The study of ancient religion has always been shaped by the questioning of the presuppositions that guide our interpretation, often through engagement with models drawn from other disciplines. For example, it has almost become a trope to emphasise that the rise of Christianity, as a monotheistic and exclusive religion, has shaped our concept of religion to such a degree that it becomes hard, not to say impossible, to study the basically polytheistic systems of Antiquity without Christianising assumptions and concepts – as are, in fact, the very terms ‘monotheism’ and ‘polytheism’. Much attention has been devoted to these issues, although the arguments tend to go in opposite directions. On the one hand, scholars have questioned the stark differentiation between ancient polytheism and Christian monotheism, arguing for the existence of pagan forms of monotheism in Greek and Roman culture. On the other, in contrast with such attempts to bridge the gulf between Christianity and paganism in later Antiquity, other scholars have contrasted the Christian emphasis on theology with the classical focus on ritual action and have advocated a focus on rites to avoid Christianising assumptions.

On such a view, a fundamental gap separates Christian and ancient understandings of religion.

The recent work on pagan monotheism is part of a wider scholarly attempt to describe and explain religious changes in Antiquity. Study of ancient religion has long been static, in that it tried to understand the system, to retrieve its original form, and to describe its development. Only rarely convincing explanations were offered for the adoption of one religious idea and not another. When developments were set out, they tended to be inspired by theories of decline and progress. A dominant view saw Greek and Roman religion declining from its supposedly original kernel. Such an approach was exemplified in the work of great historians such as Georg Wissowa and Kurt Latte and even, in some way, in Georges Dumézil’s indo-european investigations. Such visions of decline remain tributary to Western philosophical conceptualisations of the evolution of history as linear and teleological, be it by inverting them. Chronological evolution is then implicitly seen as a synonym of causal necessity and the victory of beliefs is ascribed to the winner’s superiority over the subjected, as is shown, for example, by Franz Cumont’s fascinating, if dated, analysis of the ‘oriental religions’.

Such wide-ranging interpretations are now generally abandoned and replaced by attempts to explain changes through social processes and interaction. We wish to signal only

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1 For henotheistic elements, see Versnel (1999) and (2011). The rise of monotheistic tendencies in the Roman Empire has been discussed since the 19th century, finding an influential formulation in Gefficken (1929), and has recently been discussed in Athanassiadi and Frede (1999), Mitchell and Van Nuffelen (2010a) and (2010b).
2 This perspective is best illustrated by Beard, North and Price (1998), but see also the references in note 22 of Van Nuffelen (2010).
4 Wissowa (1912), Latte (1960).
5 Dumézil (1974). Key features of Dumézil’s approach emanate from the equation of the ‘archaic’ with the ‘original’: the reconstruction of ‘original’ narratives by investigating tripartite structures and the understanding of religious features through comparison with still older features in other indo-European cultures.
6 Cumont (1906). See Praet in this volume.
7 Cf. e.g. Bonnet, Ribichini and Rüpke (2008).
two prominent attempts. John North has repeatedly argued that the defining factor in religious change is the shift from an allegiance to the civic religion towards religious group identities. What sets the Roman Empire apart, is the proliferation of such groups that could compete for the adherence of the faithful. He therefore employed the metaphor of a market place to characterise the religious life of the empire – a metaphor that is now commonly used.\(^8\) In a series of papers, Angelos Chaniotis has argued that theological changes in religion in Asia Minor in the Hellenistic and Roman period, as expressed in dedications to gods that are addressed in superlatives (‘the greatest’, ‘the highest’, etc.), are the result of competition for prestige between different cities and shrines. Such dedications say, in effect, ‘my god is greater than yours’.\(^9\) Both North’s and Chaniotis’ models illustrate the importance the notion of competition has started to assume in explanations of religious change in Antiquity.

Its current prominence is not surprising. The assumption that competition was pervasive in ancient society can be traced back to its identification as ‘agonistic’ in nineteenth-century thought, and one can be tempted to see a cultural continuity running from the Homeric culture of honour and shame to the inter-city rivalry of the Roman Empire.\(^10\) This traditional emphasis, albeit it of an ideological origin,\(^11\) meshes well with prevailing assumptions in modern society about the centrality of competition to social action. Economic theory, with its assumption of the ultimately positive nature of competition, is merely the most obvious illustration, but much sociological theory, emphasising the contest for status and capital of various sorts,\(^12\) presupposes competition as a natural condition among individuals.\(^13\) Indeed, given the impact of evolution theory on humanities and its emphasis on the struggle for life, altruism (the apparent opposite of competition) has become a puzzle for psychologists and philosophers alike. It is obvious that all of these disciplines presuppose a very particular anthropology (and hence ethics): as was shown by the crushing critique of A. MacIntyre in After Virtue (2007), from within an Aristotelian framework none of the above is self-evident. The emphasis on competition and the transfer of economic models has also entered the study of religion, in its most extreme form with the idea of ‘religionomics’,\(^14\) and has entered classical scholarship in this way too.\(^15\)

Scholarship thus seems to be undergoing a major shift: some of the classic concepts, such as the civic compromise, implicitly rely on a Durkheimian sociology which emphasises the social coherence and cohesion generated by religion, but an approach influenced by a sociology that puts the notion of competition central is bound to generate a more fractious image of Greek and Roman religion. The present volume wishes to contribute to current discussions by explicitly foregrounding the concept of ‘competition’ and by exemplifying its difficulties and usefulness through a series of case-studies. It cannot be its aim to subject the

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\(^10\) For an overview, see Fisher and van Wees (2011). For the field of religion, see, e.g., Faraone (1991).


\(^12\) See the classics of Veblen (1899), Goffman (1969), Bourdieu (1979).

\(^13\) Cf. van Wees (2011). For the idea of a natural impetus for competition, see Simmel’s chapter on Der Streit (1908).

\(^14\) See Stark (2006) and (2007) and further discussion below.

\(^15\) Gladigow (2005), 125-60.
very notion of competition to systematic scrutiny and criticism but it hopes to contribute to scholarship in two ways. First, there is still room for further assessing the forms taken and roles played by competition in ancient religion. On this level one can operate with a prima facie understanding of competition and the problem is not so much the definition of competition (an obviously fluid concept) as the identification of religious competition: given the embedded nature of religion in Antiquity, it is methodologically impossible and unsound to try to detect supposedly clear examples of religious competition, where two religious groups would, for example, compete for popular participation. Competition in other realms, for example politics, often expressed itself in religion. In turn, competition between religious groups could have important political religious repercussions. Given the inevitable imbrications of religion and other realms of society, this is largely a methodological distinction, and one unlikely to be made by the ancients themselves. In order to gain a better understanding of the role played by competition in religion, both need to be taken into account. In the second place, this volume wishes to increase our awareness of the theoretical implications of a focus on competition, and this by discussing a number of models and narratives that have competition at their heart.

The first part of the introduction addresses the first issue and traces the role played by religious competition in three areas, namely ethnic oppositions, social distinctions, and politics – where necessary taking a look at the process in both directions. A second part reviews recent models that explain religious change through social and political competition, focusing in particular on an assessment of the possibilities and limits of the economic ‘market’-metaphor applied to ancient religion.

Religion and cultural, social and political conflicts

Any account of religious competition in Antiquity must start by pointing out the variety of gods, rituals and beliefs characteristic of ancient polytheism. The different forms of ancient religion were, with some exceptions, compatible with each other, and some specific cults even expressly requested the introduction of new cults, as did the Sibylline oracles and as happened through the Roman ritual of evocatio. If there was competition, it rarely transformed into open hostility and permitted the existence of a religious climate conducive to the diffusion and syncretism of different divinities, cults and rites. One can state that, with some notable exceptions, ancient religion was fairly tolerant.16 The precise origins of this toleration are less clear than is often assumed. It is now commonly asserted that a polytheistic or henotheistic system is essentially more tolerant of difference than a monotheistic one, as the former is inclusive and the latter exclusive,17 but there abound historical examples of tolerant monotheisms and intolerant polytheisms.18 Many religions (and its individual believers) can

16 Kötting (1977), North (1979), Garnsey (1984), Canella (2010). The word is first attested in Cicero: Tolerantia rerum humanarum: Cic. parad. 27; toleratio dolorum: Cic. fin. 2.94. For intolerantia, see Cic. Cluent. 40.112 and Gell. 17.19.5. The term belongs in a philosophical rather than a religious context: See Cic. inv. 2.163 and Sen. epist. 67.5-10.
17 Armstrong (1981) and some of the papers in Athanassiadi and Frede (1999) and Barceló (2010).
18 See, e.g., the paradigmatic situation of Sicily and its transition from polytheism through Christianity to Islam and back again: Becker (2010), Engels (2011). For intolerant polytheism, one can think of recent Hindu agitation against Muslims in India.
shift from one mode into another. The historical study of toleration has shown that, rather than abstract assertions, the socio-political conditions need to be taken into account. From a different perspective, scholars have argued that ancient inclusiveness rested on the religious similitude that sprang from common Indo-European origins, or, on the contrary, that it originated in the ethnocentric identification of foreign with domestic forms of religion, best exemplified by the *interpretatio graeca* and *interpretatio romana*, a practice studied often since Wissowa and already, even if infrequently, criticised in classical Antiquity, for example by Xenophanes or Philo of Byblos.

At the same time, religious tolerance had clear limits and could easily turn into persecution. Conflicts arose whenever a new religious form seemed to endanger the social and political cohesion of the city and could not be wholly adapted to the local understanding (as Venus Erycina in Rome) or at least socially confined to foreigners only (as through the interdiction of Roman citizens to become priests of Magna Mater). Also, religious beliefs deemed ‘atheist’ or impious (*atheos*/*asebeia*) seemed to represent a risk of disruption to civic unity, which was based on the sharing of a common cult, and were relentlessly persecuted, as is illustrated by the processes against Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Diogoras and Socrates and the persecution of Christians. Similarly, any cult destabilising the traditional social and familial hierarchy seemed suspect to the authorities and were equally persecuted, as is shown by the famous scandal of the Bacchanals. Finally, not every act, even if religiously legitimised, was acceptable: a certain understanding of human dignity explains the outright refusal of Celtic religion because of its practice of human sacrifices.

Given the interweaving of the various realms of society, typical for a pre-modern society, religious competition never was purely religious – leaving aside whether it is ever so, even today. In this section, we distinguish three areas in which religious competition played a role: ethnic and cultural differences, social distinctions, and politics.

(a) Ethnic and cultural differences

From the classical period onwards, religions were often identified with cultures. This is already visible in Herodotus’ desire to match the Egyptian and Persian religion on that of Greece, and continues into Late Antiquity, when designations such as ‘Christian’ and ‘Hellene’ still had a primarily ethnic meaning. Scholarship on the Classical Period has tended to focus on the transmission of Near Eastern material into Greek religion, rather than on the possible conflicts between the various traditions. In the Hellenistic Period,

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19 See, e.g., Cameron (2007) with further references.
21 Wissowa (1918).
22 See e.g. Xenophanes fr. 15-16 DK; Philo of Byblos, in: Euseb. *praep. ev.*, 1.10.8 and 1.10.40f.
24 See the contribution by Lefka.
26 Suet. *Claud.* 25.5, with Aldhouse-Green (2010). Of course, the persecution of druids, the intellectual elite and main cohesive institution, also enabled the Romans to establish their rule more quickly.
27 Lloyd (2005).
characterised by the expansion of Greek colonisation, conflict between various ethnic groups does seem to express itself in religious terms. One can point to the famous ‘oracle of the potter’ which opposed Hellenistic and traditional Egyptian cult, blamed the Hellenistic rulers for having abducted Egyptian idols and represented foreign rule as oppressive on a religious level, announcing in apocalyptical terms its imminent destruction.\textsuperscript{30} These texts were not exceptions, as show the pseudo-Sibylline oracles, proof of a widespread anti-Hellenistic and anti-Roman religious hostility,\textsuperscript{31} and the Apocalypse of Hystaspes.\textsuperscript{32} The so-called \textit{Acta Alexandrinorum} similarly couples the ethnic opposition between Greeks and Jews in Alexandria to religious views, in the context of the riots of 35 A.D.\textsuperscript{33}

The cultural dimension also played an important part in religious competition in the Roman world. Roman and Etruscan religion seem to competed, as much as both states competed politically, even if Roman religion was heavily indebted to the Etruscans. The annals of Roman historians are full with anecdotes depicting the various instances where Etruscan \textit{haruspices} tried to deprive the Romans of their rightful due, as is exemplified by the histories concerning the Capitoline prodigies, the inundation of the Lake of Alba, or the story pertaining to the statue of Horatius Cocles\textsuperscript{34} – profound resentments still vivid in much later dates, as proves Cato’s famous sentence about the smiling \textit{haruspices},\textsuperscript{35} and which have been extensively been studied in the collection “La divination dans le monde étrusco-italique”.\textsuperscript{36} While the opposition to Etruscan religion was grounded in political animosity, but not in cultic rejection, the gradual importance gained by the so-called “oriental cults” – investigated in classical but controversial form by Cumont and Toutain\textsuperscript{37} – compelled the Roman authorities to define a coherent approach to the popular appeal of these religions. It was characterised by a first phase of prudent assimilation, as exemplified by the introduction of Magna Mater, a second phase of violent rejection, culminating in the scandal of the Bacchanals (186 B.C.), and a third phase distinguished by the adaptation of ‘oriental’ religious propaganda by the great politicians themselves. The last phase is illustrated by the co-existence of, on the one hand, the allusion to and evocation of Eastern Mediterranean religions in Augustan propaganda,\textsuperscript{38} and, on the other, the denigration of traditional Egyptian and Parthian religion by Augustan poetry and official propaganda.\textsuperscript{39} Similar to this close association of specific religious forms to a single culture or \textit{ethnos}, rites may also be used as an element in the self-definition of one’s own religion. Livy famously rejected human sacrifice in Roman religion as \textit{minime romano sacro},\textsuperscript{40} thus excluding it from the Roman way of doing things.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{30} See e.g. Koenen (2002).
\textsuperscript{31} Parke (1988), Potter (1990), Lightfoot (2007).
\textsuperscript{32} See Windisch (1929).
\textsuperscript{33} Musurillo (1954), Harker (2008).
\textsuperscript{34} Cf. e.g. the classical versions in Liv. 1.55.3-6; Dion. Hal. 3.69.3-6, 4.59.2-61.2, Plut. \textit{Publ.} 13.1-5 (Capitoline prodigies); Liv. 5.15-23, Dion. Hal. 12.10-13.3; Plut. \textit{Cam.} 3.1-4.7 (inundation of the Alban lake); Gell. 4.5.1-6 (statue of Horatius Cocles). Sources and literature: Engels (2007) n° 26, 27, 30, 52 and 383.
\textsuperscript{35} Cic. \textit{div.} 2.51 (cfr. \textit{nat. deor.} 1.71).
\textsuperscript{36} See Guitard (1985-1999). See the paper by Briquel in this volume.
\textsuperscript{37} Cumont (1906), Toutain (1911). See now Kaizer (2006).
\textsuperscript{38} Cf. Engels (2010).
\textsuperscript{39} Sonnabend (1986).
\textsuperscript{40} Liv. 22.57.6.
\textsuperscript{41} For recent literature, see Engels (2007), 443-448.
Social status and religious competition

Briefly, one can also point to the social aspect of religious competition, as it appears in particular in the competition between private and official forms of religion. One of the most intriguing examples undoubtedly comes from Rome and concerns the opposition between official and private divination. There are numerous attestations of confiscation and even official destruction of clandestine oracles, as in 213/2 B.C. and under Augustus, who purged the reconstituted Sibylline Oracles. A similar attitude is shown by Cato and Cicero, who criticise and even ridicule private augurs and clandestine oracles. It is noteworthy to see that the ancient authors insist on the superiority of official over private divination, not because of the superior religious credibility or divine inspiration of state divination, but because of the control exerted over it by the social and political Roman elite. Religious competition thus becomes a political rather than a theological issue, and as the state religion’s most important inner values are sought in the field of the exercise of power, it has to be protected against the popularity of private beliefs.

(c) politics

If religion played a role in the two previous areas, it is evident that its intertwining with the realm of politics is most obvious. Given its omnipresence in the Greek polis, religion always played a role in conflict and competition between cities – even though parallels can be found in earlier periods. We may think of the religious origins of the Peloponnesian war, uncovered by Simon Hornblower from the silences of Thucydides. Similarly, one need not be reminded of the games that accompanied all religious festivals. Theoretically, a distinction can be made between, on the one hand, the use of religion in the strife for status and power between individual poleis, and, on the other, the competition between the cults themselves, e.g. the attempts of the Delphic oracle to become the major oracular shrine in Greece or the similar efforts of the Didymaeum in Asia Minor. Nevertheless, such a distinction may be useful as a tool, but can only exist on paper, as certain cults were specifically tied to specific cities and their promotion was thus often also that of the neighbouring city.

In the archaic and classical period, tales of mythical ancestry established imaginary communities and, concomitantly, reflected animosities, for example between Boeotia and Thessaly. Religious festivals were show-places for the power and wealth of a city, such as

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42 For social aspects of competition, see König (2011), who shows that competition is related to social status: sophists only compete with individuals of equal status. One does not compete with the emperor.
43 Liv. 25.1.12.
44 Serv. Aen. 6.72 Diels (1890), Hoffmann (1933), Berneder (2001).
45 Cato agr. 5.4, Cic. div. 2.148-150. See also Colum. 11.1.22.6 and 1.8.5.7.
48 See the chapter by Boiy.
50 Parke (1939), Fontenrose (1959). See the chapter by Eidinow for critical discussion.
51 Fontenrose (1988).
the Panathenaia for Athens, making at least implicitly a statement of superiority to its neighbours and enemies and preventing, by underlining the cultic unity of Attica, a possible dislocation of the diverse peripheral villages; a case typical for the political ambivalence of regional and supra-regional sanctuaries and rituals.\textsuperscript{53} Embedded as religion was in the autonomous polis, specifically religious competition may seem hard to separate from other forms of strife.\textsuperscript{54}

With the arrival of the great Hellenistic kingdoms and, most notably, the Romans, religious competition becomes more tangible. If the traditional image of a complete loss of political importance of the cities is too negative, the incorporation into the Antigonid, Seleucid, Lagid, Attalid and Roman Empire did have some major effects on city life in the East. It dramatically reduced the possibility of violent conflict between cities and put the hegemonic power in the position of supreme arbiters of status. Cities now had to vie for honour and benefits by playing out their trump cards, such as, again, distinguished ancestry, usually with mythical connections,\textsuperscript{55} economic importance, and proven loyalty to the Empire.

The competition for such honours was often played in the field of religion: cities would argue for precedence on the basis of their glorious ancestry.\textsuperscript{56} But they could also appeal to the prestige of the local shrines, and requests for asylia for these shrines, which had started in the Hellenistic Period, multiplied under Roman rule.\textsuperscript{57} The ruler cult developed into a battle ground: not only were local cults of the emperor signs of the city’s loyalty to the ruling power, the creation of a provincial cult spurred competition between cities for the title of ‘neokoros’, ‘warden’ of the provincial cult.\textsuperscript{58} For the provincial élite, the charges of high-priests of this provincial cult became career pathways to enter the true élite of the empire – those who had Roman citizenship.\textsuperscript{59} Religious competition between cities in the Roman East has become now a major strand of interpretation,\textsuperscript{60} and it has recently been extended to the literary competition of the second sophistic.\textsuperscript{61} Classical Greek culture was famously described as ‘agonistic’, but their descendants of the Roman period seem not to have yielded much in competitive spirit. It may be misleading to conclude that intercity competition assumed a greater religious guise than in the past; religion rather was an area where peaceful competition was still possible within the Roman Empire. Competition between cities did not end with the arrival of Christianity. The new religion provided a new focus for local pride, in particular martyrs. It has been argued that martyr homilies could fulfil the same role as city panegyrics in earlier times: they proclaimed the greatness of the city, because of the presence of a local martyr, in explicit or implicit contrast with surrounding cities.\textsuperscript{62}

Leaving city-life aside and returning to the Hellenistic Period, the possible politicisation of religion was, of course, strongest when traditions conflicted whose

\textsuperscript{53} Freitag e.a. (2006).
\textsuperscript{55} Stephan (2002). For an example from late Antiquity, see Busine in this volume.
\textsuperscript{56} Robert (1977).
\textsuperscript{57} Rigsby (1996).
\textsuperscript{59} Best documented are the Asiarchs. On the debate surrounding this title and its relationship to the archiereus, see Weiss (2002) and Campanile (2004) with earlier literature.
\textsuperscript{61} Bendlin (2006).
\textsuperscript{62} Weiss (2003). See Busine and Jacobs in this volume.
theological views were scarcely compatible. Antiochos IV (175-164 B.C.), attempted to hellenise the Jewish cult and provoked a major rift between Judaea and Samaria. This emphasised the already existing differences, facilitating violence and repression, as the Samaritans renamed their sanctuary of mount Gerizim into the temple of Zeus Hellenios in the 170s in order to ingratiate themselves with Antiochus IV and to dissociate themselves from Jewish orthodoxy, even going as far as to claim Iranian origins. They subsequently supported Seleucid troops in 166 that fought the Maccabean revolt, and had to face, after the success of the Maccabees, revenge for their apparent apostasy and the destruction, in 128, of their sanctuary.

In Rome, the situation is more opaque because the senatorial elite’s inner cohesion and its virtual monopoly over the official cult make it difficult to detect traces of inner competition when state religion is concerned. Indeed, senatorial status of the major priests implied that competition and enmity pertained mainly to political and not to religious issues. In fact, the state religion’s main political interest, at least until the Late Republic, was the visualisation of cohesion and official piety, and the (permanent) instrumentalisation of official religious institutions had pragmatic aims. In this context, one can cite, for instance, the gaining of social status through office-holding, and the interdiction of specific political actions on formal grounds by the obnuntiatio. Roman divination was intensely instrumentalised by politicians, creating sometimes artificial competitive situations. One can think of the famous episode of 207 B.C., when a complex combination of different prodigies initiated a debate about the ideal expiation of these signs, involving the haruspices, the pontifices, the decemviri and the aediles. They produced contradictory interpretations and prescribed heterogeneous religious ceremonies. The analysis of this event has remained controversial: the complexity of the different actors and actions involved has partially been explained, for example by Cousin and Gagé, by internal rivalries between the different institutions, partially, quite to the contrary, by an attempt to demonstrate the state’s cohesion even in times of outer crisis, as put forward by Champeaux and Rosenberger. Only towards the end of the republic, the growing hostilities between single politicians and the underlying rivalries between Senate and magistrates made the instrumentalisation of religion and thus the inference of politics with religious competition more obvious. We may thus cite the famous ‘augural contest’ between Cicero and Marc Antony, when both politicians, newly elected to the office of augur (Cicero since 53, Marc Antony since 50 B.C.) called each other incompetent priests and politicised their religious duties. Quite differently, in the Late Republic, politicised competition might not only extend to rivalries between priesthoods or single cultic officials, but even to the visualisation and propagation of different divinities. One can think of the religious propaganda of the Second Triumvirate, when the contest between

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63 Jos. Ant. 12.5; different in 2 Macc. 6.2 (Zeus Xenios).
64 1 Macc 3-10.
65 Coggins (1975).
68 Enn. ann. 8.xv (Skutsch), in: Serv. Aen. 1.20, Enn. ann. 8.xvi (Skutsch), in: Serv. Aen. 1.281, Liv. 27.37. For more literature on the subject, compare Engels (2007), 470-476.
69 Cousin (1943), Gagé (1955).
Octavian and Marc Antony gradually crystallised in the opposition of two divinities that had hitherto been rather unimportant in Roman politics: on the one hand, Apollo, who rapidly became the equivalent of republican order, political traditionalism, artistical classicism and rhetorical Atticism, and, on the other, Dionysius and Hercules, equated with monarchy, hybrid Hellenism, cultural orientalism and the rhetoric of Asianism. This competition was also visible in contemporary art, for example the terracottas of the Apollo Palatinus-temple, which represent a contest between Apollo and Hercules.

So far, we have been mainly considering the influence of political competition on religion, but that was not the only direction of influence. Religious competition could also generated political conflict.

The religious problems of Hellenistic Judaea have already been mentioned from a Samaritan point of view. There has been a long debate about the reasons of Antiochus IV’s attempt to hellenise the JHWH-cult (religious, political or economical). The debate is fairly representative of the evolution of ancient history as a discipline, as the ideological and theological motives, mainly put forward by the book of Maccabees, have been gradually de-emphasised by modern historians because of our increased knowledge of Hellenistic history and mentality. It is now widely assumed that Antiochus IV supposed that a religious uniformisation and hence abolition of individual and not universally-compatible cultic traditions could contribute to the stability of the Seleucid Empire. This pragmatic objective was shared by progressive Jewish circles hoping to benefit from a cultural and economic integration of Judea. It transformed the hostility between Greek paganism and Jewish monotheism into a major political issue and initiated political unrest which can be seen as a major factor in the decline of Seleucid power in the second and first century B.C.

Quite differently, some aspects of late republican Roman politics can be ascribed to the opposition between the Stoic, Epicurean and, albeit to a lesser degree, Academic schools of philosophy. Their incompatible views, as much in competition which each as with popular religion since classical Greek times, influenced or at least ostensibly legitimised political positions: philosophical beliefs about the afterlife play an important role in Sallust’s presentation of Caesar’s altercation with Cato concerning the appropriate punishment for the Catilinarian conspirators. Not dissimilarly, the competition between paganism and Christianity in late Antiquity was also a political issue and had an impact on the confrontation between different political factions in late Antiquity. Constantine’s support for Christianity may well have had an effect on the loyalty of his Christian subjects, while the return of Julian the Apostate to paganism resulted in the questioning of his legitimacy – two very

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73 Lefèvre (1989).
76 Pena (1990), Benferhat (1999), Besnier (2001).
78 Schmid (1962), Karl (1988), referring to the opposition of Sall. Cat. 51 (Caesar: in luctu atque miseriis mortem aerumnarum requiem, non cruciatum esse; eam cuncta mortalium mala dissolvere; ultra neque curae neque gaudio locum esse) and 52 (Cato: credo falsa existumans ea, quae de inferis memorantur: diverso itinere malos a bonis loca taetra, inculta, foeda adque formidulosa habere.).
79 Constantine soon took on the defence of Christians outside the empire, as shown by the letter to the Persian king in Eus. VC 4.9.
popular subjects often and copiously studied, both regarding Constantine, by Van Dam and Girardet,\textsuperscript{80} and Julian, by Smith, Rosen and Giebel – to cite but a few names.\textsuperscript{81} Similarly, the politics of late antique Arabia was characterised by the political orientation implied in religious adherence to Judaism, different forms of Christianity (Monophysitism and Chalcedonianism) and autochthonous cults such as Sabaea polytheism, explaining the diverse Arabian client king’s loyalty to (and frequent apostasy from) the different religions associated with their main allies, the Roman, Sasanid and Ethiopian empire.\textsuperscript{82}

These examples show that religion and politics were highly permeable and that it is difficult to designate one or the other as the true cause of competition. It may be useful in this context to raise the issue of ‘propaganda’ in Antiquity and thus the question if and when religion was perceived as a means to foster systematically specific political interests. Of course, propaganda is an issue complicated enough already in itself, as the notion can be defined to both include and exclude ancient forms of the circulation of political ideas.\textsuperscript{83} If we adopt a definition of ‘propaganda’ large enough to incorporate at once classical Antiquity’s rudimentary methods of circulation of political ideas and the possibilities for exerting political pressure on potential dissidents,\textsuperscript{84} we have to wonder first to what extent politically useful religious acts could be designed as overtly propagandistic – a question as difficult and ambivalent as Veyne’s famous question: “Les Grecs ont-ils cru en leurs mythes?”\textsuperscript{85} A typical example of this problem is Peisistratus’ attempt to take possession of Athens thanks to the company of a woman representing Athena: Herodotus qualifies this strategy as a deception of popular religious credulity,\textsuperscript{86} whereas modern studies have insisted on the ritual, civic and performative signification of this unique act of religious propaganda.\textsuperscript{87} One can also think of the evolution of civic cults, which not only constructed identity but also legitimacy (e.g. for Cimon’s party through the repatriation of Theseus’ corpse), and the expulsion of inner political enemies on alleged religious grounds (e.g. the trial of Socrates). In each case, it is nearly impossible to draw the line between traditionalism and belief on the one side, and cold-blooded manipulation on the other. The genesis of the Hellenistic ruler cult raises a similar issue. The veneration of living rulers as divine entities might be partially justified by their specific charisma, as argued by Taeger.\textsuperscript{88} Nevertheless, the ancients’ own criticism and rationalising of those cults (as exemplified in the famous paean sung in honour of Demetrius Poliorcetes\textsuperscript{89}) and their institution through official decrees\textsuperscript{90} can be taken to suggest that the everyday reality of the ruler-cult often did not go much beyond the public show of loyalty, at least as far as the elite is concerned.

This ambivalence of the notion of ‘propaganda’ can also be traced in the Roman world at least since the beginning of Hellenisation. Of course, the connection between religion and

\textsuperscript{80} Van Dam (2007), Girardet (2010).
\textsuperscript{83} See the case studies presented by Enenkel et al. (2005).
\textsuperscript{84} Cf. critically Weber and Zimmermann (2003).
\textsuperscript{85} Veyne (1983).
\textsuperscript{86} Hdt. 1.60.3.
\textsuperscript{88} Taeger (1957-1960).
\textsuperscript{89} Athenaeus VI, p. 253. (FHG II 476; PL III 674 B 4).
politics, *pietas* and *mos maiorum*, was much stronger there than in the Greek world. It became still more so, as imperial expansion went hand in hand with an ideology that depicted political success as a reward for the piety of the Romans, the *religiosissumi mortales*.

Thus, politics and religion were inseparable, as religious offices were traditionally reserved for the elite, which, in turn, used religious attributes to enhance its status. Nevertheless, the Hellenisation of Roman society implied also a transformation of Roman religion. The clash between a rationalising and sceptical philosophy and a religion the inherent conservatism of which had preserved even the most archaic features became a major moment in the history of paganism, and mainly centered around the problem to what extent the issue of contemporary religious propaganda is intrinsically linked to the question of belief and hypocrisy, and to what extent the change in Roman religion has to be interpreted as sign of decline, as held by older authorities in the field of Roman religion, or rather as a sign of dynamism. Indeed, the adoption of philosophical scepticism, the growing popularity of oriental cults and the importance of rationalising interpretations such as Varro’s *theologia tripertita* deprived the traditional state religion of its credibility and interest. It was relegated either to the rank of mere formalism or suffered gradual institutional neglect. This helps to explain the ambivalent attitude of conservatives, such as Cicero, deemed a “hypocrite in religion” by Heibges, and Augustus, whose restoration of the state cult proved to be as ephemeral as superficial, because many of the restored or renovated priesthoods (such as the VII viri epulones, the XII viri sacris faciundis and the fratres Arvalium) were drained of their original sense to the benefit of the newly established ruler cult.

Narratives and models of religious change

The preceding pages have amply shown how religion played a role in various forms of cultural, social, and especially political competition in Antiquity, sometimes driving competition and at other times being shaped by it – to the extent, that is, that the vector of influence can be determined. In this section, we wish to take a closer look at a number of recent contributions that identify competition as an engine of religious change, and discuss some models of religious competition.

(a) Sociology and changes in theology

Competition between cults has in recent years been identified not only as a major phenomenon of the Hellenistic and Roman period, but also as an engine of religious change. Especially Angelos Chaniotis has focused on how festivals and acclamations aim at outbidding neighbouring communities and cults. Acclamations, for example, increasingly...
start to use superlatives to characterise the god who is being praised: their intention is to prove that the god of that community is greater than any other competing god. Similarly, festivals aimed at displaying the greatness of one’s own god. In theological terms, the outcome of this process has been variously termed henotheistic or monotheistic.98 Chaniotis’ detailed investigations of the epigraphic material stand out by not proposing to reduce these expressions of religious sentiment and competition to anything else, such as political and economic interests, although these are obviously intertwined.99

Another, related, interpretation of religion in the cities of the Roman Empire also gives pride of place to competition. Starting out from the observation that much of what we know about the religious life of cities is due to elite support for certain cults and developing the idea of a political and social instrumentalisation of religion that has been argued for in the Roman Republic,100 Andreas Bendlin has suggested that the competing interests of local elites not only rendered civic religion dynamic, but were also essential in holding it together: their communication instrumentalised a limited number of deities, which were closely associated with civic history and tradition, and thus generated an impression of unity. The decline of the republican aristocracy caused a decline in competition and a change in communication: the greater variety one notes from the second century A.D. onwards is due to the fact that the elites extended the pantheon they promoted in their communication. As such, elite contests generate the greater variety that becomes visible in our sources.101

The strength of the models of Chaniotis and Bendlin lies in the fact that theological changes, i.e. regarding the conception of the divine, are explained by social processes, thus tying theology – which may seem abstract and remote at first – into the social life of Antiquity. Both assume implicitly a priority of the social over the theological, a presupposition that is very common but needs to be pointed out. It is, for example, striking to note that regarding the rise of Islam scholars are now, again, foregrounding religious beliefs as the fundamental drivers of the Islam, and not social or economic factors as often used to be the case.102

(b) Christianisation and the end of competition

If the foregrounding of competition is relatively recent in the study of classical Greek and Roman religion, it has been a traditional part of narratives of Christianisation.103 Many a cult of the Roman Empire has been – explicitly or implicitly – seen as a competitor of Christianity, ranging from the imperial cult104 over Mithras105 to the oriental cults.106 Scholarship now emphasises more the embedded nature of Christianity, which inserted itself into the religious

100 See North (2000), 32-3. Orlin (1997) has argued that the elite attitude towards religion in the Republic is rather one of collaboration than competition.
102 Donner (2010); Howard-Johnston (2010).
103 Judge (2003); Rüpke (2011), 145-56.
104 Cerfaux and Tondriau (1957).
106 Cumont (1906).
landscape of the Roman Empire, but the traditional emphasis on competition continues to shape our understanding of the rise of Christianity, in particular in recent discussions of religious violence and intolerance in late Antiquity. It is probably not mistaken to state that the triumph of Christianity in the beginning of the fourth century is commonly seen as the beginning of the end of competition between Christianity and the other cults. The rise of the new belief, imposed with stick and carrot, is often assumed to have meant the inevitable decline of the pluralism of the Roman Empire and the creation of a monoreligious empire. In recent years the sometimes irenic depictions of this process have given way to a strong emphasis on the rise of intolerance. The coercive power of the state is seen as the key tool in imposing religious conformity and the often violent exclusion of dissent. Jews and pagans are identified as the major victims of this suppression of free religious competition.

While such a view identifies some of the major factors contributing to late Antique religious change, it may still be too much of a negative obverse of the triumphant narratives of the rise of Christianity, which need to be questioned on a more fundamental level. Especially the idea that late Antiquity is to be seen as a period of state-sponsored suppression of religious difference demands correction. Contrary to unilaterally negative interpretations based on imperial legislation, the position of the Jews in the later Empire has recently been set out in much more positive terms. Thus, their high public profile in cities such as Aphrodisias has been pointed out, suggesting at least the need to distinguish between rhetoric and reality, and to differentiate between locations. Moreover, there is sufficient evidence that competition and conflict never stopped – if empire and church aimed at cohesion and conformity, they strikingly failed to achieve it. For example, Jas Elsner has argued that the image of Christian pilgrimage as occasions for the expression of a deep sense of Christian community may be too irenic. Pilgrimage could be a locus for contestations, for example, when pagans, Christians, and Jews shared the same cult places, as was the case at Mamre. In addition, different religious groups could chose different locations to contest the meanings invested in other locations by other groups. Religious conflicts were often fought out in public disputes between religious leaders. Hence, religious interaction and all the doubts it generates were never suppressed, and one can even argue that Christianity, in all its fractiousness, only created new fronts of competition: religious competition is still rife in the age of Justinian. The promotion of orthodox Christianity (whatever its nature) by the state obviously impacted on the modes and forms of competition between religions and forms of Christianity in the Empire, but did not suppress it.

As an illustration of the continuing yet changing nature of competition, one can point to the idea of competition for spiritual authority, which is now seen as a key feature of late antique religious and political life. Its origins can be traced back to seminal papers by Peter

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111 See further examples in Kofsky and Stroumsa (1998).  
112 Isele (2010).  
Brown on the ‘holy man’ in Christianity. The strength of the concept lies in its fluidity: the holy man can have various social and ecclesiastical roles, but he is somebody who derives his authority directly from the divine, in contrast and competition with figures whose power is only conditioned by their position in a social hierarchy. The tension between the ‘holy man’, often a monk, and the bishop has become paradigmatic for the competing forms of religious authority in Late Antiquity. The identification of spiritual authority as the most important religious capital in Late Antiquity has spurred a series of fine studies, which have dispelled the idea of a homogenous church (if that was ever held). Yet, it has also, and maybe dangerously, drawn attention away from the vast majority of clerics, who were not holy men, and has overemphasised holiness in the religious history of Late Antiquity at the expense of political power play, doctrinal differences, and local traditions.

The idea of a decline of religious competition in Late Antiquity, concomitant with a rise in intolerance, is thus too simple a narrative: the religious landscape of late Antiquity never fully stabilised. The standard narrative also fails to ask a more fundamental question. It is, indeed, the case that the Roman state started to police the religion of its inhabitants more strictly from the third century onwards, before Constantine embraced Christianity. Why was this the case? What had changed in the self-understanding of the Roman state that it thought this a worthwhile effort? If we start to ask this question, we may be able to go beyond the view that ascribes the agency only to Christianity and its monotheism.

(c) The economics of religion: on a metaphor

The comparison of the contemporary Western religious situation to that of a market situation, in which each individual can ‘shop for God’, has become increasingly popular among sociologists of religion. It can be traced back to Peter Berger, who diagnosed the religious changes in twentieth-century Western society as follows: ‘As a result, the religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be “marketed”. It must be “sold” to a clientele that is no longer constrained to “buy”.’ The transfer from a ‘monopoly’ to ‘market competition’ was for Berger clearly a metaphor – as indicated by the quotations marks – with which to describe a change in the social role of religion. The success of the metaphor – to the extent that the metaphor becomes reality – can be partially explained by the fact that man has progressively been seen as a homo oeconomicus, who rationally calculates his benefits notwithstanding the reductive and misleading nature of such anthropology. It also can refer to what seems, prima facie, an obvious evolution from authoritative and strong religious traditions to a more diffuse and fragmented religious landscape. Yet, such a view relies on a foreshortened view of the history of religion in the West: while it may make sense of changes that happened in the twentieth-century, it seems to forget, for example, that large

117 See the chapters by Van Nuffelen and Engels.
120 Berger (1969), 137.
parts of the lower-class in Victorian England were largely irreligious and that great effort was undertaken to ‘sell’ religion in nineteenth-century cities.\(^{121}\)

The market metaphor has been picked up by classicists as well, although it never gained wide currency. It has long been around in an implicit, unreflective way, in particular to describe how Christianity ‘outbid’ paganism.\(^{122}\) It was used in a more explicit way by John North, when attempting to find a vocabulary to describe the religious situation in the Roman Empire. For him, one of the key characteristics of this period is that it witnesses the formation of numerous religious groups, which pose certain demands, in terms of ritual and beliefs, on their adherents to maintain cohesion, but as such also widen the spectrum of religious choices for the individual beyond the ‘civic compromise’. These religious communities are responsible for religious change in the Roman Empire.\(^{123}\) A similar attitude has been adopted by Christoph Auffarth when describing the Roman ‘Reichsreligion’ more as a chronological than a generic notion, underlining its importance as a free-market framework for the competition and mutual inspiration of the diverse Mediterranean cults as essentially ‘migrant religions’.\(^{124}\)

In his challenge to the idea of a ‘civic compromise’, Andreas Bendlin used the opposition between a ‘free market model’ and that of a centralised economy to illustrate the differences between his view and the one he disputes. In his view, the religious situation, even in Republican Rome, was not characterised by a dominance of the elite which did not leave room for private initiatives, beliefs and acts, as the civic compromise would have it. Religious life was more like a deregulated market in which religion developed in interplay with the individual choices and state interventions.\(^{125}\)

A metaphor may seem only a comparison designed to illuminate. But metaphors also import additional meanings which may mislead. Market metaphors presuppose that religions compete: together with rational choice, competition is one of the basic tenets of liberal economics. Martin Goodman has mounted a challenge precisely against the notion of competition between ancient religions in his ‘Mission and Conversion’. Studying the concept of mission in ancient texts, he argues that in the ancient world there was choice, but not competition: there did not exist the concept of mission in the sense of proselytism; religions made their messages known, but there was no attempt to persuade individuals to enter the community.\(^{126}\) In practical terms, it has been argued by Roger Beck that Mithraism did not self-advertise,\(^ {127}\) and this may hold for many other communities. In addition, most religious communities remain difficult to identify, with blurred boundaries,\(^ {128}\) and it can be presumed that many people had multiple religious allegiances. It remains to be seen what competition for a market share can mean in such a context.

Finally, whereas competitors in the situation of free market concurrence endeavour to obtain, on the long run, a monopolistic situation, enabling them to organise prices and profits

\(^{121}\) Cf. e.g. Etherington (2005).


\(^{123}\) North (1992). See also North (2010).

\(^{124}\) Auffahrt (2008) and (2009).

\(^{125}\) Bendlin (2000).


\(^{128}\) See Belayche and Mimouni (2003).
on a dictatorial basis, it should not be forgotten that these tendencies were largely absent in pagan cultic advertisement and only gradually emerged in Christianity. Thus, Susan G. Cole and Frits Naerebout have shown the inner limits of polytheistic competition by underlining the importance of controlling and even restricting, but not enlarging access to ritual practices and cult memberships.129 In this context, speaking of religious competition may even be misleading, as it suggests similar aims and methods, whereas Christianity and paganism did not even compete following the same rules, as the latter only tried to guarantee its survival as a system, but could never try to claim universal truth or to advertise a homogenous and all-encompassing system of faith.

The market metaphor thus can illuminate aspects of the religious life in Antiquity, and may even find some justification in the fact that in Late Antiquity the spiritual journey could be compared to a commercial one.130 But it has to be used as a metaphor, with clear limits. Otherwise one risks importing a baggage that may be unsuited for antiquity and questionable even for modernity.

(d) Bourdieu on Weber

If the market is, for obvious reasons, the most popular model, it is far from the only one, and in order to enrich future discussions, we wish to introduce briefly Bourdieu’s re-reading of Weber. In a paper published in 1971, Bourdieu re-interprets the religious ideal-types of Max Weber (priest, prophet, and sorcerer) in a structuralist sense: situating these figures in a ‘religious field’ (champ religieux), he argues that their interactions are governed by competing interests, which moreover must be contextualised in society at large, in which both elite and lower class laity are driven by their interest.131 Each of these figures has a specific claim to religious competence and stands in competition to the other two: priests represent the religious bureaucracy and hence the ordinary claim to continuity with the original message; prophets provide an extraordinary return to the original message; sorcerers claim magical coercion. In relation to the laity, all groups maintain relations of ‘transaction’, that is: ‘Religious labor by specialists creates religious understandings of the particular social conditions of existence of specific groups. Symbolic labor produces symbolic power by transforming relations of interest into disinterested meanings.’132

As any sociological model, this one cannot be simply applied to Antiquity. For one, it is difficult to clearly set priests apart from laity in, e.g., Rome, where political and religious power was exercised by the same class and individuals. Yet Bourdieu’s model may provide some additional understanding for events such as the suppression of the Bacchanalia,133 or the repeated expulsions of magicians, philosophers and the like during the Empire. Often interpreted in political terms,134 Bourdieu helps us at once to maintain a religious interpretation of the suppression of the Bacchanalia and to see more in it: the Bacchanalia, either interpreted as prophecy or sorcery, started to threaten the privileged position of the

130 Ps-Nilus 2.6.
132 Swartz (1997), 44.
133 Liv. 39.8-19.
134 See the useful summary of Tackacs (2000).
priests and the symbolic ordering of society they represent. A violent crackdown became necessary, maybe not so much because the followers of Bacchus became so numerous that they could have overrun the state, but because on the symbolic level part of the religious life of Rome was not subject anymore to the religious bureaucracy represented by the priests: that is, the Bacchanalia did not need to be a real threat, it sufficed that they were perceived as such. In turn, the repeated expulsions of other religious figures and groups can, in Bourdieu’s perspective, be well interpreted as the symbolic affirmation of the fact that the priestly class still dominated the ‘religious field’ in the face of the other, competing religious figures. Those expulsions would, then, not so much be matters of purification as of affirmation of domination. It helps to explain why they are repeated and, as it seems, not very strictly enforced – or at least not for a very long time.

There is still much room for the introduction of further theoretical perspectives on competition, for example drawn from the sociology of conflict. As shown by our discussion, these will need to be fine-tuned for Antiquity and one will always need to be aware of the fact that models shed light on features as yet obscured but may also obscure some other aspects of ancient reality.

Summary of papers

Tom Boiy’s chapter starts out from the fact that in the fifth century BC Anu replaced the goddess Ištar as patron deity of the South Mesopotamian town Uruk. During the Hellenistic period the Uruk onomasticon and collection of preserved cultic texts clearly show the overwhelming success of the Anu cult. The position of Marduk, as patron deity of the capital Babylon and as head of the Mesopotamian pantheon also of importance in Uruk during the Neo-Babylonian and early Achaemenid period, in Uruk dwindled in the same period until virtual non-existence in Hellenistic times. The two intertwining evolutions in Uruk’s pantheon, Marduk’s loss of influence and the substitution of Ištar by Anu as patron deity, are studied.

Esther Eidinow examines the dimensions and dynamics of the ancient Greek ‘market in futures’, investigating current claims about competition in the field of oracular consultation—between and among oracular sanctuaries and individual oracle providers (manteis or chresmologoi). Examining the concept of competition, it suggests that oracular sanctuaries emerged within local contexts, into an existing ‘market in futures’ comprising individual, and often itinerant, oracle-sellers and seers. It explores alternative paradigms for relationships between these elements, including co-operation and complementarity. This paper’s approach is underpinned by a model of ancient Greek religion as consisting of networks of relationships, rather than a more schematic structure of institutional hierarchies.

E. Lefka seeks to explain why in the relatively open environment of classical Greece some famous thinkers were persecuted, exiled or even condemned to death, after being officially accused for ‘impiety’, because of their subversive theological and other revolutionary doctrines. One thinks in particular of the Pythagoreans, Anaxagoras, Protagoras, and, most famously, Socrates. Although the limited and often ambiguous, or even contradictory, data impose a great prudence in our conclusions, she argues that at least in the cited cases, a combination of religious, political, historical and psychological factors was
necessary to arrive at these results. As such, she helps to clarify the reasons, the modalities and the limits of competition among the different religious beliefs in the ancient world.

Dominique Briquel considers the development of Etruscan religion in its contacts with Roman religion. The Etruscans had developed a system of religious beliefs and rites, the „Etrusca disciplina”, exercised by the haruspices. This discipline was outlined in books presented as having emanated, at the beginning of the history of Etruria, from divine beings. These books contained a ritual part, exposing what rites had to be followed in specific context in order to assure divine favour, and a divinatory part, explaining how to investigate the gods’ intentions and thus the future, notably by techniques like the observation of birds, lightning bolts or the livers of sacrificed animals. The Romans, whose ancestral religious traditions had no equivalent institutions, very soon called on the Etruscan haruspices for advice, creating thus a situation of competition between local and foreign religious institutions and traditions. Indeed, the import of ritual specialists rapidly provoked a certain distrust, as it seemed somewhat problematic that the city confided its religious communication with the gods to these highly specialised strangers just at the moment when their Etruscan homeland had been conquered by Rome. Hence, some political and religious reserves where unavoidable and can be retraced through a number of anecdotes where perfidious haruspices tried to cheat on the Romans. Under the empire, however, this situation was to change, as the „Etrusca disciplina” had been thoroughly integrated into the Roman religion and as the fierce competition between pagan religion(s) and Christianity even prompted the Romans to put forward Etruscan traditions as a national “alternative” to Christianity: as the Etruscans also relied on Holy Books, based on divine revelation, a true Roman had no reason to turn over to Christianity.

Françoise Van Haeperen seeks to understand whether or not the notion of religious competition is applicable to the harbour of Rome, Ostia. She focuses first on the phenomenon of competition which might have animated devotees from various polytheistic cults through evergetism. Second she examines the issue of competition between the polytheistic cults in the city. Did the new cults of foreign origin enter into competition with traditional cults and did their presence tend to replace traditional cults in the heart of the faithful, as often claimed? Finally, she assesses to what extent religious competition affected the relationship between Christians and pagans in Ostia. Overall, competition is seen as having little impact on the religious life of the city.

In Richard Lim’s Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity (1995), the decline of religious disputations after the fourth century AD has been described as a marker for the decline of religious competition in late Antiquity. In his view, disputations are a test case to detect wider changes in religious life in this period. Peter Van Nuffelen argues that the idea of a general decline in religious pluralism and a disappearance of disputations are mistaken. Disputations in fact continue to be practised throughout the period and that if open and free disputations rarely or never took place, they continued to shape the minds as an ideal: persuasion was seen the proper way to deal with religious difference. Competition for adherents, social standing, and imperial protection thus never ceased between various Christian and non-Christian groups in late Antiquity: if the nature of religious pluralism changed, it never disappeared, nor did the tensions that go with it.

Veit Rosenberger studies the symbolic statements made by late ancient ascetics concerning their eating and drinking habits and asks to what extent these practices can be
interpreted as competition. Competition can be noticed on several levels. First, the ascetics competed against the devil and his helpers, the demons. Second, there existed friendly competition between the ascetics and God, for the divine reward – entrance to paradise – surpassed everything the monks could offer. Third, there are traces of a more or less open competition between the ascetics. No-one ever claimed explicitly to surpass the others but there is a development, at least on the narrative level: in Theodoretus’ *theophilos historia*, some ascetics of his own time are depicted as striving to surpass previous monks by carrying heavy chains or by living on the top of a column. Fourth, ascetic competition seems to be somehow connected to martyrdom, which was often described as *agon* between the Christian and his prosecutors. The ascetic movement gained momentum at the time when martyrdom was not any longer an option, at least in the Roman Empire.

Ine Jacobs charts how the boundaries between the secular, sacred, and profane were reconfigured in the changing religious landscape of Late Antiquity. Focusing on opinions on the theatre as expressed in literary sources but also in the archaeological material, various competing views existed. Whereas the theatre as an institution survived and was often only superficially secularised, more ascetic church leaders sometimes were less interested in accommodating the classical heritage. Initially such demands had little effect, but by the fifth century Christian monuments become more prominent in cities and they function, as it were, as bastions from which the rest of the city can be purified from superstition and pollution. Finally, she demonstrates how the application of a cross on statues and buildings could serve as a means to purify them without having to destroy them.

Aude Busine focuses on another aspect of the same transformation. Traditionally, civic identities had been shaped by the elaborating of local histories and myths which gave local inhabitants a place in wider history and religion. Christians do not reject these traditions but develop ways of accommodating them in the new world view, for example by euhemerising myths or by adding Christian elements. In other instances, links are established with the Old and New Testament to create a Christian local history. For certain cities local martyrs become the new focus of local identity. These various processes slowly led to replacement of Greco-Roman local identities with Christian ones.

David Engels takes the long view on ancient religious change. Continuity and discontinuity, dissociation and teleology were central elements of defining religion and constructing apologetic strategies in the context of the competition of religions. The construction of religious legitimacy through the projection of cultic origins into a distant past already was deeply embedded in classical mentality, coalescing in the famous "Altersbeweis". Nevertheless, it did not allow for the formation of a meaningful and universally recognised salvation history, which precisely defined, linked and evaluated, from a theological point of view, the historical past, present and future. Only the influence of Near Eastern and particularly Jewish Messianism added a forward-looking dimension to this mostly backward oriented perspective, and with the rise of Christianity, the present gained a precise theological status. The historising of religion constituted one of Christianity's major assets in the competition with the diverse forms of paganism, and enabled it to effectively back up men's hopes and aspirations. Judaism and paganism were considered as teleologically necessary, albeit outperformed predecessors, easing conversion as well as delimitation. As the delay of the Parousia weakened Christianity's credibility, the allusion to the coming of the Paraclete
enabled new religions to connect their new beliefs to Christianity and reinterpret salvation history according to their own needs, thus turning Christian argumentatory strategies against itself and degrading it to a mere predecessor in order to prove their own absolute truthfulness. This technique became more and more popular and allowed the rapid spread of Manichaeism, Sunnite Islam and even Isma'ilism, each drawing on the religious potential of the former, until the evolution reached the point when the religious debate, the quest for continuity and the learned game of interpreting allusions and prophecies risked becoming a mere cynical game of manipulation and arbitrariness.

Danny Praet studies one famous model of religious competition, that between Christianity and Oriental cults (in particular Mithraism) through the work of Ernest Renan and Franz Cumont. Both scholars adhered to an evolutionist account of religious history, presuming that there was a clear progress in the various stages of mankind’s history towards individual liberty. The Oriental religions were seen as overcoming the decrepit old Roman religion, and then competed with Christianity. Cumont’s image of Mithraism is therefore very much modelled on what we know about the early Church. Both groups competed, as it were, for the upper hand in Roman society, but Christianity won when Constantine chose to support it.
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