Introduction

This volume is the result of our collaborative efforts to organise a conference that would address the issues of appropriation and interaction with religious professionals in the Roman Imperial Era without overinvesting in labels that are fraught with methodological problems, such as ‘priests’, ‘priestesses’, and ‘priesthood’. These terms are used here, but with caution and in full awareness of their limited applicability to a wide range of religious entrepreneurs of the Roman Empire. The three-day international conference entitled ‘Beyond Duty: Interacting with Religious Professionals and Appropriating Tradition’, which took place in Erfurt in January 2015, was intended to evoke answers to three central questions: who laid claim to special performative competence in cultic matters, how they went about acquiring it, and how they used existing schemata to anchor and legitimate their innovations in the realm of religious knowledge.

The past decade has seen a surge of scholarly interest in these religious professionals and, along with it, a number of high-quality publications. These volumes form simultaneously the point of reference and the point of departure for our volume.

- Jörg Rüpke, Fasti sacerdotum. Die Mitglieder der Priesterchaften und das sakrale Funktionspersonal römischer, griechischer, orientalischer und jüdisch-christlicher Kulte in der Stadt Rom von 300 v.Chr. bis 499 n.Chr (Franz Steiner, 2005).
- James Richardson and Federico Santangelo, eds., Priests and State in the Roman World (Franz Steiner, 2011).
- Marietta Horster and Anja Klöckner, eds. Civic Priests (De Gruyter, 2011).

Our volume, however, is substantially different due to its intercultural character and its explicit focus on appropriation and contestation of religious expertise in the Imperial Era. By contrast with the rather narrow focus upon civic priests of the volumes listed above, the papers collected here examine a wide range of religious professionals, their dynamic interaction with established religious authorities and institutions, and their contributions to religious innovation in the
ancient Mediterranean world, from the late Hellenistic period through to Late Antiquity, from the City of Rome to mainland Greece, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt, from Greek civic practice to ancient Judaism.

A further, but equally significant, feature of our volume is the wide range of media of transmission taken into account. Our contributors look at both old and new materials, which derive not only from literary sources but also from papyri, inscriptions, and material culture. Beyond all this, however, the volume seeks to question current categories and terminology. One of the major aims is to ask how far the established categories of ‘priests’ and ‘priesthood’ correlate with the range of religious entrepreneurship and innovation in antiquity. Our authors employ a variety of terms for the agents they have chosen to study, not simply the holders of institutionalised offices in various traditions, viz. ‘priests’, but religious entrepreneurs, ritual practitioners, hieratic specialists, even philosophers and poets. It is indeed the shared aim of at least partially questioning the tendency to think in the first place of institutionalised office-holders when framing our ideas of religious agency in the Roman Empire that unites our endeavour. This is our justification for adopting the rather provocative title Beyond Priesthood: Religious Entrepreneurs and Innovators in the Roman Empire.

All but one of the papers included in this volume (the exception is that of Emiliano Urciuoli) were delivered at the fifth Lived Ancient Religion (henceforth LAR) conference, entitled ‘Beyond Duty’, held in the Augustinerkloster, Erfurt in January 2015, which focused on religious practitioners and providers of specialised religious knowledge and their interaction with lay people in the Ancient Mediterranean. The working perspective of the LAR project made clear to us that insufficient attention is generally paid to the issue of how individuals and groups make claims to religious knowledge and expertise, how they support these claims, and how they implement their individual plans for recognition and success as ‘religious professionals’. It was however left open to contributors to choose their own angle of approach to these rather general questions, as seemed most appropriate to their own field of research and in view of their own interests and pre-occupations. Each was encouraged to provide his or her own gloss on the deliberately open-ended notion of ‘beyond duty’ (which, in the final publication, has been narrowed down somewhat to the rather more definite ‘beyond priesthood’). This helps to explain the undeniable diversity of the contributions in terms of chronology, geography, culture and genre. In timid acknowledgement of the grand sweep of Max Weber’s reflections on religious knowledge, the varieties of religious specialism, power, religion and life-chances, religion and ‘the world’ (‘religiöse Weltbeziehungen’) in ‘Religiöse Gemein-
schaften’,¹ it was our deliberate aim not to confine the topic to Greek and Roman ‘paganism’ but to include papers on Judean/Jewish practice and early Christianity, viewed as ancient religious knowledge-practices.

Nevertheless a number of shared concerns are evident. One recurring theme in several papers included in the present volume, especially those by Bremmer, Eidinow, Gasparini, Gordon, and Urciuoli, is the nature of the strategies employed by self-styled religious experts to attract support from ‘clients’ or followers. Implicit here are conflicts with other interests, whether of individuals or groups, and the influence such pressures had upon perceived options, strategies and even content. A second major theme is the concern to view authors as contributors in their own right to the construction of the diversification of the religious field, in organising, highlighting, criticising or commemorating versions of religious claims, institutions and ideals (Rüpke/Santangelo, Bremmer, Denzey Lewis, Gasparini, Petridou, Standhartinger, Swartz, Weissenrieder).

Another common concern is packaging. How do religious experts and groups of religious specialists construct their offers, organisationally and theologically? How do they make their claims to religious knowledge effective? What role did religious entrepreneurs play in shaping religious action and theory in the Ancient Mediterranean? How successful were they in diversifying day-to-day religious ideas and practices? Some contributors (e.g. Eidinow, Denzey Lewis, Gasparini, Luijendijk, Petridou, Standhartinger) concentrate more on issues of visibility and intensity of interaction with lay people: how often did these professionals interact with (potential) followers and how accessible were they (and to whom)?

Others (especially Raja, Rüpke/Santangelo, Vinzent) focus on the relation between religious knowledge, social status and symbolic capital in different contexts. A number of contributors (especially Bremmer, Denzey Lewis, Gordon, Petridou, Rüpke, and Weissenrieder) examine the related but thematically distinct issue of de-restriction of recognised religious expertise and wider dissemination of religious knowledge. The contributions of Luijendijk and Swartz lay special emphasis on the educational background of claimants to religious authority.

The body as locus of contestation and signification of religious power is another important theme, explored in the contributions of Klückner, Gasparini, Raja and Weissenrieder. This group of papers targets religious officials in relation to genre, sexuality, bodily transformation and mutilation. Gasparini, moreover,

takes up the issue of perceived or claimed pereversion of ritual practice, as well as misappropriation of ritual space and priestly attributes by both priestly personnel and laymen.

1. Innovation: Forms and Limits

In the first chapter (Public priests and religious innovation in imperial Rome), Federico Santangelo and Jörg Rüpke jointly address the issue of institutionalised religious knowledge at Rome and the loci of innovation. While Santangelo studies the role of the colleges (and individual priests) in the context of the re-definition of aristocratic competition in the early Principate, Rüpke focuses on public religious specialists in Rome, i.e. the members of the priestly colleges, using Dio’s representation of them, written in the long Severan period, to provide a deliberately unconventional account: Dio locates innovation neither in function nor the dominance of the imperial house but in divinatory practices, architecture, and philosophy. Until the adoption of Christianity as Reichsreligion, we can hardly expect significant religious innovation from the socio-political elite in Rome.

The second chapter looks at more radical innovation in the Greek East as viewed through the satirical eye of Lucian. Jan Bremmer (Lucian on Peregrinus and Alexander of Abonuteichos: A sceptical view of two religious entrepreneurs) argues that, reading between the lines, these two figures provide an authentic glimpse of the plethora of new religious initiatives and possibilities in the second half of the second century CE. An analogous theme is pursued by Nicola Denzey Lewis in the third chapter of this section (Lived religion among second-century Gnostic hieratic specialists), who shows how the charges of aberrant sex and ritual impropriety against three early ‘gnostic’ heretics, Marcus the Magician, Marcellina, and Theodotus, belong to a specific rhetoric of defamation of innovation. Denzey Lewis shows how the LAR methodological framework can help us to read these charges differently.

Finally, AnneMarie Luijendijk (On and beyond duty: Christian clergy at Oxyrhynchus) looks at interactions between religious professionals and lay people in early Christian communities at Oxyrhynchus in Lower Egypt. So far from confirming the image of constant contestation offered by the Apologetic tradition, the correspondence between the Bishop Sotas and his fellow bishops and lay members reveals the harmonious co-existence of pagan priests and Christian religious specialists in the third century. Moreover, other contemporary epistolary evidence from the same city opens up the possibility that Christian female religious professionals may also have been active at the same period.
II. The Author as Religious Entrepreneur

This group of papers pays particular attention to authors as themselves agents of religious reformation and revisionism.

Angela Standhartinger (Best practice. Religious reformation in Philo’s representation of the therapeutae and therapeutrides) looks at the group of men and women who are said by Philo in his De vita contemplativa to live an ascetic life on the shores of Lake Mareia or Mareotis near Alexandria, in a manner strikingly similar to that of a group of Egyptian priests described shortly afterwards by the Stoic author Chaeremon. In his encomium, Philo represents this Jewish group as the ultimate embodiment of true religion. The paper assumes the utopian/critical character of this account and asks whether Philo’s aim was to reform Judaism alone or the very notion of ‘religion’ as a whole.

In the second chapter of Part II, Annette Weissenrieder (A Roadmap to the Heavens: High priestly vestments and the Jerusalem Temple in Flavius Josephus) focuses on Josephus’ ecphrastic treatment of the architectural complexities and symbolism of the First and Second Temple and the vestments of the High Priests. This dense theological and cosmological account of the vestments and their socio-political significance for Second-Temple Jews forms a kind of commemorative elegy just as the Temple itself passed out of existence, implicitly establishing Josephus’ text as the authoritative repository of this entire tradition.

In a section otherwise heavily dominated by Jewish topics, Georgia Petridou (Contesting medical and religious expertise in the Hieroi Logoi: The therapeutae of Pergamum as religious and medical entrepreneurs) explores Aelius Aristides’ appropriation in the Hieroi Logoi of the roles and the functions of religious officials of the Asclepieion. Aristides takes over pre-established ritual schemata and models himself on the tightly-knit community of high-born therapeutae of Pergamum in an attempt to contest current religious and medical expertise and establish himself as a religious and medical expert.

Markus Vinzent (Christians, the ‘more obvious’ representatives of the religion of Israel than the Rabbis?) argues that second-century Hellenised ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ philosophers re-conceptualised sacrifice and Temple-cult to compensate for what Guy Stroumsa has called one of the biggest challenges of the time, the cessation of regular blood-sacrifices. Starting from Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho, Vinzent suggests that collective religious expertise was displaced by individual philosophers whose theme was not cult-practice but ‘religion’.

Michael Swartz’s chapter (Rhetorical indications of the poet’s craft in the ancient synagogue) analyses the interaction between divinely-inspired poets and the community in Late-Antique Jewish tradition. The poets attempt to fashion
themselves as charismatic religious entrepreneurs who represent the group in its communication with the divine. Swartz is interested in the question of “how ritual practitioners ... sought to distinguish themselves as worthy of consideration as members of a vocation that claimed a pedigree, identity, and singular status”.

III. Filling in the Blanks

This section includes chapters that present religious innovation in the Graeco-Roman world (including Christianity as a ‘Graeco-Roman religion’) as a permanent feature of these religious systems, though one largely concealed by the paradigm of ‘polis-religion’, which naturally emphasises the standard and regular, and tends therefore to concentrate on public institutions rather than more informal types of religious leadership and knowledge-practices.

Religious specialists who operate independently of elite norms and/or on the margins of civic tolerance and control, such as itinerant prophets, healers, purifiers and other religious practitioners, are of special interest here. The first chapter, by Esther Eidinow (In search of the ‘beggar-priest’), surveys the origins and the cultural connotations of itinerant ‘beggar-priests’ from classical Greece through to the Roman Imperial era. She lays special emphasis on the suspicion and general mistrust that surrounded these individuals in the Graeco-Roman world inasmuch as they competed with the polis in the provision of selected Heilsgüter. To that extent, we can think of such specialists as ‘filling in the blanks’ left unoccupied by the dominant religious institutions and organised professionals.

In the second chapter, Richard Gordon (Projects, performance and charisma: Managing small religious groups in the Roman Empire) compares three contrasting forms of ‘small-group religion’ in the Empire, and the expectations and aims of their organisers. Gordon argues that religious ideas developed outside the traditional religious framework of the Greek and Roman worlds offered greater imaginative scope to the small religious entrepreneurs of the type he terms ‘(Weberian) mystagogues’ than indigenous ones.

The final chapter of Part III, commissioned especially for the volume, treats religious competence in early Christianity as a form of zero-sum symbolic capital (Emiliano Urciuoli, Enforcing priesthood: The struggle for the monopolisation of religious goods and the construction of the Christian religious field). Christian clergy, charismatic individuals, wealthy lay-people and providers of ‘gnosis’, deriving from wide range of different religious backgrounds, all attempted in the mid-2nd to the end of the 3rd century CE to ground their claims to religious authority through their possession of specialised knowledge. A major focus is the strat-
egies employed by the ‘ecclesiastical party’ of the emergent bishops to denigrate religious competitors and establish the office of the bishop as the sole legitimate and effective Christian religious authority.

IV. ‘Written on the Body’

The chapters in the final section discuss the body as a focus of religious signification. One dramatic case here is that of the castrati in the cult of the Mater Magna. Anja Klöckner (Tertium genus? Representations of religious professionals in the cults of Magna Mater/Cybele and Attis) discusses the exoticism of the galli and archigalli as documented in iconography. Klöckner emphasises the alterity of these representations as signs of non-standard religious commitments.

Bodily purity and alterity are major themes in Valentino Gasparini’s contribution (Negotiating the body: Between religious investment and narratological strategies. Paulina, Decius Mundus and the priests of Anubis), which discusses Isiac practices of asceticism, moral virtue and bodily purity, and their role in defining the distinctive religious profile of these cults. Here too, though, such difference might lead to accusations of negative alterity, as in the famous case, whether historical or not, of Paulina and Decius Mundus under Tiberius, as narrated by Josephus.

In the final chapter, Rubina Raja (‘You can leave your hat on.’ Priestly representations from Palmyra—between visual genre, religious importance and social status) considers the significance of Palmyrene representations of high-status males dressed in priestly vestments, especially the modius. The argument is that such images signal an intentional difference between Palmyrene and Roman religious offices, whereas public magistracies were re-modelled in conformity with general Graeco-Roman usage.

It is our hope that the intercultural and intermedial character of the essays in the volume will be of interest not only to students of Classical studies, history of religion, and ancient history, but also to those who work in the fields of comparative theology and literature, social and cultural anthropology, and the history of ideas.