2001), although the idea was present in the Northern Zhou also.

As we noted, there had been persecutions of Buddhism under the Northern Wei and the Northern Zhou, but the backlash had been notably severe in terms of popular sentiment. The Buddhist historians and propagandists were always keen to remind their official sponsors of these instances—as well as sometimes waxing hysterical about much milder attempts to limit the numbers of clergy or the power of the monasteries (Benn 2007b).

When Tang emperors like Gaozu did try to purge Buddhism, they would claim it was for the benefit of the religion—to ensure that only true monks remained within the monastic community. Gaozu's vision was in fact for a radically slimmed-down establishment—just three Buddhist monasteries in the capital and one in each prefecture (there were over a hundred monasteries in the capital at the time). But Gaozu was replaced within a month of his promulgated policy by Li Shimin (Emperor Taizong) who rescinded the edict.

Beyond the immediate concerns around the size of the clergy and the occasional speculation about whether it was possible to have Buddhism with all its social benefits but without the costly and troublesome saṃgha, the Tang state mostly concerned itself with questions of how to co-opt mainstream Buddhist ideas by harnessing or tweaking doctrine while also taming the wilder fringes of the religion. If Buddhist morality was generally good for the state, but monastics were a drain on resources, could one have Buddhism without monks and nuns? There were various attempts to try to bring about that particular vision, but it may ultimately have been an impossible autocratic dream (Chen 2002). By the time of the Tang the need for a full time monastic order was too well entrenched in society. The Tang state had a better chance of realizing its vision of a state religion with Daoism where it endorsed a larger, more diffuse kind of membership of the church through a progressive form of ordination that allowed members to move up the ecclesiastical hierarchy without actually joining the ranks of the full-time religious professionals (Barrett 1996).

Legally, the Tang state held Buddhist (and sometimes Daoist) clergy answerable to higher standards in law than the general population, and to a more stringent level of conduct than their own monastic codes. Taizong attempted to have Buddhist monastics pay homage to their parents rather than the other way around, but his edict on the practice had to be rescinded in the face of strong opposition from the Buddhist church. Why was the state concerned about the behaviour of monks at all? Aside from the larger Neo-Legalist orientation of the state, and the concern to keep monks from interfering in politics, there may have been some concern to maintain the ritual purity of the clergy. Would state Buddhist ritual be effective if it were conducted by meat-eating, wine-drinking, fornicating monks who were morally or ritually impure? This was certainly a factor affecting the morality of Buddhist monks in medieval Japan, for example.

7.6 Alliances

Often, members of the monastic elite found that their interests aligned with those of the state. Some monks, such as Fazang (643–712) for example, were quite skilled politicians, who worked with sympathetic officials with the ambition of creating something like a Buddhist theocracy (Chen 2007). Even monks who were sometimes critical of specific policies, like Daoxuan (596–667), had visions of a perfectly-ordered Buddhist society (Ho 1995). When things were not going well for the Tang, during the post-An Lushan rebellion for example, ritual specialists like the monk Amoghavajra (705–774), who had come to Tang China from his native South India, served alongside the Tang military to defeat rebels and barbarians (Goble 2016).

7.7 Action Buddhism

Millenarian and apocalyptic ideas in action are somewhat endemic to Buddhism, a religion which prophesies its own decline. Tang Buddhists in particular were acutely aware that they lived far in time and space from the Buddha and that their great teacher had long ago warned of the waning of his teachings and the consequent degeneration of the saṃgha. Many understood themselves to be living in a dark time, while others looked forward to the imminent arrival of the next Buddha, Maitreya, even though the scriptural tradition held that he was not expected to arrive for some eons. To some extent, the Tang benefitted from millenarian expectations, both Buddhist and Daoist, and especially in its foundation. But once the dynasty was established these same ideas could become sources of resistance and rebellion (Bokenkamp 1994). Empress Wu and her Buddhist collaborators played the Maitreya card effectively while her reign lasted.

But Medieval China also harbored currents of Buddhism of which current scholarship is almost entirely ignorant, often because they have been glossed over by Buddhist authors. One way to characterize these trends when we catch glimpses of them in our patchy historical data would be to speak of a kind of "action Buddhism," designed to rally monks and laity against the complacency associated with more cerebral forms of practice and to push back the encroaching darkness of the declining dharma. To judge from some of the cases we do know of charismatic leaders of Buddhist cults, this "action Buddhism" was by no means simple-minded, but rather a multi-faceted and sophisticated form of medieval religiosity that could appeal to literati and commoners, to elite monks, and even to rulers (Benn 2006).

One form of Tang "action Buddhism" is the Teaching of the Three Levels (Hubbard 2001). The monk around whom this movement coalesced, Xinxing, was born in 540 in northern China. He sought ordination at a young age, suffered during the Northern Zhou persecution of Buddhism in the 570s, and eventually founded his own congregation first at Ye, the capital of several northern dynasties, and later in the city of Chang'an, where he was patronized by the powerful Sui minister, Gao Jiong (d. 607), and established a following. He died in 594. After Xinxing's death, a sizeable community of Three Levels followers maintained a sectarian identity based on his teachings for at least three centuries. Both the Sui and Tang regimes issued legislation to curtail the Three Levels movement. In 730, Three Levels texts were listed as "spurious" in the official catalogue of the canon in an attempt to curtail their circulation. The Teaching of the Three Levels is often characterized as "heterodox," but its doctrine is not that divergent from mainstream medieval Buddhism. The real (or perceived) threat to the imperial state came from the movement's popularity and sense of autonomy. Its members lived separately from other monastics, bowed to all whom they encountered, regardless of their status, and ran an "inexhaustible treasury." This institution took in donations, lent them out at interest, and used the money to rebuild monasteries and support the poor. It was the rampant popularity of the inexhaustible treasury that caused the Tang state such anxiety and led to moves against the cult. The state was nervous about a form of "action Buddhism" that had drawn in both elite and commoners and posed a threat to its own monopoly on ordering human society in a humane way. The focus of the Three Levels movement on what we might call "social justice" and its emphasis on radical egalitarianism seen in its practice of bowing to all offers an example of the immediate interests of action Buddhism.

7.8 The Fanatical Edge

Buddhism in Tang China was a broad church but it had a fanatical edge to it. Much of the sponsorship of cataloguing and regularization of doctrine undertaken by the Tang and its predecessors was fundamentally intended to clean up the exuberant textual manifestations of Buddhist belief and to make it the respectable face of an official religion. Because of what had happened between church and state in previous dynasties there probably was also some idea of martyrdom in the face of persecution or state control, and the Tang state had to navigate the surrounding sentiments effectively and sensitively. For example, some Buddhist biographies and histories definitely and deliberately conflated Buddhist identity with resistance to other illegitimate rulers during the chaos at the founding of the Tang (Benn

2007b). Buddhist martyrdom had to be managed somewhat carefully because cults of remembrance to Buddhist martyrs were places where popular sentiment and intellectual polemics combined. Essentially, the Tang state needed to keep the Buddhist intelligentsia onside because they could not afford to lose their support. For example, the Tang exiled the Buddhist monk Falin (572–640) who criticized the state's patronage of Daoism and insisted on pointing out the Li family's non-Chinese origins, but he was actively remembered within the community and probably remained a focus of Buddhist resentment (Wong 2016).

Acts of self-immolation by Chinese Buddhists are but part of a longer history of the ideals and practices of "abandoning the body" that may be found throughout the Chinese Buddhist tradition from the late fourth century to the present (Benn 2007a). In my research on the topic, I have encountered several hundred accounts of monks, nuns and laypeople who offered up or gave away their own bodies for a variety of reasons, and in multiple different ways. It is impossible to typify self-immolators since they are drawn from across the spectrum of the saṃgha in China: Chan/Zen masters, distinguished scholars, exegetes, proselytisers, wonder-workers, and ascetics as well as otherwise undistinguished and unknown monastics and laypeople. The deeds of self-immolators were usually enacted before large audiences. Government officials and sometimes even rulers themselves (at least prior to the Tang) often attended their final moments, interred the sacred remains and composed eulogies, verses, and inscriptions that extolled their actions. One form of self-immolation known as "auto-cremation" (burning the body) frequently took the form of a dramatically staged public spectacle. Overall, the performance and remembrance of self-immolation took a strong hold on the Chinese Buddhist imagination from early medieval times onwards. When we examine *en masse* the representative cases we discover that self-immolation, rather than being an aberrant or deviant practice that was rejected by the Buddhist tradition, could actually be understood to offer a bodily path to attain awakening and ultimately buddhahood. While this path took rather a different form than those soteriologies that stress the mind, such as meditation and learning, it was a path to deliverance that was nonetheless considered valid by many Chinese Buddhists during Tang times.

For mid-seventh century metropolitan monks who were charged with understanding self-immolation as a Buddhist practice, the world and the saṃgha's place within it looked very different than they had appeared to their earlier counterparts. By the seventh century self-immolation was a well-established practice, the earliest case dating to 396, but in contrast to the earlier situation in which rulers apparently colluded in the acts of self-immolators, it now sometimes took on a somewhat more overtly confrontational aspect. Also, Buddhists of the sixth and seventh centuries were on occasion made acutely aware that the teaching of the Buddha was not only under threat from secular forces, but also that it was losing

efficacy because of the ever-increasing temporal distance between themselves and their great teacher. Fears of the decline of the dharma, or the impending end of the eon (*kalpa*) also affected the practices and interpretation of self-immolation. For some Buddhists self-immolation offered nothing less than a renewal of the waning power of the dharma and the Tang state was not immune to this apocalyptic side of Buddhist thought. Certainly, Tang emperors recognized the actions of some self-immolators with official posthumous titles and imperial robes. Self-immolation was also not restricted to the popular fringes, even an elite monk such as Fazang burned off a finger as an act of homage to a relic.

As we noted earlier, Buddhist relics were most often deployed deliberately by the state, and were also the locus of extreme body practices when they were put on public display. In his infamous Memorial on the Buddha Relic submitted to the throne in 819, the official Han Yu (768–824) complained to the emperor Xianzong (r. 805–820) that if he should honour the Buddha's relic as he proposed to do then the common people, being easily misled, would, "in their tens or hundreds burn the tops of their heads and burn off their fingers in sacrifice." Furthermore,

> Unless there is an immediate prohibition to check and control the various monasteries, there will inevitably be those who will cut off their limbs or slice up their bodies in making offerings which will pervert our customs and destroy normal usages, making us a laughing stock to the world. This would be no small matter (*Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, 615).

It appears that Han Yu may not have simply been waxing rhetorical here. There are accounts of laypeople burning their scalps, branding their arms, and cutting off their fingers when the relic of the Buddha was brought to Chang'an in 819, and again in 873. Extreme body practice by Buddhists in conjunction with state-sponsored Buddhist ceremonies was likely the norm rather than the exception.

Daoxuan, who compiled an important collection of monastic hagiographies in the late seventh century, used his collection to laud the sacrifices made by the heroes of recent anti-Buddhist persecutions and (albeit obliquely) to remind the Tang rulers of the necessity of their continued patronage of the saṃgha. He wrote from a perspective that recognised that Buddhism in China appeared to be stronger than ever, but at the same time acknowledged the fact that he and his contemporaries were far from the Buddha in time and space, and at the mercy of fickle political forces that they might hope to influence but not to control. The idea that monks would lay down their lives to protect the saṃgha as a whole against the depredations of the state is exemplified in the biography of a monk called Dazhi. In 609, the tranquillity of his life was shattered when the emperor Sui Yangdi (r. 604–617) imposed some controls on the numbers of monks, nuns, and monasteries after nearly thirty years of unrestricted growth, first under his father, Sui Wendi, and then in

the earlier years of his own reign. While the official histories of the period make little of Yangdi's measures, there is some evidence from Daoxuan's autobiographical writings of a restriction on monasteries in this period that affected his own training and early career. Dazhi seems to have taken the news rather badly and after publicly lamenting that "the deterioration of the dharma should have reached a point such as this," he submitted a memorial to the emperor announcing his intention to burn off his own arm "in order to repay the compassion of the state." The emperor assented, and ordered a great vegetarian feast to be held. Dazhi afterwards burned off his own arm in a public ceremony. The episode is recounted in quite gruesome detail in a number of Buddhist sources, aside from his hagiography. Dazhi died seven days later, but left behind a seventy-page vow, which was still being annually recited at his home monastery in the late seventh century.

Daoxuan's presentation of biographies of Dazhi and other monks who died in state persecutions of Buddhism is no accident; rather these tales represent almost a kind of moral blackmail—as if saying to the Tang rulers (probably Taizong in particular), "You see what happen when you do not support the sangha: eminent monks jump off cliffs or burn off their arms and die."

Tang biographies of Buddhist self-immolators mix imitation of scriptural models taken from the *Lotus Sutra* (in which the Bodhisattva Medicine King sets fire to his own body) and the previous lives of the Buddha found in the *jātaka* literature with pragmatic and sometimes desperate attempts to defend the dharma against the depredations of the state. Daoxuan hints strongly that the moral power and charisma of self-immolators allowed them to act as the guardians of the Buddhist community. As a monk who spent much of his career close to the centre of political power, he was particularly interested in self-immolators who demonstrated such power and charisma within sight of the court. His aim was to remind his readers of those who had fought to maintain the integrity, indeed the very survival, of the saṃgha under previous regimes. More specifically, he likely wanted Taizong to take notice of the fact that Buddhist monks had the means to oppose tyrants and usher in just rule by their physical acts. The powers of self-immolation in Tang times were thus harnessed to protect the saṃgha from encroachments by the state as well as to generate religious merit for practitioners and witnesses of the act.

Despite the literary aspects of self-immolation—such as explicit references to obscure *jātakas*, written vows-cum-manifestoes and death-verses—there was another strain of medieval self-immolation that stressed the power of the physical act. The charismatic self-immolators seem to have been convinced that their style of "action Buddhism"—often manifested in the form of burning fingers and bodies—had the power to extend or renew the vitality not only of the Buddha's teaching but the very world itself. The Tang state was not entirely sceptical

of this claim, but needed to bring it under their control—usually by officially recognizing the monks with honorary titles and imperial robes. As we have seen, imperially sponsored processions of Buddha-relics were often accompanied by enthusiastic acts of self-immolation—monks and laypeople burned off fingers or cut off their arms as offerings—making it difficult to separate the practice from the sponsors of the relics. The Tang state was at least resigned to tolerating extreme acts of piety among its subjects, as long as the objects of devotion remained firmly under its control.

Self-immolation was a well-entrenched aspect of Chinese Buddhism by the mid-seventh century, but it did not remain static. Monks and nuns brought to it a deeper appreciation and knowledge of the scriptural antecedents as well as a confidence that it was a practice that could not only meet their personal requirements, but one that was desperately needed by a monastic community whose continued existence depended on the sometimes-precarious patronage of rulers as well as on a cosmos that was moving entropically from order to chaos. Self-immolation entailed not just the transformation of a single monk, it could be a ritual force for social and cosmic renewal. Emperors of the Tang and later dynasties sometimes recognized the special efforts of self-immolators by bestowing on them imperial titles or purple robes.

The extreme edge of Buddhism needs some consideration in terms of our understanding of state policy towards the religion. It is possible that the Tang state chose to recognise the self-immolators it did as a way of simultaneously taming and harnessing their popular appeal. Emperors and administrators were probably acutely aware that they were dealing with sensitive areas of practice and that it was best to keep practitioners of action Buddhism in the glare of publicity rather than in the shadows where they might start to harbour resentment and foment opposition. Also, self-immolators, like the holy men of late antiquity (Brown 1982), were often possessed of considerable charisma and became sources of local power that could be co-opted for the imperial project.

7.9 Conclusion

There is much to consider when it comes to empires and religions and their relationship. While there is a good deal of rational choice that imperial administrations can exercise, we should not underestimate the irrational and extreme tendencies with which both state and religious institutions had to deal. Although our historical sources are often apt to tidy them away, the manifestations of religious fervour were likely never far from the view of our historical actors.

With Buddhism, the Tang faced an institution that was too well entrenched to do without but was too sophisticated and self-aware to manipulate easily. Buddhist leaders had experience and institutional memory of how to deal effectively with rulers. Ever alert to dangers of excessive control, and keen to maintain firm boundaries vis-à-vis the empire, Buddhism was subtle, expansive, diverse, but the policies the state could actually enforce (limit size of saṃgha, ban subversive writings, make example of worst behaved monks or critics of their regime) were too crude in comparison to the intellectual and practical resources that Buddhism could command. The Tang emperors did much better with Daoism, a less cohesive tradition at the beginning of the seventh century, that they could engineer into a state religion. But ultimately Daoism just was not as popular as Buddhism and could not replace it. Looking across empires, however, we can see that the Tang state found remarkably effective strategies in its control of a large and relatively cohesive religious institution that was the Buddhist *saṃgha.*

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Michal Biran

8 Religions in the Mongol Empire Revisited: Exchanges, Conversion, Consequences

8.1 Introduction

The unprecedented expansion of the Mongol Empire was understood by the Mongols, as well as their subjects, enemies and neighbors, as Heaven's will. Although the Mongols did not have a specific word for religion up to the mid-fourteenth century (De Rachewiltz 1972; Kara 2009; Elverskog 2023), even a cursory look at the *Secret History*, the only indigenous contemporary source for the rise of the Mongol Empire, firmly attests that for the Mongols, nothing happened without Tengri (Tenggeri). Indeed it was Tengri, the sky god of the steppe, who conferred upon Chinggis Khan the right to rule over earth and the charisma required for pursuing it.[1] Understanding world religions as different paths to reach Tengri, the Mongols practiced a policy of religious pluralism. They mobilized the spiritual resources of their domains for the sake of the empire just as they did with their human and material resources, thereby promoting religious exchange on an unparalleled scale and transforming the religious landscape of Eurasia. This exchange also affected the Mongols themselves who adopted universal religions: Tibetan Buddhism in China and Islam in the three western khanates. This chapter analyses the Mongols' political theology and its role in the Empire's expansion; the Mongols' religious policies and their impact on the Empire; as well as the Mongols' process of conversion,[2] and its impact on Mongol and post-Mongol empires.

The Mongol Empire in this contribution is defined as the realm governed by the Mongols from the rise of Chinggis Khan (r. 1206–1227) to the retreat of the Qa'an ulus, better known as the Yuan dynasty, from China, in 1368. This time span (1206–1368), known as "the Mongol Moment," is divided into two main eras. The first is the united Mongol empire (1206–1260), a constantly expanding polity ruled from Mongolia; and the second "the Mongol Commonwealth" (1260–1368), in which the empire was dissolved in a process that resulted in the creation of four regional empires, centred in China, Iran, Central Asia and the Volga region, each of

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1 E. g., De Rachewiltz 2006, paragraphs 8, 19, 22, 43, 52, 64, 66, 82, 85, 117, 128, 139, 140, 165, 173, 176, 185, 209.

2 Conversion is used hereafter as a shorthand for the adoption of religious affiliation, namely a set of practices, symbols, and beliefs that enabled the convert to be regarded as a member of a religion community by this community and by himself. See also DeWeese 2009, 121–122

which headed by a Chinggisid branch. The Great Khan or Qa'an ruled mainly in China and Mongolia and enjoyed a certain—though not uncontested—primacy over the other three realms. The retreat of the Yuan to Mongolia in 1368 represents the end of "the Mongol Moment" in world history, even though some Mongol polities held power for centuries later.

Before starting, a few words about the sources' limitations are in order: Most of the sources on the Mongol Empire (like other nomadic empires) were penned not by the Mongols themselves but by their sedentary subjects or neighbors, each bounded in the premises of his own civilization, religion and historiographical tradition. Yet this general problem is more acute when it comes to religion. This is not only because some of our most informed observers are missionaries from Latin Europe, total foreigners to the Asian scene, but mainly because during their military campaigns and diplomatic correspondence, the Mongols deliberately exploited the religious sensitivities of their enemies, often leading the latter to mistake them as believers.[3] Despite these limitations, however, the Mongols' attitude to religion has attracted considerable scholarly attention, both of medieval writers inside and outside the Empire and of modern historians, ever since Gibbon praised the religious tolerance of the barbarian Chinggis Khan (Gibbon, 1977 [1776–1788], 3: 625–626, cited in Atwood 2004a, 238). This paper owes much to these scholarly endeavors,[4] and while consulting a plethora of multilingual primary sources of various genres (including travelogues, diplomatic letters, seals, coins, chronicles and theological works) from inside and outside the Empire, it is basically an informed state-of-the-field hopefully with some new insights.

8.2 Mongol Political Theology

The divine, in the form of Tengri, played a major role in the Mongols' life, politics and ideology. This ideology or political theology is succinctly expressed in the phrase *Möngke Tengri-yin küchün-dür; Qaghan-u suu-dur*, i. e. "By the Might of Eter-

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3 Jackson 2005, 249–250; for a short review of the sources for the United Empire: De Rachewiltz 2007, 108–112.

4 Eminent contemporary scholars who have dealt with the religion of the Mongols include, among others, Johan Elverskog, Peter Jackson, Christopher Atwood, Brian Baumann, Igor de Rachewiltz, Herbert Franke, and Thomas Allsen. Mongol Islamization has also attracted plenty of scholarly attention, mainly by Dewin DeWeese and Peter Jackson, with important contributions of Jonathan Brack, Reuven Amitai, and Judith Pfeiffer, to name just a few.

nal Heaven; by the Good Fortune (charisma) of the Qa'an."[5] This formula, first appearing in the latter half of Chinggis Khan's reign, frequently repeated by rank and file Mongols (Peng Daya and Xu Ting 1975, 488), and widely broadcasted in the ultimatums that Chinggis Khan's immediate heirs sent to foreign powers from Korea to Europe, consists of two main parts. First, Heaven (i. e. Tengri) bestowed upon the Mongolian ruler a mandate for universal dominion over earth; and second, Heaven also gave this ruler, the Qa'an, a special good fortune or charisma that guarantees his success.

For understanding the operation of this dual political theology (as well as the Mongols' relations with world religions discussed below), we have to locate it in the context of the Mongols' indigenous religion. As Jonathan Brack recently argued, it was an immanent religion. Unlike transcendentalist religions that are oriented towards salvation and universal ethics, immanent religions are mainly concerned with ritual efficacy, purity and communal wellbeing. They stress the empirically-attested effectiveness of gods, rites and clerics in here-and-now worldly affairs (e. g., healing the sick, winning a battle), and not the afterlife. Thus they lack a clear division between the mundane and the divine, natural and supernatural, and society and cosmos. This view often results in a central role for a divinized king who connects human to the divine, and in 'empirical religiosity' as a measure for evaluating other religions. Another major aspect of the immanent concept was the translatability (or non-exclusivity) of religion. Namely, instead of setting boundaries between religions, it saw them as having a common ground, which enables them to function as a means of intercultural translation and communication (Brack 2021, 2022, citing Assman 1997; Strathern 2019).

Tengri, the sky god of the steppe, was an immanent god as opposed to the transcendental god of the Abrahamic religions. It was not an abstract entity, but an empirical reality that governed earth and decided the destiny of men. It was the vault of the sky, a guide for finding the way in the steppe and the provider of sun and rain, which secured prosperity. Unlike the monotheistic god, to which the Mongols early on translated it (as *Allāh, Deus, Khudā*), Tengri was not a personal god. Tengri was amoral, the cause of both good and evil, not bound to salvation or damnation, and yet a fearsome God that demanded human submission (Baumann 2013, 234–237; De Rachewiltz 2007, 112–128).

Human submission to Tengri was delegated through the one to whom Tengri conferred upon the mandate to rule over earth- the Qa'an. The Qa'an was submissive (Mong. *il*) to Heaven, but he rules the lives of the common people just as Heav-

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5 Qa'an means Great Khan, i. e. the supreme ruler of the whole empire as opposed to regional khans; it is the Mongolian equivalent of the Turkic *Khaqan*.

en does, demanding the same submission from other nations. (Baumann 2013, 249–251). The mandate was given to the Mongols of all the nations and to the Chinggisids of all the Mongols. Like the mandate of older steppe empires, and unlike the Chinese mandate of heaven, the Mongol mandate was conferred upon a single clan, each of whose members, and only them, could theoretically be elevated to the supreme rulership, represented by the title Qa'an. The Empire was conceived as the joint property of the entire royal clan. Lineage and genealogy mattered, but the main criteria for selecting the Qa'an among the clan members was a demonstration of his charisma, namely skills and fortune.[6] Moreover, unlike the Chinese case, Tengri did not bestow his mandate on every generation, namely the steppe world was often left without a unifying ruler, sometimes—as in the era that precedes the rise of Chinggis Khan—for centuries. Yet the notion of the mandate remained as an ideology in reserve even during the periods of disunion, ready to be revived if the creation of a supra-tribal empire was to be attempted again. The aspirant Qa'an therefore had to prove that he had received the mandate by displaying the charisma required to hold it, mainly in the battlefield. The scope of the mandate increased with the empire: the Mongols' mandate started—like the Turkic mandate before it—as referring to "the people of the felt tents," namely the steppe nomads. Following Chinggis Khan's unprecedented military success, it was broadened to include the whole world, both steppe and sown (Biran 2015a, 2015b).

Chinggis Khan's unprecedented worldly success not only assured beyond any doubt that he had the charisma required for a successful holding of the mandate, but also made him an independent source of charisma. Charisma (Mongolian: *suu;*[7] Turkic: *kut*; Persian: *farr*; Arabic: *dawlat*; Chinese: *yun, fu*) was understood as genius or good fortune, which assured the success of the imperial venture and the prosperity of the Qa'an's subjects. The Qa'an, the possessor of the charisma, was linked to Heaven through his inhuman genealogical lineage and his investiture by his followers, who raised him on an "earthy" white felt carpet, symbolizing the union of Heaven and Earth under one legitimate government that mediated between Heaven, Earth and men. Moreover, through his unmediated,

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6 See Fletcher 1980, who named this election according to skills as tanistry, due to its similarity to the Celtic practice thus named.

7 *Suu* literally means distinction, superior[ity], genius; hence the genius bestowed by Heaven i.e. charisma (Lessing 1960, 740). It was often rendered as *suu zali* (or *jhali*), *zali* meaning flame, spirit (Lessing 1960, 1031), an allusion to the solar-like brilliance of the ruler, his nimbus, or "golden face." *Suu zali* was closer to the meaning of the Turkic *qut*, i.e. charisma. Gold, the color of the sun was also the color of Heaven and a symbol of authority. Indeed, the Chinggisids were called the *Altan urugh*, the golden lineage, due to their close connection to Heaven. Allsen 1997, 58–62.

personal communion with Heaven, the Qa'an attained divine knowledge or intuition. This super-mundane intelligence enabled him, at least in the case of Chinggis Khan, to create a legal system for ruling his people "from the page of his own mind without the toil of perusing records or the trouble of conforming with tradition" (Juwaynī, tr. Boyle 1997, 23–24). This resulted in the famous *Jasaq/Yasa*, the legal system ascribed to Chinggis Khan that was later seen as equivalent to the Sharī'a or the Dharma The charisma was manifested also in more mundane expressions of the Qa'an's good fortune, such as by narrow escapes, last minute warnings, and advantageous changes of weather on the battlefield (Brack 2018, 2021; Allsen 2009, 2023).

Charisma could be stored, shared and manufactured not only by Heaven, but also by other means: Repositories of charisma existed in sacred territories, among talented people who possessed various kinds of knowledge, and among the ancestors, if properly honored. The Chinggisids certainly tried to tap into all these sources. Thus the Mongol capital, Qaraqorum, was built, after considerable deliberations meant to ensure the Empire's prosperity, in the Orkhon valley in central Mongolia, a region that was sacred also to the Turks and Uighurs. Burqan Qaldun, in northeastern Mongolia, Chinggis Khan's birthplace, was another such sacred territory, where Chinggis Khan was worshipped (Allsen 1996).

The ancestors, if appropriately revered, were another source of charisma. The Mongols kept *ongghod*, figurines of felt, silk, or bronze within which dwelled the ancestor spirits, to whom they regularly offered food and gifts to ensure their support (Atwood 2004b, 423). The spectacular success of Chinggis Khan resulted in a more elaborated worship that began soon after his death. In the 1240s the friars John of Plano Carpini and Benedict the Pole recorded such worship at the court of Batu, the son of Chinggis Khan's eldest son Jochi, in southern Russia:

> They have also made an idol to the first emperor, which they have placed in a cart in a place of honour before a dwelling, as we saw before the present Emperor's court, and they offer many gifts to it, they also present horses to it and no one dare mount these till their death; they also give other animals to it, and if they slaughter these for food they do not break any of their bones but burn them in a fire. They bow to it towards the south as to a God, and they make other nobles who are visiting them do the same (Plano Carpini in Dawson 1955, 9; cited in Elverskog 2006, 49).

While the friars took part in the ceremony, later on it was apparently limited to the "golden family," as such descriptions are uncommon. Worship was performed in Mongolia and later, when Qubilai Qa'an (r. 1260–1294) transferred the Mongol capital to north China, a more elaborated worship was performed in the "Eight White Yurts" (*Naiman chaghan ger*), an eight-halled ancestor temple that he had built in

Dadu (Beijing).[8] Moreover, the Mongols' diplomatic letters written under Chinggis Khan's immediate heirs often refer to the latter as if he were still alive and ruling side by side with the current Qa'an or Khan. Thus, the Chinggisid charisma became the basis for his descendants' rule, and the Qa'an in the formula "in the Good Fortune of the Qa'an" may refer not to the reigning Qa'an but to Chinggis Khan, who sanctified the right of his descendants to rule.[9]

But while all the Chinggisids inherited their forefather's charisma, it was not equally divided—each offspring, especially khans or aspiring khans, had to prove that he owned a bigger share of charisma than his rivals to the throne. Chinggisid rulers therefore connected themselves to their forefathers' charisma not only through worship but by claiming privileged descent within the Chinggisid line;[10] demonstrating adherence to Chinggis Khan' real or fictive policies as expressed in his *Jasaq* and mission of world conquest; or by embodying the divinely inspired traits attributed to the imperial founder, such as his supra-mundane intelligence, and divine knowledge attained through his unmediated, personal communion with Heaven (Lane 2016, 246; Allsen 2023; Brack 2018, 2021).

Knowledge of various kinds was an integral part of the charisma and a manifestation of it, hence talented people possessed a significant measure of charisma. The Mongols' religious experts—*böge* (Mong. soothsayers, magicians) or *qam* (Tur. priest), usually translated as shamans—served the Mongol Khans and their rank and file followers as keepers and purveyors of knowledge, practicing various kinds of divination (including astronomy) to study the way of Heaven and secure health and prosperity, both individual and imperial.[11] Yet the knowledge of other people was also widely appreciated: the display of experts at the Mongol courts, including religious specialists but also artisans, astronomers, physicians etc., was

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8 The eight-halled ancestor temple were dedicated to Chinggis Khan, his parents, his four main sons and the two grandsons who ruled before Qubilai. Ritual was performed four times a year, probably seasonally, in Mongolian, and included the recitation of the deceased Khan's names and offering of animals and food. Song 1976, 77/ 1923–1924; Elverskog 2006, 51–52. While it is tempting to compare this to Chinese ancestor worship, the details are different. Today the Mongols in Inner Mongolia still worship the "Eight White Yurts." On the color white, see further below. The establishment of such an elaborated temple was probably meant to compensate for the desertion of the repositories of charisma in Qaraqorum in the Orkhon valley.

9 E.g., in William of Rubruck's version of Möngke's letter to Louis IX, it says, "This is the order of the everlasting God. 'In Heaven there is only one eternal God; on earth there is only one lord, Chinggis Khan.'" Rubruck, tr. Jackson 1990, 248, cited in Elverskog 2006, 50.

10 Genealogical seniority was determined by a hierarchical system of chief wives and degrees of descent from Chinggis Khan: Shir 2006; Broadbridge 2018.

11 Baumann, 253–254, comparing the shamans to the Magi of the Achaemenids. The Mongols consulted shamans and later also astronomers before military campaigns.

not only for serving the ruler and increasing his prestige but also for accumulating, concentrating and redistributing charisma (Allsen 2009; 2023). The Qa'an and khans regularly distributed charisma among their followers through gift exchange, so much so that the Qa'an's guard (*keshig*), manned by his closest followers and hence receivers of lavish wealth, became a synonym of 'blessing' or 'good fortune,' and *keshigten*, 'imperial guardsmen,' that of 'blessed' or 'fortunate ones' (Allsen 2009; 2023).

Charisma could also be manufactured through the color white, a sacred color for the Mongols, who "take white to be the cause of good fortune (*fu*)" (Su Tianjue, ch. 57, 12a, cited in Allsen, 2023, 453). For this reason, the Mongolian elite made extensive use of white things: clothing, pearls, white mares and koumiss (fermented mare's milk). The manufactured charisma was then bestowed upon the land and its people, e.g., by regular libations of koumiss to the air and earth to bring fertility to the realm (Allsen, 1997, 58–59). Chinggis Khan's white standard with the nine tails was also considered a source of charisma, so much so that its name changed from the Turkic *tuq* to the Mongol *sülde* meaning soul, prosperity and good fortune (Skrynnikova 1992–1993; Allsen 1997, 59).

Indeed, the Mongols had a host of cultic traditions apart from their political theology, that is to say, their religious world was far more complicated than one controlled simply by one God (though how its various parts were combined it is hard to tell). But while they never tried to disseminate these ethnic cults among their subjects (though they demanded that they respect it), they propagated their succinct political theology widely, arguing that they enjoy Heaven's favor and that those who opposed them oppose Heaven and are therefore bound to fail. The Mongols' political theology was easily accepted even by their sedentary subjects. This was not only due to the Mongols' unprecedented victories that made it hard to refute, but also because its tenets were easily translatable to similar sedentary concepts. The mandate to the Chinese mandate of Heaven (*tianming*; see Pines, this volume); the charisma to the Iranian concept of *farr/farrah/ khvarᵊnah*, the good fortune of the Iranian kings; and the submission to Heaven to the submission (i.e. *Islām*) to Allāh required from the Muslims (Jackson 2017, 328 ff; Allsen 2023). Pursuing religious translatability, multi-lingual from the outset, and champions of propaganda, the Mongols deliberately and early on translated their political theology to terms familiar to their various audiences. Stressing similarities and belittling differences, they made this political theology into an imperial ideology that played a major role in the empire's expansion and legitimacy.

8.3 Religious Policies: The Mongols and World Religions

The indigenous religion, however, was not the only one the Mongols were familiar with: they rose to power in a multi-religious environment where no religion was considered exclusive. Among the early supporters of Temüjin, even before he was proclaimed Chinggis Khan, were Central Asian Muslims, Christian Mongols and Buddhist Khitans. The Mongols saw these world religions as referring to a different sphere than their indigenous beliefs: when they adopted a word for religion in the mid-fourteenth century—*šasin*, from the Uygur Buddhist variant of the Sanskrit *sasana*—it did not refer to their own shamans but mainly to Buddhism (Poppe 1957, 47, 50, 55; Elverskog, 2023; Atwood 2022). Their attitude to world religions is famously attested by the words of Chinggis Khan's grandson, Möngke Qa'an (r. 1251–1259) to the Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck (d. 1293):

> "We Mo'als," he said, "believe that there is only one God, by whom we live and by whom we die, and towards him we direct our hearts . . . But just as God has given the hand several fingers, so he has given mankind several paths . . . So, then, God has given you the Scriptures, and you do not observe them, whereas to us he has given soothsayers, and we do as they tell us and live in peace" (Rubruck, tr. Jackson 1990, 236–237).

This statement suggests that all humans have religion and that all religions are basically equal, merely different paths to the same God. This concept of religion, which puts world religions on an equal footing, invites religious relativism, which indeed appears under Mongol rule. Yet there was a certain hierarchy: apparently Möngke saw Tengri as the palm of the hand, while the other religions were the fingers, thus the Mongols were closer to Tengri than the other religions were to God.[12] Moreover, the Mongols secured Heaven's support by following their shamans' directions and hence conquered their enemies, while the defeats of their rivals proved that they were less successful in pleasing Heaven (e. g. did not obey the scriptures in the Christian case). Such a view was clearly expressed in the Mongol correspondence with the Pope in the 1240s and with the Caliph in 1258, where they refused to adopt Christianity or Islam, arguing that God was clearly on the Mon-

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12 Such phrasing appears in a Buddhist description of a later debate that also took place under Möngke in 1255. There Möngke allegedly says that the palm is Buddhism, and Christianity, Islam and Daoism are the fingers. Since the participants' report of the outcome of religious debates is partisan; there is no sign of Möngke actually adopting Buddhism; and no Christians or Muslims actually took part in this Buddhist-Daoist debate, it makes sense that the Buddhists altered his words according to their wishes. Kedar 1999.

gols' side (Atwood 2004a). In other words, if all people had a religion directed to Heaven, they and their traditions were also by definition subject to the power of Heaven and in turn to Mongol power.

Mongol religious policies were hence based on seeing world religions as addressing the same Heaven, and basically equal. This is most famously stated by the Iranian historian Juwaynī [Juvainī, d. 1283], writing in the 1260s:

> [Chinggis Khan] eschewed bigotry, and the preference of one faith to another, and the placing of some above others; rather he honoured and respected the learned and pious of every sect . . . And as he viewed the Moslems with the eye of respect, so also did he hold the Christians and idolaters [i. e. Buddhists] in high esteem. As for his children and grandchildren, several of them have chosen a religion according to their inclination . . . But though they have adopted some religion they still for the most part . . . do not swerve from the *yasa* [law] of Chingiz-Khan, namely, to consider all sects as one and not to distinguish them from one another (Juwaynī, tr. Boyle 1997, 26).

For Juwaynī, treating all faiths as equal, regardless of personal beliefs, was an integral part of the Yasa/Jasaq, the law code ascribed to Chinggis Khan. This outlook was the basis of the Mongols' famous religious pluralism, often denoted as tolerance. Such religious pluralism was not unique to the Mongols but was practiced also by some of their steppe predecessors, e.g., the Qara Khitai (1124–1218) and former nomadic empires, mainly due to their non-exclusive concept of religion and their understanding of the advantage of such a policy for co-opting their varied groups of subjects and securing legitimation (Jackson 2019a; for the Qara Khitai: Biran 2005).

As shown by Jackson (Jackson 2005, 259–262) however, Mongol "tolerance" was conditional. Worship was free as long it neither contravened Mongol indigenous beliefs nor posed a threat to the Empire. If it did (e. g. in the case of the Muslim slaughter ritual),[13] the Mongols did not hesitate to prohibit it. The Mongols cases of intolerance were, as Brack argued (Brack 2021, 2022) of 'negative intolerance', namely they did not persecute the religious other, but they did not tolerate the refusal of their subjects or visitors to perform actions they demanded, such as venerating Chinggis Khan's image or keeping their taboos re slaughtering or not washing in running water. Such refusals not only offended Mongol sensibilities, but were often seen as defiant acts against Chinggisid supremacy, and were hence pro-

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13 Jackson 2005, 260–262 referring to the United Empire; for Qubilai's later prohibition of Muslim slaughter see Cleaves 1992; May, 2019, where the differences between Mongol and Muslim slaughter are explored. In Ilkhanid Iran and the steppe khanates, however, we hear nothing about problems with Muslim slaughter, as the Mongols probably acknowledged the impracticality of enforcing their slaughter method in a mainly Muslim environment.

hibited and punished. Nor did the Mongols hesitate to oppress anybody who claimed to have too personal a connection with God. In this last respect, the equal treatment of all creeds included even the Mongols' faith. When Teb Tengri, the shaman who had predicted the rise of Chinggis Khan and enthroned him in 1206, tried to divide the imperial clan, Chinggis Khan orchestrated his execution, thereby attesting that his own connection to Tengri was by far closer than that of any other religious expert.[14] All religions were subject to the Heaven-ordained Empire and its deified leader.

Moreover, religious pluralism did not prevent the Mongols from exploiting religious sensitivities and divides for the benefit of imperial expansion. Thus, they are said to have a cross carried in front of their armies while attacking Georgia or certain Russian towns in the 1220s. The Christians, expecting another Christian force, did not take precautions, and were easily conquered (Jackson 2005, 249–252; Jackson 2019b). In 1221 Rayy (modern Teheran) and 1235 Isfahan the Mongols benefitted from inter-Muslim conflicts, either Shi'ite-Sunni or among the various Sunni schools (Hanafis and Shafi'ites). In both cases, one faction invited the Mongols in to help against the other, thereby facilitating their conquest (Jackson 2019b). The Mongols were therefore well aware of the dangers of religious rivalries and tried to minimize them by co-opting the religious elites.

Mongol policies towards the religious classes combined *realpolitik* with respect towards "holy men." Since all religions address the same Heaven, the Mongols recognized religious specialists as potential invokers of Heaven's favor, in addition to their position as leaders of their earthly congregations. Already Chinggis Khan was fascinated with the abilities of religious experts (e.g., the Daoist Changchun [1148–1227] and the Buddhist Haiyun [1202–1257]) and conferred upon them tax exemptions in return for their praying for his continuous success. Under Chinggis Khan's son and heir Ögödei (r. 1229–1241), this policy was systematized and broadened to include experts of the four dominant faiths—Buddhism, Daoism, Islam and Christianity. The clergy of these four main religions received the position of *tarkhan/darkhan*, namely they enjoyed tax immunities (the specific details of which were modified from time to time and in different realms), and in return were expected to pray for the Qa'an's wellbeing. Such privileges, however, were not extended to the clergy of religions without state power (i.e. religions that were not empirically attested), such as Judaism or Manichaeism, nor to the Confu-

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14 Biran 2015b; see e.g. De Rachewiltz 2006, 1: 171–172 (par. 245); Rashīd al-Dīn, tr. Thackston, 1: 90. Execution was also the fate of later claimants of close connection to the supernatural such as the Muslim Maḥmud Ṭārābī, who rebelled in Transoxiana in 1238–1239 (Juwaynī, tr. Boyle, 109–114) or the "prophet" who claimed to be Jesus Christ who appeared in Ilkhanid Baghdad in 1273 (Anonymous 1997, 411–412).

cians who did not have a defined clergy nor did they pray to heaven, a privilege that they saved only for the Emperor.[15] In north China this policy meant that Buddhists and Daoist clergy acquired a larger social role than before or after Mongol rule, enjoyed Mongol patronage, and often took part in Mongol administration, functioning as local or professional elites on the expense of the Confucians (Wang 2018). Thus, despite Juwaynī's words, not *all* religions were equally treated, only those that could benefit the empire.

This "pray for pay" exchange (for some Chinese parallels to which see Benn, this volume) was also a means of controlling religious experts and securing the support of the clergy and through them—their communities. The *tarkhans* received decrees of tax immunity (available—with very similar phrasing—in Chinese, Mongolian, Tibetan, Persian and Russian). At least in China, such edicts were often engraved on steles or temple walls, thereby serving as another public tool of Mongol propaganda: The edicts opened with the Mongolian ideological formula, declared the clergy's privileges and noted that in return for this imperial favor they were "to invoke heaven and pray for the good fortune (*fu*) of the emperor."[16] Such edicts served as constant reminders for clergymen to remember the Chinggisids in their prayers and to share these sentiments with their congregations.[17] Cho's recent article that reviews the changes in the Yuan dynasty's tax exemptions to religious groups, concluded that the various shifts in the privileges accorded to the religious leaders reflect Mongol preference of specific imperial needs, which sometimes prioritized an increase in the tax revenues and in other occasions preferred more blessing through prayers (Cho 2019).

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[15] For Confucians and the Mongols: Atwood 2004a, 2010; Halperin 2015; for the changing status of Judaism and Manichaeism (depending on their classification as Muslim or Christian sects respectively): Atwood 2004a: 250–251; Cho 2014. Cf. Jackson 2019b, who suggested that the Mongols preferred universal proselytizing religions and hence excluded Judaism that was mostly confined to a single people. Immunities were given to Christian, Daoist and Buddhist monks, as well as to Muslim *sayyid*s (descendants of the prophet Muhammad) and *imam*s (who led the prayers in the mosque), while many Muslim scholars were subsidized via endowments that the Mongols left untouched and sometimes created.

[16] E. g. Cai Meibiao 1955, 21, 25, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, *et passim*; Chavannes 1908, 372, 373, 376, 378, 388, 391, *et passim*; Poppe 1957, 47, 49, 52; Atwood 2004a; Allsen 2023.

[17] Atwood 2004a. A glimpse of how this was actually practiced is provided by the description of Möngke's enthronement in 1251 when Nestorians, Muslims and "idolater priests" all hailed his elevation and thereafter followed his court while forecasting "his good fortune," thereby dramatically showcasing Heaven's approval of the new Qa'an's universal rule: see Rubruck, tr. Jackson 1990, 187. Cf. Juwaynī, tr. Boyle, 561. For a list of edicts from the United Empire and the yuan dynasty: Cho 2019, 29–34.

8.4 Exchange

Mongol religious pluralism combined with Mongol mobilization policies, resulted in an unprecedented religious exchange. Exchanges took place in many arenas, but Mongol courts were an important locus: at courts, the Khans often presided over multi-confessional religious debates, welcoming religious experts of various creeds. While in China such debates often involved judicial issues such as the different privileges of certain congregations, in both Mongolia and Iran they were more of an entertainment and a training in argumentation (the intellectual equivalent of wrestling or martial competitions). Another purpose, as Jackson eloquently argued, might have been to give the proponents of competing religions the opportunity to 'let off steam' in a regulated arena, and hence to foster peaceful coexistence of various religious communities (Amitai 2014; Lane 2016; Jackson 2019b). In all cases, however, the debates' main function for the Mongols was a means for accumulating knowledge and hence charisma, and, moreover, displaying the divinized wisdom of the Khan who served as the arbiter in the debate, thereby asserting his connection to Chinggis Khan, the acclaimed source of such wisdom. (Brack 2021).

Furthermore, fueled by the Mongols' fascination with holy men and their generosity towards the clergy, missionaries and religious scholars flocked to the Mongol courts and not only for debating purposes. Some of them became imperial agents (they were especially popular as Mongol emissaries to foreign lands), and many religious scholars of all creeds, often skilled also in other fields such as commerce, medicine or astronomy, served in the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Mongol administration and retinues. This created myriad opportunities for religious encounters both within and among religions. Thus, for example, we have descriptions of Buddhism by both Muslims and Christians (there are far fewer descriptions of western religions in Chinese sources, which usually focus on the mundane Western Regions' diasporas and their adaptation to the Chinese environment).[18] Moreover, the description of Buddhism in the *Compendium of Chronicles* of Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318), the prominent historian of the Mongols in Iran often considered the first world historian, includes elements of Chinese, Tibetan, Uighur and Kashmiri Buddhism, thereby attesting to a considerable inter-Buddhist exchange,

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18 Christians, e.g. the Armenian historians Kirakos (1203–1271; Elverskog 2010, 139–140) and Vardan (ca. 1198–1271; Thompson 1989, 221; cited in Elverskog 2023, 533), as well as Marco Polo (1254–1324; Polo [1938] 1976: 409); Muslims, notably Rashīd al-Dīn: see Akasoy 2013, Brack 2016, 2020; Rashīd al-Dīn's descriptions are far more elaborated than the Christian or Chinese references; Chinese: e.g. Chen Yuan1966; Ma Shinian 2017.

that in Yuan China included also Korean and Japanese Buddhists. Multiple translations of Buddhist texts (mainly from Tibetan to Mongolian, Uighur and Chinese) appeared in China and Central Asia under Mongol rule and some entered the various canons (Elverskog 2010, 149–162; Biran 2015a). All the famous travel accounts from the empire period are filled with descriptions—and at times denigrations—of other religions and their practices. Be they Christians in the East or West (De Rachewiltz 1971; Rossabi 1992), Confucians in Central Asia and Mongolia (De Rachewiltz 1962; Olbricht and Pinks 1980), Japanese Buddhists in China (Robinson 2009, 206; Elverskog 2023), or Muslims in China (Chen 1966; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, tr. Gibb, 1994, 4: 892–910), all of them experienced religious difference and wrote about it.

Indeed, religious encounters were neither limited to the court, nor to the intellectual sphere: the enormous movement of people made possible by the empire—as well as the imperial policy of population transfers—meant that peoples of various religious traditions came into contact with one another whether they wanted to or not. Inevitably, not all of these encounters were necessarily amicable: they also involved tensions, hostility, the rise of nativist feeling etc. Specifically, the imposing of newcomers was not always easy for the receiving population, and migrants often found it hard to accommodate to their new environment. Thus, the Buddhist priests from Beshbaliq (today's north Xinjiang), a town to which the Mongols transferred myriads of Muslim artisans in the 1220s, allegedly suggested to Güyük Qa'an (r. 1246–1248) the elimination of all the Muslims or at least their emasculation (Jūzjānī/Ḥabībī 1963–1964, 1:171–173; Biran 2005, 196). Less extremely, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 1377), the famous Muslim traveler, felt constantly threatened by the "infidelity" of China during his sojourn there, despite its affluence that he admired (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa/Gibb, 1994, 4: 892–910).

It is hard to estimate the degree of actual exchange that such encounters produced: the description of foreign religions or believers of other faiths are often "ethnographic" and their impact on their compilers unclear if any. Yet Polo's remark after recounting the story of the Buddha, "for truly if he had been a Christian he would have been a great saint with our Lord Jesus Christ" (Polo [1938] 1976: 409), or Rashīd al-Dīn's lengthy description of the Buddha as a prophet with a book (Akasoy 2013, cited in Brack 2020), suggest that some of the sophisticated agents of the Empire were influenced by Mongol relativism. Yet, an illuminating case it that of 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Simnānī (d. 1336). Simnānī, a famous Sufi raised in the Ilkhanid guard, recorded in his autobiography the conversations he had held with Buddhist monks (Indian, Tibetan and Uighur) and Jewish rabbis at the court of the Ilkhan Arghun (r. 1284–1291), and even concluded that the Dharma, the Buddhist law, was tantamount to the Sharī'a law. Yet, as DeWeese noted, "Simnānī did not become a freethinking believer in the truth of all spiritual paths. He was, rather, a Muslim whose experience at the Mongol court if anything

increased his conviction regarding the superiority, and exclusive access to the highest spiritual attainments, of his own religious community" (DeWeese 2014, 72, cited in Elverskog 2023, 534). In contrast, Jana Valtrová, who studied European missionaries in the Mongol empire, concluded that while the missionaries never challenged the validity of Christianity, the context of comparison on various levels (beliefs, practices, funeral rites, roles of the clergy), which was especially new for the Europeans, created a platform necessary for more general thinking about the common category of "religion" (Valtrová 2016, 579).

Despite these reservations, in the long run (but already during "the Mongol Moment"), one enduring outcome of such mobility and exchange was mass conversion, and not only of the Mongols. The open routes of the Empires and Mongol religious pluralism were highly attractive for missionaries of various creeds. But it was Islam—by far the most mobile, mercantile and cosmopolitan religion in the empire, that had already amassed considerable experience in assimilating people, including many nomads—that was the great winner in the conversion race. Three out of the four Mongol polities embraced Islam; Islamic communities became part and parcel of China and India; and Islamization was enhanced even in Africa and Southeast Asia. Tibetan Budhhism, embraced by the Chinggisids in China (and highly popular in Iran and Central Asia before Islamization) also expanded, while the record of Christianity is mainly negative despite considerable missionary efforts.[19] It is, however, to the conversion of the Mongols themselves that we now turn.

8.5 Conversion

Mongol adoption of world religions was also closely connected to imperial interests: As long as the empire remained united, expanding, and victorious, in other words enjoyed a healthy amount of Tengri's support, it did not adopt any other religion.[20] After the dissolution of the empire in 1260, however, with the gradual shift from universal to regional empires, and when military expansion became harder, Mongol polities looked for additional legitimation concepts: Each khanate gradual-

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19 Biran 2007, 91–98; 2015a, for explaining the Mongols' indirect contribution to Islamization outside the Empire, often by traders or refugees; Jackson 2018, 314–319 for Christianity's failure; May 2012, 172–199 for further demonstrations of religious exchange.

20 Various Khans and princes are said to have embraced a certain world religion, often more than one, but these, even when not a result of mistaking sympathy for a certain religion with belief, were personal matters. See Jackson 2005, 268–275; Biran 2016 for Hülegü, who was portrayed as a Tibetan Buddhist, a Christian and (after Mongol Islamization) even a Muslim.

ly embraced a world religion, Tibetan Buddhism in the case of Yuan China, or Islam in the three western Mongol polities.[21] In China and Iran, both regions that had an established imperial tradition long before the Mongol conquest, they also adopted the local legitimation concepts—Confucian in China and Persian in Iran, side by side with the Chinggisid and religious legitimation models. In both cases however, the Mongols adopted universal religions, and those that already proved capable of absorbing characteristics of other religions. This is obvious in the case of the inclusive Buddhism, but is also true for Islam that presented itself as the most updated Abrahamic religion, subsuming its Jewish and Christian predecessors (Jackson 2018, 314–316; 2019b). Moreover, the interlocutors who initiated Mongol conversion in the different realms, probably aware of the translatability of the Mongols' indigenous religion, used the strategy of reversion, the claim to return to rather than depart from one's ancestral belief, to lay the foundation of Mongol conversion. Thus, Chinggis Khan was portrayed as a Buddhist king and a proto-monotheist (as well as an innate Confucianist), and converting to the new faith was presented to his descendants as a return to their ancestor's pristine path, not as a complete break with the past (Brack 2021). In other words, we must not associate the Mongols' conversion with Christian concepts of change of the heart or psychological concepts of personality's transformation. Instead, in adopting new religion the Mongols continued to look for the translatability and efficacy that characterized their indigenous religion. Pragmatic considerations therefore played an important role in Mongol conversion.

In China, Qubilai was first initiated as a Tibetan Buddhist novice in 1253, namely before he rose to the throne, by the brilliant lama and linguist Phagspa (1235–1280). It was, however, in the 1260s—when he became Qa'an and moved the Empire's capital from Mongolia to his stronghold in North China—that he made Tibetan Buddhism an integral part of the imperial institution. By then Qubilai's legitimation had been seriously challenged: Although he was a prominent Chinggisid, a brother of the former Qa'an Möngke, his position as the Great Khan was compromised first by his brother Arigh Böke (d. 1264) and later by the Ögödeid prince Qaidu (d. 1303) and his Central Asian allies, thus his possession of the required amount of charisma was questionable. Moreover, while Qubilai strove to present himself as a Chinese emperor, adopting quite a few imperial trappings (e.g. reign titles) even before he established a Chinese-like dynasty in 1271, the ongoing existence of the Song emperor until 1279 and Qubilai's non-Han origin

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21 This situation is rather similar to the case of the Turkic empire, where for the united Empire Tengri was the only god, but the Turks' successor states, the Uighurs in Mongolia and the Khazars on the Volga, adopted Manichaeism and Judaism respectively, while the various non-imperial Turkic polities in between adopted Islam. Khazanov 1994.

also hampered his local legitimacy. Under these circumstances, embracing a universal world religion like Buddhism, that could both appeal to the Empire's diverse subjects and allow Qubilai to present himself as Chakravartin—the universal Buddhist monarch who turns the wheel of Dharma—makes a great deal of sense. Moreover, this Buddhist theory of kingship that goes back to Aśoka (r. 268–232 BCE) had already been used by various non-Han Chinese emperors, including the Liao and Jin emperors that preceded the Mongols in north China (Franke 1978, 56–64). What was unique in Qubilai's case was the choice of the Tibetan variant of Buddhism. This was not only due to Phagspa's agency, and the attractiveness of Tibetan Buddhism's shamanic-like magic and color, but mainly amid its political and martial character. The Chinese Chan Buddhism that the Mongols had encountered already by Chinggis Khan's time did not have a political theory. Moreover, Phagspa's Saskya sect was especially connected to Mahakala, a protector deity represented with a terrifying aspect, i. e. a fearsome warrior deity (a sort of Tibetan god of war), who became the patron of the Mongols. In addition, Tibetan Buddhism, while universal and appealing especially to Qubilai's Tibetan (Uigur and Tangut) subjects, also conspicuously distinguished Qubilai from his Han-Chinese subjects. It therefore contributed to his ability to retain a distinct identity, without, however, alienating the majority of his subjects who were familiar with Buddhism (as the embracing of a completely foreign religion might have done) (Franke 1978, 52–64; Khazanov 1994).

Phagspa's rendering of Tibetan Buddhism accorded a place of honor to Chinggis Khan, who was depicted as *the* Chakravartin of the age, a descendant of the kings of India and Tibet, born 3250 years after the Buddha's nirvana. Qubilai was his heir and representative in this function. However, Phagspa located Qubilai in a dual system of state and religion: Qubilai was the Chakravartin's representative, responsible for the secular salvation of his realm, while Phagspa, a reincarnation of the Buddha, dealt with religious salvation (Franke 1978, 55–56). This system, while giving Qubilai high stature, was at odds with the Mongol stress on the direct connection between the ruler and the Divine, as Phagspa was now the representative of the Buddha. The situation, however, was not that clear-cut: Qubilai and his descendants were also sacralized as *boddhisatavas* (those who could become a Buddha but chose to remain in this world to help the less enlightened). Simultaneously, the same Yuan Buddhist works that depicted Chinggis Khan as Chakravartin also showed him as "the holy martial emperor (*shengwu huangdi*), originating fortune (*yun*) in accordance with Heaven," thereby suggesting the coexistence of Buddhist, Mongol and Confucian-Chinese concepts of kingship. Moreover, Phagspa took part in Yuan administration and in this capacity, even when titled imperial preceptor (*dishi*), he was obviously subject to Qubilai (Franke 1978, 55–56; Franke 1981; Rossabi 1988, 143–146; Dunnell 1992).

Brian Baumman has argued that the adoption of Buddhism under Qubilai meant that the government of Tengri, as understood by the Mongols, came to a staggering halt. With Buddhism, "the vault of the sky" was "transcended by a higher heaven"—"a moral, everlasting [heaven] where good prevails and evil, sin, and death are no more." As a result, the nature of the Chinggisid authority thus changed: Heaven was no longer partial to the Chinggisids, and the Mongols no longer governed through their affinity with Heaven. Their rule now hinged on their abidance by Buddhist moral codes and imaginations of the thereafter (Baumann 2013, 246, 276–278). I suspect, however, that this is not how Qubilai and his heirs saw the situation. More likely they saw themselves as presenting multi-faceted compatible images—Chinggisid, Chinese and Buddhist—to their various subjects (as the Qing dynasty [1644–1912] did later on with great success) and pursuing various ways to God. They certainly continued to perform the Mongolian indigenous cults, such as worshipping Chinggis Khan and his heirs, even establishing a network of spirit halls (*shenyudian*) to honor deceased emperors and empresses, and held the traditional *koumiss* libations for gaining charisma, side by side with the Buddhist and Confucian rituals (Farquhar 1990, 139). Whether they were aware of the change in Tengri's character we have no way to know, but most probably they believed that—just like in the case of the *Jasaq/Yasa* and the *Sharī'a*—such contradictory ideas were translatable and could easily coexist, especially if their cohabitation served the imperial interests. The sophisticated efforts of Muslim scholars to phrase Mongol political theology in Muslim guise (discussed below) also strongly suggest that Mongol indigenous beliefs did not disappear with the adoption of a world religion.

Unlike the Mongols' adoption of Tibetan Buddhism in the sixteenth century or their conversion to Islam, embracing Buddhism at this stage was a highly elitist phenomenon that won few adherents among the Mongol rank and file and was mainly limited to the imperial house (Franke 1978, 58). Yet Tibetan rituals, mainly for "Suppression of Demons and Protecting the State," became an important part not only of the emperor's calendar but also of the capitals' public sphere, and artistic and architectural forms of Tibetan Buddhism became integral components of Yuan palaces (Franke 1978; Halperin 2015).

In terms of religious policy, Qubilai and his heirs lavishly patronized Buddhist monasteries (of both Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism), but apart from short periods or incidents of persecution of Muslims and Daoists, overall freedom of worship—which was also the norm in pre-Mongol China—remained intact. Qubilai also retained the privileges of the Buddhist, Daoist, Muslim and Christian clergy, though specifics were often negotiated. The clergy represented their communities in legal matters, and served as the state's middlemen for dealing with their congregations. Yet the clergy—as well as other people with a claim to an access to the superna-

tural such as diviners of various kinds—were closely supervised by a variety of government agencies that were directly subject to the imperial household (Cho 2014, 110–143; 2019; Endicott-West 1999; Yang 2019). Religions remained squarely in the service of the Empire.

While specific acts of Tibetan Buddhists (notably the desecration of the Song imperial tombs in 1291) enraged Chinese literati, and the devotion of the last Yuan emperor Toghon Temür (r. 1333–1370) to extravagant Buddhist rituals was brought as one reason for the Yuan collapse, the relations between Buddhists and other religions in Mongol China remained generally relaxed and even cooperative throughout the dynasty. For instance, prominent southern literati wrote inscriptions for Buddhist temples and monks, more so than in any previous dynasty. In the last and turbulent decades of Yuan rule, however, Chinese Buddhists and adherents of messianic secret societies played a significant part (Franke 1978; Robinson 2009; Halperin 2015).

The Mongols did not acknowledge Confucianism as a religion,[22] yet they were quick to adopt the Confucian imperial institution, including its state cult and Confucian rites. They subsidized a certain number of Confucian households *(ruhu)*, 4000 in the north and 100,000 in the south, who were expected to study for the empire and built and subsidized Confucian temples across the country. Yet they were less reluctant to adopt the main Confucian institution, the imperial examination system, which was restored only in 1313 in a limited form. Ironically, however, their institutionalization of Neo-Confucianism (*Daoxue*) as the curriculum of the renewed examinations had a tremendous effect on the history of Imperial China, as it became the orthodox ideology of the Empire up to its fall in 1911 (Mote 1994, 507–510).

Confucian advisors enhanced the similarities between Chinese and Mongol notions of the mandate of Heaven as well as ancestor worship, and Chinggis Khan was proclaimed as the first emperor of the Western Yuan, the original holder of the Heavenly mandate. Moreover, they presented Mongol emperors as intuitive Confucians, whose innate knowledge enabled them to grasp the Confucian tradition without having to study it first. The Mongols cooperated only to a point, retaining their worship of Chinggis Khan and his heirs in its Mongolian form and language. Moreover, while they performed the various Confucian rituals (mainly the offerings for Heaven, Earth the gods of soil and grain, the deities of holy mountains and rivers), they usually did not perform these ceremonies themselves (unlike the Buddhist ceremonies), instead delegating power to their officials, a fact

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[22] Because, as mentioned above, the Confucians did not have a defined clergy, nor did they pray for Heaven. For the vexed issue of Confucianism as a religion: Sun 2013.

that according to Ming historians prevented Heaven from giving them lasting good fortune (Franke 1978; Atwood 2010).

The Islamization of the Mongol western polities was an incremental, slower but much wider process that stretched over most of "the Mongol Moment" and beyond. The regular dating is that the Ilkhanate adopted Islam as state religion in 1295 under Ilkhan Ghazan (r. 1295–1304); the Golden Horde in 1313 under Özbeg Khan (r. 1313–1341), while in the Central Asian Chaghadaid realm, the western part of Transoxania embraced Islam under Tarmashirin Khan (r. 1331–1334) and the Eastern Chaghadadids only in the 1350s, under Tughluq Temür Khan (r. 1347–1363). While these dates—as well as the extant conversion stories—suggest that Mongol Islamization began with a royal conversion and then spread downward, the current scholarly consensus is that it was a bottom-up process, namely that Mongol khans accepted Islam in the wake of the rank-and-file of their military. The fact that in each of the three realms there were "abortive" Muslim-Mongol khans before the "Islamizer" khans mentioned above also supports this view (Melville 1990; Biran 2002; DeWeese 2009; Jackson 2017, 2019a).

The further legitimation that the Mongol Khans looked for while adopting Islam was first and foremost from their Mongol military, as a result of inter-Chinggisid conflicts. Thus Ghazan, for example, embraced Islam during his struggle for the throne with his cousin Baidu (r. 1295), in order to win the support of Muslim segments in the army—both his and Baidu's—not least a senior Mongol-Muslim commander. Tughluq Temür's conversion in the eastern and sparsely Islamic Chaghadaid realm was closely connected to his short-lived attempt to reunite the Chaghadaid khanate whose western part was already Muslim at this stage (Melville 1990; Kim 1999). The Chinggisids were probably aware of the legitimating value of Islam among their Tajik (Persian- and Arabic-speaking Muslims) subjects, who were the majority in the Ilkhanate and the inhabitants of the more sedentary regions in the steppe khanates—Khwārazm and Volga Bulgharia in the Golden Horde and Transoxiana and Farghana in the Chaghadaid realm. These Tajiks, however, had striven to appropriate the Mongols as legitimate rulers long before the latter's Islamization.[23] From the Mongol point of view, gaining their support by adopting Islam was probably only a secondary consideration or a fortunate by-product.

More broadly, Islamic expansionist and military ideology that divided the world to the abode of Islam (*dār al-Islām*) and the abode and war (*dār al-ḥarb*)

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[23] This is obvious in Ilkhanid Iran, where the Mongols were portrayed as the last link in the chain of Iranian dynasties (Melville 2001, 2007) and in Central Asia, where the justice of the Mongol rulers (e.g. Möngke Qa'an) was widely praised and served as their legitimation. E.g. Qarshī 2005, CLXVI.

and aimed to make the later part of the former, fits well with the Mongol concept of world conquest. Furthermore, Mongol annihilation of the Caliphate in 1258 meant that there was no longer a universal leader of Islam (as the Pope purported to be for Western Christendom). Thus, upon converting to Islam the Mongols were immediately in the running for this position. This was especially relevant for Ghazan, who controlled the central Islamic lands of Iran and Iraq and was a bitter rival of the Mamluk sultanate that supported a puppet Abbasid Caliph in Cairo, depicted as the heir of the defunct Abbasids. Ghazan stressed his coming to the throne from Khurasan (eastern Iran, where the Abbasid revolution began), using black banners reminiscent of those raised by the Abbasids when they rose against the Umayyads in 747 CE, and challenging the Mamluks' position as guardians of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina (Melville 1992; Broadbridge 2008; Jackson 2017, 365).

Certainly, acculturation was another important factor, both in the Islamization of the Khans and that of their military. Again, the picture is clearer in Iran: The army, of which a considerable part of the soldiers were Muslim Turks (those arriving with Hülegü in the west in the 1250s or those who had joined him during his campaign), was a major channel of acculturation. Moreover, many of the Mongol soldiers who accompanied Hülegü to Baghdad had been previously stationed in mainly Muslim regions (e.g. Anatolia) for decades, and had been in contact with Muslims in the public sphere (via merchants, administrators, preachers etc.) and sometimes also in the domestic one (e.g. marrying Muslim women, raised by Muslim mothers or wet nurses) (De Nicola 2017). The Muslims' connection to skills appreciated by the Mongols such as astronomy or trade might have also facilitated conversion, as did the agency of the convertors—not only army commanders but also religious specialists, mostly Sufi sheikhs. Later sources and hagiographies probably exaggerated the role of the Sufis, projecting the Sufis' later status back to the realities of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Moreover, the once automatic equivalence between Sufis and Shamans has proved to be too superficial: the known royal convertors were usually nomian Sufis, who often were also respected '*ulamā*' (Muslim scholars. e.g. jurists, Hadith transmitters), not eccentric dervishes. Yet the Sufis' charismatic personality, religious zeal and social prestige were instrumental in the conversion process. Moreover, in the local level, Sufis played a major role in social conversion, establishing communal connections for the new converts. The Sufis offered social bonds (framed in family terms or as master and disciples); mediated the adoption of new political, economic and ritual frameworks; asserted correspondence between Mongol and Muslim genealogical and historical traditions; developed narratives of Islamization and, in general, embodied Islam for the nomads by providing them with a new communal identity (Amitai 1996; DeWeese 1994, 2009, 2017; De Nicola 2017).

Frustrated Christians argued that Islam won over the Mongols because it was an easy religion to observe: one has only to recite the *Shahāda* ("There is no God but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God"), not to follow any moral demands (Riccoldo da Montecroce, cited in Jackson 2017, 331). This can be debated, yet the Islamic view according to which even nominal conversion is welcome as it conveys a certain amount of blessing (*baraka*) on its performer and can be a first step towards a deeper commitment to Islam, must have facilitated acculturation. In fact, both before and after the rulers' Islamization we find evidence of attempts initiated by the local elites, both Tajik and Mongol, to draw the soon-to-be Muslims or the new Muslims further into Islamic lore. Interestingly, the Muslims used Buddhist and Christian methods for pulling the Mongols further towards Islam, thereby manifesting the effects of religious exchange. Thus, the missionary use of visual culture that was characteristic of Buddhism and Christianity was adopted in Muslim Iran, where for the first time in the history of Muslim art, we find visual representations of Muhammad (and other prophets). In these renderings, Muhammad is placed in Buddhist or Christian models (for instance, the Prophet's birth in Rashīd al-Dīn's *Compendium of Chronicles* is based on the Christian Nativity scene). These portraits must have appealed to the Chinggisids' taste, as they surface in competing Sunni and Shi'ite works aimed at proselytizing the Mongols (Elverskog 2010, 167–174). One such early text, an Ilkhanid *Book of Ascension* (*Mi'rāj nāma*), dated to 1286, and illustrated in the early fourteenth century, recounts in Persian the night journey of the prophet Muhammad to Heaven, a popular tale originating in Quar'anic exegesis, that could easily appeal to Tengri's adherents. This book served as a pictured handbook into Muslim faith and prayer, meant to attract readers or listeners to Sunni Islam. Another *Mi'rāj nāma* was prepared for the last Ilkhan, Abū Sa'īd (r. 1317–1335) (Gruber 2010).

In poorer Central Asia, where lucrative art was beyond the reach of most patrons, it was stories of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*), the Muslim equivalent of Christian stories about the saints and Buddhist *jātakas*, that were used for attracting the Mongols further into Islam. The main surviving work, the first Chaghatay-Turkic version of these stories, was compiled by Naṣīr ad-Dīn b. Burhān ad-Dīn ar-Rabghūzī, a Transoxanian judge (*qāḍī*) who completed his work in 1311. The work was commissioned by a certain Toqbuqa/Dorbuqa Bek, a young Mongol-Muslim commander from Ghazna (present-day Afghanistan), whom the traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa later mentioned as Tarmashirin's amir, namely a commander who embraced Islam before the khan (DeWeese 2023). The text includes not only the stories of the Israelite prophets and kings, Jesus and St. George—all of whom are prophets in Islam—but also Alexander the Great, a figure highly popular among the Mongols as another world conqueror. Moreover, unlike most books of this genre, Rabghūzī's *Stories of the Prophets* also includes the life of the Prophet Muhammad,

the rightly-guided Caliphs and 'Alī's sons, thereby encapsulating everything the new converts needed to know about Islamic salvation history. It also gives place of pride to local heroes whose shrines must have been familiar to the audience (see, e.g. Rabghūzī 2015, 1:137, 140, 142–151 [text]; 2: 336, 343, 345–369 [translation]).

In court and on a higher intellectual level, religious debates continued to take place: a notable example is the three refutations of Buddhism prepared by the Il-khanid vizier Rashīd al-Dīn for his patron, Ghazan's brother and heir Öljeitü (r. 1305–1316), and centered around the afterlife, a dimension missing in the Mongol indigenous religion but essential to most world religions. The vizier forcibly argued against reincarnation and in favor of resurrection as the way to save the Khan's soul (Brack 2016, 195–273; 2018, 2020). The Buddhists thus remained influential in the religious landscape of Iran even after the Ilkhanate's Islamization.

Yet unlike Buddhism, Islam was an exclusive religion with clear instructions about how to treat non-Muslims. Embracing Islam as state religion therefore entailed a considerable change in the attitude of Mongol rulers towards religion and did not conform with treating all faiths as equal. Thus, royal conversions were often accompanied by persecution of non-Muslims and devastation of their worship sites. This was especially true for Buddhism, whose adherents were idolators, not even "People of the Book" like the Jews and Christians. Such riots, however, were often instigated by local commanders or urban mob, rather than by the khan, who usually tried to quell them. A certain degree of tolerance was rather quickly restored, especially when *realpolitik* encouraged it (e.g. towards the Christians in the Golden Horde; even Buddhists in Iran were allowed to stay at court as long as they did not preach their religion). At least in Iran, the *jizya*, the special poll-tax collected from the "People of the Book", was imposed on Jews and Christian in 1295, only to be cancelled already in 1296–1297, and was firmly enforced only in Abū Saʿīd's reign (1316–1335). The non-Sharʿi Mongol taxes, (e.g the *tamgha* tax on trade) as well as other Mongol institutions sanctioned by the Yasa (e.g. the *yarghu*, the Mongol court of justice), were not abolished (Jackson 2017, 352–380). Remnants of Mongol rites and social norms (e.g. levirate marriages) also survived Islamization, at least temporarily, and the Mongol political theology was also retained in a somewhat new garb. Thus, for example, an Uighur-script edict of the last Ilkhan Abū Saʿīd combines the Mongol ideology with Islamic one, starting with:

> By the Might of the Eternal Heaven,
> by the (Power) of the Nation (*umma*) of the Prophet Muhammad,
> by the protection (?) of the Great Shining Good Fortune.[24]

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[24] *Möngke Tengri-yin kuchundur/ Muqamad baighmbar-un umat-dur/yeke suu jali-yin ibegendur*; cited in Soudavar 2006, 412.

Jackson recently argued that the opposition of the "traditional" Mongols to the embracing of Islam and their accusations of the Muslim Khan having abrogated the *Yasa* refer to the specific *Yasa* (order) that requires treating all religions as equal. Opposition certainly existed, but it is hard to know how much weight to give this specific issue. Actually, as Jackson notes himself, the explicit claims of *Yasa* abrogation which are brought in the sources are different (Jackson 2017, 380; Jackson 2019a). Clearly, however, successful Muslim converts like Ghazan, Özbeg or Tughluq Temür, purged the opposition—real and potential, both princes and commanders—without mercy, thereby manifesting their charisma, while less brutal converts (e.g. the Ilkhan Aḥmad Tegüder, r. 1282–1284) were deposed (Jackson 2017, 352–380). Successful converts were those who managed to depict themselves as both Muslim and Mongol.

Indeed, unlike Buddhism, Christianity or Judaism, Mongol political theology was not conceived as a religion by either Muslims or Mongols. Therefore, attempts to incorporate Mongol concepts of kingship into an Islamic framework began soon after Ghazan's Islamization, if not beforehand. The Mongols themselves perhaps set the stage for such experiments while translating Tengri into Allāh in their first contacts with the Muslims, and attempts to depict the Mongols not only as Iranian kings but also as God's tools, portraying their atrocities as part of God's plan, began long before their Islamization. After the Mongols embraced Islam, however, God's plan became clearer, so that Rashīd al-Dīn could suggest a full historical explanation for the Mongol presence in the Islamic world. As part of God's keeping of the world, He periodically chooses "a great and mighty lord of fortune" who would clean it of the evil, corruption and decay that had accumulated as part of the passage of eons. God chose Chinggis Khan for this mission, and those who resisted him therefore also opposed God and were destroyed. When he finished cleansing the world, Chinggis Khan created the imperial *Yasa* and *Yosun* (customs), spread justice and nurtured his subjects. True, during the completion of the task of world conquest Chinggis Khan caused much harm to Muslim urban areas, but as a balm for that, the people who inflicted such wounds upon the Muslim world embraced Islam, thereby serving as clear and obvious proof of the perfection of divine power. The security and wealth of Iranian Muslims under Rashīd al-Dīn's patron, the Muslim Ilkhan Ghazan, and the strength of Islam under his reign (in terms of converting the Mongols, Uighurs and sun worshippers, and uprooting the polytheists and opponents of Islam) compensated for the misery Muslims had encountered at the hands of Chinggis Khan's troops (Rashīd/Thackston 1998, 1:16, 141–142; Biran 2007, 115–116). Following this understanding the history of Chinggis Khan and his non-Muslim heirs became part and parcel of standard Islamic histories. The Mongols also received a biblical genealogy: they were descendant of Noah's son Japheth just like the Turks; Chinggis Khan was defined as intui-

tive monotheist (*ḥanīf*), and monotheistic elements were added to his biography (Biran 2007, 117–120).

Against this background, Ilkhanid cultural brokers, again notably Rashīd al-Dīn (this time in his theological works), experimented with creating a new model of Islamic kingship that would be closer to the Mongol concept and would redefine Muslim leadership in the post-Caliphate era. The conversion of Il-khan Öljeitü to Shiʿism (after trying Buddhism, Christianity and Sunni Islam), can be explained as part of these experiments, as he equated Shiʿi Islam with authority imbedded in natural descendants of the communal founder, whether Muhammad or Chinggis Khan, and dismissed the Sunnis as the equivalent of those who think even amirs (military commanders) without Chinggisid blood were eligible to rule (Pfeiffer 1999; Deweese 2009, 125). The model suggested to Öljeitü by Rashīd al-Dīn and his peers, however, was not specifically Shiʿite. This new Mongol-Muslim king was the heir of the prophets. After prophecy was sealed, the king replaced the prophet as the bearer of God's messages and orders and hence was able to legislate according to the intuitive knowledge he possessed, thanks to the Heavenly favor. The divinized Mongol king became a sacred Muslim ruler (Brack 2018).

This new version of Islamic history, the first phrasing of which was already included in the letter Ghazan sent to the people of Damascus during his short-lived rule there in 1299,[25] marginalized the Caliphate, the puppet version of which legitimized the Ilkhanid rivals, the Mamluks, as already noted, and made the Mongols the direct heirs of the Prophet. It also stressed the intimate connection of the king to the divine, and his innate knowledge of religion. The continuous experiments created a new vocabulary of Muslim sacral kings, denoted as the *mujad-did* (renewer of religion), *ṣāḥibqirān* (lord of auspicious conjunction), and *mahdī* (lit. 'rightly guided'; eschatological redeemer and ultimate religious reformer). Thus Chinggis Khan's unique affinity with heaven found a parallel in Islamic messianism and reformism (*tajdīd*), ultimately producing an entirely new Perso-Islamic-Mongol synthesis, later adopted by the early modern Muslim empires (Brack 2018, and see Wink's article).

Not everybody was happy with these new experiments. Famously, the Mamluk jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), in what became known as his anti-Mongol *fatwa*s (legal opinions), accused the Ilkhans of impiety. He argued that despite their

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25 "In every age (*zamān*), the turn of time (*al-dawr*) requires that God, may He be exalted, send a prophet to guide the world and direct man towards the right path [...]." Yet, after prophethood ceased with Muḥammad, whenever decay and oppression spread and the Muslims turned their back on the Sharīʿa, "God brought forth an individual from amongst those in authority (*ūlī al-amr*) who would strengthen the religious matters and reproach all the beings, and forbid them from wrong"; see Baybars al-Manṣūrī 1998, 333–334, cited in Brack 2018, 1158.

claim to profess Islam, the Mongols were not really Muslims, since they still revered Chinggis Khan "like a prophet" and followed his law. They were polytheists, and should be compared to the Khawārij, a group that in the seventh century excluded itself from the Islamic *umma* (nation), and hence jihad against them was justified and required. This was a very convenient solution for the Mamluks, who (until 1323) were still at war with the Ilkhans (Aigle 2007; Aigle 2014, 283–306). Given the extensive use of Ibn Taymiyya's anti-Mongol *fatwas* among radical Islamists today, it is certainly one of the most enduring legacies of religious exchange under Mongol rule.

8.6 Consequences

The Mongol Empire drastically changed the religious landscape of Eurasia, as well as the relationship between empires and religions in the post-Mongol world. Ruling over the centers of quite a few religions and the margins of others, and seeing all religions as different paths of addressing the same Heaven, who, however, favored the Mongols, they saw the main world religions as being on equal footing, and were able to relativize them. They designed a basically unitary religious policy that, while allowing religious pluralism, enabled them both to control the multi-confessional clergy (and through them their lay believers), and to use its special skills to invoke the success of the Mongol imperial enterprise.

The Mongols' religious pluralism combined with their mobilization policies resulted in religious exchange on an unprecedented scale, which broadened the spiritual horizons of the Mongols, their subjects and neighbors; fueled religious imaginations across Eurasia and promoted religious relativism. Some of the most enduring results of this process was the huge expansion of Islam among both Mongols and non-Mongols. This process owed more to Muslim abilities to exploit the conditions under Mongol rule than to any intended Mongolian policy. Likewise, another lasting result of Mongol rule was the institutionalization of Neo-Confucianism in China within the imperial examinations, a means that the Mongols did not see as belonging to the religious sphere but that had a tremendous impact on the Chinese imperial institution. The Mongols also oversaw the completion of Tibet's unseating of India as the centre of Buddhism, and the beginning of theocratic rule in Tibet.

With the dissolution of their universal empire into regional polities, the Mongol khanates embraced Islam or Tibetan Buddhism. Their conversion impacted the imperial institution in both China and the Muslim world. In China, Tibetan Buddhism remained an imperial cult even in Ming China (1368–1644), which succeeded the Yuan, and its standing only improved under the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–

1911), which presented its emperors as incarnations of Chinggis Khan and Qubilai (Robinson 2008; Ching 2008; Elverskog 2006). The Yuan precedent also facilitated the second conversion of the Mongols to Tibetan Buddhism in the sixteenth century, this time as mass movement, so that the main spiritual competition on the Steppe during the post-Mongol era pitted Islam against Tibetan Buddhism (Elverskog, 2010, 145–162).

In the Muslim world, the Mongol period resulted in a new image of the imperial Muslim ruler. Fashioned after the Mongol charismatic ruler, and highlighting the ruler's unmediated connection to the Divine, this new model of auspicious, sacred, cosmic, and messianic rulership was later appropriated and adopted by the early modern Islamic empires from the Timurids (1370–1501) onward (see also Wink and Tezkan's contributions). While Azfar Moin presented this paradigm as an antithesis to the Chinggisid model with its stress on genealogy, Brack brilliantly showed that the roots of Muslim political theology of divine selection are found in the post-conversion Ilkhanate, when cultural brokers—literati, historians, and viziers—strove to integrate Mongol concepts of divinized kingship into an Islamic framework (Moin 2012; Brack 2018 and 2019).Like the Mongol khans, the early modern sacred kings could legislate their own laws and were less dependent on the religious scholars, who while often continuing to mediate the ruler's new image to his subjects, did it mainly as imperial agents, subject to the ruler's will, not as an independent source of religious authority (cf. Atwood 2022). The subjugation of the religious establishment to a sacrosanct emperor was also the case in post-Mongol China (a notable example is the Qing emperors' confirmation of the various Buddhist incarnations in Mongolia and Tibet), although in the Chinese realm, this was not an innovation (cf. Pines and Benn, this volume).

For nomadic empires, however, the Chinggisids' embracing of different world religions eventually prevented a future reunion of the whole steppe. Before the Mongol conquest, all nomads from Manchuria to the Black Sea shared a common repertoire of religious-ideological concepts—heavenly mandate, charisma, and universal empire. After the Mongol Moment (and certainly after the Mongols' second conversion to Tibetan Buddhism in the sixteenth century) these ideas were increasingly challenged, diluted or displaced by world religions that were hostile to one another (Allsen 2015, 161–162). The memory of Chinggis Khan still lingered across the steppe but he was disguised as a proto-Muslim on the western steppe and as a Chakravartin in its east. In the long run, the conversion of the Mongols was a factor that hindered the ability of a later nomadic empires to unite the whole steppe under the standard of Tengri.

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Len Scales

9 Religion and the Medieval Western Empire (CE 919–1519)

Emphasizing the importance of religion for the medieval western Empire is nowadays rather unfashionable. The subject has always attracted sceptics, eager to point out the gap between grand titles and claims and more modest realities. Voltaire, with his quip about the Holy Roman Empire being none of the things it professed to be, is just the most famous. Much more recently, hard-headed and stripped-down views of the imperial monarchy have found affirmation in the diverse but mutually reinforcing preoccupations of modern scholarship. One trend, especially pronounced in work by German medievalists, has been towards cutting the *Reich* and its rulers quite deliberately down to size, divesting them, as far as possible, of their trappings of grandiloquent doctrinal exceptionalism. The sacral imperial monarch is treated from this perspective as, essentially, another medieval warrior-or-magnate, understood particularly through his dealings with other such magnates (Körntgen 2001, 15–17). A different viewpoint, well-illustrated by Peter Wilson's recent monumental history, is more upbeat, emphasizing the Empire's long-term robustness as a system of secular government and its broad comparability, despite all constitutional peculiarities, with other pre-modern western European polities (Wilson 2016). While one current approach explicitly questions and diminishes the Empire's relationship with the sacred, others simply direct their interest elsewhere. The *Heiliges Römisches Reich* has never looked less holy.

Yet there ought to be no mistaking the centrality of religion to an institution that since the twelfth century had appropriated to itself the epithet *sacrum*, and whose rulers were ascribed a unique role, for good and ill, in the imagined past and future course of Christian history. Despite all elements of comparability with its European neighbours, there is no evading the Empire's uniqueness in its relationship not only with the Christian religion but with the institutionalized Church and its heads. This chapter therefore seeks to assess the importance of religion in the political doctrines and practices of the western imperial monarchy between its revival in the tenth century CE and the establishment of a hereditary Habsburg succession to the throne at the end of the Middle Ages. The last three centuries of the Empire's history are not considered, as they have a rather different character, marked by new relationships between its members and its Austrian-based rulers and, in the religious sphere, by the divisive effects of the Reformation. It aims to show how the Empire's character and development as a medieval polity acted in some ways to constrain but in others greatly to heighten the role of reli-

gion in its political life. And it traces, in turn, the role of religious doctrines and institutions, and of relations with religious specialists, notably the Roman papacy, in shaping and defining the Empire's distinctiveness as a pre-modern political formation.

9.1 The Western Empire: Development and Political Characteristics

The title of emperor was revived in post-Roman western Europe with the coronation of Charlemagne in Rome on Christmas Day 800. While the eastern Empire of Byzantium continued to lay claim to the heritage of Rome and to rule over territories in the medieval Latin west, a rival tradition of neo-Roman imperialism was henceforth current among the Germanic peoples north of the Alps (Schneidmüller 2012). A combination of dynastic conflicts among Charlemagne's heirs and the pressure of external attacks put an end to Carolingian imperialism in the later ninth century; but during the tenth the imperial mantle was assumed afresh, by rulers from another northern dynasty, the Saxon Ottonians. The first Ottonian ruler, Henry I (r. 919–936), succeeded in uniting the warrior kindreds of the eastern part of Charlemagne's former realm in successful war, particularly against the pagan Hungarians, whose armies were devastating central Europe. His son and successor Otto I (r. 936–973) completed the defeat of the Hungarians, but also renewed the Carolingian tradition of intervention in Italy—a venture which culminated in his coronation as emperor by the pope in Rome in 962. Henceforth the imperial monarchy was to have a continuous history in western Europe until the abdication of the Habsburg Francis II in 1806.

In other respects, however, it is discontinuities that dominate the Empire's history, at least until the end of the Middle Ages. In the six hundred years between the Ottonians' accession and the death of the Habsburg Maximilian I in 1519, princes from seven major central-European dynasties, as well as a number of lesser and outside figures, held or claimed the imperial title.[1] Although the Empire's rulers often sought, at times successfully, to pass on the crown to an heir, their ambitions stood in tension with the claims of secular and ecclesiastical magnates in the northern heartlands of the *Reich* to determine the succession. After the middle of the thirteenth century this principle found settled constitutional form with the emergence of a college of seven prince-electors—three German prelates and

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1 Ottonian, Salian, Hohenstaufen, Welf, Habsburg, Luxemburg, Wittelsbach.

four secular magnates—claiming exclusive power to choose the Empire's ruler.[2] The result, for a time, was a highly fragmented succession: between 1250 and the end of the fifteenth century, son followed father on the throne just once. Added to this was the right asserted by the papacy, particularly between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries, to the final say in bestowing the imperial title. Taken together, these factors help to explain the plethora of regnal candidates and counter-candidates, none enjoying uncontested legitimacy, that periodically marks the Empire's medieval history.

When compared with the greatest empires in the pre-modern world the Holy Roman Empire was of modest extent, although for medieval Europe it was exceptionally large. It comprised the central and eastern portions of Charlemagne's realm, in Germany, the Low Countries, and northern Italy, together with other territories, in Burgundy and on the Empire's mobile eastern edge, added between the tenth and the twelfth centuries. Thereafter, the frontiers of the *Reich* long remained largely stable: there were further, modest gains in the east in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, but also losses in the west, to the Empire's neighbor, the kingdom of France. The Empire's material resources were theoretically great, as it contained within its bounds, particularly in northern Italy, some of the most urbanized and economically advanced regions of pre-modern Europe. The capacity of the monarchy to tap this wealth was always limited, however, and declined sharply in the later Middle Ages, when imperial expeditions into northern Italy became fewer, briefer, and less military in style. By the sixteenth century the Empire had contracted to become an almost wholly north-European polity. Yet at no point since the tenth century had the *Reich* been an empire of conquest. When medieval emperors fought, it was mostly in an (often unsuccessful) attempt to assert control over what they believed was already theirs. A few campaigned sporadically beyond the Empire's frontiers, particularly in the south. But none commanded the means, or probably had the aspiration, systematically to exploit the peripheries to enrich an imperial core.

Indeed, the *Reich* offers only a limited basis for speaking of such a "core". It is true that most of the Empire's rulers were natives of its northern territories and that the majority spoke as their first language a Germanic tongue. It is also possible to identify regions within the Empire's cisalpine lands where resources for the monarch's support were especially densely concentrated and where he was most often to be found. For much of the Middle Ages these were located around the middle and upper Rhine and lower Main, and in the German south-west, although

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2 The archbishops of Mainz, Cologne, and Trier, the king of Bohemia, the count-palatine of the Rhine, the duke of Saxony, and the margrave of Brandenburg.

their geographical balance shifted over time. But the medieval Empire possessed nothing resembling a "capital": there was no central place, or even central region, where court and government offices were concentrated on an enduring basis (Moraw 1993). Although in the later Middle Ages towns attained increasing importance as foundations for rule, there were always multiple relevant centers, spread over a wide area. Increasingly, the cities where the Empire's late-medieval rulers were most frequently to be found lay within their dynastic patrimonies. During the later fourteenth century Prague, in the hereditary Bohemian kingdom of the Luxemburg monarchs, even briefly attained some qualities of an imperial capital (Moraw 1980a). The pattern was to be repeated, with more lasting effect, at the end of the Middle Ages in Habsburg Vienna.

The Empire's decentralised character found expression in its constitutional practices as these developed over the course of the Middle Ages. The process for accession to the throne, the main elements of which were codified in the Golden Bull issued by the emperor Charles IV (r. 1346–1378) in 1356, was temporally and spatially protracted. Election by the princes at the old Carolingian seat of Frankfurt was to be followed by coronation, at the hands of the archbishop of Cologne, at Charlemagne's former court-center, Aachen. The monarch then travelled south to Nuremberg for his first assembly, to meet with the princes and other estates of (in practice, usually only the cisalpine lands of) the *Reich* (Die Goldene Bulle 1972, 87). Yet while accession to the Empire was always a multi-stage process, concentrated in the ancient Frankish heartlands around the Rhine, the principal actors and the locations of the main constitutional acts might vary between reigns. This reflected the prospective monarchs' weakness relative to the groups of princely backers with power over their installation, and the existence of rival pretenders with access to other legitimizing sites and persons.

The Empire had the form of a loose, constitutionally composite polity. Its Italian and Burgundian territories were regarded as distinct component kingdoms, for which the ruler might—although many did not—undergo further coronations, respectively at Milan (or nearby Monza) and Arles. Of these, the Italian coronation was the more politically important, particularly for rulers seeking to intervene in the peninsula. (The most prestigious, culminating coronation, as emperor at the hands of the pope or his representatives, took place in the contested city of Rome—seat of the ancient Caesars but also, crucially, the Apostles. It is considered below.) The Burgundian kingdom, relatively marginal for much of the Empire's medieval history, was largely abandoned to the king of France in the later fourteenth century. Imperial lordship in northern Italy, although long enduring in constitutional theory, was in practice increasingly ceded to local and regional powers in return for money payments during the later Middle Ages. It can appear difficult, based on the criteria often applied in modern comparative studies, to justify speak-

ing of the *Reich* as an empire at all.[3] If only material factors counted, the case would indeed be weak.

The effects of imperial rule were experienced very unevenly within the various lands notionally subject to the emperor. If the center of gravity mostly, and in the later Middle Ages increasingly, lay north of the Alps, the Empire's German-speaking subjects, too, were affected to very varying degrees by the acts of their rulers. Throughout the medieval period, the monarch's itinerary constituted the backbone of imperial government. Some rulers naturally travelled more than others, and in the final medieval centuries government from the saddle yielded somewhat to the pull of emergent residential centers. Charles IV spent roughly a third of his reign in and around Prague and a further ten per cent of his time at the imperial city of Nuremberg (Moraw 1997, 75). Yet for Charles too, even in the penultimate medieval century, itinerant rule retained a centrality reflected in his 1,227 attested stays at 438 different locations over the course of his reign (Eberhard 1981, 15). Exceptional stamina and longevity allowed the emperor and his court to reach corners of the *Reich* where no monarch had been seen in many generations. Yet such a mode of rule remained inherently limited, and many of Charles IV's ostensible subjects would have remained oblivious to him throughout his reign.

Both cause and consequence of the long endurance of peripatetic rule was the limited development of impersonal and bureaucratic methods of government in the Empire, relative to other realms (Scales 2016). Attempts at establishing imperial oversight of the regions—most notably via the body of warrior-administrators known as *ministeriales*—were invariably thwarted by the centrifugal pull of locality and the meagreness of central resources to counter it (Bosl 1950–1951). The use of writing on the monarch's behalf admittedly grew substantially over time, particularly during the later Middle Ages: 9,000–10,000 chancery documents are estimated to have been issued in Charles IV's name, while 100,000 or more have been ascribed to his Habsburg successor Maximilian I (r. 1485–1519), a century and a half later (Lawo 2009, 535; Moraw 1985a, 172). Yet written government never attained the scale or importance for the emperors that it came to enjoy in neighboring kingdoms to the west or at the papal Curia (not to mention other pre-modern empires). Imperial documents tended more to reflect than to extend or substitute for the reach of the ruler's own travels: a study of Charles IV's chancery output found it overwhelmingly directed at the regions that most often saw him in person (Moraw 1997, 70–75).

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3 Empires are "large, expansionist polities, that are both incorporative and differentiated." Their dealings with subject-peoples are characterised by "distinction and hierarchy" (Burbank and Cooper 2010, 8, 10).

The effect, over time, was further to reinforce the Empire's inherently polycentric character, and to strengthen the regional powers at the expense of the monarch. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the princes of the Empire transformed their loose hegemonies into quasi-independent territorial polities, fortified by extensive grants of privileges from the ruler. (Keller 1986, 474–500) By the late Middle Ages these princely quasi-monarchs (the Habsburg dukes of Austria, for example) could largely exclude the emperor's person and his written acts from their far-flung domains (Moraw 1985b, 23).

The resources that came with the throne, always difficult to exploit and retain, contracted in the later Middle Ages, at just the time when the incomes of other European monarchs were expanding massively, in step with the growth of government. Annual income from imperial properties, perhaps somewhere around 100,000 gulden at the start of the fourteenth century, may have sunk to little more than 13,000 towards the middle of the fifteenth (Krieger 1992, 34). The sources of taxation at the monarch's disposal were customary, limited, difficult to collect and harder to extend (Isenmann 1999, 255). Raising a large paid army of the kind that by the later Middle Ages other European monarchs could deploy remained a generally hopeless task. Not until the changed conditions of the sixteenth century did the reforms instituted by the Estates and the Habsburg monarchs at the end of the Middle Ages begin to bear some fruit.

The material limitations of the imperial monarchy found reflection in its cultural resources and the scope and forms of its self-representation. Constrained by the need for mobility, the court remained modest in size and amorphous in character (Ganz 1992, 628–631; Moraw 1983, 25–26). Only when a monarch was able to draw on the resources of a rich dynastic patrimony does the picture change. Hohenstaufen Sicily in the thirteenth century or Prague under the Luxemburger in the fourteenth became foci for rich, learned, and distinctive court cultures such as the Empire's rulers were otherwise rarely able to sustain (Haskins 1922; Macek 1978). Only at these dynastic centers, and at a handful of others, such as Habsburg Vienna and Innsbruck, did monarchs and those around them act systematically to fashion their material environment and self-representation through patronage. In general, however, the Empire's medieval rulers exerted only variable and partial control over the terms of their public portrayal. Their representation in visual media was often more the result of local initiatives than central direction, reflecting primarily local needs and perspectives (Görich 2014). The "propaganda" writings which emperors were once credited with commissioning turn out to be too eclectic in origin, and too seldom the result of any demonstrable court sponsorship, to justify such a label (Deutinger 2010). The contrast with Byzantium, where Constantinople provided a focus for the co-ordinated, closely regulated, multimedia projection and exaltation of the emperor's image, could not be starker.

Part of the explanation for this relative cultural paucity lies with the monarchs themselves. It is no coincidence that the handful of emperors who were able to base their rule upon a rich dynastic kingdom—most notably, Frederick II (r. 1211–1250) and Charles IV, both of whom were Latin authors in their own right —also stand out from the rest in learning, intellectual sophistication, and cultural ambition. So too does the precocious Otto III (r. 983–1002), the son of a Byzantine princess and companion of the great minds of his day, whose court in the city of Rome itself attained a fleeting and vulnerable brilliance during the 990s (Schramm 1929). Often, however, the men raised to the throne in the Middle Ages were military aristocrats with relatively little formal education. Few were capable of engaging unaided with abstract legal or theological ideas in the manner of, for example, the east-Roman Byzantine emperors. In matters of political or religious doctrine, they were heavily dependent on the educated specialists—throughout the Middle Ages, almost invariably Latinate clerics—in their milieu.[4]

In view of the importance of the past as a source of legitimacy in medieval Europe, it is striking that throughout the Middle Ages the emperors and their court played relatively little part in directing their own commemoration by commissioning works of history. Rare exceptions—the account of the *Gesta* of Frederick Barbarossa (r. 1152–1190), for example, written at the emperor's request by his uncle, Bishop Otto of Freising—only prove the rule: Otto's imperial biography seems largely to have been forgotten within a generation of its writing; and it found no successor (Grundmann 1987, 61–64). It was left to others, unconnected with and sometimes hostile to the monarchy, to give account of its deeds. This is in stark contrast to the Empire's neighbors, particularly the kingdom of France (as well as the papacy), where traditions of official historiography were well developed by the later Middle Ages (Moeglin 2002).

Western imperial *memoria* was discontinuous and fragmented. Part of the reason for the lack of a truly imperial historiography lies in the absence, in contrast to other European monarchies, of any center of continuous religious cult and remembrance dedicated to the western emperors. Instead, the remains of the Empire's medieval rulers are to be found in well over twenty different places, across the length and breadth of Europe and beyond[5] (Rader 2006, 174–175). The bones of the seven Roman kings and emperors from the Hohenstaufen dynasty (r. 1139–1254) are scattered between six locations, only two in the cisalpine heartlands of the *Reich.* Although the cathedral church at Speyer on the Rhine, where eight rul-

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[4] Although by the end of the Middle Ages secular experts, particularly university-trained lawyers, were already of growing importance as imperial advisors.

[5] The number rises further if the separate burial sites of some rulers' hearts and viscera are included.

ers lie buried, attained some of the qualities of an imperial mausoleum, and was occasionally spoken of as such, rulers continued to opt for other sites, guided by dynastic preferences (Ehlers 1996, 166–183). Around the time that Frederick II was arranging for his royal uncle, Philip of Swabia (r. 1198–1208) to be laid to rest at Speyer, he was planning his own future repose alongside his maternal ancestors, far to the south of the imperial frontier in Palermo (Rader 2009). Only one medieval Roman emperor—Otto II (r. 973–983)—lies buried in Rome.

9.2 The Empire and the Sacred

To consider the medieval Empire's relationship with religion is first to be struck by what we do not find. Connections and relationships familiar from other medieval Christian monarchies seem by their absence to signal the Empire's distinctive character and development. The miracle-working kings of medieval France and England had no imperial counterpart: not even the most exalted emperor was believed capable of curing the sick. Despite occasional signs of the nascent development—particularly in favor of the Hohenstaufen—of ideas of a holy dynasty of emperors, dynastic succession remained too uncertain, too much subject to outside factors, for notions of sacred imperial blood to take lasting root (Schaller 1974, 118–119). Emperorship did not draw strength from the memory of dynastic ruler-saints as did other medieval monarchies. Two medieval emperors were canonized by the Church: Henry II (r. 1002–1024) in 1146 and Charlemagne in 1165; yet both cults were primarily of local importance, for Bamberg and Aachen respectively. Although various emperors sought to connect themselves with the memory of Charlemagne, genealogically and in other ways, they seldom attempted to claim a share of his official holiness (Görich 2013). Despite the attempts which monarchs sometimes made to associate their rule with particular saints—such as Otto I's promotion of the cult of St Maurice, in connection with his founding of the church of Magdeburg—the Empire never gained a holy protector comparable to other regnal patrons (Graus 1975, 180–181).

These absences do not, however, reflect only the Empire's decentralised character, the disjunctions in its history, and the relative weakness of its monarchical head, but also the particular—and central—role of religion from the outset in its ideological justification. As one thirteenth-century commentator explained, it was because of the Empire's special holiness that it was not, like other crowns, conveyed dynastically, but bestowed by the "canonical election" (*electio canonica*) of the princes (Alexander von Roes 1958, 124). The principle that the first duties of the Empire's ruler were to protect the Church and extend the Christian faith was fundamental to the tenth-century Ottonians, just as it had been to the Carolin-

gians, their model in this as in much else. It would be proclaimed by emperors and their learned apologists (and periodically held up to them as a rebuke by their critics in the Church) down to the end of the Middle Ages and beyond. The background to the renewal of the imperial title in the tenth century lay in the successful defense organised by the first two Ottonian rulers against pagan Hungarian raids into Christian central Europe. The Ottonians' wars of conquest against their Slav neighbors were justified as extending the bounds of Christendom in the spirit of Charlemagne's Saxon wars of a century and a half before. Chroniclers invoked the imagery of the Old-Testament Israelites to celebrate the military triumphs of the first two Saxon rulers as those of a people and monarchs favored by God (Althoff and Keller 1985, I: 26–28). Otto I's coronation at Rome by the pope in 962 was understood as acknowledging his power and duty to protect the bishop of Rome particularly. This had been the justification for Carolingian emperorship, and it was one that would often be repeated during the centuries that followed.

With the formulation by the Church of a new doctrine for the militant defense of Christendom—the crusade—at the end of the eleventh century, the Empire's rulers played a prominent role from a relatively early date. While few post-Carolingian kings and emperors fought consistently to extend the frontiers of the *Reich*, some campaigned far beyond its bounds for religious objectives. The Hohenstaufen became particularly associated with crusading: Frederick Barbarossa died in the east, while his grandson Frederick II was to recover Jerusalem for Christendom (although by diplomacy rather than force) on his crusade of 1228–1229 (Görich 2006, 66–68, 98–100). The eschatological expectations placed on emperors, discussed below, emphasized the future wars they would wage against the infidel. While the idea of the emperor as leader of the crusade faded for a time in the later Middle Ages, it was never forgotten. Sigismund of Luxemburg (r. 1410–1437), who before his accession had fought against the Turks at Nicopolis (1396), worked tirelessly although fruitlessly to unite the princes of Europe in an expedition to liberate the Holy City (Hoensch 1996, 79–87).

The rulers of the western Empire were from an early date made the subject of exalted conceptions of Christian monarchy. Although the first of the Ottonians, Henry I, assumed the throne without anointing, and was never crowned emperor in Rome, unction became the unvarying norm from the accession of his son, Otto I. Already with Otto, the Saxon monarchs were portrayed as receiving power from Christ (Mayr-Harting 2001, 135). The idea that their majesty was itself Christ-like was implicit in their depiction, recurrent in the tenth century as it had been under the Carolingians, as new Davids (Erkens 1998). The later Ottonians, Otto III and Henry II, were made the subject of manuscript illustrations in which they appear as set apart from the mortal world, assimilated to the heavenly realm. How these images, which followed but also extended Carolingian proto-

types, should be read remains the subject of debate (Körntgen 2001; Keller 2002b). Problems of interpretation revolve around the extent to which they can be understood politically—as articulating a doctrine of Christomimetic sacral monarchy, rather than expressive primarily of the ruler's hope of salvation and need for prayer. Further questions concern the respective roles of court and local religious centers in determining content and meaning (Boshof 2005, 354–356). Answers have proved difficult, because tenth-century emperorship was the subject of few systematic writings, addressing its nature and relationship with the supernatural. Ottonian monarchy was mainly articulated through the more polyvalent media of image and ritual. Ongoing debates notwithstanding, however, what remains beyond doubt is the centrality of the place ascribed to the emperor within the Church.

The early-medieval imperial monarchy was founded upon an exceptionally close relationship of mutual dependency between ruler and Church, especially in the Empire's cisalpine heartlands. The relationship had both ideological and material aspects (Keller 2002a). Over the course of the tenth century kings and emperors became increasingly reliant on religious specialists—particularly bishops and the heads of religious communities, some of whom were their own close kinsmen and -women—for the words, symbols, and public acts and gestures through which their power was conceptualized, represented, and distinguished from that of other high nobles. The deeply religious Henry II was presented as a quasi-prelate, who summoned Church councils which sat in parallel with the assemblies of his magnates (Weinfurter 1999, 163). Henry was active in founding churches, and attended their consecration in imperial state, surrounded by the bishops of the Empire (Mayr-Harting 2001, 136).

Not only the form and doctrinal substance of imperial rule but the material foundations on which it rested came to a large extent to be supplied by the Church, which in turn benefitted from extensive grants of property and powers of lordship (Fried 1994, 666–699). Episcopal seats, monasteries, and other religious foundations were among the most important places of stay and providers of sustenance for the itinerant monarch on his travels (Brühl 1968; Bernhardt 1993). The clerics of the imperial chapel, who accompanied him on his journeys, represented the main source of governmental literacy (Fleckenstein 1966). Imperial churches provided contingents of troops for military campaigns. Bishops, usually the ruler's appointees and products of the court chapel, governed the regions as his agents.

According to a traditional view, substantially modified but by no means discredited by more recent scholarship, both the ideological and material strength that emperors drew from the Church were severely curtailed by changes at the end of the eleventh century. (Erkens 2006) The "Investiture Contest", which broke out during the reign of Henry IV (r. 1056–1106), ostensibly concerned who rightfully had the power to invest prelates with the insignia of their office. This

was a right which, in imperial territories, had hitherto belonged to the emperor. But behind the immediate matters in dispute lay more fundamental questions: about the access that secular rulers should have to the Church and its property, and about the proper place of those rulers (and other laypeople) relative to the clergy within a Christian world order. Despite being sparked by a specific quarrel, over the see of Milan, the conflict's longer-term cause was the emergence of a movement for fundamental reform within the Church itself (Zey 2017, 41–50). Leadership fell to a succession of energetic and idealistic popes, the most outstanding of whom was Gregory VII (r. 1073–1085). The reformers challenged the privileged position which the emperors had attained within (and in some ways, over) the Church, insisting instead upon their status as laymen, subject like all laymen to clerical direction. Such a radical shift in the relations of churchmen with the imperial monarchy is without parallel, and would have been unthinkable in Byzantium.

The "Investiture Contest" affected both the material and the ideological standing of the emperor, although how severely, in what ways, and how permanently remain matters of dispute. His ability to appoint bishops was weakened; but much scope to influence the process remained, and strong emperors could still make their will effective. His access to the material resources of the Church became less assured; yet prelates remained at the heart of the Empire's government and self-presentation, while episcopal towns continued to host the court and churches to serve the monarch's needs in diverse ways. The *Pfaffengasse* ("priests' alley") of the Middle and Upper Rhine, home to some of the Empire's richest and most powerful churchmen but also a crucial resource-base for the monarchy, would remain open to kings and emperors into the late Middle Ages (Schneidmüller 2020). The Christomimetic kingship of the tenth and eleventh centuries rarely found comparable expression thereafter. Yet to speak, as historians sometimes do, of a process of "secularization" fails to acknowledge the many ways in which religion remained central to the conceptualization of the imperial monarchy, and in some ways gained new importance, in the later medieval centuries.

The Empire's ruler continued to be associated with the sphere of the sacred—serving, for example, as a subdeacon at his (and his queen's) Rome coronation (Bauch 2015, 89, 234). Emperors themselves remained determined to assert the connection—perhaps most strikingly, through involvement in the making of saints and translation of their relics (Petersohn 1994). In the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries these acts continued to be tied to important political occasions, such as assemblies. Although this seems to become less common thereafter, there was no inexorable process of decline. In the fourteenth century Charles IV attained relationships with the holy as intimate as any that his predecessors had claimed. Not only did he accumulate an unparalleled relic collection; he successfully sought

proximity to the remains of saints, even in ways that transgressed the canon-law bounds of permissible activity for a layman (Bauch 2015, 91, 475). Charles's ability to amass and instrumentalize holy objects was partly a result of the wealth that he drew from his dynastic kingdom of Bohemia, and of the stage for monarchical religious display provided by his city of Prague (Crossley and Opačić 2005). Frederick II, the last Hohenstaufen emperor, was exalted as Christ's image and earthly deputy in a manner comparable with the grandest claims of early-medieval emperorship. Part of the explanation lies in the access which Frederick enjoyed to conceptions of Christocentric monarchy, of ultimately Byzantine origin, rooted in his hereditary kingdom of Sicily (Rader 2011, 125–146). Some elements of pre-Gregorian modes of emperorship thus proved remarkably resilient, when later-medieval rulers possessed the resources and will to sustain them.

It was perhaps partly (though certainly not only) in response to the "Investiture Contest" that the idea of sacrality was gradually transferred from the monarch's person onto the Empire itself. The earliest imperial documents designating the Empire as holy (*sacrum*) date from 1157 (Appelt 1967, 12–13; Sulovsky 2019a, 40–41, 45–46). Who introduced the term into the chancery, and why precisely then, has been the subject of various theories; and only slowly did its use become widespread (Sulovsky 2019b). But over the course of the following decades, the Empire's titular holiness gradually took firm and lasting root. It was the only European polity to boast such a designation.

By this time another, complementary, idea was already well established: that of the Empire's Roman character. Roman themes, titles, and motifs had been present since the tenth century (as they were already under the Carolingians). (Erdmann 1943) Otto III, who ruled for a time from a palace in the city of Rome itself, had celebrated the Roman Empire's *renovatio* in his person (Schramm 1929; Görich 1993). But it was during the first half of the eleventh that the Empire and its rulers came to be designated more consistently and comprehensively as Roman (Koch 1972). From the late twelfth century, and then more frequently in the thirteenth, the *sacrum* and *Romanum* epithets (and later their German-vernacular translations) would be combined in imperial titles to produce the familiar "Holy Roman Empire" form (Schwarz 2003, 101–110, 210–212, 235–243). The Romanizing of the Empire, like its sacralising, was probably accelerated by the "Investiture Contest". It was in the late eleventh century that the monarch began to be styled in official documents "king of the Romans" from the time of his first, Aachen coronation. (He became "*emperor* of the Romans" on receiving the crown in Rome.) This was at the time when the Gregorian papacy was seeking to undermine the position of its adversary, Henry IV, by referring to him as a merely "German" king (Müller-Mertens 1970, 388–389).

Beginning in the eleventh century, the Empire's medieval rulers came increasingly to find incorporation into continuous histories of Roman imperial rule, starting with Caesar or Augustus. For one late-medieval chronicler, the Rhenish count Adolf of Nassau (r. 1292–1298), a mere *rex Romanorum* who never reached Rome, was the Romans' hundredth ruler since Caesar (Liber de rebus 1859, 213). A doctrine of the Roman Empire's "translation" was elaborated, in order to explain how that institution had come into the hands of German-speaking northerners (Goez 1958). According to this view, Roman emperorship—understood particularly as a protective duty over the Church—had historically been transferred (whether by the pope or by some other means was disputed) between successive bearer-peoples. Its final, definitive northward shift was believed to have taken place either under Charlemagne or under the tenth-century Ottonians.

The "Romanising" of medieval western emperorship was of central importance to developing conceptions of its relationship with religion. Rulers were now encouraged to look back to the Christian emperors of late Antiquity, with their commanding position in religious affairs, as predecessors and exemplars. Frederick Barbarossa's forebears were lauded as including Constantine, Valentinian, Theodosius, and Justinian (Ganz 1992, 633). The historicizing, Rome-ward turn emphasized the status of the Empire's medieval rulers as direct heirs to the emperors of early Christian history and the New Testament, including its prophetic passages. This development was not without dangers: Nero and Diocletian, too, became ancestors. Prophetic works reflecting the ideas of Joachim of Fiore (discussed more fully below) included images of the apocalyptic dragon, its heads labelled with the names of ancient and medieval Roman emperors (Patchovsky 1998). But the positive contribution to the religious image of emperorship was greater, through the resulting emphasis upon the scriptural basis for the emperor's unique place within a Christian scheme of past and future. No other polity could claim to have been legitimized by Christ himself, or to have prepared the way for his coming. This latter idea attained striking ritual form in the tradition inaugurated by Charles IV, of the emperor's Christmas-Eve reading, with drawn sword in hand, of the passage from Luke's gospel recounting the decree of Caesar Augustus that set the holy family on the road to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1; Heimpel 1983). The unique, timeless centrality of the Roman emperor to the Christian order could scarcely have received more powerful symbolic expression.

In 1356 Charles performed his Christmas gospel-reading at the great imperial assembly held at Metz, with a cardinal legate and the heir to the French throne among those present (Garnier 2009, 207–210). But while the Metz assembly was exceptionally magnificent, the occasion illustrates well how the unique character of the imperial monarchy—including what by the fourteenth century appear its more archaic aspects—enfolded the monarch in religious symbolism in an especially

visible, encompassing way. Itineracy had a special relationship with ritual. Indeed, the emperor's peregrinations were capable of being understood as a series of extended ritual processions between sacred sites (Mayr-Harting 2001, 136). Imperial assemblies were traditionally summoned to coincide with the great feasts of the Church, when political deliberations could be combined with the monarch wearing his crown in one of the major churches of his *Reich*. While this tradition, at its strongest in the tenth and eleventh centuries, had by Charles IV's day been somewhat undercut by the emperor's increasingly lengthy stays in dynastic and imperial cities, the events of Christmas 1356 highlight its continuing potential importance. Religious performance dominated to the end of the Middle Ages the ruler's ceremonial entries into the towns of his realm in the course of his travels, when he could expect to be met by clergy bearing banners and the relics of local saints (Schenk 2003, 313–359).

The emperor's special religious status and responsibilities also found symbolic expression through objects associated with his person and rule. (Fig. 9.1) The imperial regalia included since the early tenth century one of the holiest Passion relics: the lance believed to have pierced Christ's side[6] (Schwineköper 1981, 208–210). The lance, which was credited with bringing Henry I and Otto I victory against the Hungarians, had from an early date a further Passion relic, a nail from the cross, bound to its blade. In the eleventh century a large piece of wood from the true cross was added to the imperial treasure and soon encased in a magnificent crucifix—a further symbolic weapon, affirming the triumphant Christian majesty of its bearer. (Later sources record the battle-cry of the imperial army as "Christ" as well as "Rome" (Scales 2012, 233–234).) In 1354 Pope Innocent VI, at the urging of Charles IV, established a feast day for the lance and nail, when indulgences could be earned through their veneration in Prague.[7] The new feast quickly drew large numbers of pilgrims to the Bohemian capital (Bauch, 2015, 94–95).

The octagonal imperial crown, although not considered a relic, was likewise laden with religious symbolism and associations (Staats 1991). Its form and decoration were probably intended to recall the heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation, while the images and inscriptions on its faces invoked Christomimetic and Old-Testament priestly kingship. A strangely-coloured (and later lost) jewel in the crown, the "orphan", became widely known and inspired mystical interpretations: the court poet Walther von der Vogelweide, early in the thirteenth century, called it

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6 Its prestige does not seem greatly to have suffered from the fact that the Byzantine emperors claimed to possess the lance – which was also miraculously discovered by the army of the first crusade in Antioch in 1098.

7 The feast continued until the Reformation in Nuremberg, where the imperial regalia were kept from 1424 onward.

Fig. 9.1 Charlemagne with imperial regalia (but without the lance), by Albrecht Dürer (1512). Courtesy of Wikimedia commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Charlemagne-by-Durer.jpg).

"the guiding star of all princes" (Staats 1991, 85). In the late Middle Ages, the crown (which was probably made in the tenth century) came to be identified with Charlemagne, by then a saint.

The physical proximity of the emperors to objects enjoying a special Christian status may help to explain why the presentation of their own persons did not, despite the "Investiture Contest", follow a trajectory of progressive laicization, but took instead an opposite course. Formal western imperial dress developed over the Middle Ages as a fusion of regal with quasi-clerical garments. Items such as the Byzantine-derived *stola* (in origin an imperial, but to late-medieval eyes a

priestly adornment) were by the fourteenth century combined with new features —most notably, an increasingly prominent mitre, worn under the crown (Kintzinger 2006, 358–363; Suckale 2009, 338–339). A chronicler remarked of Charles IV when he visited Lübeck in 1375 that the emperor resembled a bishop (Bauch 2015, 85 n. 123). To the end of the Middle Ages, western emperorship never lost its capacity to dissolve the boundary between the earthly and the otherworldly. The fact was not lost on the emperor's subjects. In Lübeck, site of Charles's appearance in "episcopal" guise, the town hall was (earlier) in the fourteenth century adorned with a bronze door-pull depicting the emperor surrounded by his electors, in clear imitation of portrayals of Christ with the apostles (Heiliges Römisches Reich 2006, 422–424).

9.3 Empire, Church, and Papacy

The unique status of medieval Roman emperors is highlighted by the manner of their making: no other monarch received his crown from the head of the Church, the bearer of Christ's mandate to St Peter. The universal Christian responsibility of the pope was mirrored by that of the emperor. This was an idea which, beginning in the thirteenth century, found particularly graphic expression in the pope-emperor chronicle, one of the most prolific historiographical genres of the Middle Ages, in which the successors of St Peter and Augustus were listed in parallel, usually on facing manuscript pages (Mierau 2006). The obscure Gospel reference to the sufficiency of "two swords" continued throughout the Middle Ages to be repeated in its political interpretation, as legitimizing the spiritual and temporal power embodied by pope and emperor (Luke 22:38). As a letter of Frederick Barbarossa from 1159 observed, there was "one God, one pope, one emperor" (Benson 1982, 378–379). The view was repeated well beyond official circles. For a German-vernacular poet in the thirteenth century the Empire's ruler was "the guardian of all Christendom" (Politische Lyrik 1972, 75). It was when he acted as the champion of Church and faith that his monarchy appeared most unbounded. Charles IV styled himself "world monarch" (*monarcha mundi*) in calling upon the pagan Lithuanians to convert (Schneider 1973, 147–148). What limits, after all, could be set to the Christian word and its defence? "You have the earth, he [God] has the heavens", Walther von der Vogelweide assured Otto IV (r. 1198–1218) (Die Gedichte 1864, 12).

A special place within the Christian order entailed weighty, specific duties. "To the emperor", wrote the fourteenth-century treatise-writer Konrad von Megenberg, "pertains the office of defending the Church of Christ and delivering all her sons from molestation and oppression" (Konrad von Megenberg 1914, 254). It was axiomatic from the start that the emperor should be a leader in religious war-

fare against pagans or heretics. The Good Friday liturgy continued into the late Middle Ages to include prayers for imperial triumph over "barbarian [meaning non-Christian] peoples" (Hirsch 1965, 2–3). The ability of the Empire's rulers to live up to such daunting expectations was subject to many constraints, which only multiplied over time. Nevertheless, emperors did draw the "secular sword" for the defense of the Church—as when, like Frederick II, they legislated against heretics. And when, in time of crisis, the monarch took special steps, his actions might shed a startling light on his authority and on the opportunities which it afforded.

As late as the fifteenth century, Sigismund of Luxemburg, while still a mere Aachen-crowned "king of the Romans", was instrumental in the summoning and conduct of a great ecclesiastical council, which sat at Constance from 1414 to 1417 (Engels 1966). The council's purpose was to address urgent questions of Church reform and, most pressingly, bring an end to the long-running schism in the papacy. Sigismund's ability to act was the product of a singular diplomatic moment, when other European monarchies were weakened and divided. But his belief in his power and duty on behalf of the Church was no less important. (Among the grounds which the prince-electors cited for deposing Sigismund's half-brother and predecessor, Wenceslas (r. 1376–1400), from the throne was that he had done nothing to end the schism (Scales 2012, 228).) Sigismund's role as the council's promoter and protector found visible expression when he observed its sessions, dressed in imperial regalia, from a special seat in Constance cathedral. Nevertheless, there was no western counterpart to the Byzantine emperor's direct interventions to regulate doctrine and practice in the eastern Church (Preiser-Kapeller, this volume).

The emperor's protective responsibility towards Church and pope, and his duty to act at need on their behalf was the most clearly established, although also the most troublesome, consequence of his status as one of the two heads of Christendom. Service in arms to the church of Rome had been the basis for papal favor towards the upstart Frankish Carolingians. Rescuing the pope from local enemies or restoring him to his rightful seat in Rome was a justification recurrently given for imperial expeditions south of the Alps in the centuries that followed. As late as 1368 Charles IV gave demonstration of this protector-role when he accompanied Pope Urban V back into his city following the papacy's decades-long residence in Avignon (Bauch 2015, 160–162). Charles was able thereby briefly to present himself as an imitator not only of Charlemagne but of Constantine, the Church's first Roman imperial guardian. But did this duty towards Church and pope make of the emperor their lord or their servant? Where did the final say in their relationship lie?

These questions found various answers over the course of the Middle Ages, reflecting in part the changing facts of power, both in Italy and the north. For most of the tenth and eleventh centuries the emperors had the decisive voice in the relationship, treating the pope at times almost as another imperial bishop, appointed at their will. The great diploma that Otto I issued in 962 in favor of John XII included the requirement that the pope swear fealty to the emperor before consecration. When John proved disloyal, Otto had him deposed. Henry III (r. 1039–1056), when he came to Rome in 1046, arranged for the setting-aside of three rival papal claimants before having his own candidate, a German bishop who had travelled south with him, installed as pope. The new pontiff, Clement II, proceeded to crown Henry emperor.

After the mid-eleventh century, however, popes of a more assertive kind were ready to oppose the emperor in matters of the Church. The reformers' insistence upon the right of the cardinals to elect the bishop of Rome free of imperial interference helped to set the scene for more antagonistic relations between the two heads of Christendom (Keller 1986, 164–168). In 1076 Henry IV declared the reigning pope, Gregory VII, deposed; only months later, the emperor himself was compelled to beg for reconciliation before the castle of Canossa—the first (but not the last) public humiliation of an emperor in a trial of strength with the papacy. In the hundred and fifty years that followed, only two rulers of the Empire would avoid papal excommunication. The papacy too, however, now entered a long period of recurrent schism, as imperial partisans in the Church raised up their own candidates against the new-style pontiffs set on resisting the emperor.

Abundant material for strife was available, as both sides came to concentrate more closely on the significance of words, symbols, and actions. During the twelfth century the practice became established of notifying the pope of the outcome of elections to the imperial throne. But opinions differed as to whether this was a mere courtesy, or a request for confirmation which the pope might refuse. In an era of developing legal ideas about feudal-military relationships, a special sensitivity came to surround any words or practices capable of being interpreted to show the emperor as the pope's vassal. One of these was the custom, which took root in the twelfth century and became a source of particular tensions, that the emperor on the occasion of his Rome coronation should lead the pope's horse and hold his stirrup while he mounted and dismounted (Görich 2001, 92–185).

Over the course of successive disputes, the canon law of the Church became increasingly explicit, and increasingly assertive, on the nature of the relationship between the two powers (Morris 1989, 424–433). Innocent III (r. 1198–1216), in his decretal *Venerabilem* (1202), insisted that it was the papacy that had transferred the Roman Empire to its contemporary holders, the Germans. It therefore pertained to the pope, on account of his responsibility for the Christian common-

wealth, to ascertain whether the candidate chosen by the princes was suitable for the imperial office, and to reject him if he was found wanting. Innocent himself invoked this power to decide between rival pretenders for the throne, at a time when the Empire was disputed between the candidates of different princely factions. This papal power to make and unmake emperors offers the strongest contrast with Byzantium, where emperors not only designated but also crowned their successors, and where the patriarch of Constantinople's role in the coronation had a strictly auxiliary character (Lilie 2012).

The singularly troubled nature of the relationship between medieval emperors and the Church and its head was partly a result of a unique combination of structural factors, on which that relationship rested. Whereas in the eastern Roman Empire the imperial palace and the seat of the patriarch both lay within the same city, for western emperor and pope to meet necessitated a long and gruelling journey over the Alps. Neither of Latin Christendom's heads could hope to keep the other in constant view, let alone under control. The Empire's ruler needed to come south if he wished to be crowned Roman emperor; but he also had other reasons for entering Italy: to impose his authority on the imperial territories in the north of the peninsula, and sometimes also to campaign further south. Emperors crossed the Alps at the head of armies, which they expected to employ against their Italian subjects, many of whom regarded them as unwelcome foreign interlopers. Trouble often flared again when imperial forces reached Rome: street battles with local factions were for centuries the recurrent backdrop to imperial coronations.

Popes therefore came to view an impending imperial visit with no more enthusiasm than did many other inhabitants of the peninsula. Memories of early imperial domineering combined with the threat which the presence of foreign armies always posed to the bishop of Rome's control over the central-Italian territories on which his independent power rested. Papal desire to restrict the imperial monarchy's access to Italy was favored by the increasing difficulty that kings and emperors faced in raising the resources for expeditions, as their power-base in the north contracted. By the later Middle Ages the situation had become chronic: of the eighteen monarchs who took the title of king of the Romans between the mid-thirteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, only a third were ever crowned emperor in the south. Times had changed. When Charles IV came to Rome for coronation in 1355, it was on the strict condition that he bring only a modest retinue and depart the city by the close of his coronation day (Bauch 2015, 144–149).

9.4 Empire and Eschatology

Popes did not seek only to constrain and rebuff emperors: occasionally they fought against them with unparalleled ideological ferocity. In 1245 Frederick II of Hohenstaufen was formally deposed by a Church council in Lyon, under the headship of Pope Innocent IV (r. 1243–1254). By this time Frederick had already been denounced in papal polemic as an agent of supernatural evil: the "beast from the sea" of the Book of Revelation (McGinn 1979, 173–174). The last Hohenstaufen emperor had a singular reputation. Uniquely among medieval emperors, he had worn his crown in the Holy Sepulchre—but he had done so while under papal excommunication ((Stürner 2009, II.85–167). He was a reputed friend of Muslims and Jews, and his own orthodoxy stood under suspicion. He was held responsible for the imprisonment, torture, and murder of prelates of the Church. Such deeds and rumors mattered not only for the light they shed on Frederick as a monarch; they appeared also, to friends and foes alike, to affirm the emperor's centrality to an unfolding eschatological order, that would soon reach its climax.

The most fundamental of all the ways in which the Empire was interwoven with religion was via the role that its rulers were ascribed in the final acts of Christian history. This role was characteristically ambivalent, encompassing, in different versions, expectations of heroic Christian triumph, salutary, purifying chastisement, and radical anti-Christian malevolence. The person and memory of Frederick II would draw upon all these strands. The complexity of medieval imperial eschatology reflected its varied roots and long development. Some of these roots were in late-antique emperor-prophecies of Byzantine origin, others in Christian and Jewish reworkings of Roman Sibylline prognostications. The most fundamental originated in a body of prophetic material, ambivalent as well as obscure, to be found in various books of the Bible. These sources came over the course of the Middle Ages to be overlaid by, and read in the light of, new prophetic works, some deeply learned, others polemical, fantastic, or informed by popular hopes and fears. They were also reinterpreted, from varied standpoints, in the light of the Empire's unfolding history and its changing relations with the Church.

Christian prophecy concentrated on the Roman Empire from an early date. Nero, for early Christians a wicked persecutor destined one day to return, became a prototype for future eschatological scourges (Lerner 1988, 371). New stimuli came with the conversion of Constantine and the crises of late Antiquity. Some identified the Empire with the Pauline *katéchon*, which by its continued existence held at bay the final calamities of human history (2 Thessalonians 2:1–12). The feet of the figure in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, made of iron mixed with clay (Daniel 2:31–45), were thought to symbolize Rome, understood as the last in a succession of four world

empires. Attention thus fell particularly upon the Empire's end and on its expected role in the final drama of human history. While these interpretations were never universally accepted, their affirmation by some of the Church Fathers, notably Jerome (347–420 CE), helped to ensure their widespread reception in later centuries (Möhring 2000, 17).

Other prophecies, of late Roman origin, identified the emperor's future role more explicitly. The Tiburtine Sibyl (which in its earliest surviving Latin form dates from the eleventh century, but which has late-antique origins) identifies by name a future Christian emperor, Constans, who was to reign for over a century, inaugurate an era of peace and plenty, convert the pagans, and overcome the unclean peoples of Gog and Magog, before surrendering his diadem at Jerusalem (McGinn 1985, 26). In the east, the rise of Islam gave a powerful spur to imperial eschatology, reflected in the composition, in Mesopotamia during the second half of the seventh century, of the *Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius* (Alexander 1978; Preiser-Kapeller, this volume). This prophecy, too, envisaged a last great (eastern) Christian emperor, whose reign would be a time of earthly bliss and whose final surrender of his insignia on Golgotha would open the way for Antichrist and the end of human history.

Important for perceptions of the medieval western Empire was that these eastern works became known in Latin Europe at a relatively early date. But the interest that they attracted is indicative, in its turn, of the speed with which the new Empire, in the hands of the Franks and their northern successors, came itself to be thought about in eschatological terms. Early evidence comes in the form of a Latin treatise, *On the Origins and Life of Antichrist*, composed around 950 (Sibyllinische Texte 1898, 104–113). Its author, the monk Adso, wrote at the request of Geberga, queen to the West-Frankish Carolingian Louis IV. His message was that the *katéchon* had come north. Although the Roman Empire was much diminished, he argued, the Pauline "falling away", heralding the last things, would not occur so long as a portion of the Empire was held by a king of the Franks. When the last emperor arose, he too would be a Frank.

Although Adso's widely-read treatise (which survives in around 170 manuscripts) centred on Charlemagne's West-Frankish successor-kings, it is likely to have been known from an early date in the Empire too, and to have influenced ideas about the imperial monarchy. (Its dedicatee was a sister of the reigning emperor, Otto I.) There are indications that the later Ottonians at least regarded their emperorship as part of an eschatological scheme. Otto III may even have considered himself to be in some sense the last emperor: his visit to Aachen at Pentecost 1000—a year charged with apocalyptic meaning—to seek and venerate the remains of Charlemagne has been seen as supporting such an interpretation

(Roach 2013). There are various indications that Otto's successor, Henry II, was preoccupied with the imminence of the end times (Weinfurter 1999, 85–90).

Yet while the eschatological resonances of western imperialism between the tenth and thirteenth centuries are undeniable, they are also elusive. Even at times of conflict, associating named emperors explicitly with the last things was avoided. Apocalyptic language was rife on both sides in the "Investiture Contest": for the German anti-imperialist Gerhoch of Reichersberg, Henry IV's reign was evidence of the millennial loosing of Satan, promised in Revelation (Gerhoch von Reichersberg 1897, 328). Yet neither side went so far as to declare that the end had arrived: even Henry's papal adversaries stopped short of naming him as the Antichrist. Instead, the last things tended to be placed in the near but not immediate future, and the path towards them not portrayed as inexorable. Contemplating disaster became a way of calling for reform (Rauh 1988).

The striking thing about texts linking the Empire to apocalyptic futures is often what they do not say. The *Ludus de Antichristo*, composed in southern Germany during the second half of the twelfth century, is an adaption of the Pseudo-Methodius prophecy of the last emperor to the western Empire and its German rulers. And yet, although attempts have been made to link it with the court of Frederick Barbarossa, it has proved impossible to move beyond speculation since the play avoids contemporary reference (Kahl 1991; Möhring 2000, 176–184). Barbarossa's son Henry VI, who at the time of his death may have been preparing not only a crusade to Jerusalem but the conquest of the Byzantine empire, is another ruler whose intentions seem to chime with last-emperor prophecies. There are hints from writings produced close to Henry's court that those around him were thinking in such terms (Foerster 2010). But they remain only hints. The public encyclicals issued by Henry's son Frederick II at the time of his controversial crusade of 1228–1229 and following his entry into Jerusalem make calculated but also seemingly deliberately evasive and selective reference to last-emperor motifs (Hechelhammer 2002, 243–247).

What did more than anything to bring about a new readiness in the later Middle Ages to link current and expected future emperors to eschatological hopes and fears were the writings of the Calabrian abbot Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202) (Reeves 1969). Abbot Joachim developed techniques of close biblical analysis that, crucially, appeared to show not only that eschatological change was imminent but that its date could be reckoned with precision. Joachim's vision of an impending Third Age of a spiritually purified Church drew urgency from the fact that the newly-established orders of mendicant friars, particularly the Franciscans, quickly identified themselves as its agents and beneficiaries. First, however, the reign of Antichrist had to be endured. Joachim himself had hinted that the coming persecutor would be an emperor. With the onset of Frederick II's bitter final struggle

with the papacy, the abbot's disciples felt ready to identify the Hohenstaufen explicitly with the keenly-awaited man of evil. Yet in addition to the Joachimites who demonised Frederick there were others who greeted him as a positive eschatological figure: a righteous chastiser of the corrupt Church, paving the way for the impending transformation (Schaller 1982).

Not only Frederick's apparent fulfilment of the Joachimite Antichrist-role but also his ultimate failure to fulfil it proved important. When the emperor died the reign of Joachim's Antichrist, generally calculated for 1260, still lay a decade in the future. It was now particularly Frederick's enemies among the friars who proved ingenious in prolonging his existence until the time was ripe (Lerner 1988). On one view, he lived on in his offspring, who would complete his work of wickedness. Another theory held out the hope of Frederick himself returning. Rumors persisted that he was still alive. Meanwhile, a hostile Franciscan source recorded a sighting of the emperor and his army descending into Mount Etna: the myth, much repeated in the following centuries, of the subterranean *Kaiser*, awaiting his hour to emerge, had been born (Ex Thome de Eccleston 1888, 568).[8]

Between the late thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries the legacy of Joachimism and anti-Hohenstaufen rumor combined both with much more ancient emperor-prophecies and with new, folkloric and astrological themes in a strange, distinctively late-medieval brew (Lerner 1976). Obscure imposters now appeared, claiming, sometimes with brief success, to be the absent Hohenstaufen emperor (Struve 1988). "Frederick" became a name to conjure with—its association with the Hohenstaufen only reinforcing the promise embedded in its German-vernacular form, that its imperial bearer would inaugurate a chiliastic "empire of peace".[9] Memories of Frederick II also underpinned the conviction, which attains much prominence in late-medieval prophecies, that the coming emperor will persecute (and thereby purify) the clergy. Verses from the fourteenth century about a future emperor Frederick present a characteristic picture:

> That most high-born prince will entirely destroy the monasteries;
> I tell you truly, he will give the nuns in marriage,
> They will have to tread grapes and thresh corn for us;
> When that happens, the good times will have come. (Schröder 1893, 22–23)

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[8] Though later versions of the myth usually located the magic mountain in Germany, and identified the subterranean emperor as, for many, a figure of positive hope.

[9] Thus the report of the fifteenth-century Thuringian chronicler Johannes Rothe, concerning popular expectations of a coming, transformative emperor: "… und den nenne man Frederich umb fredis willen den her machit" (Düringische Chronik 1859, 426).

A luxuriating imperial apocalypticism is encountered particularly in late-medieval Germany, expressed increasingly (as in the above example) in the vernacular. The signs are that late-medieval emperor-prophecies sought and often found a wide, popular audience (Courtney Kneupper 2016, 19–25). Themes of social justice were sounded; some motifs associate the hidden or awaited emperor particularly with the poor. How—and how seriously—such texts were read is hard to judge. Some prophecies citing a date for the end of the world survive only in manuscripts written after that date, suggesting that earthly reform rather than impending supernatural transformation remained the principal concern of scribes and readers (Möhring 2000, 254–255). Imperial eschatology demonstrates clearly how the very weakness of the imperial monarchy might affirm its intimate association with religion. Eschatology lent meaning to decline, since it mapped the Empire onto a scheme that required things to get worse in order to get better. If the reigning emperor was weak and obscure, this merely demonstrated that the time was ripe for him, or some other, to assume the predestined, transformative role. For one early sixteenth-century treatise-writer, the contemporary ruler's name—Maximilian—affirmed the message which the learned books showed was written in the stars: he would be *mille maximus:* the millennial hope (Oberrheinische Revolutionär 2009, 92).[10]

9.5 Conclusions

Imperial eschatology granted the emperor a singular status, transgressing the boundaries between seen and unseen, earthly and supernatural, temporal and timeless. Nowhere else in Europe produced nearly so much political prophecy as did the lands of the late-medieval Empire. No other monarch was made the subject of such speculation as often as were emperors. And while the circumstances of the late Middle Ages were in some ways novel, the prophecies also drew on ancient motifs and reflected long continuities in thought about Christian Roman emperorship. Although the power of emperors was less in the final medieval centuries, they had seldom played the role of territorial conquerors—and in the brief, early period when they did it was mainly under the mantle of spreading the faith. Rather than an empire of conquest, exploitation, and control, the Holy Roman Empire was above all an empire of discourse and imagination. Its imperial

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10 By the time that he wrote, however, following years of unfulfilled hopes of imperial reform, the author had begun to lose patience in Maximilian, and looked instead to a transformative emperor Frederick of obscure origin, from "the Black Forest".

quality was expressed not through administrative or coercive practices, still less through far-flung networks of colonies or trading stations, but through a distinctive, legitimizing body of ideas, and the symbols and repetitive behaviours into which those ideas were distilled. The discourse of medieval emperorship was framed mainly in religious terms and conducted, at least in its more systematic forms, by and between religious specialists. The Roman kings and emperors, with rare if important exceptions, had only a secondary part in defining its terms and content.

The relative weakness of the imperial monarchy, and the dependence of the monarchs on others for much of their cultural work, left scope for a diverse range of actors to fill it with content, to contest (and through contestation, enrich and complicate) it, and imaginatively to reconfigure it, reflecting their own hopes, fears, and ambitions. For most of the Empire's medieval history, central control over its representation was limited. But this merely allowed other voices freer rein. Medieval emperorship was narrated, judged, and categorised even by those unconnected with it and unsympathetic to it, because its history appeared inseparable from that of the Church. Whatever its own limitations, the imperial monarchy was bound in diverse and contradictory ways to an institution with unrivalled doctrinal and communicative resources. Those resources were powerfully deployed throughout the Middle Ages both by the Empire's friends and (particularly in later centuries) its foes within the Church. This guaranteed for western emperorship a lasting cultural salience otherwise unthinkable.

Where other empires had armies, fleets, and bureaucracies, the medieval western Empire had images, symbols, and authoritative texts. The importance of these must admittedly not be overrated or misjudged. There is a particular danger of the religious component, fundamental though it undeniably was, commanding disproportionate attention because the texts and artefacts that shed light on it, difficult though they often are to interpret, have at least survived in substantial quantity. The Empire would appear in a different, perhaps less impressive, light if we knew more about the secular culture of the imperial elite, as expressed at assemblies and their accompanying feasts, at tournaments, on military campaigns or hunting expeditions. The "underlying consensus" among this group, of which one historian has written (Moraw 1980b, 150), that lent the Empire an enduring stability, was far from being only religious in content; but its secular components—ideas, beliefs, stories, myths, objects, rituals, and traditions—can mostly only be glimpsed. Nor should the potency of ideas in general be overstated. What undoubtedly did much to ensure the Empire's long survival was the ease with which, in everyday practice, it could often be ignored. Emperors, by the later Middle Ages increasingly, promised their powerful subjects the benefits of legitimate power with relatively few of the pains of accompanying obligation.

The Empire's limitations proved not only materially but also imaginatively liberating: a monarch who could do relatively little might be imagined doing almost anything. Incomes might decay, properties be usurped, and subjects fall away; but ideas and doctrines were more durable. A German magnate or north-Italian commune might look sceptically upon the pretended neo-Roman majesty of a Charles IV; but St Luke the Evangelist proved a steadier witness. Little, it seems, was forgotten. As late as the fifteenth century an obscure (but evidently much-read) reform treatise in the German vernacular was still awaiting the transformative reign of a priest-king Frederick, as if the "Investiture Contest" had never occurred (Reformation Siegmunds 1964, 333).[11] Even as the emperor of hard reality, through the all too visible limits of his rule, was stirring a desire for reform, the emperor of memory, fantasy, and authoritative text was forever pulling on his boots, ready to assuage those self-same, diffuse and contradictory, longings.

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11 Admittedly, an obscure, idiosyncratic, and peculiarly hard-to-interpret priest-king.

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Baki Tezcan

10 A Populist Reformation: The Early Modern Transformation of Islam in the Ottoman Empire

In mid-September 1633, on the occasion of Muhammad's birthday celebrations, a very large crowd had gathered at the Mosque of Sultan Ahmed to listen to the most popular preachers of the Ottoman imperial capital. After Abdülmecid Sivasi (d. 1639), a Sufi sheikh of the Khalveti order and the Friday preacher at the Mosque of Sultan Ahmed, gave a sermon with an insinuating sneer directed at Kadızade Mehmed (d. 1635), who was the preacher at the cathedral-turned-mosque of Aya Sofya (Hagia Sophia), the latter took his turn. He started with an exegesis of the Qur'anic verse "Indeed, God commands you to render trusts to whom they are due (from 4:58)," continued with statements that enjoined the preference of justice and the prohibition of wrong, and told the story of Nasreddin Hoca beating his large ox every time the small one moved—the idea being that in order to discipline the smaller one, he was making an example of the larger one. The grandees in the audience became so uneasy from this illusion that some of the scholars moved to throw their slippers at him. Even though Kadızade was his adversary, the grand mufti Ahizade Hüseyin stopped them as it was not the right occasion to do such a thing, especially in the presence of the young emperor, Murad IV (r. 1623–1640), who was very fond of Kadızade. After the crowd at the mosque dispersed, Murad IV, who was reportedly a heavy drinker himself, ordered the destruction of the taverns in the imperial capital (Çelebi, *Fezleke* II, 155; Zilfi 1988, 133–134, 137–138).

This anecdote brings together several themes that I connect in this study: the rising significance of urban masses and the pulpits of grand mosques where one could preach to them, an emphasis on justice and pious activism in public discourse, the cooptation of this pious activism by the royal authority to spread fear with a view to crush political opposition, the growing tension between certain Sufi sheikhs and their critics, and, perhaps most importantly, the articulation of this tension with an implied allusion to social tensions between upper classes and the commoners. The particular combination of these themes in seventeenth-

century Istanbul lends itself to narrate a story that is much bigger than the sum of its parts. It is a story that helps one locate early modernity within Islamic discourse, or diagnose the impact the socio-economic transformations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had on the transformation of Islam, which could well be construed as a reformation of sorts.[1]

In terms of the theme of this volume, this "reformation of sorts" corresponds to a new configuration in the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Islam. As I discuss below, during its foundational phase, the Ottoman feudal kingdom benefitted greatly from a very open-ended understanding of Islam. A gradually growing concern with defining the "correct" version of Islam, while at the same time still recognizing the multi-faceted nature of this "correct" version, accompanied the transformation of the feudal kingdom into an expansionist patrimonial empire, which I call the First Ottoman Empire (ca. 1453–1580; Tezcan 2010, 89–93). As the expansionist phase reached a closure in the late sixteenth century, the patrimonial structure of the empire entered a period of transformation that opened the polity to new political actors. Most of these new actors happened to hail from the Muslim majority and gradually replaced the Christian-born ruling class of the patrimonial First Empire that had come to exclude freeborn Muslims from higher executive posts and channeled them to the judiciary. It was during this transitional period that the imperial concern with defining the "correct" form of Islam acquired a new and specifically socio-political significance as Islam offered a collective identity that could bring the new rulers and the majority of the ruled together. While some Muslims were becoming politically powerful and others were destined to remain as subjects, they were all supposed to be equal in the eyes of God. Thus, this "reformation of sorts," by reminding Muslims that they were all equal and none of them had any privileges, carried Islam to early modernity, an epoch marked by the empowerment of egalitarian discourses that accompanied the development of collective identities to mediate socio-economic differences.

I said "a reformation of sorts" and referred to that which I have in mind as "a populist reformation" in the title as I would not like to appear as if I am arguing for an exact parallel to the Christian Reformation. That would be an impossible case as the historical experience of Islam in pre-dominantly Muslim societies had not created an institution that could be comparable to the Catholic Church in the sense of an independent corporate body the doctrinal interpretations of which were considered binding for all and final—although the Ottoman hierarchy

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1 For the socio-economic and political transformations, see Tezcan 2010.

of Muslim judges, professors of law, and preachers, came very close to it.[2] The later historical experience of Muslims did not create any Protestant churches, either. However, if one were to think of the Reformation as a call to discard some of the products of medieval socio-religious experiences and rationalize the faith by going back to the scriptural sources, then one could talk about some important parallels, for instance, in the ways in which both Protestant reformers in Europe and their Muslim counterparts considered seeking intercession from saints tantamount to idolatry. But what is more important to my purposes than looking for parallels with the Christian Reformation is to recognize that early modern Muslims were engaged in some soul searching as they questioned the validity of the medieval religious practices they have been following. Some of them indeed discarded some of these practices while others continued with them but in a different way. In this process, going back to the original scriptural sources, as well as invocations of a textual rationality based on those sources and their interpretations by well respected scholars, played such an important role that compared to the medieval experience of Islam, which was enchanted with saints who walked the earth dispersing divinity to Muslims, early modern Islam was marked by a relative disenchantment (Tezcan 2022; Tezcan Forthcoming-1). Thus, I argue that, in the particular sense of shedding parts of the medieval heritage and re-interpreting the ancient sources in a textually rationalist way, we may indeed talk about a Muslim reformation in the early modern period. It is quite likely that this development took place in several parts of the Islamic world. There are strong parallels between some Ottoman and Mughal Muslim thinkers in this respect. Furthermore, going beyond parallels, there are very traceable movements of people and ideas from Mughal India, where a contemporary of Kadızade, Aḥmad al-Sirhindī (d. 1624), inspired a movement, which called itself "Renewalist" (*mujaddidī*) and was quickly embraced once it reached the Ottoman Empire in the late seventeenth century. While at the end of this chapter, I briefly touch upon the South Asian Renewalists, my general focus remains on the Ottoman Empire as my research experience allows me to better articulate the connections of this reformation to socio-economic and political developments there; hence, the adjective "populist" in my title, to which I return in the second part of the article and conclusion.

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2 On this hierarchy, the most recent monograph in English is Atçıl 2017; on the interpretational hegemony that this hierarchy sought to achieve in the law, see Burak 2015.

10.1 The Medieval Background and Some Early Modern Changes

Before entering the early modern Ottoman context of this study, however, I must introduce a few concepts that have been developed by my late colleague Shahab Ahmed, an engagement with whose work very much inspired the form this study took (Ahmed 2016).

Ahmed builds his analysis of Islam, among other things, on the concept of a social hierarchy of truth that operated in the geographical region between the Balkans and the Bengal in 1350–1850 and allowed the educated elite to explore the mystical and philosophical dimensions of Islam in the private sphere while a more legalistic understanding of Islam, which was often at odds with mystical and philosophical interpretations, operated in the public sphere for the masses. Ahmed sees the European modernity, with its foundational myth of human equality and the accompanying social egalitarianism of a simple truth for all, as the phenomenon that rendered the possibility of a hierarchical epistemology, which offered alternative paths to truth to different social groups, untenable. While I am very much inspired by Ahmed's concept of a social hierarchy of truth and his identification of modernity as the cause that destroyed this hierarchy and led to the hegemony of a legal understanding of Islam, I argue that modernity was not thrusted upon Muslims by the sheer force of European colonialism but rather produced by them—more or less simultaneously with European Christians—as a result of upward social mobility and the political transformation this mobility brought about by expanding the ruling class in the early modern era. I also historicize Ahmed's concept of a social hierarchy of truth by demonstrating how it had been built in parallel to the production of a social differentiation between the ruling class and the masses in the medieval period. This historicization also highlights the shifts in the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Islam.

The late medieval era in Anatolia and the Balkans corresponds to the foundational period of the Ottoman Empire, or what one may call the times of the Ottoman feudal kingdom, ca. 1300–1450 (Tezcan 2010, 81–89), during which a relatively cohesive ruling class of predominantly Turkish Muslim conquerors, who ruled a mainly Christian agrarian population, fostered an experience of Islam the legal, mystical, and philosophical dimensions of which cohered well in the public space. The Ottoman political enterprise was predominantly feudal and depended on Turkish *alp*s (knights), as well as Greek and Slavic vassals. Islam was the religion of the ruling demographic minority, the Turkish knights and their nomadic or semi-settled Turcoman warriors, and remained as such for the first century of Ottoman rule as the Ottoman territorial expansion first focused on the Balkans, a

predominantly Orthodox Christian land. The prevalent practices of Islam in this period were inclusive with regards to both new converts, some of whom regarded Jesus as the most superior prophet of God (Tezcan 2009, 384–385, notes 5–6), and different sorts of medieval Anatolian Muslims, some of whom were antinomian (Karamustafa 1994), while others did not differentiate between the canonical rituals of Islam and the mystical rituals of Sufi orders both of which were hosted in the same public space, the T-shaped houses of worship that could also function as hospices for travelers belonging to any religion (Necipoğlu 2005, 49–50).

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, a well-known medieval Muslim traveler, happened to pass through Bursa in the early 1330s, only a few years after the Ottomans conquered the city and made it the capital of their political enterprise. It was Muharram 10 in Muslim calendar, that is, the day of the Ashura when Muslims commemorate, often by fasting, the murder of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, in Karbala by Muslim royal authorities in 680. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was invited to the hospice of the Akhis, a brotherhood of craftsmen that was well organized in most Anatolian cities at the time. Apparently, a great feast was organized to which "the principal officers of the army and leading citizens" had been invited. After people broke their fast, "the Qur'ān readers recited with beautiful voices," a jurist delivered "an eloquent homily and exhortation, after which they began to sing and dance." They stayed there all night, performing the dawn prayer and leaving after the sunrise (Ibn Battuta 2000, 2: 450–451).

In short, the earliest Ottomans did not have any problems with Sufi rituals, such as the singing and dancing of the Akhis, and the canonical Muslim prayers taking place in the same place where people ate as well. The architectural remnant of this medieval moment is to be found in what architectural historians call the T-shaped mosques, or mosques with convents and/or hospices, that were widespread in Ottoman domains until the late fifteenth century and disappeared by the early-sixteenth century. Since these structures are used exclusively for the canonical five daily prayers today, it is difficult to reconstruct the experience of their medieval users. However, their inscriptions refer to them with such names as the "abode of goodness" rather than mosques.[3] Thus, the early Ottoman urban Muslim did not categorize Sufi rituals in a separate mental space than canonical Muslim prayers.

If we had a chance to visit an early Ottoman Muslim village or the encampment of some Ottoman nomads, our likelihood of encountering, what we would call, a Sufi ritual would probably be higher than canonical Muslim prayers. A cen-

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3 Acar 2011 includes a comprehensive study of all such buildings, indicating the name by which each one was designated.

tury later, during the reign of Mehmed II (1451–1481), the Ottoman central authority was no longer content with this state of affairs and issued orders demanding that district governors make sure for the people to perform their canonical prayers (Lugal and Erzi 1956, 94–95). Gradually, the space reserved for canonical prayers became distinct, and Sufi practices moved to convents that were earmarked for particular orders—although a convent could change hands over time or be converted to a *madrasa*, or college of (Islamic) law.

Even in the early sixteenth century, however, one could witness a Sufi ritual at a mosque. The Friday preacher positions at the imperial mosques of Istanbul were usually given to well-known Sufi sheikhs. The Khalveti sheikh Sünbül Sinan (d. 1529) used to preach either at the Mosque of Mehmed II or the Aya Sofya. After the sermon, he would start a ritual of *dhikr. Dhikr* literally means remembrance. One of the ways in which a Sufi achieves a constant awareness of the divine is by remembering God through repeating one of God's many names or a formulaic phrase. So at a *dhikr* ritual, one would see dervishes repeating the same phrase over and over again, often with bodily movements. In some Sufi orders, including the Khalveti one, the repetition would be vocal and then evolve into a *devran* ritual as the dervishes would put their arms on the shoulders of one another and start turning. The *devran* of Sünbül Sinan's dervishes created some opposition among the jurists, who found the ritual unislamic. While Sünbül Sinan was able to defend the ritual of his dervishes in the early sixteenth century, it became less and less possible to see such rituals in mosques as they moved permanently behind the walls of convents—and in some convent complexes where Sufis used to hold their ceremonies at the structure that was also used as a mosque, separate structures for Sufi ceremonies were added in the later sixteenth century (Vassâf 2006, 3: 361–393).

The fact that Sufism had a central part in the Ottoman social experience of Islam is quite clear from the many convents one comes across all over its territories. Another physical marker of Sufism related socio-religious experiences is the frequency by which one comes across to shrines dedicated to Sufi saints. The word used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish to designate a saint is *walī* (pl. *awliyāʾ*), which may be translated as "near" to be understood as "someone who is very close to God"; hence, a friend of God.

Having mentioned friends of God, it is impossible not to be mindful of *the* friend of God, ʿAli, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and the fourth Caliph, whose name is added to the Shiʿite call to prayer with that very phrase, *walī Allāh.* But it is not just by Shiʿites, who regard him as the rightful political and spiritual successor of the Prophet, that ʿAlī is venerated. Many Sufi orders that would otherwise consider themselves Sunni venerate ʿAli as their spiritual founder by retrospectively connecting their spiritual chain of sheikhs back to him. ʿAlī was also a

key figure in medieval Anatolian Islam as he represented the hero in many popular stories. Even his sword Dhū'l-fiqār and his white mule Duldul were literary figures known to the learned and the commoners alike.

While the popular devotion to 'Alī was a central tenet of medieval Islam in Anatolia, it started to become problematic for the Ottomans as a particular Sufi order, the Safavi one that laid great emphasis on this devotion, mobilized its supporters in Anatolia to establish a political entity during the late fifteenth century. Many of these supporters, who were called *kızılbaş*, or red-head, because of the red headgear they donned, were Ottoman subjects, mostly Turkish nomads and semi-nomads, who found in the Safavi cause a channel to articulate their discontent with Ottoman taxation and other centralizing policies. The historical details of the Ottoman-Safavi conflict are beyond the purview of this chapter except for a brief summary below (for a detailed study in English, see Allouche 1983). However, it is well-known that this conflict played an important role in the heavier emphasis the Ottoman center placed on its Sunni identity during the sixteenth century.

Adopting a term from early modern European historiography, Tijana Krstić suggested calling this process confessionalization (Krstić 2011, especially, 12–16, 167–174). Derin Terzioğlu used the term "Sunnitization" in analyzing some of the developments I referred to above and drew attention to the close relationship between Ottoman state formation and the increasing emphasis on the institutions and practices of Sunni Islam (Terzioğlu 2012, 86–99; Terzioğlu 2013, 301–338). I find these concepts quite helpful in many ways, yet I am not completely satisfied with them. While confessionalization inadvertently creates too much emphasis on the imperial rivalry between the Ottomans and the Safavids, which came to be pronounced through the ideological vocabularies of Sunni and Shi'ite Islam, Sunnitization has the potential to essentialize Sunni Islam as an inherently intolerant formation. More importantly, both concepts miss the mark as one does not witness the conversion of non-Sunni Muslims to Sunni Islam or the creation of a new confession but rather the transformation of Sunni Islam into a relatively more disenchanted version of itself. Just as importantly, both concepts focus on the relationship between religion and politics, neither one of them engaging with the socio-economic background of the political and religious transformations. And yet this politico-religious development, whether we call it confessionalization or Sunnitization, has a lot to do with hierarchies, both social and intellectual.

A very important and socially significant feature of medieval Sufism was the hierarchical nature of access to knowledge that came with it. To begin with, there was a hierarchy in the social organization of most Sufi orders. The sheikh would lead the seekers on the path to Truth, and some of these seekers would then become sheikhs in their own right to lead others. But perhaps more important than this organizational hierarchy was the epistemological hierarchy involved in

attaining the *ḥaqīqa*, or the ultimate Truth. Only some seekers would be considered to have reached the level of intellectual and spiritual maturity at which the secrets of the Truth would be disclosed to them. While the phrase the secrets of the Truth might sound contradictory, it was at the very heart of Sufi thought for many. As the late Shahab Ahmed reminds us:

> The notion of *secret* (Arabic: *sirr*; Persian: *rāz*) is simultaneously one of the most important, and least studied, elements in Sufi discourse: it is at the level of *sirr*—of the individual's most intimate self—that the most subtle and *meaningful* experiences of Divine Truth take place. It is for this reason that the standard invocation made after one mentions the name of a deceased Sufi "Friend of God" is *qaddasa Allāhu sirrahu:* "May God Purify his secret!" ... The fact that the most subtle and profound Truth is also the one experienced in the most secret *space of Revelation* gives rise to a dilemma: should this Truth be divulged and communicated for the benefit of others, or not? If it is to be divulged: then to whom, and in what form? On the one hand: if the truth is not revealed, then those people capable of benefitting from that truth are deprived of the opportunity. On the other hand, if the truth is revealed to those incompetent to its *meaning*, then both speaker and the listeners are imperiled: "The mass of people, prisoners of their own ignorance, can only become violent if the secret is revealed to them, even if only partially." The dangers attendant for the speaker upon revealing such a pure Truth to those unqualified to receive it are, of course, exemplified in the fate of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, martyred for his proclamation, "I am the Truth," whose crime, according to the Sufis, is *ifshā-yi sirr*—"disclosure of the secret." (Ahmed 2016, 377–378)

The sixteenth-century Ottoman Istanbul witnessed not one but two Sufi martyrs who were executed for their beliefs the jurists found heretical (Ocak 1998, 274–304; Üstün 1991, 100–123). As far as their followers were concerned, however, what they did was to have disclosed the secret to people who were not qualified to handle it. The court documents about the first one, İsmail Maşuki, suggest that this martyr did not believe in the necessity of daily prayers, fasting, and most other practices which are expected of Muslims and that he suggested that "every individual is God; it is He who is seen in each figure," which is very similar to Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj's claim that also took him to death in 922 (Ocak 1998, 354–357). When al-Ḥallāj referred to himself as the Truth, which is one of the names of God, or İsmail Maşuki reportedly stated that it is God who is seen in each individual, they were referencing the Sufi idea that everything is a manifestation of God, or that God is the only thing that really exists. This idea was developed in medieval Sufi thought in some detail, reaching its most elaborate articulation in the works of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) and his late medieval interpreters who developed the theory of the "unity of existence." Even though Ibn 'Arabī had come under heavy criticism by some of his contemporaries and later generations, for the early Ottomans, his ideas represented the highest achievement of Islamic thought. The first professor ever appointed to an Ottoman *medrese*, Davud el-Kayseri

(d. 1350) was a major interpreter of Ibn ʿArabī. One of the first grand muftis of the Ottoman Empire, Molla Fenari (d. 1431), was a commentator of Ibn ʿArabī. And when Selim I (r. 1512–1520) conquered Damascus, one of the first things he did was to locate Ibn ʿArabī's grave and order the construction of a tomb complex around it (Zildžić 2012, vi, 135).

How could the Ottomans, on the one hand, transform a Sufi philosopher into a saint and yet at the same time condemn vernacular articulations of his thought in public? The late Shahab Ahmed's work is an attempt to make sense of this seeming contradiction in, what he calls, the "Balkans-to-Bengal complex" in 1350–1850. One of the key mechanisms that make this world cohere is the principle that the Truth attained by the Sufi experience is not something to be shared publicly with every-one. It is only shared by those who can handle it, and it is shared privately. The intellectual elitism of this portrait should be obvious; and Ahmed does not have any qualms about it:

> The notion that a social hierarchy of truth might provide for possibilities of complex meaning that a social egalitarianism of simple truth cannot accommodate is an argument which, in the modern context, would likely be repudiated and rejected as "elitist"; which, of course, it is— but with "elitism" construed in the one instance as a positive quality and, in the other in-stance, as a negative one (Ahmed 2016, 521).

Historicizing Ahmed's work in the Ottoman context, one observes the creation of a social hierarchy of Islamic truth during the First Ottoman Empire whereby the ex-ploration of mystical and philosophical dimensions of truth is pushed to the priva-cy of elite gatherings, literary circles, and special convents while a more legalistic representation of Islam takes hold of the public space for the crowds. I suggest that the development of this epistemological hierarchy parallels the increasing differ-entiation between the Ottoman ruling class and its Muslim population that came to establish the majority of the empire's subjects. The military success of the Ottoman feudal kingdom in the foundational period brought together several Anatolian and Balkan principalities and kingdoms in an imperial zone that was crowned with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. The facilitation of trade in this larger zone that shared a single currency brought about an increasingly mone-tarized economy that enabled the Ottoman treasury to master the financial resour-ces to grow a central army the soldiers of which, such as the janissaries, received salaries as opposed to fiefs. As the descendants of the Turkish Muslim conquerors were gradually replaced by the *devşirme*s, or royal slaves who were recruited from among the Christian population, converted to Islam, taught Turkish, and either al-lotted salaries from the central treasury or given large royal demesnes, the Otto-man feudal kingdom was transformed to a patrimonial empire, the First Empire, which grew territorially to include all of the western Middle East and large parts of

southeastern Europe, including Anatolia, greater Syria, Iraq, parts of Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, North Africa (except Morocco), most of the Balkans, the northern Black Sea littoral, and parts of the Caucasus. The First Empire thus came to rule a predominantly Muslim population with an administrative caste of mainly Christian origins whose members worked closely with Muslim jurists and legal scholars.

Perhaps the single most important internal political challenge came from the disenfranchised Turkish fief holders and their nomadic or semi-nomadic warriors who had once supported either the Ottomans or one of the Anatolian Turkish principalities or kingdoms that were annexed by them. In a conceptual sense, they were the descendants of the cohesive Muslim ruling class of the Ottoman feudal kingdom (or one of the post-Mongol principalities in Anatolia). They supported the cause of Shah Ismail (1487–1524), the hereditary leader of a Sufi order who eventually founded the Safavid Empire in Persia. Even though Shah Ismail was defeated by the Ottoman sultan Selim I (r. 1512–1520) and established Twelver Shi'ism, rather than *kızılbaş* Sufism, as the religion of the realm in his kingdom, antinomian Sufi practices were increasingly associated with the Safavids and thus became ideologically suspect in the First Empire. Even some well-established Sufi practices, such as whirling, had to move to specifically designated places in convents, thus clearing mosques to be used exclusively for canonical rituals, a development that is reflected in the discontinuation of building T-shaped houses of worship by the early sixteenth century, as was mentioned earlier.

Yet, the establishment of the Safavid Empire did not result in the abandonment of Sufi practices by the Ottomans. Notwithstanding the emphasis on canonical Islam in the public space, both the Ottoman dynasty and its ruling class continued to patronize mystical and philosophical explorations of Islam in private circles and semi-private convents, as exemplified by literary works as well as foundations that supported Sufi convents. However, vernacular articulations of certain mystical ideas in the public space came to cost one his life as it did for at least three sheikhs who were condemned to death by Muslim jurists in the sixteenth century. The articulation of the Truth that was defined by and meant for the intellectual elite to the masses was socio-politically dangerous as it had the potential to be construed as a challenge to the socio-political order as had been the case with *kızılbaş* Sufism. That is why it was politically crucial to keep this hierarchical epistemology intact and, thus, keep the elite version of Islamic Truth away from the masses.

10.2 Kadızade's Moment of Truth and the Birth of Modern Politics

The main protagonist of the narrative of this study, Kadızade Mehmed, is someone who seems to have decided to expose the double standard applied to Islamic Truth and to recreate it in a one-size-fits-all fashion for the masses of the Ottoman imperial capital. He was definitely not the first one to attempt this in the history of majority Muslim societies. But thanks to the socio-political transformations that shaped the particular time and space he lived in and eventually produced a politicized public sphere, his message caught the attention of the commoners as well as the powers that be. Below I start with his personal experience in the context of socio-religious developments and continue with contextualizing his reform movement in the political stage of the early modern Ottoman Empire.

Kadızade was born in a small northwest Anatolian town. His father was a local judge, possibly with some palace connection in the family. His first teacher was a former student of Birgivi (d. 1573), the intellectual father, not only of Kadızade but the whole movement of Ottoman reformation. I return to Birgivi below as Birgivi's intellectual influence on Kadızade came to have an effect later in his life. After receiving a solid education in Arabic and logic, Kadızade moved to Istanbul as a teenager. While his father had arranged an administrative career for him, he chose the path of the law and continued following the classes of various scholars in Istanbul. In 1602, a few months before he turned twenty years old, he started holding public lectures at the Mosque of Murad Pasha (Tezcan 2019a, 197–201).

While Kadızade was continuing his studies and teaching the interested public, he also joined the Khalveti order by becoming a disciple of Sheikh Ömer at the Dragoman Yunus Convent. He apparently entered the "forty days of solitude," a Sufi practice of the Khalveti order, with Sheikh Ömer three times. When Sheikh Ömer went to a military campaign with the grand vizier 'Ali Pasha against the Habsburgs in 1604, he left Kadızade as his successor for his sermons at the imperial mosque of Selim I. Thus Kadızade preached at the Mosque of Sultan Selim, a much larger mosque than that of Murad Pasha, for nine months when he was only twenty-two. In his autobiographical letters, Kadızade also notes that he got married during these months in his own neighborhood. When Sheikh Ömer came back from the military campaign, he invited Kadızade to his neighborhood, settled him in a house that was endowed to be occupied by scholars, and appointed him as his successor at the Dragoman Yunus Convent where Kadızade preached and commented upon the Qur'an for a year, after which Sheikh Ömer and Kadızade fell into a disagreement in some issues that Kadızade does not specify in his letters. Then Kadızade separated himself from Sheikh Ömer, and returned to his former

neighborhood and to his teaching at the Murad Pasha Mosque. Eventually, Kadı-zade Mehmed gave up on a legal career and sought a promotion to preach at larger mosques, which he secured in due course. Becoming arguably the most influential preacher of the imperial capital in the 1620s and the early 1630s, he came to pose a threat to his former Sufi order as he engaged in debates with the Khalveti sheikh Sivasi that were continued by the followers of both after their deaths.

The controversy between Kadızade and Sivasi (and their posthumous follow-ers) left a mark on the social and intellectual life of the seventeenth century in the Ottoman public sphere. It led to street fights and demonstrations, and not just in Istanbul. The points of contention between the two sides had been analyzed by their seventeenth-century contemporaries (Chelebi 1957), as well as modern scholars (Öztürk 1981; Zilfi 1986). They revolve around topics some of which sound arcane or inconsequential while others are topical even today, such as the use of tobacco, opium, and other drugs. But most of them relate to either Sufi practices that developed in the medieval period, such as singing and whirling, or other "innovations" that were not part of the ancient Islamic practice that the followers of Kadızade would like to recreate by reviving the example of the Proph-et and his companions. This, I must emphasize, is a relatively egalitarian model that is traditionally contrasted with the social structure of pre-Islamic Mecca, which was marked by a merchant oligarchy.

One of the crucial articles of the debate is the Islamic principle of "enjoining right and forbidding wrong," the significance of which would not be challenged by any Muslim, yet opinions would differ as to how far one should go in its applica-tion (Cook 2000). The more activist believers tended to interpret it as an invitation to reform society. And the supporters of Kadızade, or the *Kadızadelis* as they are known in Turkish, aimed to do just that. We have evidence suggesting that their debates spread all over the empire later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centu-ries, including the Balkans, Crimea, Egypt, and Syria (Filan 2013, 43–62; Yakubovych 2017, 155–170; Peters 1987, 93–115; Schlegell 1997, 84–85), and that the Kadızadelis re-ceived political support at various times during some of which Sufi practices were officially banned (Baer 2008, 109–119). I will not enter a detailed analysis of the top-ics of the debate here. Instead I would like to focus on how the debate has been framed in modern studies and how it could be framed instead. One way in which this controversy was studied was to portray Kadızade as someone who was influenced by "extremist" Hanbali ideas. Another one constructed the debate as one between orthodoxy and Sufism.

Several scholars noted that Kadızade seems to have been influenced by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) (the first one to do so was Ocak 1983, 208–225), a Hanbali scholar who was very critical of Ibn ʿArabī and certain Sufi practices and paid for his criti-cism with imprisonment by Mamluk authorities in Syria and Egypt. The Hanbali

school of (Islamic) law is known for its literarism. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792), the founding father of the Saudi interpretation of Islam, for instance, was a Hanbali. My research suggests that while Kadızade had read some Hanbali authors, most of his education was centered in the Ottoman madrasa curriculum. Moreover, his most important sources for his very critical opinions about Ibn 'Arabī and certain Sufi practices were actually authors who belonged to the Hanafi school of law, which was the one followed by the Ottomans. Thus, Kadızade and his posthumous followers were not representing marginal extremists in the otherwise tolerant environment of Ottoman Hanafi Islam. Rather, the Kadızadelis were pushing to expand the effective boundaries of the legalistic interpretations of Islam in the public sphere (Tezcan 2019a). In a sense, they were simply following the conclusions that some legitimate interpretations of Islamic thought could reach and actually *did* reach within the Hanafi school on Ottoman territories a century before them. Thus the more important question is why Kadızade's voice was heard and attracted massive support in the seventeenth century while, for instance, that of Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī (d. 1549), whom Kadızade cites, remained within the pages of manuscripts.

Another—and almost reflexive—reaction to the debate between Sivasi and Kadızade was to look at it as one that brings Sufism head to head with "orthodoxy." In Turkish scholarship the same opposition was articulated through the locales ascribed to these two sides (the convent vs. the *madrasa*, or the college of [Islamic] law), or through the personalities of the jurist and the Sufi (see, for instance, Bilkan 2016). While there is a lot of evidence one could cite in support of the argument that Kadızade was dead set against certain Sufi practices, a closer look at his writings reveal that he was not against Sufism as such. Moreover, as the anecdote in the introduction of this study suggests, Kadızade was not appreciated by contemporary jurists at all. Last, but not least, his autobiographical letters surprise us as he notes that after abandoning the Khalveti order in his early twenties, Kadızade apparently joined the Naqshbandi Sufi order. Thus, the controversy was, in a sense, between two different conceptions of Sufism, or two different socio-religious formations represented by the Khalveti and Naqshbandi orders. Both of these orders would place themselves within "orthodox" or Sunni Islam. Therefore, rather than between "orthodoxy" and something else, the struggle between Kadızadelis and the followers of Sivasi was about the very definition of orthodoxy, or the boundaries of Sunni Islam; hence, the problem with the concept of Sunnitization as a descriptor for this age.

The Naqshbandi order was more or less as old in Anatolia as the Khalveti order. Yet, even though the Khalveti order had become very powerful in the Ottoman capital during the sixteenth century, the Naqshbandiyya had remained on the margins, not receiving much royal patronage in the sixteenth and seventeenth cen-

turies. While no Sufi order consistently follows the same principles in all of its branches, the principles that distinguished the Naqshbandi order were its emphasis on personal conversations rather than rituals of singing and whirling, which most of its members shunned; its preference of silent *dhikr* as opposed to the loud one; and its choice of "solitude within society... [that is], being inwardly alone with God and concentrated on His reality while outwardly immersed in the transactions and relationships that sustain Muslim society," (Algar 1990, 152) rather than the practice of actual solitude as was the case with Kadızade's experience with his Khalveti sheikh during the period of his initiation. The Naqshbandi order is also distinguished by the emphasis its members place on the strict observance of the divine law and the example of the Prophet. In short, as far as re-creating Islam as it was experienced during the time of the Prophet and his companions by shedding the medieval Sufi practices go, the Naqshbandi order presents a quite appropriate medium. Another relevant feature of the Naqshbandi order to note is the political activism many of its leading sheikhs engaged in, especially in the early modern and modern periods. This, too, fits well with the message of Kadızade who was keen on enjoining right and forbidding wrong, a principle for the execution of which an alliance with the political authority is essential. Last, but not least, while most Sufi orders, including the Khalveti one, point to ʿAlī as their spiritual founder, the Naqshbandis' ultimate spiritual ancestor is Abū Bakr, the first Caliph after Muhammad and the ultimate symbol of Sunni Islam.[4] Thus it is no wonder that Kadızade paid allegiance to a Naqshbandi sheikh after abandoning the Khalveti order. As persuasively argued by Mustapha Sheikh, the writings of Akhisari Ahmed Rumi, an elder contemporary of Kadızade and a major intellectual inspiration for later Kadızadelis, is in great harmony with Naqshbandi ideas, too, almost foreshadowing the order's later Mujaddidi phase (Sheikh 2016, 56–66).

With the hindsight provided, one can easily say that these principles of the Naqshbandi order must have answered some social needs in the early modern and modern periods of Ottoman history as this order was going to increase its hold over Ottoman society in the eighteenth and, especially, nineteenth centuries, so much so that when we got to the twentieth century, the only remaining Sufi order of note in Turkey, the principal majority-Muslim inheritor of the Ottoman political heritage without a colonial break, was the Naqshbandiyya. In short, there must be something very modern about this order, or rather in the way in which the order presented itself to the Ottoman society in the early modern period, as the Naqshbandi order itself went through a transformation in the late six-

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4 On the Naqshbandi order, in general, see Weismann 2007; on Ottoman Naqshbandis before the Mujaddidi phase, see Le Gall 2005.

teenth and early seventeenth centuries in India, and it was this transformed order, the Mujaddidi branch of the Naqshbandiyya that took hold in the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire, finding itself a perfect spot prepared by the followers of Kadızade.

Other than being very adaptable to modern life with some of its foundational principles, such as solitude while being engaged in society, the Naqshbandiyya was also very modern in its solution to the theological riddle presented by, what I call, enchanted Sufism. While early Sufi practices grew out of asceticism, the medieval quest for experiencing the divine in this world by lifting the veil that separates the human from the divine and becoming one with the latter brought Sufism to conceptual territories that were found quite questionable from the perspective of a theology that was based on an absolutely transcendental God. Nevertheless, al-Ghazzālī's synthesis that granted recognition to knowledge gained by divine inspiration provided this experiential Sufi quest some legitimacy within Sunni Islam. The medieval landscape of the Islamic world was thus enchanted with Sufis many of whom were seen as intermediaries between humans and the divine. The ultimate goal of the Sufi quest in enchanted Sufism was to reach the divine in this world at which point one would no longer be bound by the regulations of the *sharīʻa* (Islamic law), at least, according to some Sufis. The goal of the Naqshbandi path, especially in its reformed Mujaddidi phase, on the other hand, was "neither union with God, nor participation in His attributes, but simply to obey the Sharīʻa and to be a faithful servant of God" (Sheikh 2016, 61). The ultimate Truth one was supposed to reach at the end of the Sufi path was no different from the legalistic Truth of the commoners. In this sense, the kind of Sufism that the Kadızadelis and early modern Naqshbandis were envisioning was a disenchanted one, practically limited with asceticism. One of the ways in which Naqshbandis disenchanted Sufism was by placing a distance between themselves and the popular perception of the heritage of Ibn ʻArabī.

Not surprisingly, the heritage of Ibn ʻArabī played a very important role in Kadızade's departure from the Khalveti order, as well. As I elaborated elsewhere (Tezcan 2019a), Kadızade witnessed quite closely around himself how ideas that were inspired by Ibn ʻArabī and led to death sentences when uttered publicly a few decades ago were commonly shared and commented upon by jurists, scholars, Sufis, and high-ranking imperial administrators. In this socio-intellectual context, Kadızade started reading Ibn ʻArabī's critiques and eventually broke up with his Khalveti sheikh who, for all practical purposes, seems to have paid allegiance to one of the later successors of the above mentioned İsmail Maşuki. Instead of staying in the Khalveti order and eventually succeeding to his sheikh, Kadızade chose to reject this intellectual environment in which one preached to the masses from one register of Truth while adopting another one in intimate discussions with the

learned elite. It was around this time that he got closer to the followers of Birgivi, the sixteenth-century scholar some of whose students were Kadızade's first teachers in his hometown in the 1580s.

Birgivi had a similar experience with Sufism. Originally a seeker in the Bayrami order, he had eventually become a scholar who came to criticize many Sufi practices. He preferred to teach in the small northwest Anatolian town of Birgi but took part in one of the most important Ottoman legal debates of the sixteenth century, the one on the legality of endowments in cash. The monetarization of the Ottoman economy had led to the spread of an unprecedented Islamic practice in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries: endowments in cash funds that were lent in return for—what was practically—interest, which was forbidden according to the law. This practice was legitimized by leading Ottoman jurists despite significant opposition. Birgivi defied the authority of the famous grand mufti Ebussu'ud and wrote several treatises making a strong case against the legality of endowments in cash (Mandaville 1979, 289–308). Although he was not able to alter the practice, he remained an opponent of cash endowments and also wrote against the widespread practice of performing religious services (for instance, reciting the Qur'an) for monetary compensation. The ideal of a just Muslim society was becoming far less attainable, so Birgivi advised to shun political authority, which was, by definition, unjust (Birgili 2000, 117, 120, 126), and focused on counseling the believers with his works some of which, such as *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*, or the Path of Muhammad, eventually became bestsellers in the Ottoman Empire and beyond. The kind of Sufism that Birgivi envisioned was neither Khalveti, nor Bayrami, it was simply Muhammadi; hence, the title of his book. One did not need to follow any specially designed practices by this Sufi order or the other; the example of Muhammad was all that one needed to purify one's soul and achieve salvation. There were no secret Truths to be found anywhere else than the Qur'an and the *hadith*, that is, the tradition of the Prophet. Birgivi was not against Sufism, but what he understood from Sufism was simply disciplining the soul, not a quest to reach the divine in this world by lifting the veil that separates the humankind from the divine. It was this disenchanted Sufism, reduced to asceticism that Kadızade found appealing in him.

Birgivi's favorite son Fazlullah came to Istanbul around 1610 and preached at some of the imperial mosques. Kadızade followed him in his appointments, becoming his successor in the mosques of Selim I and Bayezid II. Looking at the copying dates of the extant manuscripts of *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya* in the libraries of Istanbul, it is possible to observe that as Kadızade reached out to larger masses in the imperial mosques of the capital, Birgivi's work started to be read much more widely fifty years after his death. Kadızade thus amplified Birgivi's message, which had not been very popular until then, on the influential pulpits of the imperial

mosques of Istanbul (Kaylı 2010, 176–177, 190, and Table VI). Unlike his intellectual forefather Birgivi, however, Kadızade did not shun the political authority. He got close to sultans Osman II (r. 1618–1622) and Murad IV (r. 1623–1640) for whom he penned treatises of political advice with a strong reformist bend (Tezcan 2019a, 215–229).

As I pointed out elsewhere (Tezcan 2010, 122), Ottoman sultans started taking a keen interest in preachers from the early years of the seventeenth century on. Breaking the tradition of his forefathers, who preferred professors of law as princely tutors, Ahmed I appointed someone who was better known as a preacher than a professor to tutor his sons. They were very well aware that the imperial mosques of the capital were the largest public gathering places of Istanbul where each Friday tens of thousands of men frequented the weekly congregational prayers.[5] The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had witnessed an influx of immigrants to the capital, especially from Anatolia, where provincial unrest led many peasants to emigrate from their villages. This period coincided with a series of rebellions in Istanbul that transformed the imperial army corps into major political actors who at times received the legitimizing political support of—at least a part of—the judicial leadership. Just as these actors, who represented what we may call corporate political bodies, tried to influence the public opinion to legitimize their actions that set limitations on the absolutist ambitions of the Ottoman court, the sultans started thinking about ways to strengthen their hand in the public sphere. In short, the management of the political loyalties of the urban masses in the imperial capital became increasingly important in the competition to establish ideological hegemony in the imperial polity. If the relatively newly emerging coffeehouses were too diffused to control for the political authority (Hattox 1985), the pulpits of the imperial mosques, of which there were only a limited number, were not. The early modern public sphere of the imperial capital was thus politicized one coffeehouse and one mosque congregation at a time. Politics was no longer the exclusive domain of the ruling class, the Ottoman *'askeri*, whose members started competing for popular support among the urban masses, thus enlarging the domain of the political to include, at least, a segment of the subjects, the Muslim *re'aya*, and increasing the attraction of populist ideas.

Kadızade and his followers were very critical of the janissaries, who deposed Osman II in 1622 and continued to play a central role on the political stage during the early years of Murad IV's reign when the sultan was still a teenager. Up to 1632, the pulse of the streets in the imperial capital remained under the control of the

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5 While these mosques had segregated sections for women, Muslim women were not required to attend Friday prayers according to, at least, Hanafi interpretation of the law.

members of the central military corporations. The dynamics started changing in 1632 when Murad IV—now twenty years old—started to take the reins of power into his own hands. Thus, Kadızade's sermon in the introduction of this study that advised social discipline was responding to Murad IV's desire to take the imperial capital under discipline.

The egalitarian and solemn voice of the Kadızadelis provided a double blessing for the imperial authority. They mediated the potentially disastrous impact of the growing income gap between the Muslim grandees and the Muslim masses by emphasizing the equality of all Muslims in the eyes of God, on the one hand, and by elevating all Muslims over all non-Muslims, on the other. Muslims were called to avoid both enchanted Sufis, who offered privileged access to the Divine, and Christians and Jews, who refused to see the supposed superiority of Islam. At the same time, by targeting the military corporations that frequently challenged the authority of the sultan, the Kadızadelis strengthened the public image of the imperial political authority. Their ideas might have even played a role in the end of the practice of the *devşirme*, that is, the collection of Christian boys to be educated and trained as future members of the Ottoman ruling class.

Another important legacy of the Kadızadelis was to anchor Sunni Islam in a textual rationalism that rejected mystical inspiration as a source of knowledge. Instead of the path of the enchanted Sufis that carried the promise of special access to secret knowledge, Kadızadelis preached Birgivi's *Muhammadan Path* according to which knowledge was accessible to all in the Qur'an, the Prophet's sayings, and texts produced by well-respected Muslim scholars that interpret the Scripture. Thus, Sunni Islam was centered on a textual rationalism, moving away from an inspirational conviction.

10.3 Conclusion

After re-emphasizing the connection between the ideas of Muslim reformation Kadızade popularized, thus contributing to the formation of an urban political domain, with the larger socio-economic and political context of the early modern Ottoman Empire, I will conclude by thinking through some questions on the history of secularism and the status of non-Muslims in the empire that I could not adequately draw attention above.

The social basis of early modernity in the Ottoman Empire was upward mobility and urbanization that were brought about by the monetarization of the Ottoman economy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The upwardly mobile Muslim merchants and craftsmen succeeded in breaking the barriers of the administrative ruling class that had been reserved to the slaves of the sultan

who were recruited from among the Christian populations of the empire and converted to Islam. In contrast to the First Empire, in which the members of the ruling elite were distinguished by their ethno-religious backgrounds from the Muslim population, the Second Empire gradually came to present a principally Muslim-born ruling class for the masses. This combination of upward mobility and the expansion of the political nation, however, was pregnant with social tensions as most Muslims could not be as fortunate as their financially astute fellow believers. Thus, it became more important than ever to consolidate a collective identity that could connect the demographic majority with the ruling class and mediate socio-political tensions.

Sunni Islam served a new function in this new dispensation: with its egalitarian message, it was the perfect glue for the Second Empire. And yet, one could not project a society in which social class did not matter with two different registers of Truth, one of which was reserved for the elite. By targeting medieval Sufi ideas and practices that could be tainted with an intellectual elitism and supposedly re-creating the ancient experience of Islam, which is marked by the egalitarianism of the companions of the Prophet, with a populist discourse that made a strong case for epistemological egalitarianism, early modern Muslim reformers like Kadızade created a seemingly leveled playing field for all Muslims. While the military disaster that followed the Ottoman Siege of Vienna (1683) pushed the followers of Kadızade to the side, they had already prepared the ground for the surge of the Mujaddidi branch of the Naqshbandi order which reached Istanbul from India through a Bukharan sheikh in 1681 (Abu-Manneh 2013, 1–25).

As I discuss elsewhere, the ascetic, legalistic, and epistemologically egalitarian idiom that the Kadızadelis developed continued to be influential in the representation of Islam during the eighteenth century and even found its way to the first modern primers on Islam in the nineteenth century (Tezcan 2022; Tezcan Forthcoming 1). This reformed, disenchanted Islam also articulated itself in the crystallization of Maturidi theology as an almost strictly rationalist approach to the interpretation of religious questions in the eighteenth century. Not surprisingly, this approach was foreshadowed in Birgivi's *Muhammadan Path* and developed by mostly Naqshbandi authors (Bruckmayr 2011; Kalaycı 2016, 205–221). Perhaps also not surprisingly, this reformed, disenchanted, and rationalist Islam proved to be not as open to pluralism as its medieval enchanted version used to be. Thomas Bauer is, thus, correct in arguing that modern Islam is much less ambiguity tolerant than its pre-modern self; yet rather than European rationalism, as he would like to suggest, it was the early modern disambiguation of Islamic theology in the Islamic world that produced modern Islam (Bauer 2011).

Rather conveniently, neither the Kadızadelis nor their Naqshbandi successors focused on the question of endowments in cash as they themselves and some of

their key social allies, such as non-janissary merchants, were benefitting from them. Clearly, an egalitarian epistemology that alluded to an egalitarian social order was one thing; actually attacking the institutions that privileged owners of capital and thus sustained a society built around socio-economic privilege was another.

Going back to the theme of empires and religions, I would suggest that Islam served the Ottoman Empire rather well during the periods of its foundation, expansion, and transformative consolidation. The more open-ended understanding of Islam that was prevalent during the first hundred fifty years facilitated the political cooperation of a diverse range of historical actors without much hindrance and witnessed the development of such creative practices as the *devşirme*, which has no place in the *sharī'a*.

After the conquest of Constantinople, the Ottomans continued to expand during the era of the First Empire. They also paid a lot of attention to establish a legal framework that would encompass the whole empire. In order to accomplish the latter, they solidified the *ilmiye*, or the educational, judicial, and legal hierarchy of Muslim scholars, in such a way that the resulting edifice looked not very different from an imperial Church in the sense of an institution that had the ultimate authority on the definition of the correct belief. This was an inevitable byproduct of establishing a judicial hierarchy that followed the same interpretation of the law all over the empire because the Hanafi law, which the Ottomans established a monopoly of interpretation in through the *ilmiye* hierarchy, also pertained to matters of belief. Modern scholars of Islam often emphasize the fact that the Church as an institution of final authority in faith is foreign to Islam. Yet the centralization of religious authority in the person of the Ottoman Grand Mufti, or *şeyhülislam*, and the strict hierarchy of the *ilmiye* came very close to an Ottoman Church that the Ottoman emperors closely supervised, not unlike the Byzantine example of Caesaropapism (for the problems embedded in the usage of this term, cf. Preiser-Kapeller, this volume). Once such a legalistic interpretation of Islam was imperially sponsored, it became difficult to make room for singing and whirling in Ottoman places of communal worship.

As I discusss elsewhere in some detail, the age of the Second Empire witnessed many rebellious moments during which some Ottoman jurists turned the tables around and cooperated with political actors who held military power, exerting their legal authority on the emperors, sometimes authorizing their depositions (Tezcan 2010). It was in between such moments that the populist reformation ideas of the Kadızadelis were coopted by the imperial authority. After witnessing the regicide of his older brother Osman II in 1622 and having to acquiesce to further demands of the Janissaries, Murad IV embraced Kadızade in the early 1630s when he moved to execute strict measures of social discipline. Mehmed IV elevated

Vani Mehmed, who is regarded as the leader of third generation Kadızadelis, to positions of religious authority in the late seventeenth century after witnessing the regicide of his own father İbrahim in 1648.

While we do not witness the same intensity of debates around questions of Islamic belief in the eighteenth century, a list of preachers at the Aya Sofya makes it clear that Sufi sheikhs who sang and whirled were no longer receiving appointments there (Tezcan 2019a, 236–237). The public representation of Sunni Islam under imperial patronage became much more sober after the Populist Reformation of the Kadızadelis that taught Ottoman emperors how to secure popular support in times of trouble.

One would be justified in asking whether there were any seeds of secularism in the Populist Reformation I outlined in this chapter. I would suggest that the Ottoman political authority could be considered as secular as the Caesaropapism of the Eastern Roman Empire: the political authority had a certain degree of control over the *ilmiye* hierarchy but at the same time had to respect the legal-religious authority of that institution. The western European historical experience of secularism grew out of a political sphere in which the Catholic Church was an independent actor in the aftermath of the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. Since there never was an independent and powerful Muslim institution of faith that stood over Muslim kings, thus inspiring some of them to create alternatives to it and ultimately producing multiple institutions of faith each one of which stood equidistant to political authorities, the history of secularism in the Islamic world followed a different path. In order to chart the course of that path, it might be useful to start with using a term that would shed some light on that path in the first place. My own suggestion in this regard is to write a history of the concepts of "worldly" and "religious" in Islamic history and literature that might eventually bring us to a local history of the secular in the Islamic world (Tezcan 2019b; Tezcan Forthcoming-2).

Regardless of their differing histories of secularism, both Europe and the Islamic world seem to have gone through a relatively more enchanted experience with the divine during the Middle Ages. While the contours of Christian and Muslim reformations might be quite different in some regards, they both had a disenchanting effect on their respective followers who came to question some of their medieval practices and reformed themselves with a view to experience their faith in the way they imagined the founders of their respective religions did. Rulers who allied themselves with such reformers in the early modern era consolidated their political authority by finding new avenues to secure popular support for their rule just around the time when new social forces were challenging the political privileges of both the European nobility and the Ottoman ruling class.

In the long term, the crucial difference between the European path to secularism and the Ottoman version of Caesaropapism proved to be the absence of multiple institutions of Muslim faith that could have the same standing vis-à-vis the political authority. The Ottoman imperial political authority (and, following it, the Turkish republican political authority), for instance, never acknowledged *kızılbaş* Islam, which evolved to modern Alevi faith, as a religious entity in equal standing to Sunni Islam. To this day, Turkish political authorities do not recognize Alevi places of worship as places of worship and the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, the contemporary version of a "Turkish Sunni Muslim Church" in the sense of a hierarchical institution that dictates the "correct" version of Sunni Islam for Turks, almost exclusively serves the Sunni Muslim majority and continues to define Sunni Islam in the same textually rationalist way that the Kadızadelis had come to define it in the early modern era.

The fact that the Ottoman imperial (and, later, Turkish republican) state only recognized one version of Islam did not leave much room for non-Muslims, either. Of course, this is not unique to the Ottoman historical experience. Non-Christians in Europe did not fair any better in the early modern era. Yet, one might argue that the Populist Reformation of the Kadızadelis and the concomitant expansion of the political sphere to include urban Muslim masses had a negative impact on the lives of non-Muslims. As I pointed out elsewhere (Tezcan 2011), Muslim and non-Muslim subjects shared the status of being the *re'aya* of the sultan during the First Empire. During the Second Empire, however, the term *re'aya* gradually came to apply to non-Muslim subjects of the empire exclusively while Muslim subjects came to be noted as Muslims, denoting their shared collective identity with the ruling class at the head of which stood the "Emperor of Islam," or *padishah-ı İslam*, a title that Ottoman sultans came to use more often during the Second Empire. The representation of Christian-born subjects in the ruling class through the institution of *devşirme* first became less common and eventually came to a complete halt during the Second Empire that came to be marked by a predominantly Muslim-born ruling class. Thus, mediating socio-political class differences through a collective identity defined by religion during the Second Empire pushed non-Muslim Ottomans away from the ruling class. Even though the Ottoman political leadership worked hard to change these dynamics with the New Order of the nineteenth century, the combination of European imperialism with ethnic nationalism made it impossible for them to succeed.

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11 Religion and Politics in the Mughal Empire of India

11.1 Introduction

Conform to widespread and longstanding belief, the early modern Muslim world "was a liberal paradise compared with Europe" (Harari 2017, 197). Today we have the new field of Mughal cultural historiography to present us with a picture of the religious conditions in the Mughal empire of India [1526–1540; 1556–1707/ 1857] that does look positively benign in comparison. According to Rajeev Kinra, a representative and brilliant practitioner of this new field, the Mughal era was a time when the Mughal emperors set themselves up as the greatest patrons in the world of Indo-Persian literary and intellectual traditions which extended across South, Central and West Asia, and their patronage lured an extraordinary number of intellectuals from all over this cosmopolitan ecumene to Delhi, Agra, Lahore, and other cultural centers where they engaged in a vast trans-regional conversation with their Indian counterparts (Kinra 2013, 2015). This Mughal openness to complex and unorthodox views had a correlate in the flourishing respect during this period for multiple classical religious and intellectual traditions— Indic, Islamicate, Persianate, Turko-Mongol, Greco-Hellenic—"even while there was also a powerful sense of epochal newness in the air," and "Mughal culture and politics thus rested on a dual sense of both continuity with the great classical traditions of the old world and the equally strong belief that by integrating these cultural streams into a composite world view, safeguarded by Mughal power, they were crafting an empire of unprecedented dynamism, social harmony and 'absolute civility' (*sulh-i kull*)" (Kinra 2013, 253). All this, Kinra elaborates, does not mean that there was never any religious tension, chauvinism, or persecution in seventeenth-century Mughal India, but "we are talking of completely different orders of magnitude in comparison with Europe" (Kinra 2013, 259–260). What was central to the Mughal attitude to diversity and their "efforts at institutionalized pluralism" was what became known early in Akbar's reign [1556–1605] as *sulh-i kull*, often translated as "peace with all" or "absolute peace" and rendered as "absolute civility" by Kinra (Kinra 2013, 261). This core attitude flourished during Akbar's reign as much as in subsequent reigns, and Kinra warns that we should not follow scholars who want to suggest that the post-1605 period ushered in an ominous return to an Islamic political culture of exclusion. Mughal religious tolerance and the "Mughal approach to handling diversity" can be favorably contrasted with

contemporary European attitudes of the Reformation throughout the reigns of the Mughal emperors from Akbar to Alamgar [1556–1707].

This article attempts to advance a more complex, nuanced, and in some respects starkly different view of Mughal imperial religion and attitudes towards religion. The Mughal empire was the last and, for good reasons, the most celebrated Islamic empire to arise on Indian soil. Originating in the early sixteenth century, it accommodated an almost infinite range of local cults of rulers and deities and religious sects. Like many empires in history, it certainly was, on one level, a successful multi-cultural and multi-religious political formation. At the same time, it will be argued here, the Mughal empire presided over an epochal but slow religious transformation that sought to overcome these conditions of cultural and religious pluralism. This was the continuation of a crossover from old pagan beliefs and religious cults to the monotheistic religion of Islam, a process that had a parallel in the crossover to Christianity and Islam in the Mediterranean and Europe but began much later and was never completed.

11.2 Conflicting Views on Mughal Imperial Religion and Attitudes Towards Religion

To be sure, it is not particularly difficult to find a broad range of statements by European travelers to Mughal India that convey the message that "Here every man hath libertie to professe his owne religion freely" (Terry 1968, 315). But, equally, it is not difficult to find statements by other, or even the same, European travelers that suggest the Mughal emperors were not able to guarantee such liberty in many places. The Jesuit Father Monserrate, for instance, wrote this about the dangers of traveling in Mughal India that beset Christians, even under Akbar, the most "tolerant" of all Mughal emperors: "To Musalmans the mere name of Christian or Frank is horrible and hateful. Hence they are easily induced to put Christians to death" (Hoyland 1922, 186). It was observed by the Jesuits that emperor Jahangir [1605–1627], upon his accession, moved without delay to crush the political ambitions of the collateral branches of the Mughal dynasty—by imprisoning, banishing and publicly degrading the sons and grandsons of his late uncle Mirza Muhammad Hakim, and by converting his three minor nephews to Christianity. A Christian convert prince evidently could not aspire to the Mughal throne and was politically marginalized, and indeed rendered irrelevant.

At other times, Monserrate and others suggest the "official" attitude to religious liberty in Mughal India was not so much the result of an attitude of toleration as a deeper-rooted indifference to religion, in particular Islam, on the part of

the emperors personally. Thus, Monserrate cannot hide his disappointment when his efforts to convert Akbar to Christianity came to nothing, commenting bitterly that the emperor "cared little that in allowing everyone to follow his own religion he was in reality violating all religions" (Hoyland 1922, 142). The charge of religious indifference was especially often directed at Jahangir. Thomas Coryat wrote about Jahangir that he does not like "those that change their religion; hee himselfe beeing of none but his own making and therefore suffers all religions in his kingdom" (Coryat 1968, 280). Sir Thomas Roe, the English ambassador at Jahangir's court, wrote about the same emperor: "Jahangir... the present King ... never circumcised, bread up without any religion at all ... is an Atheist. Sometyme he will make profession of a Moore: but always observe the holidayes, and doe all the Ceremonyes with the Gentilles too. Hee is Content with all religions, only hee loues none that Changeth" (Foster 1909, II, 313–314). The Venetian traveler Niccolao Manucci did not think much of the Islamic religion of the Mughals in general, observing that they "have an easy method of devotion, consisting in visits to tombs great and small, in order to obtain what they are in need of" (Manucci 2005, II, 13). In the early nineteenth century, Charles Masson recorded the received opinion that "Mogals and Patans were irreligious" and apparently had always been considered so (Masson 1997–2001, I, 386).

The religious record of the Mughal emperors is indeed often inconsistent, and erratic. Babur, the first of the Mughal emperors [1526–1530], described himself as a practicing Muslim, be he is quite frank about his own Islamic deficiencies, and he is not overly concerned with Hindu paganism. Neither are his successors Humayun [1530–1540/1556] and Akbar. The latter is described by contemporaries early in his career as an "unsurpassed adherent of God's words and an extirpator of polytheists" (Beveridge 1979, II, f. 171). But the later Akbar is presented in Mughal chronicles as the emperor who suspended the practice of forced conversion of Hindus and abolished the Hindu pilgrimage tax and the Islamic poll tax (none of which measures appear to have been actually enforced prior to him). Akbar is depicted by the historian Badauni as an apostate who began moving away from Islam after his half-brother Mirza Muhammad Hakim died in 1580 and ceased to be a potential focus of orthodox revolt. Emperor Jahangir acted against the Muslim religion in every way he could—by not observing the fast, by drinking wine, and eating pork—so much so that his grandson Alamgir [1658–1707] later declared him an infidel (Manucci 2005, 206), and Bernier concluded he had the utmost contempt for the laws of the Quran and admired Christianity (Bernier 1989, 287). Yet, Jahangir himself sought to establish his good Islamic credentials. By his own testimony, he engaged in "holy war" against the infidel Rana of Mewar, abstained from "wine on Fridays," patronized Mecca pilgrims, ordered the Quran translated into Persian, and excoriated the "worthless religion of the Hindus" and the Sikh guru

Arjun who "was regarded a saint even by ignorant and foolish followers of Islam" (Rogers 1989, I, 16, 72, 254).

Among Muslim religious cadres, meanwhile, no tradition celebrating the climate of religious tolerance of Mughal India ever took hold. To the contrary, here we consistently find denunciations of the poor state of Islam in the Indian subcontinent as compared with that of *Mā warā' an-nahr* or Transoxania. This tradition is first recorded by the emperor Babur. As Babur observed, "ever since the time of the Prophet, no province has been known to have produced so many leaders of Islam as Mā warā' an-nahr" (Babur 1993, f. 44b). Babur writes that Samarkand became Muslim during the time of Caliph ʿUthmān [644–656], and that one of the Companions of the Prophet went there, and that when his own great ancestor Timur Beg made Samarkand his capital it became a city where "people are all Sunnis and orthodox followers of the religious law," while the Timurid capital of Herat became the other great "city of Islam" (*shahr-i-islām*) (Babur 1993, 44b, 169b). No such cities are mentioned by Babur in Hindustan, and no such "leaders of Islam" reported by him to have emerged from its soil. To the contrary, Babur loathed Hindustan and everything in it, including the many deviant forms of Islam he encountered there and which he thought he could identify with meticulous precision in his descriptions of his encounters with "good, orthodox Muslims" which he takes care to distinguish from "Muslims who have taken on infidel customs" or "deviated somewhat" from "true Islam" or were "half Muslims."

A century after Babur, the Naqshbandi Sufi theologian Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi was still so conscious of the indebtedness of Indian Muslims to the *ʿulamāʾ* of Mā warā' an-nahr that he metaphorically speaks of India as the "lower country" as opposed to Mā warā' an-nahr as the "upper country" (Friedmann 2000, 69). This perception would not change. Even as late as the early nineteenth century, Mountstuart Elphinstone observed that Afghan mullas would travel to Bukhara for study, or, if that were impossible, to Peshawar, but that "India has no great reputation for [Islamic] learning" (Elphinstone 1992, I, 250). Back in the heyday of Mughal power, Sirhindi was merely the most outspoken of a chorus of critics of Indian Islam. "One of the tyrants of our age," he wrote of Akbar, "has tortured many ʿulamāʾ because of their strict compliance with the shariʿa and their unflinching obedience to the prophets. The situation is so bad that the name of Muhammad is not being mentioned at the royal court, and persons bearing it have adopted other names. The tyrant has forbidden the sacrifice of the cow, which is one of the most important rites of Islam in India. He has demolished mosques and has honored pagan temples; the customs of the infidels have been disseminated and their laws translated into Persian with the aim of the obliteration of Islam in view" (Friedmann 2000, 33–34). The miserable state of Islam in India in general, according to Sirhindi, was due to "the remoteness of the prophetic period [and] the

study of the science of philosophy and the books of the Indian sages." It was not just Akbar's fault. Sirhindi's description of the condition of Islam during the reign of Jahangir, produced between 1616/17 and 1618/19, was as gloomy as his description of that of Akbar's reign (Friedmann 2000, 82).

11.3 Religious Reform

There is other evidence to show that, in important respects, imperial Mughal attitudes towards religion changed over time. The more dominant the Timurid-Mughal dynasty became, the more these attitudes appear to have become infused with a reformist agenda, and in particular Mughal attitudes towards Hinduism changed decisively in the course of the seventeenth century, even when more and more Hindus came under Mughal imperial rule and entered the apparatus of government, often on honorable and lucrative terms. Partly also as a result of the Mughals' deepening engagement with Hinduism on a theological level, increasingly self-conscious assertions about the superiority of Islam began to be made with increasing frequency. It can be shown that the Mughal imperial regime was indeed pluralistic and tolerant to a degree but that it also aimed, and successfully so, to set the terms for an ever more uniform Sunni Islamic culture that was sharply at odds with this pluralism and respect for diversity. There are some striking parallels here with the increasing emphasis on the institutions and practices of Sunni Islam within the Ottoman empire in broadly the same period, as described by Baki Tezcan elsewhere in this volume.

Although there is no question that the Mughal government did not normally interfere in the Hindu caste system, there were, in effect, attempts to reform Hinduism and undermine the power of the brahmans. Thus, it increasingly turned against the Hindu practice of widow burning, and ultimately did prohibit it entirely. This infamous practice was known as *sati* and it had become widespread in the medieval centuries among caste Hindus. It was uniquely Indian, although perhaps not without parallels elsewhere. The unfortunate women who were burnt as witches in medieval and early modern Europe were most commonly widows as well, or women who never married—as in India, these were especially vulnerable because they were regarded as susceptible to demonic temptation.

In any case, the burning of women with their dead husbands, either "voluntary" or "involuntary," was quite common in the entire Indic realm—under the medieval Indo-Islamic rulers and even more so under the independent Rajas (of which there were hundreds) as well as in the great Hindu empire of Vijayanagara [1336–1565] in the south. Some Indo-Islamic rulers attempted to suppress it from an early date. We read of a temporarily successful prohibition of *sati* under Sultan

Sikandar Butshikan of Kashmir [1389–1413]. That prohibition was lifted, however, by his son Sultan Zain al-Abidin [1420–1470], as part of a negotiated agreement with the brahmans of the valley that he would not interfere in their customs and sectarian marches—which seems to be an indication of how difficult it was to suppress (De 1996, 652).

The first description of an attempt by a Mughal emperor to prevent involuntary *sati* comes from the *Akbarnama*, in the twenty-eighth year of Akbar's reign (Beveridge 1979, III, f. 402). It is stated elsewhere that Akbar forbade involuntary *sati* (Blochmann 1977, I, 216). It appears that, as a result of Akbar's prohibition, involuntary *sati* became a regulated practice for a long time, requiring permission from the Mughal governors, who demanded a steep fee for such permission. We read that the governors of the Mughal empire as well as the coeval Deccan Sultanates attempted to dissuade requests of voluntary *sati*, but "were not allowed to refuse these requests" and "the right to burn wives could be purchased" (Moreland and Geyl 1925, 178; Bowrey 1997, 39). In Agra, under Jahangir, it still commonly occurred in either form two or three times a week, according to Francisco Pelsaert (Moreland and Geyl 1925, 78). All European visitors describe at length, and claim to have witnessed, at least one voluntary widow burning themselves and comment on its widespread prevalence. Thomas Bowrey wrote that on the Coromandel coast in the 1670s the practice was still most common among Nayakas and Rajas but not half as much in the Muslim-governed parts (Bowrey 1997, 39). According to Giovanni Careri, "the Mahometans do not consent easily to this inhumanity...which brahmans uphold because they can carry off the gold [of the women's ornaments]...but wives of the Rajpouts cannot avoid it...if they have no male issue...and are forced (Sen 1949, 250). Jean de Thevenot has it that "the women are happy that the Mahometans are become the masters of the Indies, to deliver them from the tyranny of the Bramens...who desire their deaths because of their ornaments...Now it requires permission from governors and considerable presents"(Sen 1949, 120). Towards the end of the seventeenth century, we read in Manucci, "Aurangzeb issued an order that in all lands under Mogol control never again should the officials allow a woman to be burnt" (Manucci 2005, II, 90). This order appears to have remained in force. And the Muslim rulers of the Deccan, if they did not forbid it outright, appear to have been no less averse to the practice; an anonymous writer asserts that among them *sati* "is not permitted where Muslims are numerous...and is sometimes prevented" (Sen 1949, 1). In the province of Kandahar, we read, "the King of Persia suffers not the Gentiles there to burn themselves when their husbands are dead" (Sen 1949, 79). Pires still describes *sati* as a custom of "the heathens and not the Moors of Java" and which disappeared from Java under Muslim rule, whereas the Dutch still encountered it in Hindu Bali in the nineteenth century (Pires 1990, I, 176, 198; Reid 1988–1993, II, 165). It thus appears that not only the

imperial Mughal regime but the early modern Indo-Islamic regimes everywhere worked to terminate the practice of widow burning, and that they achieved at least a modicum of success in this.

Imperial interference in Hindu religious life went well beyond this. While there is no denying that some of the Mughal emperors set themselves up as patrons of Indian literature (Sanskrit and vernacular), there is some indication that the intentional physical destruction of Hindu sacred manuscripts was not uncommon in Mughal India either. To be sure, there is no evidence of a Diocletian type of effort to systematically destroy *all* Hindu sacred literature under Mughal rule. But there may have been widespread concealment of manuscripts to prevent their destruction. In a revealing passage, François Bernier explains how he searched for copies of the Vedic texts but turned up empty handed even though he was willing to pay for them, because "the Gentiles indeed conceal them with much care, lest they should fall into the hands of the Muhammadans, and be burnt, as frequently has happened" (Bernier 1989, 335–336). It may be speculated that Hindu sacred texts were not often burnt or otherwise destroyed because they were so carefully hidden and that they would often, or at least more often, have been destroyed if they had not been hidden. However, Bernier is our only source for this, and it is not enough to reach a final conclusion on the subject.

The same cannot be said about Hindu icons and temples, which can easily be demonstrated to have suffered a great deal under Mughal rule. Islamic iconoclasm and temple destruction was unmistakably on the increase in the Mughal period of Indian history, and unlike book manuscripts only some movable icons and very few temples could be hidden from the iconoclasts. In itself, of course, iconoclasm was nothing new in India, and probably all Indo-Islamic rulers engaged in it at least occasionally. Notwithstanding recent attempts to argue otherwise (Eaton 2000), Islamic iconoclasm always manifested itself as a phenomenon with both a political and a religious or theological dimension, and it was not sporadic but widespread. It was, also, not only a phenomenon of the political frontier or the frontier of conquest, and never a mere tactical manoeuver. We have considerable evidence of such Islamic iconoclasm or temple and "idol" destruction in many parts of India from early medieval times onwards, while it did indeed occur on a very wide scale during the Ghaznavid conquests in the eleventh century. We have blanket orders issued by Muslim rulers to destroy the temples of entire regions, which appear to have been carried out at least partly, from as early as the fifteenth century in Gujarat and Kashmir (Wink 1990–2004, II, 160–161 and note 241). Among the Indo-Afghan rulers, Sikandar Lodi [489–1517] acquired a special reputation as a prolific destroyer of Hindu temples. All Mughal emperors from Babur to Alamgir engaged in it, even those who are described as patrons of the arts and painting, and notwithstanding their simultaneous material support for Hindu

religious institutions elsewhere. Babur describes himself as an "enemy of idols" and, on the eve of his conquest of Hindustan, as filled with "a desire to break idols," and enthusiastically doing so on multiple occasions. Some temples were converted into mosques in the reign of Humayun. Among Indo-Islamic rulers, Akbar has the unique distinction of having ordered the reconversion of a mosque to a Hindu temple which had earlier been destroyed. But even Akbar, in his early career, after the conquest of Chitor in 1568, reportedly "destroyed temples in those places and all over Hindustan" (Wink 2009, 89). The chronicles of Akbar's reign mention an excessive hatred of "idolatry" among some of his officials, and how this hatred was released into the demolition of "rich temples." It is nothing unusual to find Akbar's court historian Abu-l-Fazl praising the emperor's celebrated Hindu finance minister Todar Mal, but dismissing the latter at the same time as a"simpleton" on account of his worship of "idols." Still under Akbar, Father Monserrate observed with approval the Muslims' destruction of Hindu "idols," but felt they should do more of it. Subsequently it is only occasionally mentioned under Jahangir. But it picked up dramatically under Shah Jahan. As the *Shahjahannama* makes clear:"In 1632–1633…Shah Jahan raised the standard of Islam over that abode of the infidels and commenced subverting the temples of their idols…It has been previously represented that there were some of the finest Hindu temples in Varanasi. In former reigns, the foundations of many new ones had been laid, some of which had been completed, while others still remained in an imperfect state; and these the opulent among the pagans were desirous of seeing finished. The infidel-consuming monarch, who is the guardian of true religion, had therefore commanded that at Varanasi and throughout the entire imperial dominions, wherever idol-temples had been recently built, they should be razed to the ground. Accordingly, in these days it was reported from the province of Allahabad that seventy had been demolished in Varanasi alone" (Begley 1990, 89–90).

Such a prohibition of the construction of new temples throughout a ruler's realm is unprecedented in Indo-Islamic history. Shah Jahan, furthermore, is on record for having demolished some very old temples, in Kashmir for instance, for no particular fault of the inhabitants of the region (who were moreover Muslims). Yet it was under his successor Alamgir that the destruction of Hindu temples reached an all-time high. Even if we allow for some considerable rhetorical exaggeration in the sources, the evidence is just too overwhelming for this to be plausibly denied. European sources give it as much attention as Indo-Islamic and Indian vernacular sources of all description. Even then, the destruction was not systematic or complete in any way. As Manucci makes clear,"although Alamgir [Aurangzeb] destroyed numerous temples, there does not fail to be many left at different places, both in his empire and in the territories subject to the tributary princes. All of them are thronged with worshipers; even those that are destroyed are still vener-

ated by the Hindus…" (Manucci 2005, III, 232). Among the most famous temples destroyed by Alamgir we count the great Keshava Rai temple of Mathura and the Vishwanath temple at Varanasi. Countless others were destroyed especially in Rajasthan, Sind and Thatta. In the latter areas, Alamgir was also financing the maintenance of other Hindu temples and hermitages at the same time (Mukhia 2004, 26; Datta 1962). There is no contradiction in this. What mattered was the direction of the process, and that it retained momentum.

11.4 Monotheism vs. Paganism

While this was going on, we are confronted with ever higher levels of anti-Hindu rhetoric in the sources as a means to extol the Islamic virtue of the Mughal rulers. At the court of Jahangir, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's critique of Hinduism was unsurpassed (Friedmann 2000, 72–73). In a scornful and devastating attack, Sirhindi wrote that the honor of Islam demanded the humiliation of the infidels and their false religion, that the poll tax (*jiziya*) should be mercilessly taken from them, and that they should be treated like dogs, while cows had to be slaughtered to demonstrate the superiority of Islam, and that Islam and infidelity are two irreconcilable opposites. Not to be outdone, the *Shahjahannama* praises Shah Jahan routinely as the "infidel consuming monarch," and devotes an entire chapter to the "Manifestation of Signal Marks of Justice and Regard for the True Faith of Islam on the Part of the Emperor, the Bulwark of Religious Law" (Begley 1990, 139). An anti-Hindu climax is reached between 1678 and 1679, when Alamgir imposed a discriminatory fiscal policy by introducing the *jiziya* poll tax and other levies on the Hindus. Pious to a fault, and prone to fits of excessive devotion, Alamgir, in the words of Tavernier, became known for his "Sunni zeal, of which he is so faithful a follower that he surpasses all his predecessors in external observance of the Law, which has been the veil by means of which he has concealed his usurpation of the kingdom…insisting upon the Law of Muhammad being observed in all its strictness, as it had been relaxed during the reigns of Shahjahan and Jahangir" (Ball and Crooke n. d., II, 139). "All the aims of the religious emperor," according to a contemporary Indo-Persian source,"were directed to the spreading of the law of Islam and the overthrow of the practices of the infidels" (Sarkar 1947, 108).

　The theological engagements between Muslims and Hindus led to assertions of the superiority of Islam on a more rarefied level, but no less decisively. Early in the sixteenth century, the view first took hold at the Mughal court that Hinduism had core beliefs that resonated with Islam. Akbar, for some time, became quite pre-occupied with this issue and made it the subject of extensive debate. But it was around the middle of the seventeenth century, under the patronage of Shah Ja-

han's eldest son Dara Shukoh [1615–1659], that investigations into Hinduism took a decisive turn (Faruqui 2014). Dara Shukoh commissioned or encouraged the translation into Persian of certain Vedantic texts, most importantly the Yogavasishta and the Upanishads. Through the exploration of these Hindu texts, Dara Shukoh and his circle came to believe not only that there were elements in Hinduism that were more Islamic than had previously been acknowledged but that Hinduism had monotheistic origins and that scriptures like the Upanishads could offer insights into the Quran and by extension Islamic beliefs (Faruqui 2014, 33, xv). As Munis Faruqui has pointed out, Dara Shukoh thereby challenged the deeply held view that Islam was perfectly self-contained but at the same time sought to strengthen certain core Islamic beliefs (Faruqui 2014, xvi). In his last work, the *Sirr-i Akbar*, Dara Shukoh conclusively made his claim that the Upanishads were the source of all expressions of *tauhid* or monotheism a final time. But this final work of Dara Shukoh can also be read as a call to all Hindu "believers in the unity of God" (*muwahhidān*) and "realizers of truth" (*muhaqqiqān*) to accept their rightful place within the Islamic fold (Faruqui 2014, 50). What is equally revealing is that only the opinion of fellow Muslims appears to have mattered to Dara Shukoh, and that he felt compelled to re-assure them of his commitment to Islam by stating his essential belief that Islam is the best of all religions, and that, through dialogue with the Upanishads, it will emerge theologically stronger than ever in the future (Faruqui 2014, 59). In the words of Supriya Gandhi,"in general, his work reveals a pronounced commitment to the external forms of Islamic orthodoxy and piety, positioned as the dominant religious framework through which he integrates and ultimately subsumes his construction of Indic monotheism" (Gandhi 2014, 70). There were thus clear limits to the Mughal engagement with Hinduism, even in the best of circumstances. What is more, Dara Shukoh engaged only with a group of Hindus whom he calls the "muwahhidān-i-Hind" or "monotheists of India" and whom he regarded as a privileged class of Hindu saints superior to the ordinary Hindus and more like Sufis in their commitment to the affirmation of divine unity, whereas he casually dismisses ordinary Hindus as *kafirs* or "infidels" throughout his writings (Gandhi 2014, 71).

11.5 Sunni and Shi'a

Accompanying the increasing commitment of the Timurid-Mughal dynasty to Sunni Islam as the sole religious legitimation of their rule, there was the inevitable turn against Shi'ism. This is all the more remarkable because the Mughal dynasty had initially embraced it, if mostly per force. Babur had established contact with the Shah of Persia when he merely ruled the small kingdom of Kabul; at that stage

he obtained Persian military support against the Uzbegs, but it was on the condition that he accept the Shi'a tenets—the official religion of Persia—and struck coins and read the khutba in the Shi'a fashion, and donned the Qizilbash dress, including the Shi'a taj. The emerging Mughal dominion was from then on conceived of as an outer extension of the Safawid realm. Both Babur and his son and successor Humayun were formally commissioned by the Persian Shah as amirs of the Safawid empire, with the provision that as long as they maintained this status they would be exempt from Safawid intervention. And in Mughal India the open profession of Shi'a Islam came to be seen as the outward symbol of (a mostly nominal) submission to the Safawid monarch. Moreover, about a third of the Mughal mansabdar corps of high military commanders and office holders eventually came to consist of Persians, and these were disproportionally influential, especially in the administration, and many of them sent their savings home, while generally favoring "their own nation" in India.

It is characteristic of Mughal India, however, that in spite of the increasing presence of Shi'ite Persians in the army and administration, the career of Shi'ism was aborted. The Persian Shah never gave up the claim of suzerainty over the Mughal dynasty, but in 1579 Akbar repudiated this claim by issuing a *mahzar* (sometimes called his "infallibility decree") and proclaiming himself the Sunni head of the Shi'a community in India. After 1579, in Mughal India it was Sunni Islam that stood for a declared independence from Persia, while Shi'a Islam continued to signal some kind of recognition of Persian suzerainty. Irani and Shi'a were often used as synonyms. In Jahangir's time, still, we witness an increasing influence of the Irani element and of Shi'ism among the ruling elite, largely due to the role played by the emperor's wife and regent Nur Jahan, herself of Persian extraction, and for a short while the Twelve Shi'a Imams came to be religiously revered even among Sunni Muslims. But this provoked a sharp backlash from the side of the Sunni Muslims. Again, it was Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi who was in the forefront of the attack against Shi'ism. But he was far from alone. After the reign of Jahangir/Nur Jahan, Shi'ism and the concomitant political allegiance to the Safawid rulers were shunted out and at times even came to occupy a subaltern position. Shah Jahan's son Shah Shuja' made a last-ditch stand for Shi'ism and himself became a Shi'ite in a desperate attempt to attract all the Persians to his cause in his bid for the Mughal throne against his brothers.

With Shah Shuja' eliminated, however, the influence of Shi'ism was completely eclipsed under Alamgir. The Mughal wars against the Shi'a Sultanates of the Deccan gaining momentum at the same time, objections were raised even to the inclusion of the name of the ruling Safawids in the khutbas of Bijapur and Golkonda, and pressure was exerted on these states to formally accept Mughal Sunni overlordship instead. Yet the names of the Safawid kings continued to be recited in the khutbas

of the Deccan Sultans far into the seventeenth century. In particular the Sultans of Golkonda remained closely attached to "the sect of 'Ali," and for this reason, according to Tavernier, writing around 1665,"the Persians, who arrive in India in great numbers to seek their fortunes, prefer to go to the King of Golkonda rather than the Mogul" (Ball and Crooke n. d., I, 139). Many Persians also chose to enter the service of the Shi'a Sultans of Bijapur. Even before the Mughal annexation of these last remaining Deccan Sultanates (Bijapur was conquered in 1686 and Golkonda in 1687), Alamgir successfully banned the public performance of Shi'a rituals among his nobility. As Tavernier recorded in 1669,"although he [Alamgir] had numerous Persians in his service, he did not allow them to celebrate the festival of Hasan and Husayn, sons of Ali, who were killed by Sunnis…and they themselves, to please the Emperor and advance their own fortunes, made no scruple about confirming themselves outwardly to the cult of the Sunnis" (Ball and Crooke n.d., II, 139).

The result of this religious repositioning of the Mughal dynasty is unambiguous: Mughal dynastic legitimacy became unchallenged throughout the subcontinent. If in Babur's time there were still numerous other Muslim and Hindu rulers in India who regarded themselves as sovereign powers in their own right, and if throughout the sixteenth and a large part of the seventeenth century the Deccan Sultans looked at the Shi'a Safawid rulers of Persia as the source of their legitimacy, in the course of the seventeenth century the Timurid-Mughal dynasty gradually advanced itself, and came to be seen by others, as the only true source of sovereignty in the entire subcontinent, until by the later part of Alamgir's reign even the idea of Vijayanagara had ceased to play a role and, after the conquest of Bijapur and Golkonda, even such arch Hindu rebels as the Marathas fought "to protect the Sultan of Taimur."

11.6 Imperial Law?

Did this alignment of the Mughal dynasty with Sunni Islam turn its empire into a theocracy? Did it introduce "Islamic law," or did it "uphold the Sharia"? The argument has often been made that before the British came "law followed religion." According to this argument, the Sharia was the official code of Islamic states, and the Dharmashastra was the official code of Hindu states (Holleman 1981, 8). In British India, this conception was already enthroned by Warren Hastings [Governor-General 1772–1785] during the time of the East India Company in his Plan for the Administration of Justice. If this argument were correct, the Mughal governing structure would have been shackled to an immutable canonical system of law and this would have left little or no room for institutional innovation, especially in the

religious realm. Legal reform would also be ruled out—what with the "gate of ij-tihad (interpretation)" of Islamic law closed since the eleventh century?

But here too the situation is much more ambiguous. To be sure, our written sources do sometimes display a formal regard for what they call Islamic law or *shar'*, i. e. the Sharia. Thus, the *Shahjahannama* asserts unequivocally about Shah Jahan that "if His Majesty orders punishment, he does so in complete accord with Islamic law" (Begley 1990, 571). There is no denying that the constantly pro-fessed love of justice of all Mughal emperors is presented as a reflection of their dynastic commitment to Islam. Indeed, the pursuit of justice was made out to be the essence of Islam. Manucci correctly summarizes this predicament as follows:"-This monarch [Aurangzeb, i. e. Alamgir] is...desirous of appearing a great lover of justice. This is why he said one day that it was a bounden duty of kings to apply themselves unweariedly and painstakingly to the dispensing of equal justice to ev-erybody. For, as he said, this duty and that we owe to God for having devoted us to His sole service are the two principal grounds of action on which should rest the conduct of princes. They owe inviolable fidelity to that Supreme Being, and must work without ceasing for the furtherance of His glory and the propagation of re-ligion...nothing except love of justice and of virtue [also] forced that great prince [Taimur] into the war against Bayazid...[it was] the crisis of the oppressed [that forced him]...the same motives propel me... the fear of [seeing] the Mohamedan religion oppressed in Hindustan if my brother Dara had ascended the throne...see-ing my father ruin the kingdom...and to deliver my subjects from miseries..so now my kingdom is full of noble mosques in place of hideous temples...there are no tav-erns and brothels but congregations of devout men...who proclaim unceasingly the greatness and virtues of God" (Manucci 2005, III, 248–249).

As proof of his commitment to justice and to show that his decisions were just and equal, Alamgir sent every day to walk through the principal square a lion in the company of a goat that had been brought up alongside it from birth (Manucci 2005, II, 416).

And yet European travelers in India are in virtually unanimous agreement that the Mughal emperors were not bound by any written law and, what is more, there was no written law of any kind in Mughal India anywhere. Thus the Flemish geographer, philologist and naturalist Joannes De Laet [1593–1649] ob-served firsthand that "The Emperor of India is an absolute monarch: there are no written laws: the will of the Emperor is held to be law" (Hoyland 1975, 93). And according to Careri, "the Great Mogul is so absolute, that there being no writ-ten Laws, his Will in all things is Law, and the last decision of all causes, both civil and criminal" (Sen 1949, 240). Sir Thomas Roe also wrote that "...They have no writ-ten law...This king is one of the mightiest of Asia...but government so uncertain, without written law" (Foster 1909, I, 110, 120). Manucci has it that in India there

are books of law only in Pegu (northern Burma): "Among all the races of India there is none which has books of laws. But these Burmans [of Pegu] keep books of the ordinances, arguments, sentences, and appeals before the king's tribunal" (Manucci 2005, I, 353). The same author wrote elsewhere: "All the collectors of the crown rents are, during the time they are in office, absolute masters of the province made over to them, and can take cognizance of all disputes, whether regarding civil or criminal questions, even matters relating to religion. In everything they can pass final sentence without appeal, even when the death penalty is involved. Since there is not throughout the empire any written law or ordinance, each one acts as it best pleases him, and puts to death anyone as he thinks fit" (Manucci 2005, III, 46).

These observations are not wrong and they should not come as a surprise. For Mughal governance and the administration of justice evolved within a matrix of customary law, not canonical or prescriptive texts. The formal religious codes always had few practical implications anywhere. In the towns and cities of Mughal India, the reach of the Sharia was mostly felt in the religious sphere —it prescribed sanctions against infractions such as adultery, drunkenness, blasphemy, the consumption of pork, prayer, fasting, and so on—and issues related to marriage and divorce among Muslims (Begley 1990, passim; Sarkar 1947, 73–77; Bowrey 1997, 94; Sen 1949, 26). This was similar to how Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and Zoroastrians applied their own religious or caste codes in the same spheres. In relevant cases advice could be sought from religious experts or clergy, who might or might not consult scripture and whose advice might or might not be acted upon or be allowed to influence decision making. Outside these spheres, the Sharia was an ambiguous system of law, characterized by a high degree of flexibility that allowed it to assimilate local norms and customs, and this ambiguity was always exploited by various social groups who manipulated it to protect their interests (Hasan 2006, 71–72; Ewing 1988). In the important Mughal port city of Surat, as one recent study has demonstrated, what was alleged to be the code of the Sharia was "placed in the arena of local conflicts and struggles" and it was for this reason not even restricted in its application to Muslims alone, but came to be appropriated by all sections of society (Hasan 2006, 72). It was not until the British period that the Sharia was removed from local relations of power and became a rigid system of codified law. Until then it was a tool for vested interests, contested by political elites who treated the *'ulamā'* or theologians with indifference, if they did not ignore them altogether.

Wherever we encounter court of justice, it was the emperor and government officials with delegated authority who passed legal judgements in both civil and criminal cases, ostensibly in accordance with allegation and proof, and these courts might or might not include qazis or "Islamic judges," but if they did the

qazis would always be appointed and dismissed by the government at will (Hoyland 1975, 93; Moreland and Geyl 1925, 57; Sen 1949, 240). To make a famous case in point: when Aurangzeb/Alamgir imprisoned his father Shah Jahan in his palace and seized the Mughal throne for himself, he sought Islamic legitimation for his accession from the chief qazi of the empire; the latter however, refusing to provide such legitimation, was unceremoniously fired and replaced by a newly appointed chief qazi who was lavishly rewarded for providing it in his stead. Francisco Pelsaert is the only European observer in Mughal India who mentions "books of law" which contain such provisions as "hand for hand, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" and which are in the hands of "their lawyers, the Kazis," but disputes, according to Pelsaert, were decided by the payment of bribes, so that poor people could not even get a hearing, since even that required "presents" (Moreland and Geyl 1925, 57). From the king and his godless "un-judges" no mercy or compassion could be had except on payment of cash, and "everyone stands with hands open to receive." As Manucci put it,"neither at court nor in any part of the empire is there any justice; no one thinks of anything but how to plunder. Nor can the king find any remedy" (Manucci 2005, II, 416). The empire was overrun by men whose only profession was to act as false witnesses or to forge signatures. "These wretches assume a most modest attitude and attire, so that they impose upon people. They wear the clothes of penitents, have long beards, hold a chalet constantly in their hand, and as they tell their beads are for ever mumbling a prayer. Such men are greatly in fashion…the whole country is full of the disorder that these hypocrites have sown in families" (Manucci 2005, II, 249).

As Bowrey explains, it was especially difficult for Hindus to obtain fair treatment in Muslim courts because "even a Muhammadan villain in court is believed before others" (Bowrey 1997, 94, 126). The number of Islamic judges or qazis increased over time, especially under Alamgir, who aimed to increase their role in civil administration and affairs of state. In the Mughal empire, they never became a hierarchical, corporate body resembling an organized Church, as they did in the Ottoman empire described by Tezcan in this volume. Instead, they soon became just another interest group, resented by other sections of the nobility and administrative apparatus. On the local level, Islamic judges transformed their offices into hereditary family property and merged with local society (Guha 2013, 71). Islamic law was most often not even a veneer.

Throughout Mughal India, moreover, the joint or extended family household always remained the basic building block of society and the characteristic form of property enjoyment or hereditary rights in land, but the legal foundation of such property rights does not lie in religious law, whether Islamic or Hindu, but again in customary practice. The Islamic Sharia postulates a strictly freehold title to property, bypassing all the normal restrictions of customary or tribal con-

ceptions of property in land. The Hindu Dharmashastra endorses separation and denies birthright in property, while the only form of collective property known to it is the religious endowment. Vernacular sources describe the incumbents of hereditary rights in land as "sharers" of these rights and patrimonial estates. In effect, they were the political community in any given locality. They consisted of the agnatic kin and a certain number of clients or supporters collectively holding landed estates. Their complex sharing arrangements were embedded in a polity of feuding clans and families who were armed and prone to erupt in small-scale violence, and they were guided by customary practices that had the force of law, in other words by customary law, and by political considerations, not by religious law. The political and legal foundations of the state were rooted in exactly the same matrix of clan rule and shared sovereignty in which feuding,"self help" and armed opposition were central and legitimate elements. As is still the case in parts of Pakistan and India today, the arbitration of justice and the law was really politics by other means. The Indo-Pakistani subcontinent in this regard was always similar to many other heavily armed kinship-based societies (Lieven, 2011, 88). And since these kinship groups saw themselves as fundamentally independent sovereign groups, it is logical that the laws that grew out of these societies should resemble traditional international law more than modern national law. Which is to say, again, that justice is an extension of politics by other means, with the threat of violence always in the background (Lieven 2011, 84 ff). The customary legal order, in other words, has always been based more on diplomacy and pressure than on formal rules. Its aim is not so much to punish as to defend or restore collective honor and prestige, the restoration of peace, the maintenance of basic order, and the provision of compensation. It usually aims at compromise. In short, the judicial codes of Mughal India were embedded in a "negotiated state" not a "modern state" (Lieven 2011, 87 ff). As Sumit Guha puts it, "judicial processes functioned in a milieu of chronic small-scale violence as well as periodic outbreaks of war... adjudication was as much a political process directed at restoring balance in local society as a legal one intended to correct objective wrongs" (Guha 2013, 70–71).

11.7 Legal and Political Arenas

Our modern concepts of state, justice and law are fundamentally incompatible with these earlier concepts of Mughal India, as with those of medieval Europe and indeed "all pre-modern forms of political life" (Brunner 1984, 91). Everywhere in the pre-modern (and early modern) world, conflicts over rights and the pursuit of justice were generally carried out in the political arena and could be accompanied by a resort to arms. A great number of feuds was waged by local powers

against their rulers and, when larger groups took part, such feuds were apt to take the form of uprisings or rebellions (Brunner 1984, 92). This kind of "self help" in conflict adjudication was radically de-legitimized by the colonial/modern state of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which introduced the "polity of law" and dismissed the earlier dispensation as symptomatic of disorder, anarchy or chaos, a non-state or the "law of the fist," in contemporary terms a "failed state." But behind this apparent disorder and violence of Mughal India there was a different kind of legal order—a synthesis of justice, rights and law which was associated with the institutions of kingship, kinship and custom, although not without some kind of conception of transcendental, religious or divine justice.

As is to be expected, then, what we might call the "constitutions" of Indo-Islamic states and empires varied a great deal but they had in common that they were based on unwritten customary law, not Islamic law. Prior to the Mughals, and for some time in competition with them, the Afghans or Pashtuns (in India also called Pathans) were the most important empire builders in India—this was the situation between 1451 and 1556 (Wink 2009b). The Afghans' tribal customary law of the *Pashtunwali* was fundamentally at odds with Islamic religious law. Among the Afghans of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries everywhere the tribal ethos clearly took precedence over Islamic belief and practice. As a tribal code, the *Pashtunwali* embraced hospitality, revenge and giving refuge, but most importantly the notion that it was every man's right and duty to do himself justice. Ostensibly followers of Abu Hanifa's Islamic law code, in practice the Afghans routinely violated many precepts of the Sharia, even within the restricted spheres in which it was most often felt elsewhere. They demanded a high bride price, did not allow women to inherit property, refused to intermarry with non-Afghans, killed fellow Muslims, and refused to pay *zakat* (alms) and *ushr* (tithe). Afghan tribalism was ineradicable even by millenarian Islamic movements such as the Raushaniyya revolt, and we do not hear much about Sharia courts under the Indo-Afghan rulers, if at all, and Sharia courts were not established in the urban centers of Afghanistan itself until the rise of the Durrani dynasty in the mid-eighteenth century (in the rural areas they were not introduced until the rise of the Taliban in the final decades of the twentieth century). Afghan and Indo-Afghan society was, in other words, a society of feuding tribes, and even within the tribes there was constant discord about *zan*, *zer* and *zamin* (women, gold and land). The Indo-Muslim historian Abbas Khan Zarwani was therefore entirely correct when he described in his *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi* how internal strife, disunity and feuding—the *mukhalafat-i-Afghanan*—were ineradicable elements of the Afghan way of life and part of the "constitution" of the Indo-Afghan empire.

The "constitution" of the Mughal empire, by contrast, was rooted in the customary law of the Turko-Mongol steppe nomads of Central and Inner Asia. It

was essentially based on the law of the Mongol nomadic war band. Inasmuch as Afghan political systems revolved around the tribal *Pashtunwali*, the Mughals created a system of imperial rule on the basis of customary practices of rule, dynastic succession and princely feuding that went back to the early medieval Turk Qaghanate, and to Chinggis Khan and Timur. Our sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts refer to these and other practices as the "Tora ('Custom') of Chinggis Khan" (*tora'chingīz khān*), or "the custom of Chinggis Khan, the rules of Timur and common usage" (e. g. Rogers 1989, I, 76). It was also widely known as the Mongol *Yasa* (cf. chapter by Michal Biran in this volume). These terms all refer to the same unwritten code of conduct and protocol passed down over the generations and never set aside but constantly adapted at will according to changing circumstances, and in Mughal India it became known as "the Tora of the eternal monarchy" (cf. Alam 2004, 5–8). It was also "the customary practice" of the imperial Mughal dynasty.

This Mongol/Mughal customary law was very different from that of the Afghans. Unlike the mountainous terrain of the medieval Afghans' homeland which fostered fragmentation, the environment of the steppe lands clearly facilitated the introduction of a broad range of hierarchical and ranked distinctions among the nomadic Turko-Mongol lineages and tribes. Here leadership became the hereditary, legitimate and exclusive prerogative of specific charismatic dynasties. The death of a Turko-Mongol steppe ruler set in motion the process of feuding which is known as "bloody tanistry," a means to ensure succession and the survival of the fittest member of the royal dynasty by warfare and assassination. In short, if more or less autonomous tribes remained at the core of Afghan politics, the survival and success of Turko-Mongol imperial dynasties continued to be tied to succession struggles and princely feuding that would snowball into rebellion and "civil war" (Wink 1986; Faruqui 2012). The Turko-Mongol nomads of the steppe produced hereditary imperial dynasties like the Mughals of India with extraordinarily effective powers of resource mobilization but no formal system of succession. Yet it would be wrong to regard princely feuding and the "institutionalized dissidence" that was built into Mughal imperial rule as a deficiency. It was the "constitutional" foundation of the system and guaranteed an incorporative dynamism that underwrote the success of the empire as a whole.

11.8 Dynastic Succession

Once in India, the Timurids/Mughals became intensely pre-occupied with the continuity of their dynasty and the need to safeguard it in perpetuity by making adjustments to the old Turko-Mongol customary practice of tanistry—essentially an

elaboration of the open system of hereditary succession to the throne which they brought from the nomadic steppes but adapted to the different and evolving circumstances they found in India (Faruqui 2012). Under the first two Mughal emperors, in the period between Babur's conquest of Kabul in 1504 and the end of Humayun's reign in 1556, the early Central-Asian inspired corporate-style clan dynasty still invested power across te entire Mughal family. This system allowed any male of the extended Mughal family to compete for political power and it entitled each adult family member of a ruler to some share of the Mughal patrimony as well as to enjoy relative political independence. Thus, following Chaghatay-Turkish and Timurid political traditions of customary law, Babur granted his sons semi-independent and semi-permanent princely appanages or territorial holdings, while at the same time initiating efforts to limit the number of individuals within the Timurid extended family who might succeed him.

Humayun still accommodated himself to the same customary sharing arrangements of the steppe nomads but began to craft a new imperial dispensation by gradually transforming court life and ceremonial. Subsequently, Akbar effected a clear shift away from the idea of an extended ruling family sharing imperial power by conclusively excluding all but those in his direct line from competing for the throne. From then on, succession struggles involved only the emperor's sons. But the reverse side of this new dispensation was that the Mughal princes' lives became almost entirely oriented towards the eventual war of succession, and for them it was "either the throne or the coffin."

Instead of being invested with a single, delimited, fixed, and semi-permanent territorial appanage, they were now challenged to build up a support network of allies on a stage that spanned the empire. This new system of open-ended succession and alliance building, instituted by Akbar, was a crucial mechanism for augmenting the reach of the empire. Through such intensely competitive and relentless contests, which could never lose momentum and are elaborated in detail in the historical chronicles, the political, social and monetary resources of the empire were kept in constant circulation, ultimately resulting in substantial and widespread investment in the dynasty as a whole, and enhancing its potential for survival, while making its religious and ideological underpinnings more pluralistic, although not, as we have seen, without attempts at reforming them too (Faruqui 2012).

Rather than weakening the dynasty, princely feuding guaranteed an incorporative dynamism that characterized the success of the empire as a whole. It allowed the Mughal nobility infusions of fresh blood every few decades. As princes pursued alliances and built up their own political networks, they drew groups already subject to Mughal power into deeper relations with the dynasty. Competition between members of the royal family also fostered ties to powerful individuals and groups who were on the political margin or even opposed to the dynasty. Such ef-

forts only gained further momentum in the course of princely rebellions. It was precisely the capacity of princes to co-opt non-imperial sources of sedition and conflict that enabled the Mughals to parry many threats to their rule. It played a crucial role in deepening the hold of the Mughal empire across its territories. Most importantly, the system of open competition and rivalry among great households that Mughal India inherited from the steppe nomads successfully captured the momentum of Indian economic growth and expansion in the early modern centuries (associated with the influx of New World silver) and allowed the mobilization and absorption of upwardly mobile elites that sustained rather than undermined the dynastic continuity of the empire (Faruqui 2012).

It was therefore the Timurid-Mughal dynasty and its evolving code of dynastic customary law that was the central institution of the Mughal empire throughout its existence. Unsurprisingly perhaps, in a sense the dynasty even came to consider itself as sacred, or, better put, a spiritual resource in its own right, and not only did it become increasingly aligned with Sunni Islam but at times fostered certain forms of Islamic or Persianate millenarianism such as the Mahdawiyya movement and even notions of "divine" or "sacred" kingship, under the influence of Sufism, Mongol universalism, messianism, or revelatory dreams, magic and alchemy, and thus began to see itself (and was seen by others) as upholders of a divine dispensation (Moin 2012: Strathern 2014). Yet this was not a theocratic monarchy, and there is an obvious difference here with the theocratic conceptions of imperial rule that informed, for instance, the medieval Byzantine empire. The Byzantines held that promotion to rule came solely from God, and hence the imperial throne was open to anyone, peasant and noble, even a scholars and an unlearned man, as long as he was a Christian. There was no absolute law regarding succession to the throne: all means of becoming emperor were legitimate as long as they were successful, for what God had given he could also take away. The atmosphere of conspiracy and paranoia in Byzantine history is sometimes reminiscent of Mughal politics but it was the consequence of something quite different. In the Byzantine case it derived from the institution of a theocratic monarchy, in the Mughal case from the customary code of law of the dynasty of Timur and Chinggis Khan.

11.9 A Disciplinary Revolution

Since the imperial dynasty was "a law unto itself," and "the font of sublime insight," nothing stood in the way of adaptation, institutional innovation, or even abrogation of what had once had the sanction of custom. The first two Mughal emperors did not have much time for any of this, and it was left to Akbar to become the real founder of the Mughal empire (Wink 2009a). As we read in the

chronicles of his reign, not a year passed without "good institutions" being devised by him. Recognizing the necessity of taming his Mongol war band, Akbar emphasized self-mastery and etiquette as a mode of political control. Increasingly rigid etiquette and court formalities went hand in hand with a new and thus far unknown discipline. All of Akbar's nobles were given, apart from titles, numerical ranks or "mansabs," and were thus formally fitted into a quantified status hierarchy which expressed uniformity, discipline, and cohesiveness, and which was constantly reviewed and adjusted by the emperor himself. This was essentially and elaboration of the decimal system of military organization that had been another important part of the Tora of Chinggis Khan and Timur, and it allowed Akbar to create a service nobility our of his Mongol war band that he could bend at will. As a result of Akbar's disciplinary zeal, by the second half of the sixteenth century the Mughal nobility was thus beginning to turn its back on some of the more destructive and barbarian practices of its medieval Mongol ancestors. Akbar cracked down on generals engaged in the still common practices, in times of war, of indiscriminately killing non-combatants and selling captured women and children as slaves. These and other such practices were no longer tolerated after 1568. Cultivated fields were to be guarded by orderlies against being trampled by passing armies, limits were set to excessive drinking and disorderly conduct, fornication and the often manic devotion to hunting. Ghastly torturing and dismemberment practices were still condoned, and the towers of skulls (and heads or dead bodies hung from trees) of vanquished opponents and rebellious peasants along the imperial highway remained a potent reminder of the barbarian origin of India's newest ruling class. Even as the seventeenth century advanced, some of these practices (which were introduced into India by Akbar) remained in vogue. Nonetheless, as the seventeenth century advanced, we read less and less about these practices as well.

Akbar's disciplinary drive and niggling attention to detail are most in evidence in the realm of revenue collection and administration, and in his bureaucratic regulations. Here we encounter the real fulcrum of his attempt to tame the Mongol "beasts" and of his "civilizing mission." As Akbar asserted, truly great kings did not confine their attention to great things only, and he promoted himself as a friend of good order and propriety in administrative business. He introduced scientific surveys of the productivity of agricultural lands, standardized measures and uniform criteria of evaluation, auditing, and receipts, not shunning to do ignoble paperwork himself. The increased demands for conscientious bureaucrats brought the Hindu banking and financier castes to power and dominance (just like in early modern Europe they helped to turn the bourgeoisie into the main agency of monarchical rule).Through the introduction of revenue settlements, administrative regulations, and never-ending revisions, the state was redefined as a

business enterprise. Monetization corroded primordial service relationships at all levels. For Akbar the "performance of the minutiae of business was an act of divine worship," says his court chronicler and chief propagandist Abu-l-Fazl. The emperor's frugality and fiscal discipline were associated with a demand for clear naming and a "sharpening of identification" which was also characteristic of early modern Europe. Even the spectacular Mongol ring hunt or *qamargha*, which involved thousands of hunters, was recast as a religious and spiritual task associated with good governance. Revelations received during hunting prompted Akbar and other Mughals to try becoming vegetarians, not without success.

At the same time, many of Akbar's imperial regulations do remind us of the new attitudes to religious, social, economic, and political organization that emerged in Europe during the Reformation era, and are again not without parallel elsewhere in the early modern world, notably in the Ottoman empire as described in this volume by Baki Teczan. For Akbar the tools of bureaucracy, record keeping, information gathering ("daily journals of events obtained from all cities and towns"), as also the enforcement of court etiquette, and of moderation in everything, were primarily geared to the necessity of taming his post-nomadic Mongol conquest nobility. His demand for methodical work habits, rational self-control, and the efficient management of time (which in Reformation Europe culminated in the idea that "time is money") was dictated by the same imperial agenda. The result was a disciplinary revolution of sorts, and there can be no doubt it had spiritual underpinnings. In 1573, Abu-l-Fazl summarized Akbar's broader aim as follows: "The sovereign aims to enable the inhabitants of every country…to establish harmony between their outward and inward condition…[to abandon self-exaltation and]…to become disciplined, so that while not deserving the appellation of ignorant they may also not merit the description of being idle and foolish" (Beveridge 1979, III, 86).

He goes on to explain how before Akbar's reign the servants of the threshold paid no attention to time and season but lingered around the court continually, while the rest of the people were lethargic and slothful. But when Akbar came to the throne the slothful were guided to activity, and fresh luster was brought to court, things were "knit together," and the opportunity of service fell into the hands of the energetic while the slothful became depressed. Everything in the palace came to be regulated by a water clock. At fixed hours the time was struck on bronze gongs, and bells were rung, drums beaten, and trumpets sounded at fixed intervals. Then, in the recordings of 1578—a year in which Akbar had an epiphany while hunting—we read that Akbar began to "watch over his being" and "cherish his time," and from then onward he no longer spent any portion of it idly. From this year onward he began to divide the days and nights in fixed portions, each earmarked for specific activity "for the guidance of the fortunate" and "to set

an example for mankind." For this, as for almost every other measure Akbar introduced, there were antecedents at other Islamic courts of India in the sixteenth century. Akbar, however, became obsessed with time, experimenting with schedules and revised schedules for the hours of the day, days of the week, and months of the year throughout his later life, and especially when he was on tour. He never decided on any fixed schedule. Rather, Akbar's spiritual drive for discipline went into overdrive.

The vast compendium of Akbarian rules and regulations compiled by Abu-l-Fazl and known as the *Ain-i-Akbari* abundantly testifies to that. This work—which is distinctive of Akbar's reign and no other reign—is more than just an imperial gazetteer or a template of a new political order. Akbar is here depicted as if he were Gulliver—Jonathan Swift's fictional character who looked at his watch so often that his hosts the Brobdingnagians thought he was consulting his God. The *Ain-i-Akbari* is the product of an obsession with order which demanded everything to be recorded, nothing to be left to chance, no mistakes to be made, nothing to remain for messy discussion, no time to be wasted, and which, in a nutshell, did not fall short of an imagined universe of duties and obligations universally recognized by people—foremost Akbar himself—whose beastly impulses were finally and utterly tamed. It was a spiritual triumph of sorts, complementary to the military one:"The care with which His Majesty guards over his motives, and watches over his emotions, bears on the face of it the sign of the infinite, and the stamp of immortality; and although thousands of important matters occupy, at one and the same time, his attention, they do not stir up the rubbish of confusion in the temple of his mind, nor do they allow the dust of dismay to settle on the vigour of his mental powers, or the habitual earnestness with which His Majesty contemplates the charms of God's world...Knowing the value of a lifetime, he never wastes his time, nor does he omit any necessary duty, so that in the light of his upright intentions, every action of his life may be considered as an adoration of God...in the morning, at noon...in the evening [and] at midnight" (Blochmann 1977, I, 162–163).

Akbar was supposedly and emperor who almost never slept."He takes little repose in the evening, and again a short time in the morning; but his sleep looks more like waking...His Majesty is accustomed to spending the hours of the night profitably" (Blochmann 1977, I, 164). Among Akbar's sayings recorded in the *Ain-i-Akbari* we also read:"Worldlings should lead a busy life in order that idleness may be discouraged and desires not wander towards unlawful objects" (Blochmann 1977, I, 429), and:"Idleness is the root of evil" (Blochmann 1977, I, 450).

11.10 Conclusion

The Mughal empire was never wracked by wars of religion. There is only sporadic evidence of any forced conversion. The vast majority of Indians, in effect, did not convert to Islam. Conversion occurred in the Indus borderlands after they were destroyed by repeated nomadic Mongol invasions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, long before the beginning of Mughal rule, and the successive Muslim governments of these lands were not instrumental in their conversion. In east Bengal, conversion to Islam occurred both before and after Mughal rule in the wake of the eastward shifting of the river system of the area and the creation of an entirely new rice-cultivating peasant society, again without the successive Muslim governments being instrumental in it. There was also a fair amount of unmediated conversion to Islam among the coastal populations outside the caste system. Elsewhere, there were usually only small minorities of converts at any time.

It can be shown, however, that the interconnected phenomena of Mughal imperial rule, improved communications and mobility, monetization and economic growth did not fail to have a profound impact on Indian vernacular religious life. Early modern India may not have had a printing press revolution but there was a tremendous expansion of paper production and these centuries saw the dissemination of a new kind of *bhakti* or "devotional" literature in many parts of the subcontinent (Dalmia and Faruqui 2014, xii–xiv). The surge of *bhakti* textual production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was facilitated by the patronage of a growing class of affluent patrons in the cities and towns of Mughal India, even though some *bhakti* movements had their origins in the fifteenth century or even earlier, and historians of Jainism have likened a fifteenth-century reformist branch of their religion to Lutheran Protestantism and claimed it to be a forerunner of the many more early modern devotional movements that were defining themselves in multiple ways.

In the Mughal period, devotional communities with similar messages of salvation could develop bitter antagonisms in their competition for support from similar social groups and efforts to assert dominance over pilgrimage routes and sacred centers. Some were quite exclusive, others not at all. The Vallabha sampradaya or "devotional community" which is also known as the Pushti Marg and goes back to a southern brahman named Vallabha [1478–1530] produced a theological and ritual corpus that drew demarcating lines in all directions and is an example of an extremely exclusive Vaishnava sect (Dalmia 2014; Saha 2014). It consistently undermined, or explicitly denounced, the brahmanical *smarta* traditions, and it violently rejected "folk" traditions, while it looked at the *mleccha* or "barbarian" onslaught of Islam under the Mughals as a very serious threat to all of Vaishnavism

and its many practitioners. The early Pushti Marg hagiographies elaborate primarily theological and eschatological modalities which advance religious exclusivity, offering just one path to salvation, and no notion of toleration of even the somewhat like-minded, indeed of toleration as a virtue at all.

The Sants, by contrast, were proud of having shown a "middle way" (*madhi mārg*) between Hinduism and Islam (Horstmann 2014). One such Sant was Sundardās [1596–1689], a Dadupanthi monk (*sadhu*) whose anti-ritualistic teachings won him an audience among the merchant caste community but who also railed against the "immorality" of the brahmans and, claiming superior, religiously defined reason, militated against the follies of "superstition." Another Sant, who lived earlier than Sundardās but became far more renowned in the two centuries after his death, was the illiterate Kabir [1440–1518]. He was a Muslim from a large weaver (julaha) and cultivator (sudra) caste of Magahar in north India that had passed *en masse* to Islam between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. He became a Sant who combined the strict monotheism of Islam with a Hindu monotheistic condemnation of idol worship and caste. Christian missionaries, intent upon salvaging Hinduism from the morass of superstition and polytheism, liked Kabir. Polemical and satirical in character, Kabir's religious teachings were the expression of the moral and spiritual striving of the cities and the towns and of the artisans of the villages that were in contact with them, including many of those at the bottom of society who were denied access to most Hindu temples and for whom theological arguments about sectarian differences were meaningless (Vaudeville 1974, 16, 22).

Today there is hardly an ethical or spiritual truth in Hindustan that has not taken the form of a *sakhi* ascribed to Kabir (Vaudeville 1974, 53). While Kabir himself was illiterate and expressed contempt for the written word, his teachings became known through the medium of Khari Boli, the Hindi dialect spoken around Delhi that became a lingua franca suitable for the propagation of popular, non-brahmanical religious teachings,"the language of the Indian Reformation," and in that medium they were written down in due course (Vaudeville 1974, 49–50, 66; Mehrotra 2011). Followers of Kabir and similar Sants were not exclusive in their religious outlook but attacked the institutionalized religions of their time as a deadening influence on the life of the spirit and, disregarding caste distinctions, encouraged women to join in their devotional gatherings. *Bhakti* was the great leveler, but it was not so much engaged in an effort to reconcile Islam with Hindu belief by means of a synthesis of the two as an attempt to go beyond these two formal religions (Carlyle 1972, 98–100, 105). Kabir regarded both Islam and Hinduism, as well as Sufism and Hindu asceticism, as fundamentally wrongheaded. He rejected all exterior forms, ceremonies, caste distinctions, sacred languages, scriptures, images, formal religious exercises, and pilgrimages, and instead

exhorted his followers to practice inner discipline. Only then could they be called true Muslims or true Hindus. Kabir thus preached the inward way to God which was open to all who subjected themselves to the discipline which it would involve (Carlyle 1972, 105). His emphasis was entirely on the inward discipline of love, faith, mercy, and humility as expressed in righteous and compassionate deeds and adherence to the truth (Carlyle 1972, 280, 286). Since Kabir and other Sant devotional preachers attached no value to asceticism or celibacy, the Sant following commonly consisted of laymen or householders rather than monks or ascetics in the formal sense. Undeniably, the Sant movement as a whole was mostly non-sectarian, even though Kabir and many Sants left their names to the sects which sprang up as a result of their preaching. Yet, on a deeper level, no devotional movement could entirely transcend sectarianism. Kabir himself is well known for his frequent diatribes against *śāktas*—practitioners of blood sacrifices, meat-eaters, sexual ritualists, and the like, whom he as well as many other bhakti preachers regarded as a kind of sinners (Pauwels 2014).

It has often been argued that India, because it sanctified poverty and the social immobility of the lower castes, induced a kind of "this-worldly" torpor and inertia that was the very opposite of the spirit of capitalism. The Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, in his *Asian Drama*, was left to conclude that Indian religion constituted "a tremendous force for social inertia," and never worked as a positive agent for change in the way Calvinism did. But the devotional ethic of early modern India is in fact quite clearly linked to the spirit of capitalism. Such interdependence between reformist devotionalism and capitalism in India has been particularly well documented in the case of Guru Nanak and the Sikh religion (McLeod 1998). But all bhakti reformers expressed the sentiments of the urban classes and of the artisan castes. As Chris Bayly often emphasized, the new culture of devotionalism which developed in the wake of early Sikhism and Kabir was built up through the institutions of the market and worked to strengthen the influence of corporations of merchants, gentry and service people which had been emerging between state and agrarian society (Bayly 1983, 7, 10, 21–23, 34, and passim). All such devotional movements represented the interests of townspeople, the merchant castes, artisans, and lower castes emerging from under imperial Mughal rule. In their denunciation of both Hinduism and Islam and their emphasis on inner discipline and personal piety they offer parallels to the Protestant Reformation.

Without question, the expression of the market economy was related to the burgeoning devotional movement of the period (Larocque 2004). Devotional religious traditions played a central role in the development of the market, in struggles over group status and identity, and in processes of political representation during the entire period of Mughal rule (Larocque 2004, 217). Throughout this pe-

riod of rapid commercialization and social mobility, devotional movements created popular associations that both promoted and responded to the position of upwardly mobile groups from a variety of religious backgrounds, many of them marked by religious inclusivism and opposition to the caste system and its restrictions on interaction between people of different social backgrounds—a necessary prerequisite for the expansion of groups involved in a market economy. In Mughal India virtually every city, and many smaller urban centers, saw a significant increase in the number of resident artisans. Devotional leaders, while placing a higher value on achieved than on hereditary status, explicitly inculcated a positive work ethic among their followers recruited from these and similar groups (Larocque 2004, 217). Bhakti poems are often about how one can simultaneously attain spiritual merit and material wealth (Larocque 2004, 129). They are perfect expressions of what Max Weber would later call "this-worldly asceticism," and amount to exhortations to spinners and weavers to abjure anything that might lessen productivity, including sleep, conversation, and daydreaming (Larocque 2004, 131). Like the Protestant ethic, the devotional ethic of Mughal India established a link between piety and capitalism. The direction of religious change in Europe and India was the same, even though the road that led in this direction was a different one.

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